

Fairhope Public Schools Commission
February 5, 2020

Members present: Ken Cole, Robin Coleman, Danielle Mashburn-Myrick, Carrie McLemore, Hill Robinson, Miranda Schrubbe, Cornelius Woods

Members absent: Tonya Bosarge, Robert Brown

Baldwin County Public Schools: Board Member Cecil Christenberry, CSFO John Wilson

Principals present: Julie Pierce, Patrice Wolfe

Guests: Joe Kelly, James Watkins

Ken Cole opened the meeting, welcoming members and guests. A motion was made and passed to approve the minutes of the January 8th meeting of the commission.

After sharing biographical information about Chief School Financial Officer John Wilson, Ken Cole invited Mr. Wilson to present an overview of the special 3-mill tax funding to be overseen by this commission.

Timing

- The fiscal year (FY 2021) begins on October 1; Baldwin County Board of Education will advance funding for the first year of the special tax so that approved budget items can be covered before the collection of tax revenues.
- Assessments will be sent out in the spring, tax bills will be sent out in October, and tax collection will take place from December 2020 through February 2021. An updated estimate for the amount of revenue expected will be available from the revenue commissioner this June, but Mr. Wilson indicated that \$2 million is a good number to work from at this time. The estimate given in June is usually overstated, so Mr. Wilson will calculate a realistic projection at that time.
- To align with the school system's budgeting process, recommendations for expenditures should be made by the end of July, to be included in the first public budget hearing in August. Budget is to be approved by September 15th then sent to the state.
- It was suggested that requests from principals for expenditures for personnel be made by April so the commission can approve requests prior to a job fair to be held in April and hires can be made for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.
- For accounting purposes, purchases of materials/supplies should not be made until October 1st or later.
- Two budget amendments are allowed by the state during the fiscal year: one on January 15th, with final requests for changes needed in December; and one on June 15th, with final requests for changes needed in May.

Approved Expenditures

- Revenues from the special tax are to be used for “Educational Purposes.” Though generally understood to include materials, supplies, equipment, and personnel, this could be broadly interpreted, and revenues might feasibly be spent on capital projects considered to be necessary for, or in support of, educational purposes.
- Personnel can be hired with the special tax funding, if requested positions are beyond what is already being provided. It is recommended that these be specialized teacher positions to avoid any remote chance of supplanting. However, a regular classroom teacher could be funded, but the request would have to be reviewed to ensure it is definitely over and above what the county normally provides.
- Temporary positions, which are non-renewed at the end of the school year but can be re-hired again as temporary, can be funded. These employees are paid in the same manner and receive benefits just as a regular teacher, though they do not automatically earn tenure status. EAC-funded positions have been administered under this format.
- It should be noted that a retired teacher can work under an hourly contract to provide tutoring or other services, but his/her total compensation must be capped at \$31,000 in a calendar year for that employee to still receive their state teacher pension. There is a list of approved pay rates for these positions, and the commission can set a special rate if desired, with Mr. Wilson’s guidance.
- Permanent positions can be funded, but with special attention to potential for tenure and the term of the special tax. The commission in place in the final years of the 30-year period will need to consider the extent to which tenured positions could continue to be funded before approving any new permanent hires.
- Items that would incur extra liability, require special service contracts for maintenance, or where there is any question about additional costs/responsibility for the school system will need a closer look, but can usually be approved.
- All expenditures will need to fit in existing categories and the 28-digit codes assigned to budget items.

Other Items of Note

- Expenses in the amount of \$27,492.39 for the special election in September 2019 are to be repaid to the school system from the tax collections.
- Funds from the special tax can be carried over from year to year. Also, a reserve account can be funded.
- The FPSC will approve expenditures funded by an annual payment of \$300,000 to be made for 5 years by the City of Fairhope to the Baldwin County Public Schools for the purchase of the K-1 property. Payment will be due on June 30th.

- Two separate accounts will be maintained by the school system for the FPSC: one for the revenues from the special tax, and one for the proceeds from the K-1 property purchase. Accounts will earn interest and be audited yearly.
- Requests for commission-approved expenditures are to be sent to the superintendent, either detailed in a letter or email, or by forwarding the minutes of the meeting at which the expenditures are approved.
- Mr. Wilson can generate weekly, monthly, or quarterly reports for the commission.
- To address any concern that the special tax funding might supplant, rather than supplement, regular funding of Fairhope schools, Mr. Wilson shared that there is a method already established to show that Title I funding allocated to various individual schools is not used in place of regular funding. This is a chart that can be populated with the current and relevant numbers, and provided as needed, if the commission is challenged on this point.

At the conclusion of this presentation, the principals in attendance were asked what they are considering including in their respective requests. Mrs. Wolfe (JLN) is in need of an additional social worker or guidance counselor, a STEM coach or a ½ STEM coach and a ½ reading intervention coach, and an art teacher. Mrs. Pierce said that the reconfiguration of her school to a K-6 campus is going to change the allocation of her teacher units, so her personnel needs are still being determined; she will be focusing on materials for intervention and renovating the contents of the library to meet the needs of the additional grade levels.

The next meeting of the FPSC will be on March 4th at 4:30. Renee Carter, Dean of Academics of Baldwin County Public Schools, will be present to discuss the county's academic plans.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:40.

Respectfully submitted by Miranda Schrubbe