Draft- April 27th, 2016

Sharon Community Center, 219 Massapoag Avenue

Present: Ira Miller, Alexander Korin, William Brack, Gordon Gladstone, Edward Philips, Patricia-Lee Achorn, Arnold Cohen, Hanna Switlezowski

Absent: Laura Nelson, Aaron Agulnek and Charles Goodman.

1. **Review information relative to the School Department’s Capital Outlay requests for the Article 6 of Annual Town Meeting Warrant and vote the committee’s recommendations regarding the same.**

Rory Marty, Director of Operations Sharon Public Schools, began by sharing the overall cost for both the Cottage Street Elementary lights as well as the East Street Elementary HVAC. Gordon Gladstone indicated that the information was not made available to either the Finance Committee or Capital Outlay Committee when requested. In the future both committees would prefer to have the detailed information. Rory apologized. The Finance Committee wanted to be assured that any energy efficiency rebate would be returned to the Town and not the School budget. Rory will also ask Timothy Farmer to track the funds and direct them back to the Town.

**MOTION:** to recommend the Cottage Street Elementary lights and East Street Elementary HVAC system projects by Gordon Gladstone **SECONDED**: by Edward Phillips **VOTED:** 7-0-0.

Dr. John Marcus, Director of Technology and Libraries Sharon Public Schools, discussed Article 6, Capital Outlay, item 5A in the warrant regarding the purchase of MacBook Air computers for the second year of one-to-one program ($90,000 cash and $181,000 capital). The program is not just about putting a computer in every student’s hand but rather to change instruction and provide opportunities to learn in new and exciting ways. It also allows students to have increased resources for communication, collaboration and creativity.

Between implementation of the one-to-one program, and the middle of the year there have been clear improvements across the board. Innovation has increased by 10% and teachers are reporting that students have been more engaged overall. The schools are still working with students on the distractibility of the devices; however there have been vast improvements in that area as well.

Dr. Marcus stated that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requires two years of a program in order for it to be assessed and that they are still in their first year of implementation. In order to really assess this program, they will need another year to make adjustments that lead to the most positive impact for students possible.

Dr. Marcus stated that for FY 2017 the school would purchase two hundred and seventy-five, eleven inch MacBook Airs for the 8th grade, at a purchase price of $260,000. If they keep on the same track, the costs will either stay at $260,000 or go down due to passing laptops down by grade. By the end of FY2020, everyone will have a device in their hands. He also spoke of a survey that the schools ran to determine parent interest in buying a MacBook Air for their 8th or 9th grade student. 15% responded they would definitely buy one and he believes that number will continue to increase.

Comments from Finance Committee members included the following:

* There are two separate issues: A computer for students that benefits writing and creativity. The other question is which computer to use mac or other less expensive.
* The device value is the ability to use it trade in value is irrelevant because we not going to resell them.
* We trying to keep taxes in Sharon under control and this is an example of where we can save $300 on each device.
* Going to the original specification we can find equipment out there that can do 90 percent of the functionalities; what can the MacBook do that that’s so important to the program that a MacBook irreplaceable?
* Will the State bid list price will be higher compared to the same laptop at a BestBuy?
* The firm had Apple computers and switched over to PC with the same functionality, lifespan, and the same specs. There is a premium you pay for Apple products. Just because have an Apple, doesn't mean that you couldn't become PC proficient.
* How fast will the technical support be provided to the students?
* I think people who are Apple locked in really ignore the possibility of considering the other options.
* Describe the Implementation team that made a decision to use MacBook Airs.
* The reason the team choose Apple because it is something they have experience with and they don’t have enough expertise with PC.
* Technically you selected the cheapest device Apple is selling with keyboard and Mac OS and now you’re using this devices’ specifications as minimum requirements to compare all other devices
* Parents can buy a Dell Latitude for $139 a price less when cost of insurance they have to pay for MacBook Airs and it will be no cost to taxpayers.
* All comparison to Windows devices was done not based on real functional requirements but using technical characteristics of the MacBook Air
* lLimiting the selection to one Apple platform can result to limiting education software to Apple offer; this can lower the quality of education because most of schools in US use PC.
* Can a $600 PC (33% cheaper) which the schools use today, or a PC with a touch screen, can be bought with better spec compare to MacBook Air and consider as valid alternative?
* An argument against exclusively using MacBook Airs is that parents should be able to buy any computers, that function similarly because it will save money overall when including on their property taxes.
* There are a variety of products that are at least $200.00 lower in price and with potentially savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Alex Korin provided information with analysis of some alternatives to MacBook Air Computers:

* There is a chart that allows an easy comparison of the weight of kids backpacks with 4 textbooks to MacBook Airs and to $140 PC’s. It is very clear from the chart $140 PC (Dell Latitude) is a little heavier than MacBook Airs but it is less than 2 textbooks in weight.
* Documents with analyses based on information provided by the School of software installed on MacBook Air before it was given to each student. This analyses indicate all software which was installed on MacBook Air can run on Dell Latitude $139.
* Provided detailed analysis on all software installed on the MacBook Air that clearly showed PC’s can run all software or there are multiple alternative options.
* Independent research finds 47% of Schools in US used PC that is significantly more than the percentage of Apple and Google using schools.

John Marcus responded to the Finance Committee with the following information:

* Chromebooks was not a valuable option based on a list of application School use not available on Chromebooks.
* MacBook Air is the most viable option for schools. Teachers are use to the technology, and they have a trained Apple technician readily available at the schools. Macs also have the best value over time.
* They are exploring allowing students to use any qualifying OSX device.
* If the schools were to change to another device, it would be a substantial cost due to management, tech support, viruses as well as software changes.
* HP $500 ($300 less than Mac Book Air) has 14 inch screen and School wants 11 inch device.
* The most important reason for selecting MacBook Air is how much time in training and energy and effort is a going take to have teachers comfortable using devices
* IT department has plans to use High School students as Helpdesks to provide technical support to other students and teachers
* A Windows device with the same technical specifications as a MacBook Air on the State’s bit list will cost the same as a MacBook Air.
* The implementation 15-member team was 9 of School employees who use Macs today, 3 High School students and 4 parents who also use Macs, iPads, and PC.
* We choose this device because it’s small and light; that's a huge part of what the program is all about. One of those things that parents have been complaining about forever is the weight of the kids’ backpacks.

John Marcus indicated that when they came last year and asked for $275,000 they heard the voices of this Committee, the Capital Outlay Committee, the members of the Implementation Team and community members that they can not keep asking for $275,000 over and over; again that's not fiscally responsible and it's not sustainable.

They have looked at those concerns and made headway:

1. They implemented the proposal suggested in the first year for the second year of having families to start participating in cost sharing reducing between 15 and 20% of the taxpayer burden.
2. Addressing Alex's point to the implementation team and in Capital Outlay and Finance Committees about the bring-your-own-device, our first foray into that is yes we're willing to let kids bring their own device. But, to start with we'll go with the specific device one that actually doesn't significantly change the classroom experience for the teacher.
3. And 2 years from now a year from now 3 years from now we may very well be at that place where we're comfortable enough and things are smooth enough that we can say to a family, “we're okay with not having an Apple product you can bring in a PC.”

**MOTION**: by Edward Philips to recommend approval of article 5A as written, for the purchase of MacBook Airs **SECONDED**: by Hanna Switlezowski **VOTED**: 4-3-0.

Gordon Gladstone stated that the decision will never be fully agreed upon, however Dr. John Marcus makes valid points and therefore he is going to vote to approve the recommendation. Arnold Cohen stated that this problem should have been addressed last year; therefore at this point in time we are stuck to this new program. He expressed his decision to vote against the recommendation due to that mistake. William Brack ends the conversation by stating that he appreciates the School Committees flexibility and openness in the future and that is all we can ask.

1. **Adjournment**

The next Finance Committee will be held on May 16th, 2015.

The Town Meeting will be held on May 2nd, 2016.

**MOTION**:to adjourn by Edward Philips **SECONDED:** by Hanna Switlezowski **VOTED:** 8-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 pm.