



TOWN OF NORTON
SELECT BOARD
MUNICIPAL CENTER
70 EAST MAIN STREET
NORTON, MA 02766

RECEIVED
NORTON TOWN CLERK
2022 AUG 17 AM 11:54

Telephone (508) 285-0210; Facsimile (508) 285-0297

Select Board
Meeting Minutes
April 11, 2022

I. Call to Order by Chair

The April 11, 2022 joint meeting of the Norton Select Board, Norton Finance Committee, and Norton School Committee was held remotely (Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6391519600>; Phone: 646-558-8656; Meeting ID: 639 151 9600), and the Finance Committee meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M., by Ms. Aimee Sawyer, Chair of the Finance Committee. Finance Committee members present: Ms. Bonnie Yezukevich, Ms. Paula Daniels, Mr. Kevin Snyder, Mr. Frank Joe Parker, III, Ms. Yelena Gordon, Mr. Zack Tsilis, Mr. William Rotondi, and Mr. Kevin Bugaj. Mr. Steven Evans arrived at 7:04 P.M. The Select Board meeting was called to order by Mr. John Conway, Chair of the Select Board, at 7:02 P.M. Members present: Ms. Renee Deley, Ms. Christine Deveau, and Ms. Megan Artz. Mr. Michael Toole arrived at 7:06 P.M. The School Committee meeting was called to order by Mr. Deniz Savas, Chair of the School Committee, at 7:03 P.M. Members present: Mr. Daniel Sheedy, Ms. Sheri Cohen, and Ms. Carolyn Gallagher. Also in attendance: Mr. Michael D. Yunits, Town Manager.

II. New Business

- Discussion of FY23 Budget, Capital, and/or Town Meeting Requests, Including but not Limited to:

306 – Southeastern Regional.

Mr. Mark Morris, Assistant Superintendent of Finance for Southeastern Regional, along with Ms. Barbara Kaplan, the Representative from the Town of Norton on their School Committee were present. Mr. Morris explained that the FY23 budget was approved on March 8th by their School Committee. He advised that their foundation budget is \$32,362,813; that is made up of State aid in the amount of \$20,178,271 and local assessments at \$12,184,542. Mr. Morris pointed out that school transportation is required for regional schools and the cost of transportation for FY23 is \$1,879,200 and the State aid is \$1,042,593. He explained that this should be funded 100%, but unfortunately, due to constraints of the State and the availability of funds, it has never been funded at 100%. Mr. Morris urged the Town that if they speak to their State Representatives and/or Senator(s) to let them know that if this was 100% funded, there would be zero local assessment to the communities. He continued explaining that with the State aid and local receipts at \$284,000, the local assessment for transportation is \$552,607. Mr. Morris stated that they have \$192,000 in capital improvements and with the local receipts of \$112,625 the total is \$304,625. In conclusion, Mr. Morris informed the Board and Committees that the total FY23 budget is \$34,546,638.

Mr. Morris moved on to discuss the enrollment trends advising that their student enrollment increased by 7 students (for the Town of Norton down from 110 students to 104 students), giving a total of 1,631 for FY23. He pointed out that Norton makes up 6.4% of the total enrollment for Southeastern Regional. Mr. Morris reported that the total assessment for the Town will be \$1,582,609 which is down \$3,181 from this current year. Mr. Snyder asked what drives the minimum contribution by town if you break it down per cap. Mr. Morris answered that it is enrollment and the Chapter 74 is going to be based on the wealth of the community property values and student enrollment in Chapter 70; so, this is what the State says that Southeastern has to spend each year on each student.

Mr. Morris showed a slide for the Southeastern Regional recommended budget and Ms. Deley asked if this is what the School Superintendent will be presenting. Ms. Sawyer replied that Dr. Baeta will have his own presentation and the most recent data being shown here is for FY21 and they are looking at FY23 this evening. Ms. Sawyer pointed out that this chart showed a widening disparity, which she stated is certainly of interest and concern.

308 – Bristol County Agricultural.

Mr. Yunits explained that what Bristol County Agricultural has sent to the Town is their budget, which has two portions and right now the Town has 13 students enrolled. He pointed out that the projected tuition rate for FY23 is \$3,217 per student; so, for Norton that will be \$41,821. Mr. Yunits advised that they also have a debt assessment charge of \$5,400.98. The Town Manager explained that with the debt assessment multiplied by the 13 students will be \$70,212.74 and their total request is \$112,033.74. In response, Ms. Sawyer asked what say they have in capital expenditures and building projects with these schools the Town is associated with and sending students to. She pointed out that the FY21 amount expended was \$19,336 and the year before that was approximately \$21,000. Mr. Yunits responded that this is all done by the Bristol County Commissioners, so any recommendations would have to go to the Commissioners and the Advisory Board. Ms. Sawyer asked if the Town has a representative on the Advisory Board and Mr. Yunits answered that there is a Select Board representative to the Advisory Board. Mr. Toole stated that last budget season he didn't see these numbers and he has attended the Commissioners and Advisory Committee's meeting, pointing out that there have been two in the past year, and the last meeting's focus was on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and nothing about the school budget. He mentioned that he would be happy to bring back a list of specific questions. Ms. Sawyer agreed to the idea and explained that her question is more directed towards what the decision-making process and approval process are for major improvements and investment projects. Ms. Deley mentioned that she remembered voting on some project, but thought it was Southeastern Regional. Mr. Toole commented that he thought it was for Bristol Agricultural. Ms. Deley asked Mr. Yunits if Bristol Agricultural provided him with a change in the rate from last year as well as a change in the specific number of pupils from Norton. Mr. Yunits replied that they did, but he couldn't recall what they had last year. Dr. Baeta answered that they are at 13 students and explained that the special assessment is grounded on a \$100,000,000 building that they just built. Dr. Baeta continued that the Commissioners post their own meetings at town hall and they can make their own decision and the Commissioners don't have any requirement to go before the Finance Committee. Mr. Yunits added that in his 11 years as Town Manager, he doesn't believe that Bristol Agricultural has ever presented to the Finance Committee and Dr. Baeta agreed.

Mr. Tsilis pointed out that even with the assessment, they are still spending less than \$10,000 per student and asked if they are heavily subsidized, which Mr. Yunits confirmed they were. Ms. Sawyer informed Mr. Yunits that she received a request from a Finance Committee member to have a presentation done before the Finance Committee of the charter school. She mentioned that she wasn't sure if there was enough time at this point in the budget season and Mr. Yunits said he would check with the Foxboro Charter School.

300 – Norton Public Schools.

Dr. Baeta explained that the budget presentation process began in late November into December of 2021 and was moved forward to the School Committee starting in late January into February of 2022, was voted on in March, and was presented to the municipal side and Finance Committee last week or the week before. Dr. Baeta pointed out the breakdown of the mandated education, general education, transportation, and the total budget, including a breakdown of the percentage increases. He advised that the mandated increase is 2.33%, which he reported as the lowest overall recommendation increase in the budget in his years in Norton, general education at 2.32%, and transportation at 0.19%, totaling an overall budget increase of 4.84% equating to \$1,560,926. Dr. Baeta pointed out that they have 2,462 students (2,230 in their district, 193 School Choice students, and 39 READ students totaling 2,462 students). He stated that strictly looking at out of district and School Choice students, they have 566 students who are receiving Special Education services. Dr. Baeta advised that they have 24 in-district programs (not including their preschool programs) that are servicing 179 students; the number actually goes up to 25 in-district programs if you include the preschool programs and servicing 225 Special Education students. He informed the Board and Committee that if these 179 students went out of district, that would cost the Town a collaborative of approximately \$9 million without transportation. Dr. Baeta advised that they are using approximately \$2.1 million in School Choice funds, which basically zeros out that account and pointed out that they have already brought in another \$1.175 million this year. He continued his presentation of the budget going over grants and pointed out that if the legislature switches to the Circuit Breaker Transportation it would be a deal breaker for Norton because you are roughly bringing in \$350,000 to \$500,000 a year in Special Education reimbursement, which would be a significant portion of their Operating Budget account. He advised that 20% of the entire budget request before them is \$6.8 million and is coming from these major accounts (not directly related to taxpayers with the exception of the parking fees and things of that nature).

Dr. Baeta provided the following breakdown of new staff to be added:

- Sped Inclusion (NHS Mandated) 1 at \$65,000;
- School Adjustment Counselors (BEST and GRIT Mandated) 1 at \$65,000;
- Music Teacher (HAY replace 0.5 to MS) 0.5 at \$32,500. He pointed out that he wanted to be very careful about this because he has already received questions about this and explained that this is changing the music teacher's status at the Yelle school to full-time and they are being move to the Middle School so they can run their schedule and have more flexibility within the Middle School schedule. In result, he stated that he is back-filling a position at half-time for the Yelle School;
- Transitional Specials currently at the NHS (Mandated) is currently at half-time at \$40,000.

The following was provided as a list of deferred positions (*it was noted that deferred positions will be filled if purchasing efficiency occurs after July 1st):

- COTA (District Wide Mandated) FTE 0.5 and budget cost of \$20,000;
- School Adjustment Counselors (BEST and GRIT Mandated) FTE 1 and budget cost of \$65,000;
- Library Media Specialist (0.6 MS & 0.4 HAY) FTE 1 and budget cost \$65,000;
- Interventionist at the LGN FTE 0.5 and budget cost of \$32,500;
- Science Teacher at the NHS FTE 1 and budget cost of \$65,000;
- Coordinators DW FTE 2 and budget cost of \$130,000;
- Wellness Teacher at the Middle School FTE 1 and budget cost of \$65,000;
- Elementary Specialists at the LGN, JCS, and HAY budget cost of \$75,000;
- Elementary Teachers at the LGN, JCS, and HAY FTE 2 and budget cost of \$130,000;
- CollegeCareer Readiness at the NHS FTE 1 and budget cost of \$60,000; and
- Maintenance Supervisor DW (0.5 on Facilities Revolving) 1 FTE and budget cost of \$75,000;
- Total of new staff cost (DEFERRED*) at 11 FTE equals \$782,500.

Dr. Baeta noted that with this budget there aren't any extra positions and noted that in the past he has held on to one or two kindergarten positions depending on enrollment, but he is going to have to figure this out with the approval of the budget. He emphasized that he did not put those positions into the budget for this year.

The next slide he pointed out are mandated positions and that there are 13 key phrases throughout the entire budget on the far-right side, the first being "Split Retroactive Pay 12.2021" which is a factual piece of information being provided that when their FY22 budget was approved, these numbers were not included, so this is to go back and show what the actual split is. Dr. Baeta next mentioned the ESSR 3 Grant Support money, which is money being put back into the Operating Budget. He mentioned that they could also see comments, such as contracts, which means that they currently do not have a contract agreement with the teachers and the paraprofessionals or the custodians at this time. Dr. Baeta pointed out that they do have a three-year agreement with the Administrative Assistants. He also noted the new position of a new technology item called "SIS" that is "Student Information Systems." He noted that statements like "Prior Year" was a grant, which would mean that it is now in the Operating Budget. Another point he made mention of was the increased transportation for athletics during the project because they may not be playing home games starting this Fall for a period of time depending on the project. Dr. Baeta emphasized that one of the biggest ones is in facilities because they are noticing an increase in the supply chain (noticing a 20%-35% increase for deliverables; averaging a 23% in deliverables right now). He stated that he is going to be providing information where they are going to project out their FY23 through FY27 out of district tuition costs. He informed the Board and Committee that typically they project out a 5% increase and right now, one of the collaboratives is looking at a 15% to 20% increase just for next year (so his projections will be out of whack for next year if this happens).

Ms. Deley questioned in reference to the positions Dr. Baeta mentioned earlier that are being deferred and pointed out that two of them are mandated and asked how he was able to defer the mandated positions. Dr. Baeta answered that it will be by being creative where realistically they are going to have to take a lot of other staff doing some of those mandates. He pointed

out the position of COTA, which is a Certified Occupational Therapist Assistant, and explained that they don't do all of the typical testing, but they do all of the service delivery and have to be supervised. He stated that they are definitely taking a gamble on that one. Dr. Baeta advised that the School Adjustment Counselors are being deferred and they are going to stay with the current model, but the problem with the model is that Adjustment Counselor (say for the LGN) is responsible for the 285 kids there, including the 15 kids that have specialized support services. He pointed out that if they don't have the resources to service all the kids that need it, then they have to send them to the hospital to get the services they need or the student is picked up and taken to get the services they need.

Mr. Evans referred to a comment made by Dr. Baeta that Norton is a place people are finding to send their kids for these expenses and asked if they are Norton residents, which Dr. Baeta answered they were. Dr. Baeta further explained that all School Choice students that come out of district the cost goes back to the sending district fully and the Town doesn't take any responsibility for that and emphasized that these students he was referring to are all residents of the Town of Norton. Mr. Evans referred to the Principals and a footnote about increasing their work and asked what they are increasing and what the FTE equivalent of those increases and noticed that there were at least 5 or 6. Dr. Baeta replied that those would be Administrative Assistants. Mr. Evans asked what the increased work would be because it looks like they have one new position and Dr. Baeta answered that it would be an increase of 10 days from their prior contract. Mr. Evans asked what the FTE equivalent for those would be. Dr. Baeta responded for that one it would get them to about 215 days out of 261 "working days" so he would have to figure that out, but he would have the School Business Manager look at this and send it out to him. Mr. Evans pointed out another new hire position about a Business Analyst or a Financial Analyst and Dr. Baeta explained that two fiscal years ago they changed the position to Financial Analyst/Transportation Coordinator. Mr. Evans clarified that it is not a new hire, but a new person, which Dr. Baeta confirmed. Mr. Evans referred to the mandated positions listed on the first page and questioned if these were new mandates or is it something in their student body that is driving these mandated positions to increase. Dr. Baeta responded that it is the needs of the students that impact the mandated positions. Mr. Evans pointed out that last year they talked about this and noted again that the School Department is the only department that doesn't provide a breakdown of the salaries by individual. Mr. Evans continued that he thought after the discussions last year that this was something the School Department was going to provide moving forward. Dr. Baeta replied that he doesn't believe this is something that has ever been done in the past, but it is something that they can easily get to him and asked if Mr. Evans would want everything for every employee. Mr. Evans replied that he basically is looking for what every other department lays out, which is a schedule that basically lays out their base salary, stipends, etc. Dr. Baeta advised that this information wouldn't take too long to get to him and Mr. Evans thanked him in advance for doing so.

Mr. Toole stated that after looking through the budget provided, he knows from budget presentations in the past that the Town has been very careful with separating grant money from the regular budget, specifically School Choice. He expressed that it looks like now they are getting to a point (out of need) that now it is hitting on the operational side of the budget and emphasized that this is a dangerous proposition. Mr. Toole asked Dr. Baeta to provide some insight on this. Dr. Baeta used the example of Title I where you are giving students extra literacy that it has to be above it (you can't supplant you have to supplement) and the money can't be replaceable and it has to be extra money that you are utilizing. The School

Superintendent advised that the biggest “curve balls” that they are going to see is in relation to ESSR I, II, and III. He expressed that they have tried to not use grant funds for reoccurring items, but emphasized the big disparity between FY22 receiving approximately \$1.5 million in grant funding to FY23. Mr. Savas added that he has been on the School Committee since School Choice came around and when the Committee approved it, there was another gentleman on the School Committee with him named Phil Lynch and they were explicit with saying that this is a great program if it can potentially bring the Town savings and good revenue, but the only thing is these funds should not be used for operational expenses. Mr. Savas pointed out that sometimes they are faced with difficult decisions, such as if they are going to layoff a teacher or if they are going to use these funds to fund an operational expense. Mr. Toole referenced that they were deferring approximately \$782,000 in the School budget and has how they plan to balance the budget and referred to optimizing the schools and the declining enrollments (highest enrollments were around 3,200 students and now they are currently at around 2,300 students). Mr. Savas replied that he didn’t think they should necessarily compare the current enrollment with their highest and mentioned that Dr. Baeta advised of a slight increase in enrollment and added that the goal is to get more School Choice students. Mr. Savas stated that the occupancy at two or three of the schools is around 60% and explained that this is the occupancy for the entire building, which includes large rooms like the gym, cafeteria, library and auditorium, and isn’t necessarily speaking to classroom capacities. Mr. Toole asked if there is a certain number [in reference to school enrollment] where they say they need to assess optimizing resources. Dr. Baeta replied that every year they do the NASDAQ Enrollment Study and it gets published. Dr. Baeta wanted to point out to everyone that if he had 45 more students walk into the LGN tomorrow, he would have no more classroom space for those students. He explained that if any school were to be closed down in the future it would be the L.G. Nourse Elementary School. Mr. Tsilis questioned if it would be worth it to do a cost-benefit analysis on one of the schools, such as the J.C.S., spend some capital, and double the size of it and close the L.G.N. He asked Dr. Baeta if there would be savings assuming they would get 75% reimbursement from the State and the Town for the rest. Dr. Baeta answered that it is an interesting question and the two biggest issues they are going to have is the actual space at that location to do additions (behind that school is the leeching field) and that they are not going to see 75% reimbursement from the State. He pointed out that the reimbursement rate for the renovations at the High School was around 62% to 64% and they are probably going to see less than that because there are more projects needed. Dr. Baeta also noted that the funding budget for MSBA is not growing at the same rate. He further mentioned that the cost analysis for something like this would probably cost somewhere in the six-figure range. Mr. Savas said that the problem they are going to have is that fixed-cost model and expressed that he didn’t really see a cost savings existing with this proposal, but appreciated Mr. Tsilis thinking outside of the box. Mr. Sheedy suggested building up on the Yelle School in the back. Ms. Cohen pointed out all of the big projects that are either still on the books (i.e., the High School renovation) and the newly approved projects for the new Town Hall, Senior/Community Support Center, and the athletic complex and to try and add another debt-exclusion is going to be really tough. Mr. Tsilis expressed appreciation for the comments, but to Ms. Cohen’s point about the debt-exclusion and decreased State funding, they are going to have to come back to the taxpayers either way whether it is 2 or 3 years down the road. Mr. Tsilis said that they are going to have to address this and they can’t keep continuing down this path. Mr. Savas and Ms. Cohen agreed with Mr. Tsilis.

Ms. Deley advised that she was on the Clear.gov website the other day and it separates by school and isolates expenses per student per school and noted that the L.G.N. has one of the lowest rates per child. She asked what goes into determining this and why the cost per student would be so much lower for the L.G.N. Dr. Baeta reminded Ms. Deley that Clear.gov is going to include every single expenditure that the Town of Norton uses to operate because it is all audited numbers; so, if he has 10 teachers at the L.G.N. that didn't take a health insurance plan at all and then have 10 teachers at the J.C.S. that do, the cost is going to go up too. Ms. Deley referred to an earlier comment made by Dr. Baeta about several of the schools needing roof replacements and asked if they have started looking for grants to account for those expenses now so there isn't a hit to the budget. Dr. Baeta answered that the MSBA does do what they call accelerated programs, which is for projects such as roofs and boilers, so they would probably put themselves into that situation and would really need the support of the Select Board because the last that they did they asked for \$1.2 million and it came in at just under \$900,000. He advised that when himself, the School Business Manager, Mr. Yunits, and the Town Accountant met, they provided a list of the School Department's ARPA projects and the J.C.S. roof was on there. He pointed out that this is not an emergency item, but is something that needs to be addressed in the next few years. Mr. Conway questioned in reference to the ARPA funds if there were any opportunities within the grants they have access to for the school budget this year. Dr. Baeta mentioned again that they gave a list of projects of various expenses that they thought could be part of that discussion, but as it states under the statute, it is really going to be up to the Select Board because they are the governing body. Dr. Baeta mentioned that one of the proposed projects would be to connect the Yelle and the High School to the sewer line and pull the article for borrowing for this project off of the warrant. Mr. Conway asked Mr. Yunits when the last opportunity is to pull articles off of the Annual Town Meeting warrant. Mr. Yunits advised that they can pull articles off of the warrant up to when they are about to post it, so until the Board makes its final approval. Mr. Conway clarified that the posting is two weeks before the Annual Town Meeting and Mr. Yunits confirmed that it is 14 days. Mr. Conway strongly recommended that the Select Board and School Committee meet up until that point to see if that is a viable choice that wants to be made. Mr. Toole looked for clarification stating that he thought that the \$500,000 to tie into the sewer was part of the original Athletic Complex article from when the debt-exclusion was approved. Dr. Baeta responded that because the sewer line runs underneath the athletic complex, it was originally part of their plan to have it as part of the entire project, but advised that it just can't work that way; so, they put in an article again last year still thinking that they might be able to put it within that budget with the understanding that if the article was withdrawn and they don't do it, then they would come back to it at some other point. Dr. Baeta stated that his suggestion would be that there is money available from the Federal government that sewer lines and connections are definitely very clearly outlined in that, but it doesn't mean they have to be done, but they are trying to get solids into that system. He mentioned that hopefully the sewer connection for the J.C.S. and the Middle School would be something that would happen down the line as well. Mr. Toole asked Dr. Baeta that when the three projects were passed that it was the impression of the voters that the sewer connection was included or did they withdraw that prior to that time. Dr. Baeta said he would have to look back on that to give the factual information, but he would be happy to look back to see on that. Mr. Savas pointed out that when Dr. Baeta says "they can't do that" in reference to the sewer connection he means that it can't be done that way and it is because they are not allowing it within the scope of the project, which Dr. Baeta confirmed. Mr. Conway looked back at the warrant from the Special Town Meeting last May and quoted that "the sum of \$6,362,000 to be expended under the direction of the School Committee and Permanent Building Committee

for the purposes of planning, design, construction, furnishing and equipment of the Norton Public Schools community athletic complex.” Mr. Yunits replied that the intent was that that sewer connection was going to be funded with the money that was appropriated for the athletic complex and that’s why it was pulled off. Mr. Conway replied that this was correct and he had the same recollection.

Mr. Yunits asked Dr. Baeta if he would like to go over any of the town meeting articles, which Dr. Baeta said he would. Dr. Baeta began speaking to the Special Town Meeting stating that their goal is to not have to pay any late bills and have put in that article for the past 5 years. He advised that they have moved forward on capital items although they know there is a plan coming from the Town Manager and the Capital Committee.

Mr. Cody Thompson, resident, referred to the roof repairs that have to be done at three of the schools and asked what it would take to look into something along the lines of leasing out the roof space for say a solar developer or working with them to turn that into a potential income stream at the same time as covering the costs of replacing the rooves. Dr. Baeta responded that when they initially brought in Trane, they had them take a look at the rooves not only in their current states, but if they were to replace them and utilizing solar on those rooves and none of those schools are recommended for solar panels at this time; part of that being because the rooves would need to be replaced and the other part would be there is some underlying issues with some of the schools and the amount of weight that would be going on the building. Dr. Baeta continued explaining that the Trane projects ended up having them go with the solar ports at the schools, which are starting this week. He emphasized that MSBA is going to see this as a big “no-no” because they are only going to want to be involved with the roof portion of the project not the solar aspect.

Dr. Baeta gave an overview of the School Department’s articles as follows:

- Supplemental that they put a hold on. Right now, their biggest issue on this is the number of staff out due to major medical issues. The second part of this is the curve balls that come in the last quarter or third of the year (usually the last few months). He advised that this is currently a placeholder and hopefully they come back requesting nothing for this, but that is where they are at.

- COVID-19 Emergency Sick Leave Supplemental Appropriation: This is regarding the COVID-19 sick leave law. He advised that they have potential of employees that were given the opportunity to earn money, especially if they weren’t getting paid, but it is \$850 per employee and involves a paper trail that they have to figure out the person’s FTE, how many hours per week they work, how much they make and then there is the difference of the money that can be paid if they haven’t been paid or there is the negative that they are running for some of this (he mentioned he believed it was somewhere around \$18,000 now). Ms. Deley asked if there were any opportunities to use ARPA funds or other Federal funding to pay for this versus having it come out of the budget. Mr. Yunits replied that he didn’t believe they could because the directives say that they can’t supplant other funds as Dr. Baeta was saying earlier; so, if you get funds from the Federal government, you can’t combine them with State funds. Ms. Deley asked Mr. Yunits to follow-up on this.

- Sewer Project: Dr. Baeta stated that this article is for the sewer line that they spoke to earlier in the meeting.

Mr. Toole outlined that the four qualifications for uses of ARPA funds are public sector, revenue loss, public health and economic response, water/sewer and broadband infrastructure, and premium pay for essential workers, which Mr. Yunits stated was correct. Mr. Toole questioned if the schools were considered by the State as essential workers and Mr. Yunits stated that they are, but there are issues there when you start talking about providing essential pay and commented that it is a slippery slope, meaning if they provide premium pay, they are going to be providing premium pay to a lot of people and you will end up eating up all of the money.

Mr. Tsilis referred to the School Department requesting a 4.84% increase plus money to cover back bills. He asked if this money exists at the moment to fund these requests. Mr. Yunits responded that as previously mentioned, himself, Dr. Baeta, the School Business Manager, and the Town Accountant met last week to go over this and to answer the question, no, this money doesn't exist for town finances right now (for the Town budget or the School Department budget). He advised that him and Dr. Baeta were going to go back and look at areas that can be cut back and get back together to review everything again. Mr. Yunits stated that with the proposed budgets by the Town and the School Department, the School Department is a 4.84% increase and the Town a 4.607% increase, so they are approximately \$1.8 million short. Mr. Toole clarified that with the cherry sheets and town funding they should be looking at 2% increases, which Mr. Yunits confirmed. Ms. Cohen stated that they seem to have been \$1.8 million short for their budget every year since their last override attempt in 2017 and asked the Town Manager if this was a fair statement, which Mr. Yunits confirmed and further commented that it has been a challenge.

Ms. Daniels stated that she noticed in the School Department's budget that there is about \$1 million of the School Choice funds being carried over to this budget; so, next year it looks like the School Department wouldn't have a carry over and that the cuts will end up having to come from general education and possibly cutting teachers, which Dr. Baeta confirmed. Mr. Savas mentioned conversations he has had with Dr. Baeta about getting the School Choice numbers up and possibly talking to the charter school parents to see if they can actually get their kids back in the school system. He advised that they have done this once in the past. Mr. Savas said they are going to have to approach the budget process differently and really prioritize what is important.

Mr. Thompson noted that there are no towns or school districts in the area that offer a gift and talented program and asked if this has been considered to implement a program along these lines in town (and possibly attracting more School Choice students). Dr. Baeta replied that around his fourth year as School Superintendent there were discussions in their strategic plan about creating it and after a lot of those discussions, they decided a lot of the models that they now provide to students more about the heterogeneous group instead of just grouping students together based on ability and all, but expressed that this is an area he has some interest in and noted that this is a complicated area. Dr. Baeta emphasized that to make a program like that work, you have to come up with really strong policy and data.

Ms. Deley mentioned that they have some new businesses coming into town where they will benefit from the 3% excise tax and hopefully these businesses will be able to help bring some revenue to the Town to address some of the budget concerns as well as areas such as substance abuse.

Ms. Daniels referred to comments Dr. Baeta made at a past meeting (pre-COVID) about a possible foreign-exchange program that had the potential to bring money to the Town, which Dr. Baeta confirmed was correct. Dr. Baeta advised that e-mails have already started coming in and expressed that this too is politically complicated because they have things to address, such as where these students would be coming from and COVID-19 to factor in. He explained that he didn't see this being something that would be implemented this Fall, but possibly September of 2023.

Mr. Sheedy asked if there were any additional businesses coming into the Blue Star Business Park as anticipated revenue to come to the Town. Mr. Yunits advised that Home Depot is well under construction and Yale Appliance is soon to be under construction. The Town Manager mentioned that Cumberland Farms is under construction and added that one of the marijuana establishments should be opening within the next couple of months (the building is complete, but they need some inspections from the State). Mr. Yunits also mentioned a 101-unit apartment complex that has also been permitted as well as another spec warehouse space being put in at 196 Mansfield Avenue. Mr. Snyder pointed out that Pitney Bowes and Wayfair are already in the Blue Star Business Park and he believed Tosca was also in there. Ms. Deley pointed out that at an Economic Development Commission (EDC) meeting, they were pretty upset regarding the change over there because they did have a tenant that was going to be in that retail building and that would have brought some funds to the Town from permitting. Ms. Deley asked how the permitting fees are determined. Mr. Yunits stated that when someone applies for a permit, the Building Inspector will look at the plans, the permit fee is based on the value of the construction (Mr. Yunits gave the example of Yale Appliance having a permit fee in the range of \$200,000 to \$300,000 and ALNYLAM being \$1.7 million), the Assessor's Office looks at the new growth, and then once the building receives its occupancy permit that value is now considered new growth. The Town Manager noted that there is now a sign outside of the Blue Star Business Park, so hopefully now they are working hard to market that portion out front. Mr. Yunits also noted that they have been in contact with the State about the vacant land across the street from the Blue Star Business Park and advised that this land has been zoned Industrial, so they are looking for that to get on the market. In response, Ms. Deley stated that they are looking to do some bylaw changes to that as well for additional industry and establishments to be allowed there. Mr. Yunits suggested at their next meeting having the proponent for the Reed & Barton property who is looking to develop that land come to that meeting to discuss their zoning article.

Financial Discussion Regarding:

➤ Athletic Field Project Update

Dr. Baeta informed the Board and Committee that the Athletic Field project was awarded to Barnes & Lynch out of South Shore (believe to be in Falmouth). The Gale Associates cost is coming in under the \$6.3 million, but is leaving them with a very small contingency fund.

➤ Trane Project Update

Dr. Baeta advised that the Trane project is underway and that the solar projects are starting at the schools and they will be doing some boiler work at the schools as well during April break. He added that they will be seeing the new heating systems within the schools being done through the summer time. Dr. Baeta pointed out that at the Yelle School they will finally be

getting rid of steam heat. He informed the Board and Committee that the anticipated completion date for the project is sometime in the winter. He further stated that the project should kick off around May 1st and that their plan is to still be substantially done in September and closed out in October, but anything can happen. Dr. Baeta informed the Board and Committee that he will have the School Business Manager send the AC and Trane one pagers over, which were provided to the School Committee recently.

➤ Financial Management Policy

Mr. Yunits stated that they have talked about the Financial Policy in the past and it was discussed with the auditors as well because they wanted them to review it to make sure it was good to go, which he advised that it is. The Town Manager explained that the last time the Town went out to borrow, they had their Standard & Poor's call and one of the things that they identified before they go out to borrow again, which they will be doing these projects, they wanted the Town to have a Financial Policy in place (and have been working on this for about a year, maybe a little longer at this point). Mr. Yunits advised that the goal for this year is to put \$200,000 into OPEB, which is to cover health insurance for retirees, and stated that he believed last year they put in \$100,000 or \$110,000. He explained that once they have sufficient funds in OPEB that would cover the annual expenditure for the benefits payments, which in FY21 was \$2.6 million, then the actuarials will recalculate the Town's OPEB liability and its long-term rate. Mr. Yunits advised that right now they use a rate of 2.8%, but if they develop a fund that is more substantial, they could be adjusting that rate to 6.34%. He mentioned that the other parameter in there is that in 2030, Bristol County has taught that the pensions will be fully funded, which will cut the Town's annual contribution by 66% (FY23, Bristol County's contribution was \$3.5 million, so they would commit that the goal is divert that savings to OPEB). The Town Manager informed everyone that the Town is meeting its debt service and should not exceed 20% of the operating revenue (currently at 3.2%). Mr. Yunits lastly stated that this is something that will either help maintain or improve the Town's rating when the Town goes out to borrow for the Town Hall, Senior/Community Support Center, and Athletic Complex. Ms. Sawyer asked what their process is to review and maintain this policy. Mr. Yunits replied that if anyone has any questions at all to get them to him and they can put this topic on a future agenda to speak to and after that, the Select Board will have to vote to approve the policy and it will then be put into place.

➤ ARPA Funding

This topic was addressed throughout several discussion during the meeting (see above).

Mr. Tsilis recognized that there were several members of the Select Board and School Committee that have decided to move on and not run for re-election and wanted to thank them for their service to the community and expressed that it is appreciated. Mr. Snyder and Ms. Sawyer agreed.

Ms. Savas mentioned that they need to seriously consider splitting out the School District budget because of the mandated aspect of it. He suggested splitting the budget into two where one is the mandated budget and then there would be the general education budget. Mr. Toole agreed that one of the challenges they face are these unfunded mandates and compared similarities with unfunded needs of public safety where towns are pretty much being told that these are a mandate and you need to figure out a way to fund them. Dr. Baeta advised that

State Representative Steven Howitt has filed a bill for special education tuition reimbursement for students above “x” at 90%, which he commented was a very proactive bill. He used the example of if they had \$250,000 to pay, rather than getting 75% you would be getting 90% and would be getting almost 90% off (minus the \$40,000) and are now getting 90% of \$210,000, which is a big difference and are getting a significant reimbursement on that. Dr. Baeta agreed with a comment made by Mr. Toole that they need to be more proactive with their legislatures as a community.

Dr. Baeta emphasized that town meeting has to open and close on June 7th because he has a State mandate of June 15th to notify unemployment and advised that he cannot unemploy those people until September.

Mr. Snyder suggested setting up the next joint meeting either at this meeting or appoint someone the responsibility of scheduling the next joint meeting. Ms. Cohen volunteered to be the person responsible for coordinating the next joint meeting. Mr. Conway expressed that he thought meeting quarterly would be a good idea.

Ms. Deveau apologized for any rifts that existed amongst the Committees and the Board in the past and expressed that she hopes that with her next two years on the Select Board that they won't have any more heated battles during meetings or in-person and agreed that meeting quarterly for more fluency was a good idea. Mr. Conway and Ms. Deley agreed with Ms. Deveau. Ms. Deley referred to the suggestion made by Mr. Savas about splitting the School District's budget and stated that as a resident she thought it would be very helpful if they presented the budget overall showing all the mandates.

III. Old Business.

There was no old business to discuss.

IV. Open session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance Minutes.

There were no items to discuss under this agenda item.

V. Adjournment

MOTION was made by Ms. Deley to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:41 P.M. Seconded by Ms. Deveau. Vote: Ms. Artz – Yes; Ms. Deley – Yes; Ms. Deveau – Yes; Mr. Toole – Yes; and Mr. Conway – No. MOTION CARRIES.

MOTION was made by Mr. Sheedy to adjourn the School Committee meeting at 9:42 P.M. Seconded by Ms. Cohen. Vote: Mr. Sheedy – Yes; Ms. Cohen – Yes; Ms. Gallagher – Yes; and Mr. Savas – Yes. MOTION CARRIES.

MOTION was made by Ms. Yezukevich to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 9:42 P.M. Seconded by Mr. Tsilis. Vote: Ms. Yezukevich – Yes; Ms. Daniels – Yes; Mr. Snyder – Yes; Mr. Parker – Yes; Mr. Evans – Yes; Ms. Gordon – Yes; Mr. Tsilis – Yes; Mr. Rotondi – Yes; Mr. Bugaj – Yes; and Ms. Sawyer - Yes. MOTION CARRIES.

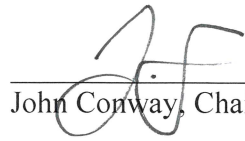
URL Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrKuugLZqQY>

Respectfully Submitted by:

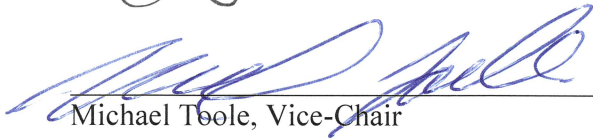


Jennifer Reid, Office Administrator

**SELECT BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
APRIL 11, 2022**



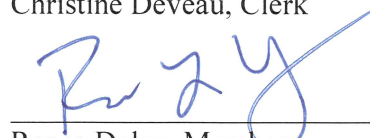
John Conway, Chair



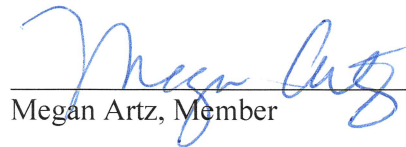
Michael Toole, Vice-Chair



Christine Deveau, Clerk



Renee Deley, Member



Megan Artz, Member

Minutes Approved by Board on: April 27, 2022