

Town of Lunenburg

Finance Committee:

Terri Burchfield, Chair

Peter Beardmore, Vice-Chair

Heather Sroka, Secretary

Christopher Menard

David Passios

Jay Simeone

Evan Watters



17 Main Street, P.O. Box 135

Lunenburg, MA 01462-0135

978.582.4139

FAX 978.582.4148

Lunenburg Finance Committee March 18, 2021

Location: Zoom Virtual Meeting

Present: Terri Burchfield, Peter Beardmore Dave Passios, Jay Simeone, Chris Menard, Evan Watters

Absent: Heather Sroka

1. Call to Order

Terri Burchfield, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and read the COVID-19 / Zoom meeting advisory statement.

This meeting was recorded and is viewable on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQAJ16kJQlc>

2. Public Comment

Peter – There was quite a bit of content received for tonight's meeting. Suggested a separate conversation to discuss personnel compensation following town meeting.

3. Lunenburg School District Budget Request

Dr. Burnham and Mr. Cassidy briefed the school district budget request from the linked powerpoint: https://1drv.ms/p/s!ArN1S_-FZTiYhQzlcaXC6FFiyVbH?e=blM4sh and pdf: https://1drv.ms/b/s!ArN1S_-FZTiYhQtsA_nZK2QJCfha?e=WHjsRN

Budget reflects the strategy for continuous improvement including:
Teaching and Learning

Communication and Operations
Cultivating Climate and Culture
Equity, Access, and Opportunity for all students

Slight enrollment increase expected in FY22 due to homeschooling during the pandemic. Ideally current class size range will be maintained.

The year the schools subscribed to online testing tools for assessment in the absence of MCAS scores.

There is a need for additional K-5 math and reading intervention.

Evaluations conducted by school psychologists for special education students were lagging due to last year's closure. Covid relief money was used to hire a part-time school psychologist. (273 students currently enrolled in special ed.)

Behavioral health advisory council was formed 2 years ago. This year there was a grant-funded stipend for a social worker to coordinate a universal referral process for behavioral health support. Many students have been identified and are receiving support.

Ch 70 funding as a percentage of the school department has been declining - 35.9% in FY21.

FY22 recommended budget reflects 2.5% increase, up from 1.58% in Fy21.

Budget partially funds first year of 5-year staffing plan. New positions include assistant principal (pk-5), director of teaching & learning, teacher (K), paraprofessional (K), full-time substitute nurse, director of extended learning programs (funded through revolving accounts), summer program, stipends for curriculum team leads. (4 planned positions are not funded.)

Offset positions: Assistant principal (6-12), offset – reduce LMHS guidance staff and dean position

Social Worker (PK-2), offset – PS Guidance

Teacher, Grade 3, THES, offset – PS 2nd Grade

Grant funded positions:

Social Worker (3-8)

Instructional Math Specialist (K-5)

Paraprofessionals, (2) Math and Reading tutor (THES)

Psychologist (PK-5)

IT Technicians

Unknowns/Unfinalized: Chapter 70, Circuit Breaker, Federal & State Grants
Bargaining units: Teachers, custodians, paraprofessionals, food service,
individual contracts

Peter – Thanked school committee for bringing complete and approved budget proposal to finance committee. Congratulated decision to return full-time on April 5. Glad to see focus on math and reading in the elementary school.

Peter – Would ‘hold harmless’ policy (using enrollment numbers from FY19) positively effect Lunenburg with respect to CH funding?

Dr. Burnham – it would positively effect districts in greater need.

Peter – do you anticipate use of Cares Act money to facilitate full return? Dr. Burnham – currently existing budget. Mr. Cassidy – as additional grants become available, we intend to charge back.

Peter – are the elimination of the guidance positions going to adversely effect choosing classes and college applications, other impacts? Dr. Burnham – roles of guidance counselors vary depend upon level. For example, clinical license is more important at primary level. Additional vice principal positions will alleviate time on MS and HS guidance counselors. HS guidance support will be monitored and may need to be restored in the future. New Covid relief act may bring additional support in the future to deal with mental health challenges that are emerging.

Dave – are there unemployment costs associated with eliminated / offset positions such as movement with ‘bubble class’? Dr. Burnham – intend to work with individual teachers and overall staff, particularly dealing with ‘bubble class’. There are also professional and emotional costs. Mr. Cassidy – there is no financial impact. We can do involuntary transfers.

Chris – current student/teacher ratio is approx. 24/1. Only two new positions are teachers. Why isn’t it better to hire more teachers rather than administrative and staff positions? Dr. Burnham – stipend teacher leader positions are teachers. Current teachers in the district don’t have the specific professional expertise to meet the current needs.

Chris – Noted needs for instructional math specialist in K-5. Where is STEM as a goal? Dr. Burnham – looking for teachers with deep knowledge of math for these specialists. Primary and elementary school teachers may be math and science-phobic. Currently the highest priority is math and reading at the primary and elementary grades. Our math program needs to be reviewed and aligned with state standards. Must address needs of ESL and special ed students.

Chris – How complete is 10-year capital forecast? For example, additional baseball diamond is not on the forecast. Dr. Burnham – field space was identified at the symposium in October 2019. We identified it but it isn't on the capital plan. Chris – it is important as we look at building use. Please make sure long term capital plan is complete.

Evan – Does the 5-year staffing plan address immediate needs or anticipated needs over the term of the 5-years. Dr. Burnham – it is a little bit of both. It will be revised again in December and may be changed after the effects of new-hires are re-assessed. Mr. Cassidy – DESE could add requirements also.

Chris – What programs do we have for dual-enrollment and how are they promoted? Dr. Burnham - Programs in place with MWCC and Fitchburg State University. Typically discussed individually between guidance counselors and students. We've also moved from Virtual High School to Educere to offer more options to students.

Evan – Has there been direct input from students to establish district needs? Dr. Burnham – many formal and informal interactions with kids. Most kids focus on social and emotional relief / academic load.

Evan – Will remote options for snow days and sick days be an option in the future. Dr. Burnham – commissioner of education is currently opposed to this. In cases with medical issues (case by case), live streaming will be an option, though not fully fleshed out.

Dave – The prioritization of other items over a life safety system (fire alarm at the primary school) was a mistake. Monty tech proactively overhauled fire and ventilation systems. Dr. Burnham – fire alarm at primary school has been problematic, but under a certain set of conditions. Trouble is increasing in frequency, particularly in winter months. Current system is obsolete, and parts are difficult to come-by. Becoming a more urgent matter. Next year it will be a higher priority.

Peter – We talk about maintaining our buildings. We have a 20 year old building, the primary school, in need of approximately \$300,000 in spending and we are doing nothing. We say one thing and we do another.

4. Monied Articles –

Mrs. Lemieux –

Articles:

C – currently no prior year expenses

D – currently no amendments to prior year, working on snow and ice deficit and whether there will be sufficient end of year funds to cover.

E – capital plan update coming, including unexpended funds from current and prior years. We may add additional projects. (DPD vehicle, Marshall Park)

H – updated consolidate omnibus budget coming, collective bargaining will not be complete by public hearing

I – stabilization \$100K recommendation exceeds fiscal policy

K – special purpose stabilization deposit will be recommended, not removing funds for DPW purchase. Ideally, we'll get it to the point where we can fund two large fire trucks in FY26 and 27. Current balance is \$1,198,705. We'd need another \$325K.

L - OPEB #'s haven't changed. Will come from free cash and sewer revolving account.

M – Solid waste, we'll need to adjust bag fees to cover cost of operations to make revenues greater than current \$302K. Bids are out for new solid waste removal contract. Probably won't be completely resolved by town meeting.

N – Water enterprise fund, to be reviewed by town accountant.

O – Health Insurance Stabilization Fund \$369,334 based on savings for FY22

P - \$15,000 for use of sale of cemetery lots funds, in addition to operating account

Q, R – rescind borrowing amounts relating to LMHS

S – LPAC budget as presented

T – waiting on costs relating to old LPS site

W – waiting on costs relating to TCP design

Z – APR is in perpetuity. Acreage is 109. Property owners are gifting 20 acres.

Peter – concerned with additional benefits to Pierce family relating to adjacent properties.

AA – Sewer capital reserve as previously presented.

CC – Salary admin plan bylaw change will delay “longevity” until fall but will address new positions in May.

Jay – Could we look at trash pick-up schedule, reducing to 4-day schedule. Mrs. Lemieux – current bid follows current Cassela schedule.

5. Minutes

None

6. Committee Reports

Dave – TCP is working on town meeting reports and will come up with funding article number for their next meeting.

7. Town Manager / Finance Director Report

Mrs. Lemieux – confirmed earmark for fire alarm expires end of FY21.
No information available on prior year bond bill.
Various scenarios about funding for this project discussed by the committee,
including a potential amendment to the capital plan.

Work on regional Covid vaccine site is underway.

8. Public Comment

Dave – 12 street lights have been identified that are missing or non-functional.
Citizens should report bad street lights to DPW.
Encouraged citizens to look at planning board articles in the warrant. Articles will
be on the planning board's web page by EOD.

9. Next Meetings

March 25 – Public Hearing and votes on committee recommendations on
warrant articles

10. Adjournment

Motion: Chris Menard
2nd: Evan Watters

In favor: Chris, Peter, Dave, Jay, Evan, Terri