

**Town of Lunenburg
Select Board Meeting Minutes
School Committee Meeting Minutes
Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Town Hall, 17 Main Street
Tuesday January 27, 2026**

Note: References to the Tri-Board in the context of this meeting refer to Finance Committee, School Committee and Select Board

Select Board Members Present: Chair Caesar Nuzzolo, Vice-Chair Amanda Moore, Clerk Renee Emkey, Member Brian Lehtinen, Member Glenn McLeod

School Committee Members Present: Chair Anthony Sculimbrene, Vice-Chair Laura Brzozoski, Secretary Mandy Gilman, Member Emily Young

Finance Committee Members Present: Chair Chris Menard, Vice-Chair Jean Russell, Clerk Tom Gray, Member Tanya Dall, Member Jay Simeone, Member Ana Lockwood (Absent-Member Mike Rupp)

Tri-Board Moderator: Tim Murphy, Town Moderator

Also Present: Town Manager Jennifer Warren-Dyment and School Business Manager Christopher McNamara

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The meeting was called to order by Tim Murphy, who served as Moderator. He asked everyone to stand and address the flag for the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Murphy provided an overview of the open meeting law requirements, noting that the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live over the Lunenburg Public Access channel, Facebook Live, and would be uploaded to the Lunenburg Access YouTube channel after the meeting.

After the Pledge, Mr. Murphy invited each Chair to officially open their respective meetings. Each board chair officially opened their meetings, with Finance Committee Chair Chris Menard calling his meeting to order at 7:11 PM, followed by the School Committee Chair Anthony Sculimbrene, and Select Board Chair Caesar Nuzzolo.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lieutenant Christos Lekaditis, President of Lunenburg Firefighters Local 5369, spoke about the critical need for an override to fund the addition of a fourth shift for the Fire Department. Lieutenant Lekaditis explained that the current staffing model is unsustainable, with firefighters working 60-80+ hour weeks and 38+ hour shifts, creating significant burnout and low morale. He

emphasized that 95% of fire departments in Massachusetts already work 42-hour weeks, and Lunenburg needs to fund this long-overdue staffing improvement to ensure adequate emergency response.

Amy Sabbio, a teacher at Turkey Hill, described how her position had been changed from full-time fourth grade special education teacher to split between special education and an MTSS interventionist. She stated that "neither position is truly half time nor is either position seeming very effective." She explained that with one fewer paraprofessional per grade level and her divided duties, seven of her IEP students with significant pull-out service needs were being seen by a paraprofessional rather than a certified special education teacher. She further noted that MTSS services this year had reached only 29 students between October and December, compared to 108 students served throughout the prior school year.

School Committee Member Mandy Gilman asked what the differences were between Special Education and MTSS. Ms. Sabbio explained that special education serves students with documented disabilities requiring specially designed instruction, while MTSS is a general education initiative targeting students in grades 3–5 who are struggling academically but may not have a documented disability.

Finance Committee Ana Lockwood commented that no funding had been taken away from the School Department and that the Town has consistently funded the school side more than the other general operations.

Lynn Marabello, also a teacher described the impact of reduced MTSS staffing on classroom teachers, who are now expected to create intervention materials and run groups without adequate resources, training, or time. She noted the loss of the I-Ready program and stated that she currently manages the schedules of six individuals in addition to her own, compared to three in a typical year. She has 53 students across two classes.

Jennifer Miller, a 17-year employee of the district, spoke to the impact of staffing and program cuts at the high school. She described the loss of the Bridge Program, the TLC and Transition programs, and cuts across special education, music, physical education, world language, math, and science. She also addressed administrative reductions, noting the district had gone from two full-time assistant principals and a full-time athletic director to 1.5 assistant principals and a part-time athletic director. She warned that educator burnout and attrition were accelerating, and that early retirements and departures to better-paying districts were increasingly likely outcomes.

Mary Foyle, a 24-year employee of Lunenburg schools, provided historical context, noting that during the 2008-2009 recession, the District consolidated from four buildings to three and negotiated zero raises for three years. She described Lunenburg as one of the smallest standalone public high schools in Massachusetts, and expressed concern that students are not receiving a comprehensive high school experience. She noted that COVID relief funds had delayed the current crisis.

Speaking as both a longtime employee and a town resident, she stated that it is "my job as a townsperson to make up the budget shortfall — it is not my job as an employee to do so." She raised concern about employees effectively absorbing budget deficits through health insurance cost increases that erode negotiated raises, and noted that employees who do not live in town receive no corresponding benefit from the services they help fund.

PRELIMINARY FY27 BUDGET PLAN DISCUSSIONS

The Town Manager presented updated revenue projections and budget drivers for FY27. The Governor's cherry sheet numbers had been released, showing a small increase in state aid. Total revenues were projected at \$51,004,918.00. After subtracting non-appropriated expenses and state assessments, and holding the same levy amount appropriated to the capital plan as in the prior year, available funds for appropriation were estimated at \$49,805,800. Compared to FY26 appropriations (excluding the additional \$500,000 for schools), this yielded approximately \$1,429,364 in new FY27 revenue — an increase of roughly \$100,000 from figures presented two weeks prior.

The Town Manager presented a proportional revenue distribution scenario: schools (53.3%) would receive approximately \$762,280; the town (43.9%) approximately \$627,634; and Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School (2.76%) approximately \$39,450. She cautioned, however, that Monty Tech's actual assessment is set by that district — last year it represented an 8.8% increase, or approximately \$117,438, which would substantially exceed its proportional share.

The Town Manager identified four major budget drivers exceeding the new revenue:

- Health insurance: Previously projected at 20%, now revised to an average of 8.3% (trust average) with a high of 14.4%, due to the removal of GLP-one drugs from coverage
- Retirement: A non-negotiable 10% increase of \$240,000
- School transportation: \$230,000 increase
- Fourth shift fire department: \$350,000

After subtracting these four items from the \$1,429,364 in new revenue, the Town Manager projected a deficit of approximately negative \$615,000. She emphasized this figure addressed only these four items. It did not account for utility increases, vendor contract increases, TCP carrying costs, the pavement management plan, Monty Tech's actual assessment, collective bargaining agreements, or other contractual increases. She stated that the full FY27 deficit, based on all budget requests received to date, is slightly north of \$3,000,000.

Discussion among board members focused on gaining clarity about these figures and the process moving forward. Finance Committee member Chris raised concerns about the presentation of staffing numbers for the school district, showing data that overall staff counts had increased over the past 10 years despite claims of cuts. School Committee members countered that recent cuts had been significant and were having direct impacts on student achievement.

Several board members discussed possible approaches to an override, with various opinions on whether to present a single unified number, multiple options, or a tiered approach. Town Manager explained that an override permanently raises the levy limit, while an excluded debt is tied to specific borrowing and disappears when paid off.

Finance Committee Member Lockwood asked the Town Manager for clarification as to the \$615,000 figure. The Town Manager explained that the \$615,000 was a result of subtracting the increases attributed to health insurance, retirement, school transportation, and the fourth shift fire from the additional revenue. She clarified that the \$3,000,000 figure reflected the total of all town budgets that had been presented to the Tri-Board, including growth, plus the school's January 16th level-service budget.

Finance Committee Member Lockwood expressed concern about presenting figures that did not represent level services and stated she did not want to engage in "scare tactics". The Town Manager rejected any suggestion of scare tactics, and re-iterated that these figures were based upon the departmental requests and did not represent a level service budget.

Select Board Member Emkey noted that the value of the Tri-Board process was transparency at an earlier stage than usual, and that the \$3,000,000 did not represent a final override number. She stated that she did not see how the gap could be closed without an override, but not that the figure was necessarily \$3,000,000. She commented that determining that number is the next task for the Tri-Board and that the number is needed for the ballot by April 10th.

Select Board Member Moore agreed that identifying the scope of the problem was a necessary first step and appreciated the transparency, while also acknowledging that the numbers remain in flux and that further refinement is needed before a final figure can be determined.

Finance Committee Member Dall noted that the Finance Committee's role would be to ask detailed questions of each department to validate the numbers, and that this should not be taken personally, commenting, "we all want what's best for the town and the schools."

School Committee Chair Sculimbrene cautioned against attempting to resolve complex budgetary math in a public meeting setting, calling it an "unmitigated disaster" in his experience. He urged the boards to wait for complete, validated data before drawing conclusions, stating: "It is absolutely transparently obvious that we need an override. Let's wait till we've got all the data and do it the right way."

The Town Manager announced that the town's new Finance Director had started that day.

The Moderator asked the Town Manager to outline the different override structures available. She explained various types from single purpose, omnibus, a la carte, tiered, and multi-year. She directed members to the Division of Local Services (DLS) property tax impact calculator, which allows residents to model the tax impact of any override amount for Lunenburg specifically. She also offered to distribute a DLS booklet on override structures.

School Committee Member Gilman raised the option of presenting two separate numbers on the ballot with one for level services and one for targeted restoration as well as the possibility of a multi-year override to avoid returning to voters annually. She noted the School Committee had discussed both approaches and suggested the full Tri-Board should deliberate on the appropriate structure.

Finance Committee Member Lockwood emphasized that before going to voters, the boards must demonstrate they have done the "hard work" of identifying internal efficiencies and cost reductions. She cited two specific areas: the town's recycling program, which she noted had grown from approximately \$150,000 at the start of COVID to over \$500,000, and school choice enrollment revenue, which has declined from approximately \$500,000 to \$112,000 on the cherry sheet. She stated she would not support any override if those efforts had not been made.

The Town Manager confirmed that conversations regarding alternative recycling models had begun, and also raised the possibility of eliminating the mosquito control program assessment (approximately \$100,000) and the need to have serious future discussions about the TCP building, which is not yielding the anticipated energy cost savings following its partial decommissioning.

School Committee Chair Sculimbrene addressed the school choice revenue issue, noting that school choice demand is uneven across grade levels and that demand cannot simply be switched on. He also noted that maintaining a school system families want to choose requires investment, a point echoed by School Committee Member Brzozski, who stated: "In order to do that, you have to have a competitive school system, and that involves not making more cuts."

Finance Committee Chair Menard raised a point of concern about claims that the school district had been cutting staff, displaying a chart of school staffing from FY16 through FY25 showing a general upward trend in headcount. He stated that it "really irritates me when we say things like we're cutting staff when the data shows that staffing has gone up almost every year in the last 10 years." He also disclosed that he had requested this data prior to last year's override vote and that it had been withheld by the former superintendent until after town meeting.

School Committee Member Brzozski acknowledged the trend but noted that FY25 saw a downward turn, and that FY26 included significant layoffs, which was not reflected in the chart. She also noted that the student population's needs have increased substantially, with more students on IEPs, more English language learners, and more students entering below benchmark, meaning that even flat staffing represents a reduction in effective capacity. The School Committee had voted mid-year to add paraprofessionals to respond to individual students with acute needs, partly to avoid far more expensive out-of-district placements.

School Committee Chair Sculimbrene acknowledged the concern about precision in language but pushed back on the characterization, noting that the more relevant data point is the composition of staff, not total headcount. He observed that the chart for instructional staff showed a decline in recent years, and that combining roles, such as the athletic director consolidation from two FTEs to one, does not appear in headcount data but has real operational consequences.

The exchange concluded with general agreement that updated data including FY26 actuals should be shared with all board members, and that precision in language about staffing trends is important for maintaining public trust.

Several members spoke to the broader question of whether an override is necessary. Finance Committee Member Lockwood stated she would support an override only if there was a demonstrated commitment to internal cost savings first, and cautioned that for many residents,

particularly seniors on fixed incomes, a \$3,000,000 override would translate to approximately \$600 per year in additional taxes, a significant burden.

School Committee Member Brzozski advocated for a unified approach, stating: "I think we should have one number and we should all support it. That's going to give us the best chance of success." The Moderator spoke to the importance of rebuilding public trust following the prior override, after which funds were subsequently returned, and stated that the Tri-Board's unified presentation would be critical. He also called for a town-wide public forum where all constituencies, including seniors and non-parents, could hear directly from all departments, including fire, police, and DPW, not only the schools.

The Town Manager noted that a forum specifically addressing FY25 questions remains to be scheduled, and that multiple public road shows would follow once firm numbers are available closer to the April 10th ballot deadline.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The Moderator invited additional public comment. No members of the public in attendance or participating remotely requested to speak.

IMPORTANT DATES & UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Tri-Board discussed scheduling its next joint meeting. The Finance Committee noted it was entering an intensive budget review cycle, with a tentative Finance Committee public hearing and vote anticipated around March 12th and 19th respectively, and a warrant closing around March 16th.

After discussion of room availability and scheduling conflicts, the Tri-Board agreed to hold its next joint meeting on Monday, February 9, 2026 at 7:00 PM, to be held at the school (Middle/High School) due to a Planning Board meeting occupying Town Hall that evening.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Member Lehtinen to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:29 p.m. Seconded by Vice-Chair Moore Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Motion by Vice-Chair Brzozski to adjourn the School Committee meeting at 9:30 p.m. Seconded by Member Young. Call for the vote: Four-aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0).

Motion by Member Lockwood to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 9:30 p.m. Seconded by Member Gray. Call for the vote: Six-aye. The motion passed unanimously (6-0-0).

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Warren-Dyment, Town Manager

These Minutes were reviewed and approved by the Select Board on: Tuesday June 13, 2026.