

**Town of Lunenburg
Select Board Meeting Minutes
School Committee Meeting Minutes
Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Town Hall, 17 Main Street
Tuesday March 10, 2026, 7:30 PM**

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: Vice-Chair Amanda Moore, Clerk Renee Emkey, Member Brian Lehtinen, Member Glenn McLeod (Absent- Chair Caesar Nuzzolo)

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-Dymont, School Superintendent Dr. Jodi Fortuna, 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 at 7:30 PM. 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 School Committee Chair Anthony Sculimbrene calling his meeting to order, followed by Finance Committee Chair Chris Menard calling his meeting to order, and Select Board Vice-Chair Amanda Moore calling her meeting to order. The Moderator also noted that Town Counsel Adam Costa was attending another meeting but would attempt to join via Zoom at some point during the proceedings, and that he might be recognized out of order to accommodate his availability.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sarah Cammer, 304 Lancaster Avenue, addressed the board. She spoke not as a representative of any board she serves on, but purely as a resident and parent. Ms. Cammer opened by observing

that Lunenburg has faced persistent budget challenges for as long as she has lived in town, roughly thirteen years, noting that even routine matters such as removing a hazardous street tree had been denied due to a lack of funds. She expressed appreciation that the Tri-Board was now addressing these issues collectively, calling it a positive development.

Ms. Cameron reflected on the impact budget cuts have had on the schools over the years, including the elimination of a librarian position at the Primary school during her daughter's kindergarten year, a decision that contributed to her choice to remove her child from Lunenburg schools for a period of time. She stated that this decision, while ultimately beneficial for her child, separated her from the broader school community, an outcome she regretted.

Turning to the substance of the FY27 budget, Ms. Cammer expressed her support for the Town Manager's budget requests, suggesting that the Town Manager had likely asked for less than was truly needed. She then directly addressed what she described as a troubling dynamic she had observed in both the School Committee meeting and the Finance Committee: a discussion about separating an override into tiers, with the suggestion that some departments, particularly the school, may be asking for too much. She argued that this framing reflected the very problem that has plagued the town for years: pitting the "town side" against the "school side." She stated emphatically that the schools and municipal services are part of one whole community, and that fragmenting an override based on distrust of any department's ask was counterproductive and harmful to the community as a whole. She cited that fifty percent of Lunenburg students are not meeting literacy targets, and called the school's requests for an interventionist, a kindergarten paraprofessional, a world language teacher, a teacher and paraprofessional for the bridge program, an English teacher, a part-time music teacher, an assistant principal, a literacy coach, and an assistant business manager entirely reasonable and defensible.

Ms. Cammer also articulated her support for the Fire Department's fourth shift, stating that the town has needed it for years. She closed by warning that if the boards proceeded with a fragmented or piecemeal override strategy, she would urge residents to vote against all of the measures until the boards returned with a single, comprehensive override that addresses the full scope of town needs.

FY27 BUDGET AND PROPOSITION 2 ½ OVERRIDE

The Moderator opened the discussion by framing the central question before the Tri-Board: what form a Proposition 2½ override should take, and how it should be structured.

School Committee Chair Anthony Sculimbrene was the first to address the Tri-Board. He opined that perhaps if the schools had requested a larger override two years ago, they would not be requesting as much now. He drew a parallel between the town's historical tendency to defer spending and the long-term costs that result. He used the air conditioning system at the Primary school as an illustrative example. In that case, the town had chosen not to install the system as originally designed during construction, and the subsequent cost of retrofitting it was exponentially higher. "We have always preferred to save a penny today even if it means we have to spend a dime tomorrow," he said.

Chair Sculimbrene strongly advocated for an override large enough to carry the town through fiscal year 2028, noting the current economic uncertainty and potential recession. He observed that inflation has exceeded 2.5 % in virtually every month since approximately 2018, and argued that the town cannot count on external relief. He further commented that the picture was not going to get any better and that the School Committee had just learned that the District's federal entitlement grants had been cut by approximately \$123,000, adding to the fiscal pressure. He argued that asking for only what is needed now would likely necessitate a return to the voters within two years, and urged the Tri-Board to think in terms of a longer-term solution.

Finance Committee Member Ana Lockwood then spoke, recounting the failed 2012 override which she described as devastating. She stated that override had lost two to one and resulted in the Friday closure at the library and that staff took a ten percent salary reduction and given up hours. She noted that the more recent override in FY25, by contrast, was a smaller, targeted ask with no organized opposition and passed by only approximately 200 votes. She stated that her primary concern is not the amount of the override but the risk of failure. She argued that if an override was needed to maintain level services then that should be presented separately to the voters. She emphasized that she had not yet completed her own line-by-line review of the budget and therefore was unable to say whether she felt an override was needed to maintain level services as of yet. Her central argument was that whatever number is brought to the voters must have the best possible chance of passing, because the consequences of failure would be devastating. She commented that it was risky to put something in front of the voters that would not pass.

School Committee Member Mandy Gilman followed, speaking with urgency about the timeline. Having worked in political campaigns throughout her career, she expressed alarm that the Tri-Board was still debating the structure of the override approximately six weeks before it would appear on the ballot, without a cuts budget, without a final override number, and without any meaningful public education effort underway. She stated, "We are currently waving in the wind six weeks before people are voting on this. We don't have a cuts budget. We don't have a list of things that are not going to happen. Nobody is paying attention."

Member Gilman pushed back firmly against those who predicted that the previous override would not pass, noting that it succeeded because a committed group of parents invested significant time in direct outreach, standing in pickup lines, distributing flyers, and speaking with families at community events. She predicted the chance of an override passing, regardless of the figure, probably had a 50-50 shot. She called for the Tri-Board to settle on a number that evening if possible, warning that further delay was eroding the time needed to run an effective public education campaign. She predicted that voters would not be moved to vote based on \$100 difference in their tax bill, but they would be moved to vote by knowing what would be cut if the override did not pass.

Select Board Vice Chair Amanda Moore introduced herself and agreed with Member Gilman's sense of urgency. She was careful to frame the conversation as one of structural math between available resources as opposed to competition between departments. She proposed a three-tiered framework for presenting the override to the community: first, a "balanced cut budget," representing the worst-case scenario with cuts across the board on both the school and town sides; second, a "core services override," a combined school and town ask with some reductions; and third, a full

"restoration" override that would fund everything the school and town have requested. Vice Chair Moore acknowledged uncertainty about whether the full restoration override could pass, stating that she had heard concerns in the community about the larger number. She responded further to Member Gilman's call for urgency in decision making, stating that the Select Board had not yet had the opportunity to go over the budget line by line as a collective and that additional budget workshop meetings have been scheduled for the Board to weigh in on the budget options as a body.

Town Manager Jennifer Warren-Dyment provided during the discussion that the average single-family home in Lunenburg is assessed at \$517,296, with a current FY26 tax bill of \$7,444. The estimated impact of a \$3,000,000 override on that average household would be an additional \$636.27 per year, based on FY26 figures. She noted that the FY27 figure would be slightly higher once the standard 2.5 percent levy increase is applied on top.

Select Board Clerk Renee Emkey spoke next and agreed that a balanced cut budget should be presented to the public, not as a scare tactic, but as an honest explanation of what would occur without an override. She supported a tiered override approach, describing it as a "plus and premium" model similar to fuel grades. However, she made clear that a true level-service override would not be sufficient, stating, "I don't think a true level service is enough. It's just there's too many critical gaps." She commented, "level services with a sprinkle of salt". She cautioned against selecting a number for the override that members thought residents would pass as opposed to selecting a number based on justifiable needs.

Member Emkey reiterated that the Select Board had several budget workshops scheduled to go line by line through the budgets. She also commented that the budgets were changing rapidly with the revenue figures having just been revised that day. Accordingly she was not prepared to commit a specific number to the override at this juncture. The Town Manager confirmed that revenues had been revised that same day, with investment income adjusted upward by \$100,000 and motor vehicle excise tax by \$75,000, meaning the balanced budget gap had narrowed somewhat. She also expressed concern for what happens in FY28 as the budget pressures were likely to continue.

Member Emkey reaffirmed her intent to pursue a unified override with the schools- commenting that she had sat in the same room a year before and made that commitment. She returned to the schedule stating, that the Select Board had scheduled additional budget workshops on March 16 and March 23 to review the budget line by line. The Moderator then turned to members of the School Committee and inquired as to when they could be ready for final number. Chair Sculimbrenne commented that the "cuts" budget would be presented on the 18th. Member Gilman commented that she believed that the School had been waiting for the balanced budget figure from the Town Manager. The Town Manager responded that the school department had those figures for several weeks, but confirmed that the Superintendent had received the adjusted revenue (from investment income and motor vehicle excise tax) that day. Member Gilman commented that it would be helpful for the Select Board to publicly state they were planning for an override. Member Emkey commented on the lack of public engagement thus far.

School Committee Vice Chair Laura Brzozski spoke in favor of a single, unified override, arguing that the town is strongest when it approaches the challenge as one community. "We're one unit. We're one town." She expressed concern that a tiered structure would send the message that the

higher-tier items, including positions the schools have identified as essential, are optional. She noted that the school's restoration budget was, in her view, already extremely conservative, restoring only positions that had been cut the prior year and whose absence has been demonstrably harmful to students. "Kids are in first grade once. They're in kindergarten once. They learn to read once. When we miss those windows, it affects them for the rest of their lives." She stated her preference for one override but acknowledged she could support whatever the body decided, as unity of message was itself important.

Finance Committee Chair Chris Menard stated that he did not think that the group could walk out of the room with one number that night, but they could choose a structure. He stated that he trusted the data this year in a way he had not in prior years. He stated that they needed to continue to look at revenues. He stated that they could look at revenues to reduce the impact of the override but know that would impact Free Cash and other things. He presented a visual diagram he had prepared to illustrate the budget situation. He described the diagram as showing the FY26 budget as a baseline and went over the revenue sources. He showed that the revenue projection line, which increases modestly, cannot keep pace with the FY27 level-service budget. The gap between the revenue line and the level-service budget represents the amount that must be cut in a balanced budget scenario. He noted additional items shown in the diagram representing expanded service requests, including the fourth fire shift, an Assistant Town Manager, and the school's restoration budget items.

Chair Menard reiterated that the Tri-Board should at minimum leave the meeting with a consensus on the structure of the override (one, two, or three questions) rather than a specific dollar amount, and said he personally was leaning toward recommending at least two override positions. He stated that a course should be charted and that the details of the budget could be discussed during the remainder of the month.

Moderator Murphy asked when numbers could be finalized. Town Manager Warren-Dyment expressed frustration at the pace of the conversation, noting that both the school and town sides already have their balanced budget numbers and their request numbers, and that what staff need is direction from the elected boards: "We need to hear whether those numbers are what the override numbers are. We need to be reacting to you." She emphasized that staff are ready to produce the detailed documentation required, but they need the policy direction to do so. The Superintendent concurred.

Member Lockwood responded that what she thought she heard was "level services with a sprinkle of salt". She stated that she wanted to see the level services budget with the additional asks. She commented that she had sent the Town Manager 125 comments on the budget as well as her suggestions as to revenue. She said she would be "rigid about what is a level service" and that the town and school both had unused money in FY25. She commented that if the Town needed to borrow to get capital projects done, that was an available alternative.

Member Gilman questioned whether if the pursuit is for a "bare bones level services override" would people be willing to be back next year again.

Finance Committee Member Tom Gray urged the group not to over-engineer the process and to deal with the information they currently had before them. He argued that the best approach is honesty

with the electorate: "We're just trying to deal with this year and we are going to try to deal with next year, next year." He acknowledged that he had watched the Fire Chief's budget presentation and found it informative, but commented how few members of the public had done so. He urged the boards to make a decision and commit to it, noting that public attention would not be captured until there are visible signs in the community and real information to react to. "We have to make decisions. We just can't sit there and pass it on." He also commented on the urgency, stating the group had been ahead of schedule, but was losing time.

Member Emkey opined that true level services was not enough and that there were too many critical gaps. She acknowledged that the school needed an Assistant School Business Manager, that a principal should not be in a kindergarten class, and that she supported an Assistant Town Manager. She questioned whether 4th shift fire would be considered level services or not.

School Committee Member Emily Young noted that as a parent who had watched the prior override process from outside the committees, the most powerful motivating factor had been the sense that the community was acting together with the town and schools in unison. She said that unity in messaging would be a significant asset in building public support.

Vice Chair Moore commented that she viewed the ask as "core services" as opposed to "level services". She commented that she would be willing to make cuts in areas of the operating budget to support the addition of the 4th shift fire. She would like a restoration budget to pass. Member Emkey commented that the needs have changed and that cuts are being made to support those changes.

Vice Chair Brzozski cautioned that the two tiers may suggest that the higher tier included optional items. She was concerned that there would be a suggestion that the things in the higher tier would be considered perhaps "unnecessary".

Additional discussion ensued about core vs. level services. Chair Menard offered that a level services option should be offered. Vice Chair Moore responded that she felt like certain cuts should be made to support core services and that is why the term core should be used. Member Lockwood commented that she felt like core services was the right direction as she believe in a "zero-base budgeting" approach. Folks should look at actuals and be strategic as opposed to adding 2 % to everything.

Moderator Murphy suggested that a group get together to work on messaging. A distinction was made between campaigning and messaging. Chair Menard offered that the Chairs will meet to discuss the messaging.

Select Board Member Brian Lehtinen expressed support for a single override number and noted that if parents and students are directly engaged and asked to show up, they will come, as demonstrated in prior elections. He agreed that the numbers should be ready by the end of March and that the numbers must be justified and reviewed by the Finance Committee. He stated that he does not believe a level-service-only override is appropriate, and that it is ultimately the school committee's responsibility to determine what the schools need and to put that number forward for voters to decide. On the question of one versus two tiers, he stated he would support a two-tiered structure

only if it were tied to a multi-year projection, and that for a single-year ask, one number is cleaner and more defensible. He affirmed that it was not just about level services, it is about the services that are needed.

Finance Committee Member Tanya Dall agreed with the consensus that the override should encompass both the schools and the town as one community, including the fire department. She emphasized that if a tiered approach is used, each tier must be accompanied by very specific data showing the dollar impact per household and the precise service implications of each option.

Chair Sculimbrene offered that he thought parents would not be motivated to vote for an override that keeps the status quo if the status quo is not good. He commented on the recent student performance metrics. He said an override based on level services will not pass and that it should be a “core function” override. Telling people to “spend more money on something that is not working is not compelling”. He said he is leaning towards core override and then a restoration override, but not an override for just level services.

Select Board Member Glenn McLeod addressed what he characterized as the broader systemic cause of the crisis: insufficient state investment in communities. He noted that more communities than ever are expected to seek overrides this year, and that simply passing overrides does not solve the underlying structural problem. He urged that any public messaging acknowledge that Lunenburg is struggling as a result of inadequate state funding and that residents should hold the state accountable.

Vice Chair Brzozski said that they have been lean for years and that there was nowhere else to cut from. She stated that they have not heard the “cuts” budget yet, but that there was nothing unnecessary in their budget. She reiterated that one override supports the message that this what we need.

Member Emkey commented that the Town was offsetting additions to its budget by making cuts in other areas of the budget. She asked that the schools look at their top priorities and perform the same exercise to come up with a “sub-restoration” budget.

The Moderator called for a straw poll on whether all members present supported placing an override on the ballot. All members present indicated their support. The Moderator confirmed that this was unanimous among those in attendance and noted for the record that it was a non-binding straw poll.

The Moderator then called for a straw poll on the structure of the override: one number, or two numbers. The count yielded approximately seven members in favor of a single override number and five members in favor of two numbers. The Moderator acknowledged the near-even split and noted that several members were absent, including Select Board Member Caesar Nuzzolo, who was away on National Guard duty.

While waiting for Town Counsel to join, the Town Manager discussed override options and mechanics with the members. She stated that many communities are thinking outside of the box when it comes to the override approach. She suggested to start with defining what you want the

structure to look like. The Moderator asked if anyone in the group was against either approach of an override (single vs. tiered).

Member Lockwood commented that she was opposed to bringing forward a single override number. She stated that her children suffered from the failure of the 2012 override. She called the prospect of repeating that outcome "extremely dangerous" and "reckless," and argued that the voters of Lunenburg have historically supported schools, citing the approval of a new school building shortly after the 2012 override failure.

Member Lehtinen reiterated support for a single number and suggested removing emotion from the process: the School Committee identifies its needs, the Finance Committee reviews the numbers, and the Select Board puts the article to the voters.

Member Gray urged the group to commit: "Pick a number and go with it, and then be forceful and educate the people." Vice Chair Moore expressed concern about a single override. Member Dall expressed concern about a "trust issue" with residents stemming from recent years' budgetary events, and argued that having two options on the ballot could be framed as transparency and a good-faith effort to work with the community rather than a sign of indecision. Chair Menard commented that he hoped that all would support the Select Board's decision regardless of what that decision may be.

After some technical difficulty establishing audio, Town Counsel Adam J. Costa joined the meeting via telephone from his vehicle, having been at another meeting. The Moderator briefed him on the central question before the Tri-Board.

Town Counsel Costa observed that the current override season is shaping up to be exceptionally busy, potentially surpassing even last year, which he described as unprecedented in his twenty years of practice. He noted that municipalities are actively seeking creative approaches but that the stringent statutory requirements governing Proposition 2½ overrides create real risk when communities try to deviate from traditional methods. He stated that he had recently had multiple conversations with the lead general counsel for the Division of Local Services (DLS) at the Massachusetts Department of Revenue regarding non-traditional override structures, and that even in those conversations, answers were not always definitive. He observed, "Thinking outside the box carries with it some risks."

He reported that despite extensive internal discussion of tiered overrides, multi-year overrides, stabilization fund overrides, and other creative variations, most communities ultimately land on something "tried and true" in a general purposes override or a categorical override. Those approaches are the ones that voters understand and that can be executed without legal uncertainty. He said that communities seem to gravitate toward simplicity when the stakes are high.

Member Emkey asked Attorney Costa to address the rules governing what elected officials and public employees can do in terms of informing the public about an override, conducting surveys, and using public access television. Town Counsel Costa responded that while he did not have all relevant materials in front of him, he could speak in general terms. He stated that the law regulates conduct, not speech, and that local officials are permitted to take positions on override questions

and speak publicly in favor of or in opposition to them. He stated the use of municipal funds or municipal resources (personnel, supplies, facilities) to promote or oppose a ballot question is what is prohibited. He noted that public employees may work on an override campaign on a volunteer basis on their own time in any capacity except fundraising. He further noted the existence of a specific statute, which he did not believe Lunenburg has adopted, that permits municipalities to send a one-page informational summary to voters regarding override questions. He committed to providing specific guidance documents through the Town Manager, including materials from the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) and the Attorney General's office.

Regarding Member Emkey's question about a public survey or poll, Town Counsel Costa indicated his belief that gathering information from residents through a poll is distinguishable from advocating on a ballot question, and that it is likely permissible, though he would confirm this in writing.

Chair Sculimbrene asked for clarification on whether, as a School Committee member, he could tell parents that they should come to town meeting with a sponsor and vote for an override article. Town Counsel Costa read directly from the DLS Proposition 2½ guide: "The law regulates conduct and not speech. Thus, while local officials can take a position on an override or exclusion question and can speak in favor of or in opposition to it, they cannot spend public funds or use public resources such as personnel, supplies, and facilities to promote or oppose the question. Public employees may work on an override question or exclusion campaign on a volunteer basis on their own time in any capacity other than fundraising." He opined that providing informational context to parent groups, such as explaining town meeting procedures and the role of a sponsor, would not run afoul of the law, though he would verify this against available guidance.

Member Emkey confirmed the key timeline constraint: the ballot question language must be submitted to the Town Clerk by April 11, 2026, which is thirty-five days prior to the election. Town Counsel Costa confirmed this, and also confirmed that if the override question fails at the ballot, the town has the option of bringing it back for a special election, provided that occurs prior to September 15th for appropriations made at the Annual Town Meeting. He noted that the thirty-five day notice requirement applies to each subsequent election as well.

Town Counsel Costa also confirmed that the specific dollar amount does not need to appear in the printed warrant; it needs to be contained in the motion on the floor, but the motion's dollar figure must match the ballot question. Town Manager Warren-Dyment confirmed the April 11th deadline is to the Town Clerk's office, not a board vote.

The Moderator thanked Town Counsel Costa for attending under difficult circumstances, and he disconnected from the meeting.

Following Town Counsel Costa's departure, the Moderator attempted to bring the conversation to a close and identify next steps. He noted that the straw poll on one versus two overrides had yielded a near-even split, and that the group was not yet in a position to reach a binding conclusion.

Member Gilman expressed urgency about the need to begin at least some form of public communication, proposing that the Tri-Board put out a statement indicating that an override is

necessary. Vice Chair Moore raised concern about taking a formal vote without Select Board Chair Caesar Nuzzolo present, as he would be returning from National Guard service later that week. The Town Manager suggested that rather than taking a formal vote, each individual member and committee could use their own platforms to communicate that the Tri-Board had met and is actively working on the FY27 budget, noting that there is nothing improper about doing so.

The Moderator noted that the April 11th ballot language deadline effectively means the Tri-Board must arrive at a final number by the end of March or very early April, and encouraged the chairs to keep that constraint front of mind.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sarah Cammer of 304 Lancaster Avenue, returned to the podium for a second public comment period. She addressed the Tri-Board as a parent, stating that the schools are "not starting this process on equal footing with the town," noting that new hires had occurred on the municipal side in the prior year while the schools had been cutting positions.

Referring directly to the diagram Chair Menard had presented earlier, Ms. Cammer took issue with the labeling of the school's restoration budget items in the highest tier, particularly the items listed as "x, y, z." She identified those items specifically: an English teacher and part-time music teacher to ensure adequate time-on-learning at the high school and middle school, an assistant principal, a literacy coach, and an assistant business manager. "These aren't x, y, z items to me," she stated.

Chair Sculimbrene exited the meeting prior to end of the public comment period.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Member Lockwood to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting. Seconded by Member Dall. Call for the vote: Six-aye. The motion passed unanimously (6-0-0).

Motion by Member Gilman to adjourn the School Committee meeting. Seconded by Member Young. Call for the vote: Three-aye. The motion passed unanimously (3-0-0).

Motion by Member Lehtinen to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:53 p.m. Seconded by Vice-Chair Moore. Call for the vote: Four-aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0).

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Warren-Dyment, Town Manager

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