



Lunenburg Public Schools

Dr. Jodi Fortuna, Superintendent of Schools

MEETING MINUTES
EMERGENCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Monday, March 23, 2026
LMHS 6:00 – Hybrid

School Committee

Anthony Sculimbrenne Chair - Present
Laura Brzozoski, Vice Chair - Present
Mandy Gilman, Secretary – Present
Emily Young, Member - Absent
Member, TBD

Superintendent

Dr. Jodi Fortuna

Recording Secretary

Courtney Fuller

Guests: Christopher McNamara – Business Administrator

In accordance with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, please be advised that this meeting is being recorded and broadcast live over the Lunenburg Public Access channel, on Facebook Live on the Public Access Facebook page.

(<http://www.facebook.com/Lunenburg-Public-Access-Cable-157427270975305/>) and will be uploaded to the Lunenburg Access YouTube after the meeting.

The agenda lists all the topics which may be discussed at the meeting and those reasonably anticipated by the Chair. Votes may be taken as a result of these discussions. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by Open Meeting Law

- 1. Call to Order at 6:00 by Mr. Sculimbrenne**
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Public Comment Ms. Gilman makes a motion to extend the public comment section past 10 minutes, Ms. Brzozoski seconds the motion, all approve**

Casey McDonnell, 1024 Mass Ave I'm a teacher at Lunenburg High School and I'm also the head football coach. I want to be very clear as the football coach, I'm not here trying to protect my puppy. I understand everybody needs to take some cuts and I'm in complete agreement with that, however, I strongly believe that a more creative avenue for further conversation needs to be had about the athletic transportation. It's a liability nightmare waiting to happen with what we're talking about by just making it completely cut. In my opinion, this fall I'm going to have 40 kids in the football program and I shudder at the idea that we are going to carpool and figure out rides to places like Gardner, Fitchburg, Worcester, Leicester, etc. There needs to be some sort of alternative option. I know Emily had talked about a one-way transportation last week, I have even talked with other coaches in the area about other programs that have done the purchase of one or two vans or buses. I'm going to leave them anonymous, but direct quotes that I've gotten from other coaches in other athletic programs in the area, "any school that wants to save money finds a way to get a van or two to supplement their travel". Another coach that told me, "It's absolutely worth it. I would recommend every school having one. It paid for itself within two years". Whatever argument against it, whether it be insurance, whatever the case may be, I promise you it is less than any lawsuit or liability that could fall back on Miss Burns, the coaches, myself. We can talk about if parents can be the ones that are responsible for bringing the kids to these games, but that's out of our control. And I don't want us to be on the other end of when a kid throws four other kids into his pickup truck, drives out to an away game that we told him to go

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to, and something bad happens. It is a legal nightmare. There are liabilities there that weigh far more financially and emotionally than us just being able to figure it out. I have full confidence and faith in our extracurricular community. I'm including band and music into this when I say this that we could come together and be able to raise funds and aid in the effort if needed. Like I said, it just requires more of a conversation and willingness to explore more creative options besides parents and families helping us to figure it out.

Nathaniel Ayles, student athlete, I have comments on the busing, all of us understand how expensive busing is, but cutting both sports and band transportation from our budget would unfairly limit student access to essential extracurricular activities that build teamwork, discipline, and school pride. Many students rely on school provided transportation to participate, and without it, those who cannot drive or lack other options would be excluded, creating inequality among the student body. Athletics and music programs are not just extras, they contribute to students' physical health, creativity, and overall academic success. Removing transportation risks lower participation, weakening school culture, and taking away opportunities that help students grow beyond the classroom

Chris Sullivan, 108 Highland Street, I am not jealous or envious of anything you guys had to do here. I think Lunenburg needs to focus on educating our students and our obligation to do that. Our obligation should be educate the entire student that includes extracurricular activities. Classroom first and foremost obviously and it goes without saying but I'm a firm believer that athletics and other extracurricular here at Lunenburg play a significant role in student development and the life experiences extend far beyond the classroom. I have two students here at the high school a sophomore and a senior and those extracurricular directly impact their social and emotional well-being, they establish long-term relationships and friendly bonds. It builds their college resumes, it helps them understand what it means to be part of something special, to be part of something more than just your individual self. I haven't heard much in the way discussion of cutting middle school sports. I'm not sure where we're at with middle school sports if they're completely off the table, but when I looked at Dr. Fortuna's slide that came out today, we're talking about \$2,400 for the ski team, \$3,300 for golf, \$4,200 for girls lacrosse, that's \$9,976. We're presently spending \$14,415 on middle school sports. There's a \$4,439 difference between the two. I would be a proponent of cutting middle school sports before I would anything to do with varsity sports. Cutting varsity sports can have direct implications on kids' college opportunities, not sure if you're aware, but our varsity lacrosse goalie is a D1 commit to Cal Berkeley next year, that opportunity goes away if we don't have opportunity here for girls to play lacrosse. Two of the sports that we're talking about, my son plays, so it hit me like a ton of bricks this morning when I got that email. He's been on the golf team since the eighth grade, he's been on the ski team for two years. Ski team is a co-op. I'm not sure if we can look at other schools taking that on. Golf, I don't know what the solutions are, but we're talking about impacting kids opportunities here to enjoy school, to be off screens, to not be going home directly after school, to build these bonds. I think that's a travesty that we are here talking about that tonight. I know we got to talk about the position, athletic trainer, not the person, Dave obviously has established a great relationship with students but whoever the trainer is, the fact that kids have somebody here full-time that they can rely on for safety, for their health, and their emotional well-being is huge. Someone that's not here full-time, I can speak to it directly. My first track meet of the season this year, my daughter pulled her hamstring, she came home distraught, totally upset. Senior year, down and out, not sure what to expect. She realized that Dave was up at the school at a basketball game. She immediately came up to the school that night, saw Dave, came home with a stim machine for the weekend to start getting herself rehabbed, and then was able to get back to compete at states at the end of the season where they won the state title for the school. The impact that a trainer can have at a school on a full-time basis is huge. Not having a trainer here full-time is a massive detriment to our program here at the school

Jim Broden, Ski Team Founder I've been involved with the ski team for over 20 years. What I would propose that we could do is if we raised that money, would you keep the team? We've done that before, we were a completely self-funded team and I believe that we could raise that money. If that wasn't an option the second thing that we could do is to go talk to Leominster High School and Littleton High School and ask if they want to be the host teams. We do not use school transportation and we make it work, everyone has insurance. When I started the team we did look up in the Massachusetts law if a parent has over \$100,000 of liability insurance they can drive. So we've never had any issues with that. I think if it's no cost, we should be able to keep it. So that's what I propose. And it's really no different than when all the kids are younger, we pay for all of their sports and we believe that we could continue to do that. For the first 12 years that I was the coach, I had all of the funding. It was all reported to the athletic director at the end of each season and we had no problems with it. So, I hope you take that into consideration.

Anna Lockwood I want to thank Mr. Broden for his comments, my daughter did the ski team when he was the coach and it was a self-funded sport, there was no cost to the school district at that point to have that team running. I think as parents we can do that again. I am looking for ways to support the school department and continue everything that's good about Lunenburg. I'd love to support any team including the golf which my son played as well. I made a comment earlier to a school committee member it's not that we don't want to support the sports I think we need to be pragmatic about it and if sports have less than number of kids then school department will not provide transportation might be a good rule to go by, so that we'll be funding sports that maximize the most benefit to the most kids. I was also very appreciative of the chair on that our last meeting where he said you know we need to focus on education. As hard as it is to admit to this, the outcome of any kid on their educational journey really has to do with social economics. I think we need to focus on doing the basics and doing the basics very well during difficult times and provide good education for the children. While the extracurricular benefits children but not as many I think we need to be frugal about it. So I do think I support the chair on his comments on focusing on education. I hope everything can stay. I hope parents can step up and gosh, I can step up, too. This is not easy. I don't envy you. Unfortunately, it seems to be a cycle that we go through every 10 years or so.

Matt Snyder 985 Flat Hill Road I agree with and appreciate everything everybody said to date. I would argue that unfortunately education first doesn't go without saying because I think that is one of the areas we cut the most, because we don't want to lose some of the extracurricular items and the things that make a potentially better-rounded student. So, I think it does need to be said over and over again that the education does have to come first and we might need to make some difficult decisions in other areas. My kids happen to play sports and they're in the band. They're both very academically successful. We're going to be impacted no matter what we cut, right? It doesn't matter. So, I'm not here to make a plea for my own self-interest or anything like that. I'm really not even here to make a plea to you folks. I know this is a difficult and challenging decision. It's really a plea to the town, we keep going through this. I know the previous speaker said we go through this every 10 years. We're going through this every year right now. It's not every 10 years. It's every year, and the problem is that we either don't ask for enough money when we go for an override or we wait too long to ask for money when we go for an override. We make these death by a thousand paper cut type moves, we dwindle away what our school system offers and then eventually we pass a band-aid fix that solves that year. The next year we're making the same conversation. Maybe an override gets us a couple years, but it's rare in my time in town that we're passing an override that significantly carries the town to the next. We need to help change the mindset in town that if we're demonstrating a financial burden and a financial need, we need to fund that financial burden and financial need or we're going to lose programming and that you can't have all the programming you want without funding it. There's no way around it, so we're watching a slow fade turn into a rapid fade of services. Everything's falling off the edge right now, we're like lemmings. It's just everything's going right over the edge. When we came to town, we had a shop program. We had all kinds of things. We built a brand new

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school and didn't have a shop because we had to cut the shop. We now can't have a shop because we don't have a space to put it, the band has been under threat every year. Our son has played in a band of like six kids, right? We're finally seeing that return. Some of that was COVID. A lot of that was funding. A lot of that was cuts in the lower levels. A prior speaker talked about cutting middle school sports. Yeah, that's an option, but those are feeder programs that feed into your high school sports. So, you start cutting the lower level sports, your feeder programs go away. Sure, there's town sports. Sure, there's programs that people can put their own kids into programs, but if it's not run through the public schools, it's the people who can't afford it who can't do it. So, it's the haves and have nots. I graduated from one of the smallest public high schools in all of Massachusetts, it probably still is. We had one honors class. We had one AP class. We did still have a shop program. I don't know how, but basically you had two offerings maybe of each subject at each grade level throughout. As far as sports, we had a single sport per season per gender, right? We had a boys' soccer, girls' soccer, we had boys' baseball and girls' softball. We had very few extracurricular offerings there. When I went off to college, I was woefully unprepared in my exposure and background. I managed to be a successful student. I'm not going to say it was in spite of my education. I think I would have succeeded just aptitude, but my high school did not prepare me for college. Lunenburg is definitely heading down the path of not preparing its kids for college if we keep cutting programs. And it's not sports. It's not band. It's not education. It's all of it. So, it's not a message to you folks, you're doing what you can to fit a square peg in a round bowl. The town needs to step up and take care of our community because we're a community. Our kids, our school is a critical part of our community. And if it starts to go downhill, the rest of the community is going to follow.

Kara Harunkiewicz, 165 Gilcrest Street I'm normally up there and trust me, I fully agree. There are many times I probably wouldn't have come to school if it wasn't for my extracurricular activities. I hate when I get a doctor's appointment that's scheduled the same day I have jazz band because then I'm not allowed to go to jazz band. But I would like to justify what I said the other day too about education coming first and why I made the comment up there about, hey, why are we cutting teachers when we aren't cutting athletic transportation. I work at a summer camp. For our kids from pre-k to first grade, our ratio is 1:7. And I mean, mind you, we're being paid minimum wage and are hardly trained, but still one of us to seven of them. The idea of it being one of us to 30 of them, I don't know how anyone could do that. It's hard enough as it is. I don't see how a primary school teacher can manage a classroom of 30 kids on their own, especially when some of those kids have special needs, can't learn the same way as the other students, and yet we'll get our football team to Martha's Vineyard. It doesn't make sense. And no one likes to come up here and advocate for the loss of extracurricular activities. It affects me too. I've done sports, not here in a while, but I have done sports through Lunenburg. It just you can't run successful sports programs when your lowest level of students aren't being educated. How is your first grader ever going to be able to play a sport if they can hardly spell their name? Which is what we're looking at when your first grade students are shoved 30 in a room. So, I would just like to justify what I said before for those who were like, why would she say that? Because I did get a few questions in school about why I would suggest cutting athletic transportation.

Laura Barooshian, 389 Mulpus Road I was at the marathon meeting on Wednesday night and saddened to see that today's presentation had even more cuts than were being discussed on Wednesday. And I think it's just a testament to the fact that to make a balanced budget, it has to come from somewhere, I want to remind the public and all of the parents and the 117 people that are on this Zoom right now. I don't know how many in the room, but May 2nd is town meeting day and May 16th is voting day, 117 votes puts through an override that avoids these cuts. Parents and taxpayers, this is a balanced budget is a one-year fix. We will be back in this room and back on the Zoom this time next year. And there won't be an athletic transportation, there won't be a music transportation cut, there won't be a point to music teacher at the fifth grade, they'll be all academic cuts. There'll be the support services for the special needs kids. There'll be teachers. The cuts

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will be even more drastic. And this will just be on we are in a vicious circle over and over again. We have to do something to stop this. 117 voices plus those in the room and those that we can talk to in your neighbors and your other maybe your family, that's what needs to happen. We can avoid this. We have one thing that we can control. There's one thing that we can do in this world, is to make your voice heard and to stop this from happening and stop I will say the board school committee from having to put this forward. They have to put this forward but this is this is up to us. I will also say the president of music gators we have our biggest sixth grade band right now because the fifth grade band last year, I think I'm going to get this right, Mr. Ballister will correct me if I don't, but I think it was 90% of the kids that started with 5th grade band last year finished with the band. And that's what's got our biggest band program now. And the musicgators will step in where we need to. We've already communicated that to the school committee. We will fill the gap, but we will be asking our parents to fund that. We will be asking for financial support to do that. But I just remind folks, this is in our control. May 2nd you have to be at town meeting and May 16th you have to be voting.

Mr. Sculimbrene reads aloud a letter from the first grade team. Dear members of the Lunenburg School Committee, the first grade team is writing to express serious concern about the proposed change from five first grade classrooms of approximately 23 students each to four classrooms of 30 students or more each. We want to begin by acknowledging and appreciating the difficult decisions you are facing and working within what we understand to be an extremely challenging and at times seemingly impossible budget. We recognize the care and thought that goes into balancing financial constraints with the needs of students, staff, and the broader community, and we are grateful for your continued commitment to our schools. At the same time, we feel strongly that this proposed change will have a significant impact on our youngest learners. First grade is a foundational year for literacy development. It is during this critical period that our students not only learn to read, but build their foundation for future learning and shape their entire academic trajectory. Increasing class sizes to 30 students significantly limits a teacher's ability to provide the instruction that early literacy demands. In smaller classes, we can more effectively deliver mandatory curriculum, identify gaps, and tailor instruction to meet diverse needs. With 30 students, that level of attention becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. As classroom teachers with little to no support already, we feel confident that our struggling learners will not receive the individualized instruction and intervention they deserve and require. This poses tremendous long-term academic consequences. Research has consistently shown that early grade size matters most. Investing in smaller classes in first grade is not simply beneficial. It is essential. We are deeply concerned about changing the class size particular particularly as the number and intensity of student behavior challenges continues to increase each year. We are already supporting students with a wide range of social, emotional, and behavioral needs, often without staffing or resources for us to do so effectively. Many of our young students are arriving in our classroom needing support in managing big emotions, dealing with trauma, following rules and routines, and maintaining focus. Addressing these needs takes substantial time, and often disrupts instruction, reduce learn reducing learning opportunities for all students. While larger class sizes may seem like a practical response to budget or staffing challenges, they often lead to unintended consequences for teacher morale, effectiveness, and retention. As class sizes grow without additional support, we have less capacity to provide individualized instruction and are forced to focus on more classroom management than meaningful learning. This shift will increase stress, make student needs harder to meet, and will lead to burnout, frustration, and a diminished sense of effectiveness in our classrooms. We respectfully urge the committee to carefully reconsider this proposal and prioritize maintaining small class sizes in first grade, smaller class sizes in first grade. Supporting our youngest learners at this critical stage is one of the most important investments we can make in their future. Thank you for your time, your service, and your consideration. Sincerely, Christa Palma, Jackie Favreau, Kara Slattery, Pattie Kilcommmins, and Mike Courtemanche

Mr. Sculimbrene reads a letter from Nicole Bienvenu on behalf of the second grade team. Dear Mr. Sculimbrene, Ms. Brzozoski, Miss Gilman and Ms. Young. We are sending this to you today as a team of professional educators with a collective 71 years of teaching and practical experience at the Lunenburg Primary School to express both our unwavering commitment for to what is best for our second grade students and also our concern for those students due to potential staffing changes in the coming year. To begin, we want to thank you for the time for taking the time to hear our concerns and for your advocacy on our schools and students during this challenging fiscal time. We are aware of and understand the budget constraints all too well as we have been experiencing this difficult environment for some time. We appreciate the difficult situation you face balancing priorities and resources. We would like to emphasize and make you aware that any staff cuts resulting in class sizes of 30 or more students at the primary level will lessen our ability to educate students of Lunenburg effectively. The result of this student to teacher ratio will negatively impact our students, their safety and their academic, social and emotional progress. Currently the struggles we are facing in our classroom include substantial and growing number of students with social emotional dysregulation major unsafe physical and verbal behaviors and a lack of staff to support these ever increasing needs. The current staffing shortage has already made it very challenging to adequately meet academic, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students at the primary school. Staffing reductions would only make that situation worse. We believe drawing on our extensive experience as educators that at those levels of student to teachers, it would become impossible to give our second grade students the focused instruction they require without even meeting the basic requirement for adequate space to safely educate our students. We are facing a current reality in education where every year our students come to us with more and more needs, specifically social, emotional, and behavioral needs. We need to acknowledge this reality and be proactive in supporting our student needs. Reducing staff at the Lunenburg Primary School will make an already difficult situation impossible. Our school is staffed by dedicated, experienced, and compassionate educators who consistently go above and beyond to ensure our students receive the support they need. We all agree our students deserve a robust and effective public education. We need and appreciate your support and advocacy in order to continue to deliver what our students need to be successful. For all of these reasons, we are asking you not to cut classroom educator positions at the Primary School. We have one more critical area of concern. Given the significant challenges we are facing in our school year, our assistant principal has been vital in supporting us. He consistently goes above and beyond to support staff and students. Our school would be less safe and less functional without a full-time assistant principal. Please also consider not cutting this full-time essential position. Our Lunenburg Primary School mission statement states, "Our mission, we prepare our students for lifelong learning and responsible community membership. Our vision, the Lunenburg Primary School is a child- centered school devoted to providing high quality early childhood education for all students. We're a community of teachers, students, and parents working together to create a safe and respectable, respectful learning environment". Our current knowledge of child development guides the school's beliefs and practices and provides the foundation for student learning. Please help us and advocate for what our students deserve in order to learn at the Lunenburg Primary School and help us live up to our mission statement. Respectfully, Nicole Bienvenu, Melissa Bourgeois, Britney Gibbons, Julie Hudson, Sara Kenney, Laura Refrigeri, and Karen Hurley.

Mandy Gilman I want to thank our educators for their thoughtful comments and feedback. I

Laura Brzozoski First of all, everything that people said tonight, thank you. You also need to be saying it to the select board and the tri board meeting is tomorrow night. It needs to be said there, too, because we know that these cuts are painful. There's nothing that doesn't hurt, so send emails to people, advocate outside of just here, please. This is good, too, I love when our students come and talk as well. I think that's says something nice about Lunenburg. This weekend I did what I think many of you also been doing, I spun out a little. I'm a school committee member, but I'm also a mom and I need my kids to get a decent education. I went to open houses. I looked at the rich towns that I can't afford to live in, the ones with the

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that I can't afford to move to, the ones with the really nice fancy schools, and then I talked to people, to the teacher from Boxboro and Groton and people in Westford and Chelmsford and a lot of really nice towns. Arlington, a lot of very expensive places to live with very good schools, and the good news and the bad news, it's not just Lunenburg, it's like this everywhere. This is a statewide issue. It is horrifying as a school committee member to see it coming and know that it's about to crash down on Massachusetts and to see the state legislature doing very little. This is awful it's like screaming avalanche and nobody's listening, homeowners, taxpayers across the state are bearing the increasing burden of education without the state helping. Massachusetts is failing its students. Lunenburg is unfortunately uniquely poised to be closer to the edge of this cliff. We are too rich for state aid. We're too poor to fund this entirely ourselves. We're too small to be a gateway city. We're too big to be rural. It's really hard. We are a very fiscally responsible community that keeps a close eye on our budgets. The schools have been running very lean for a long time. I've been saying it for three years. It has not stopped being true. What we're seeing is the result of the leanness. I don't think it's so much that it comes in cycles it's that the economy comes in cycles, but by the time it gets to the next cycle, we haven't built up from where we were before and now it's every year. What we're seeing is the result of the leanness. I'm watching what other districts are cutting first, as they hit this fiscal wall and it's usually things that Lunenburg either never had or trimmed years and years ago. We're cutting to the bone now because that's all that's left. The awful truth is it's a state issue, but we do not have time to wait for the state to fix it. I don't know if they ever will. We have to do for ourselves and take care of our own. But the good news is that doing for ourselves is a very Lunenburg thing to do. We are a community. We dig in our help our neighbor. So I need everybody listening to step in and help. An override is not a casual undertaking. It is not something that I want to be asking for year after year. It is a hard sell to ask people to pay more. We all have kids. So it makes sense to parents sometimes when you say pay a little bit more for your kids' education, but it is a hard sell to ask people without kids in the system who don't have much money to also dig a little deeper. Part of why I like Lunenburg so much is our economic diversity, but that also comes with a responsibility to maintain a town that's affordable. But this is necessary. This is what it's going to take to avoid the cuts we're talking about tonight. The cuts we talked about last week and to give our schools what they need. Not more than they need, not extra, but enough to properly educate the kids of Lunenburg. I think we're up to the challenge. The history of this town is rooted in self-reliance and community connections. I've seen how we respond to disasters. I've seen how we've responded when our neighbors' house catches on fire or people need help. That's what we do. The state is not going to come fix this this year. I don't think they're going to fix it anytime soon. We are a tiny demographic compared to the cities, but we have to do this. I'm not going to do it. The three of us are not able. It can't be just us. So this is the time if you are upset about the cuts, if you are upset about the future of Lunenburg schools, this is the time that you have to put in the effort and make a positive change in this community. So May 2nd town meeting, you have to go. Do not expect other people to go. Don't go and then be frustrated when it didn't pass because that is your fault. That's on you. Don't wait for someone else to do the work for you. You have to go to town meeting May 2nd and then you have to vote May 16th, which is the town election. Override has to pass at town meeting and then it has to pass at the town election. So May 2nd and May 16th, they're Saturdays. You've got to put them in your calendar and you have to go. And also, we need someone to run for school committee. It's really fun, that's a lie, but we do we have two people running for three seats. There are other boards and committees in town that have empty seats. No one is running for them. There are boards and committees. Right now, I don't think there's a single contested election where the citizens of Lunenburg get an option in who to vote for. That doesn't make for a good democracy. Thursday is your last day to pull papers. To get on the ballot, you need to collect 50 signatures and hand it in by Saturday. It's not impossible. You can email us. We'll help you figure it out. If you are sitting here frustrated because you have the answers and we're not seeing them, then you need to step up and run, please, and we need to work together on this override. This is going to be a team effort.

Mandy Gilman I just want to say two years ago, I did a lot of screaming and yelling at the previous version of this board. Lots and lots of people told me that we could not pass an override in this town. And we did. We passed a million-dollar override. We won by over 90 votes. And we can do it. But that means that every single person listening to this call needs to talk to bring someone with them because we can win with 800 votes and we can get there and I do not accept that this is what our kids deserve. I just won't accept it. So I just hope each person listening understands how little I'm sleeping, how little I think Dr. Fortuna is sleeping, and how much we care about this. But we can do this. I don't want to hear people saying we can't do it because that, Tony, that is the worst way to be because we can do this. There are enough people that live in this town that believe in this community. I was born here. I was raised here. I love this place.

4. **Chairs Report** I just want to make four quick points. Number one, this has been an especially unusual form of torture. Making people who care a lot about education being legally compelled to disassemble the school district they send their children to is terrible. The balance budget that we put forward on Wednesday and the revised balance budget that we put forward tonight are mandated by the town charter. This is not something that anyone would choose to do or want to do. We met with the booster parents for athletics. We're going to meet with the booster parents for other extracurricular activities. Our hope is that the only time we talk about this balanced budget is when we are obligated to and that's it. It reminds me of the process of watching my grandfather die. My dad's dad, he was named Meyer. He was born in Italy and he came here when he was a young man and he had very serious diabetes. And I lived in Ohio and they lived in in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And we would visit, every three months. And each time I would go, I would see him getting sicker and sicker. I would see, a toe get taken by the doctor and then a foot. And it just kept getting worse and worse and worse. And I think that what we need to understand is that there is a point of no return for the school district. And we are rapidly approaching the point of no return. It is a mathematical certainty at a certain point that this will not continue to work because funding from the state government is largely premised on the number of students. If we have a reason for some students to leave that would reduce funding and then that would in turn cause more students to leave. We need to be very careful as a community to avoid the death spiral and we are very close to being at that point. Second thing I want to say is the removal of fire. You know, I thought it was a negative. I still think that it was not great, but Anna Lockwood called me on Sunday and she gave me a pep talk. I am really grateful for the pep talk. Her pitch was this, a smaller override is more likely to pass. And I think that she is right. Anna is a unique person. I've never met anybody like her. I'm very glad that I can call her my friend. And I am very glad that on a Sunday afternoon when it should not be snowing, she can call and tell me, "Look at this differently. You may have been wrong." And I think she was right. The third thing is, as we sit here and talk about all the things that we would have to cut under a balanced budget, I am reminded of what our last great president said when people were booing. He said, "Don't boo, vote." So if we're complaining, go vote. If we are advocating to the school committee, go vote. If you need somebody to sponsor you to speak at town meeting, I will make sure that happens. But anybody who is agitated needs to be motivated. And the final thing is we have got to stop the process of doing this year in and year out. We need to engage in true long-term planning. That was the way I was sold on the tri-board meeting. Unfortunately, for a whole host of reasons, we didn't get to the point where we were engaging in long-term planning because the crises in front of us became too big. But we do need to go back to that model. I think the idea of bringing back things like vocational programs to the school, even if it means that we'd have to disentangle ourselves from Monty Tech that is something that has real long-term value. I think that looking at how we utilize school property has real long-term value. I think that one of the things that we could try to do is find other places where there is synergy such as if we have an athletic trainer could that person also provide some sort of basic callisthenic services at Eagle House. All of these things are things that we need to do and we need to do not just from February until May, but we need to do them all the time year round and we need to have long-term planning. I look at when we go to Fitchburg for

track meets, they took out a huge amount of money and a huge amount of effort and they got the solar canopy built for their parking lots. We need to start thinking about things like that. All of those things planned out over 10 years will work. And the reason I know that is because when I started my law firm, I had a very nice job at a boutique firm and I decided that I was going to do it by myself with one of my very good friends and we planned and we saved and we went without a salary for almost a year to make it work. If we can if I can do that and I am not a great financial wizard, I know that we as a town can make this happen. We need to engage in long-term planning and stop crisis management. It is not a crisis if it happens every year. It's just what is expected. So, we've got to do better.

5. Old Business

Action

- a. **FY 27 Balanced Budget Vote** Dr. Fortuna shares a slideshow to explain the consequences of the proposed balanced budget. **Ms. Gilman makes a motion to not pay MASC dues of \$6500 for next year, Ms. Brzozoski seconds the motion all approve. Ms. Gilman makes a motion to accept this budget as presented, Mr. Sculimbrene seconds the motion, all approve**

6. **Public Comment Mary Foyle, 985 Flat Hill Road** As someone who's worked in this district almost 25 years, and who wears a few different hats. I do get feedback from a number of people, sometimes unsolicited. I do want to point out, we have been in this position before, I think data probably shows statewide that when we went through our first cuts in 2008 that some of us lived through I think we didn't get back to 2008 numbers till covid hit because there was covid money in there. So education is often first to be cut and one of the last to come back. But I will also say speaking generally just about public funds in general, I have students in the school system. I represent teachers across the school system. So I feel I can understand the many stakes that are involved in there. But I'm also a person who lives in the town and I really have to be cognizant of the fact that police will be looking at cuts in this like other places are looking at cuts without an override. So even if some people think, well, the school hasn't done this, the school hasn't done that. I know we keep talking about last year's cuts, but I sat in a department that took cuts in FY25 as well. So the cuts go beyond just last year and the impacts we're feeling go beyond just cuts from last year. And those cuts are only going to continue if we don't pass an override. This does somewhat give us a short-term solution. If we don't do an override, and I know this was spoken about at the last meeting, and this just doesn't mean for schools, it will cost the town more to not do an override than it will cost to do an override. That cost won't just be financial. That cost will be the courses students may not take. That cost will be a life that's not saved because an EMT cannot show up soon enough. That cost will be a car accident or a robbery or you fell for a scam and the police just simply cannot be responding to it. So those costs will hit in a variety of ways. In this town, even, if we look at the buildings this notwithstanding we keep making short-term decisions because we don't want to spend the money right now. But I think we can come up with a laundry list. I know Mr. Sculimbrene, you said one the other night, with the air conditioning in the other building. I think we can come up with a laundry list of times we try to save money across the town and you end up paying for it far more down the road. So, I would encourage people that are on the fence, come give me your unsolicited comments. I will say things back as well, I'll put myself out there, but it will I will guarantee if the override does not go through, it will cost the town more.

Chris Sullivan 108 Highland Street I will plead and say show up on May 2nd, show up on May 16th, show up in November. Yes the people we elect have left us out to dry and yet continually year after year in this state, we show up and we elect the same damn people again and again and this is the impact. If this goes through as it is, the golf team, just to point out they are Midwach C League champs, the last two years, so yes we are a small team, but historically lately successful programs for the school. I am solely speaking of the experience of my kids, I can't begin to understand what other families might need

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to deal with with their kids and in their classrooms. I can speak to what we have dealt with in this town. We have had great teachers, we have had amazing aids in our classroom, I still get texts from an aid when my daughter is doing a presentation or something my son is doing, we have had the fortunate experience in our family, a lot of what we have experienced in town at the high school with our buddies. We have amazing coaches, and yes we have an amazing trainer, I can personally say that his impact has made my daughter chose to go to school next year to be a trainer. That is far beyond sitting on a bench. I toured colleges with her this summer with not much of an idea of what she wanted to do, we got through the fall and continued to work with Dave through soccer and made some decisions where she wanted to go academically and now she's accepted into Masters programs to become an athletic trainer, that is the impact things can have at this school. People need to show up now May and November.

Matt Snyder 985 Flat Hill Road Sixteen years ago, when we moved to town, we did so proudly. We did so because we knew what a great school system it had and we were excited our kids would go through it. Today the only reason I would recommend that somebody move to town for our school is because of the staff we have, not for what we offer, not for how the town supports the schools, not for how we are funding the schools. Unless we get our act together, I am going to tell people not to come to Lunenburg for the schools because we are failing the town with how we are funding our schools, 16 years, totally different perspective. Our son it is too late he is going to be a senior, our daughter, maybe we will make different decisions.

Griffin Case, 305 Wayland Road I am a custodian at the high school, my wife and I moved here in August I grew up in New York and my wife in New Hampshire, two very different places and this place is amazing. You have farmland 5 minutes away, city 5 minutes away and the community rail to Boston, it is everything we both wanted in one place. I have a 4 year old and a 1 year old, I think an override is an increase in our taxes. Based off Google AI, there are 5000 houses in Lunenburg taxed \$1.6 million dollars, that is \$350 dollars. If you have a leaking toiler or sink, I will come fix it for you, just say hello at Market Basket. I think this budget has been a little scary, but this place is amazing and I am so happy we moved her, my wife is also a teacher here, she is the new art teacher, so we are all in for our kids.

Jim Broden 24 Autumn Road I have been here since 1993, my oldest daughter graduated here, went to UMass and in now w CPA, my son went to UMaine, and my daughter went to UPenn, all out of this school, she got accepted into the doctorate program and the nursing school she graduated from was voted number one in the world. She just accepted a job at Boston College as a Nursing Professor. I say that because I live on a road with 15 houses, one of our neighbors went to Harvard, another one went to MIT that is two Ivy League schools, that is how good the school has been. I love living in this town, I think it is great and I have done lots of things here to participate in the public. One thing I wonder about is the business revenue that we bring in, is that an issue from the town growing side, I just have this perception that we want a quiet little town that has no business, which doesn't make anything easier for the school system. As far as my ski team, we already offered that we don't need any money, if we come up with a plan, that we can still function as a team with our two co-ops, can we submit something to say that we can continue to operate?

7. **Adjournment Ms. Brzozoski makes a motion to adjourn at 7:39, Ms. Gilman seconds the motion all approve.**

Submitted Respectfully,

Courtney Fuller

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