

Town of Lunenburg
Select Board Meeting Minutes
Town Hall, 17 Main Street and via Zoom Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Members Present: Chair Michael-Ray Jeffreys, Vice-Chair Lou Franco, Clerk Caesar Nuzzolo (via Zoom), Member Tom Alonzo, and Member Renee Emkey

Members Absent:

Also Present: Heather Lemieux, Town Manager

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Michael-Ray Jeffreys called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and led the Pledge of Allegiance. He announced that the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live on Lunenburg Public Access and would be available on YouTube. He also explained that the agenda includes anticipated discussion topics but allows for additional items as permitted under Open Meeting Law.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Board Comment

Vice Chair Tom Alonzo raised concern over the Marshall Park project's rising cost, noting that the estimated budget had increased from \$5.2 million in April 2023 to \$8.5 million in the February 23, 2024 Ledger posting for the Owner's Project Manager. He expressed disappointment that the Select Board had not been updated about this significant cost escalation and requested a future discussion with the Parks Commission.

Chair Michael-Ray Jeffries clarified an earlier misunderstanding from a legislative meeting. He refuted the implication that he directed state legislators not to meet with other boards unless it was first approved by the Select Board. He affirmed his commitment to open and independent engagement between local boards and state or federal delegations.

Public Comment

Mr. Burden reiterated past disagreements with Chair Jeffreys, played audio from a prior meeting, and raised concerns about property sales and tax assessments. He also accused board members of past mistreatment and expressed frustration with his experiences involving town governance and his homeowner association.

Mary Perkins, 62 Ruth Street, voiced strong support for keeping the Lake Shirley parcels under Select Board control and entering into a 10-year public access agreement with Shady Point. She emphasized the DeFazio family's generosity and support for the community and local events.

Amanda Johnson Gilman, 186 Reservoir Road, a parent and local business owner, thanked the Board and School Committee for their hard budget work and urged the Board to place an override proposal on the warrant to allow voters to decide. She shared personal stories about her

children's experiences in the schools and acknowledged concerns about affordability for residents on fixed incomes.

Amanda Johnson Gilman, 186 Reservoir Rd., thanked the Select Board, School Committee, and Finance Committee for taking a hard look at the budget of town departments including the school. Encouraged the Select Board to consider putting the override proposal on the Town Meeting warrant.

Rhonda Lisio, 181 Reservoir Road, criticized the override process, citing concerns about open meeting law violations, inconsistent budget information between town and school departments, and what she viewed as a lack of transparency. She expressed skepticism about the override being placed on the warrant without a citizen petition.

Brian Lehtinen, 88 Beachview Road, speaking as a resident and vice chair of the School Committee, supported placing the override on the ballot to preserve school services and address townwide staffing shortages. He advocated for a combined school and municipal override.

Renee Rubin, 46 Fire Road 12, spoke in opposition to transferring zero Shirley Road to the Parks Commission, citing its proximity to her home, lack of a development plan, and potential environmental and privacy impacts.

Shoshana Mule, 139 Cove Road, a parent of two students, supported an override for both schools and municipal services. She commended students who advocated at recent meetings and emphasized the value of Lunenburg schools in her family's life.

Joel Swenson, 17 Ruth Street, expressed distrust toward the Parks Commission, claiming they provided inconsistent messaging about their plans for boat ramps and access at Lake Shirley parcels. He urged the Board not to approve any transfer without a detailed plan.

DPW Director Bill Bernard addressed staffing issues, stating that the Personnel Committee's proposed salary scenarios were inadequate and failed to make Lunenburg competitive with surrounding communities. He reported collecting salary data from 83 towns and found Lunenburg's DPW director salary to be about 30% lower than the average. He urged the Select Board to ensure that future recommendations are data-driven and address the recruitment and retention crisis.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

COMMUNICATIONS FROM OTHER BOARDS

Chair Jeffreys read a letter from the Finance Committee supporting the use of \$50,000 in ARPA funds for professional grant writing services. The committee emphasized that expert assistance could help the Town pursue additional revenue opportunities across education, infrastructure, housing, and economic development.

APPOINTMENTS

One Day Sunday Entertainment license application for March 17 for Kindred Spirits, 324 Electric Ave. #4 One-Day Entertainment License

Motion by Member Alonzo to approve One Day Sunday Entertainment license application for March 17 for Kindred Spirits, 324 Electric Ave. #4 One-Day Entertainment License from 1:00 pm – 8:00 pm. Seconded by Vice-Chair Franco. Roll Call Vote: Clerk Nuzzolo – Aye, Member Emkey – Aye, Member Alonzo – Ay, Vice-Chair Franco– Aye, Chair Jeffreys – Aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Update from Personnel Committee representative on review of position descriptions and compensation/classification schedule

Wendy Bertrand provided an update on the Personnel Committee’s work to revise the job classification and compensation system. She explained that the committee shifted from an external point-based method to a revised internal grade system after evaluating 85 employees in 34 job titles. The Committee’s final recommendations are expected by mid-March for inclusion in the Annual Town Meeting Warrant. The Board expressed appreciation for the committee’s work and emphasized the need for timely and clear communication with employees.

INTERVIEWS/APPOINTMENTS/REAPPOINTMENTS/RESIGNATIONS

Ratification of the Town Manager’s appointment of Heavy Equipment Operator Paul Hallisey

Motion by Vice Chair Franco to approve the ratification of the Town Manager’s appointment of Heavy Equipment Operator Paul Hallisey. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Town Manager Lemieux provided an update on upcoming deadlines, staffing, financials, and ongoing projects. She noted that the warrant for Annual Town Meeting is open for article submissions through March 18, with the meeting scheduled for May 4 at 9:00 AM at the Lunenburg Middle/High School. She announced several vacancies on boards and committees, and encouraged residents to apply using the volunteer forms available on the Town website. Job postings include administrative and director-level positions in conservation, facilities, land use, planning, and assessing. The Historical Society has requested the cupola from 925 Massachusetts Avenue before the building is sold. Lemieux has asked the Architectural Preservation District Commission to review the request. Procurement updates included upcoming deadlines for bids on Owner’s Project Manager services for Marshall Park, the Flat Hill Culvert Project, and cleaning services for municipal buildings. Financially, the snow and ice deficit as of February 21 was \$142,000, to be covered by year-end surplus. New growth for FY24 is projected at \$630,000—\$230,000 above estimates—which will increase the FY25 tax base. Lemieux recommended allocating this additional funding to the school budget, pending final decisions. The Town’s Chapter 90 state allocation for FY25 is \$418,000, level with the prior year.

OLD BUSINESS

Discussion requests for Open Space recommendations for transferring 51 Parmenter Rd & 0 Shirley Reservoir Lake to the Parks Commission

Chair Jeffreys stated that the Open Space Committee's recommendation to transfer these parcels to the Parks Commission. Several residents raised concerns about public access and the lack of a clear usage plan.

Motion by Chair Jeffreys for the Board to take no action on the request for 51 Parmenter Rd. Seconded by Member Emkey. Roll Call Vote: Clerk Nuzzolo – Aye, Member Emkey – Aye, Member Alonzo – Ay, Vice-Chair Franco– Aye, Chair Jeffreys – Aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

The Board discussed a recommendation from the Open Space Committee to transfer the Town-owned parcel at 0 Shirley Reservoir Road to the Parks Commission. Several members spoke in favor of pursuing an alternative agreement proposed by Shady Point Beach, which would provide Lunenburg residents with lake access at no cost through a 10-year agreement.

Chair Michael-Ray Jeffreys suggested that the Town negotiate with Shady Point over the next month and, if an agreement is reached by April 2, refrain from including the transfer on the Annual Town Meeting warrant. He supported keeping the property under Select Board control unless meaningful access through other means could not be secured.

Member Emkey reaffirmed that there was no specific plan from the Parks Commission for the parcel and that transferring care and custody would limit the Board's flexibility. She stated that such a move should only occur if future infrastructure or maintenance responsibilities made it necessary.

Several members expressed appreciation for the recent site visit to the property and the engagement of Lake Shirley residents. Chair Jeffreys and others acknowledged the positive role of Shady Point in addressing community concerns and offering access. They encouraged residents to report any inappropriate behavior around the property to help ensure peaceful neighborhood use.

Following discussion, the Board unanimously voted to take no action on the Open Space Committee's request to transfer the parcel.

Motion by Chair Jeffreys to take no action on the request from the Open Space Committee for the transfer of 0 Shirley Reservoir Road to the Parks Commission. Seconded by Vice-Chair Franco. Roll Call Vote: Clerk Nuzzolo – Aye, Member Emkey – Aye, Member Alonzo – Aye, Vice-Chair Franco– Aye, Chair Jeffreys – Aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

The board took a brief three-minute recess and returned.

T - Ball Request to use old Primary School, review draft license agreement

The Board reviewed a draft license agreement allowing use of the old Primary School for T-ball

and youth recreation. The Board supported the request and emphasized safety and community engagement.

Motion by Member Alonzo to send the license agreement to Lunenburg Youth Baseball and Softball, allowing use of the old Primary School for T-ball and youth recreation, and to have them reach out to the Historical Society regarding the spaces used by them. Seconded by Member Emkey. Roll Call Vote: Clerk Nuzzolo – Aye, Member Emkey – Aye, Member Alonzo – Aye, Vice-Chair Franco– Aye, Chair Jeffreys – Aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Discuss Environmental Policies and Select Board By-laws

Discussion on Fiscal Year 2024 Budget, Fiscal Year 2025 Budget, Capital Plan, and Annual Town Meeting Warrant articles

Member Tom Alonzo clarified that the Historical Commission was reduced to five members by a 2008 Town Meeting vote, though no bylaw was ever updated to reflect the change. He noted the Board recently appointed two members beyond the five-member limit based on incorrect assumptions. Alonzo will draft a warrant article to formally codify the five-member composition in the bylaws and work with Town Counsel to clarify next steps for addressing the over-appointments. The Board supported this plan and will await legal guidance before proceeding.

Town Manager Lemieux reviewed the status of capital project planning and the development of articles for the Annual Town Meeting warrant. Articles submitted or anticipated include standard annual items such as committee reports, revolving fund spending limits, payment of prior year bills, and budget adjustments for FY24. Other proposed articles include the FY25 operating budget, capital plan, and a placeholder for a potential override. Two personnel-related articles are expected from the Personnel Committee—one to update the compensation and classification grid, and another for amendments to the salary administration plan bylaw. Additional warrant items include articles for the general and special purpose stabilization funds, the OPEB trust fund, sewer-related funding articles, solid waste, water enterprise, and public access budgets.

CURRENT BUSINESS

Review the draft Intermunicipal Agreement between Lunenburg Sewer and Leominster

A draft Intermunicipal Agreement between Lunenburg Sewer and Leominster was reviewed. Final edits and legal review are pending before Board approval.

Review Draft Teen Center Lease

The Board discussed a draft lease for a Teen Center. Some questions remain about operations and oversight. The final draft will be reviewed at a future meeting.

Motion by Member Alonzo to send the lease for Teen Center to the Boys and Girls Club Board of Directors for acceptance. Seconded by Vice-Chair Franco. Roll Call Vote: Clerk Nuzzolo – Aye, Member Emkey – Aye, Member Alonzo – Aye, Vice-Chair Franco– Aye, Chair Jeffreys – Aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Discuss possible Override to address FY25 budget; Vote may be taken

The Board engaged in an extensive discussion regarding a potential Proposition 2½ override request. The conversation was prompted by significant public input, including numerous emails and comments from parents and students concerned about anticipated cuts to the school budget. These included reductions in teaching staff, music and athletics programs, and counseling services, should additional funding not be secured.

Clerk Nuzzolo opened the discussion by noting the large volume of communication the Board had received from the community and explained the importance of using the budget process as the appropriate time to consider an override. He emphasized that while emotions were high, the discussion needed to focus on the financial realities and process.

Member Renee Emkey acknowledged the high level of public interest and supported placing a Proposition 2½ override question on both the Town Meeting warrant and the ballot, recognizing it as an issue the community should decide. While undecided on whether she would personally support the override, she shared her connection to school services and concern about proposed cuts. Member Emkey noted she had spent significant time reviewing school budgets and data, but with key questions still unanswered and no final override figure yet determined, she believed it was important to give voters the opportunity to weigh in.

Member Alonzo voiced strong concerns about the lack of finalized data, inconsistent budget presentations from the school department, and what he considered poor planning related to the expiration of ESSER funds. He emphasized that in order to support placing a question on the ballot, he needed two conditions to be met: that the Board would only submit a balanced budget to Town Meeting, and that the Town Manager would not be asked to draft a second, alternate override budget. If these conditions were met, he said he would consider supporting placement of the question on the ballot, though he was not ready to support the override itself.

Chair Jeffreys voiced skepticism about the proposed Proposition 2½ override. While he supported putting it to voters, he did not support the override itself and expected to vote against it. He criticized the school department's financial planning—particularly its reliance on temporary ESSER funds without a long-term plan—and cited a lack of data and clear messaging. He stressed that any ballot question should be contingent on a balanced Town Meeting budget and that the Town Manager should not be tasked with creating a secondary override budget.

Chair Jeffreys noted general consensus among the Board to move the override forward procedurally, placing an article on the Town Meeting warrant and a question on the ballot. While opinions varied on the override itself, all members agreed voters should decide.

Town Manager Heather Lemieux explained that overrides require approval at both Town Meeting and the ballot. Only the Select Board can place a question on the ballot, though citizens may petition for a warrant article. The Board and Town Manager will finalize the override amount and ensure the ballot and warrant language match. They agreed that any new savings or revenue should be used to reduce the override, particularly for school needs. The School Committee's upcoming budget vote will help clarify final numbers.

To prevent Town Meeting from approving spending without a successful override vote, the articles will be structured as "contingent." Deadlines for the May election are March 18 for the warrant and March 19 for the ballot question, with placeholder language used until figures are finalized.

Board members discussed whether to include non-school spending, emphasized transparency, and warned against overinflating the request. Some raised concerns about the political risks of a failed override, highlighting the need for a united front and effective messaging. They acknowledged rising costs across all departments and the potential need for future overrides beyond education.

Finally, members called for more collaboration between the Town and schools, especially in shared services like HR, IT, and facilities, while respecting the School Committee's legal independence.

Carol Archambault, Chair of the School Committee, 45 Crescent Street, was present and clarified that the school department had developed multiple budget scenarios including level services, level services minus ESSER funding, and needs-based budgets. She emphasized that the loss of federal ESSER funding was anticipated and had been discussed in public meetings since November. She confirmed that the final override request amount would be voted on at the school committee meeting the following evening and expressed appreciation for any additional funding identified by the Town Manager.

Prioritize Requests to State Delegation for Advocacy

The Board discussed incorporating environmental considerations into its policies and future by-law updates. Chair Jeffreys proposed Lunenburg lead by example in sustainability practices. The Board agreed to revisit proposed revisions at a future meeting.

The Board identified key advocacy items to raise with the Town's state legislative delegation, including capital project funding, infrastructure assistance, and school support. No formal vote was taken.

Minutes/Warrants/Action Items

The following warrants were signed by the Board:

- Accounts Payable Warrant in the amount of \$343,342.32

Member Alonzo stated that there is ongoing and unresolved encroachments on Town property observed during recent site visits. A notable case involves approximately 80 feet by 10 feet of paved land off Fire Road 12, where a resident has placed a boat, trailers, firewood, and a vehicle. This individual was previously issued a notice of encroachment by Town Counsel in 2021, but no follow-up occurred. The Board agreed this matter must be readdressed and not allowed to lapse again.

Committee Reports

Member Emkey stated that the Stormwater Task Force met and heard a presentation from Nick Christophori regarding stormwater maintenance practices in other towns. He will collaborate with the DPW Director to propose a revenue goal for a potential stormwater utility program. Extensive public outreach will be necessary to educate residents on the purpose and benefits of such a program.

Member Alonzo stated that the Finance Committee (FinCom) is scheduled to meet Thursday to hear from DPW and Facilities, with a school department presentation expected the following week. Override discussions are anticipated at upcoming meetings.

Member Alonzo stated that the Capital Planning Committee has not reconvened due to ongoing budget discussions and the full schedules of its members, most of whom are involved in other committees. Member Alonzo emphasized that the committee will resume once current priorities settle.

Vice-Chair Franco stated that the 300th Anniversary Committee discussed long-term event planning, including identifying a large, flat town-owned parcel for future large gatherings like bonfires. A 64-acre property on Northfield Road is being considered for a future site visit to assess suitability. He stated that the Master Plan Steering Committee will meet Thursday at 6:00 p.m. in the Town Hall meeting room. The meeting will be brief due to a scheduling overlap with the Finance Committee. While public attendance is welcome, this meeting is not a formal public input session.

UPCOMING MEETING/EVENTS SCHEDULE

Chair Jeffreys announced that the Select Board will be meeting March 12, March 19, April 2

PUBLIC COMMENT

Town Manager

Public

Amanda Gilman , no address stated, speaking near the end of the meeting, reminded the Board that part of Town Hall itself is technically on their private property. The comment was made humorously and was not intended as a formal complaint. They then expressed appreciation for the Board's attention to the override discussion and urged the board not to lose sight of the opportunity for critical school funding.

Paula Bertram, 312 Townsend Harbor Road, criticized the Personnel Committee process for lacking transparency and rigor. She noted that job descriptions were inconsistently reviewed and that rating decisions lacked documentation. She supported a modest cost-of-living increase in the interim but called for a formal compensation study by professionals to ensure Lunenburg remains competitive and fair in employee compensation.

Peter Beardmore, 282 Pleasant Street and School Committee Member, criticized the Board for what he saw as political posturing. He argued that the Select Board had shifted the financial burden to the school department while failing to acknowledge similar financial pressures on the town side. He pointed out that several town departments had budgets increasing well beyond 2.5%, and that the town was equally in need of an override. He called for more honest recognition of shared fiscal challenges and warned against framing the schools as the sole driver of the financial problem.

Amanda Moore, 110 Mulpus Road, voiced frustration with the Personnel Committee process, stating that employees felt undervalued. She noted that public records requests were required to access compensation scenarios and that some internal emails contained inappropriate comments. She urged the board to take a stronger role in ensuring a fair and transparent compensation review process.

Sybyl Kaufman, 27 Oak Ave, expressed disappointment with what she viewed as deflection by some board members, arguing that data on school funding needs had been available and clearly presented by the superintendent and school committee. She stressed that public schools provide essential services that support all families and the broader community and encouraged the Board to support an override.

Board Comment

Member Alonzo expressed appreciation for retiring Executive Assistant Elaine Peterson, thanking her for her nine years of dedicated service to the Town. He stated that March 25th Town caucus, offering to speak with anyone interested in learning about the responsibilities of serving on the board.

Member Alonzo thanked the public for attending and staying engaged throughout the lengthy meeting, emphasizing the importance of civic participation and respectful dialogue even amid disagreement.

Chair Jeffreys reflected on the challenges and value of public service, acknowledging that disagreement is part of healthy democracy and that compromise is key to progress.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Member Alonzo to adjourn. Seconded by Member Emkey. Roll Call Vote: Clerk Nuzzolo – Aye, Member Emkey – Aye, Member Alonzo – Aye, Vice-Chair Franco– Aye, Chair Jeffreys – Aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Meeting adjourned at 11:13 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rebecca Johnson
Minute Clerk

These minutes were reviewed and approved by the Select Board on:
Tuesday, January 6, 2026

**Chair Caesar Nuzzolo made the Motion to Approve the minutes of March 5, 2024.
Seconded by Clerk Renee Emkey. Call for the Vote: Four-aye. One abstention (Member
McLeod). Motion Passed (4-0-1).**