

Town of Lunenburg
Select Board Meeting Minutes
Town Hall, 17 Main Street and via Zoom
Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Members Present: Chair: Michael-Ray Jeffreys, Vice-Chair: Lou Franco, Clerk: Caesar Nuzzolo, Member: Tom Alonzo and Member Renee Emkey
Also Present: Town Manager: Heather Lemieux, Town Manager and Town Counsel: Adam Costa

Public Comment Participants are listed in the minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Michael-Ray Jeffreys informed attendees that the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live and would be uploaded to YouTube after the meeting. He explained that the agenda listed topics that may be discussed, but not all items may be addressed and other items not listed could be brought up as permitted by open meeting law.

I. PUBLIC COMMENT

- **BOARD:** Member Renee Emkey stated she wanted to address some comments that have come up recently at various committee meetings. Member Emkey stated she believes this year's budget season has been transparent but it's a process that adapts as numbers and unknowns become knowns. Preliminary budgets are based on estimates. Member Emkey stated she believes the Town Manager has the experience to allow her to make knowledgeable initial estimates. Last year the money was transferred to the overlay account to cover property tax abatements and the Town was able to pay out over \$1M in abatements without an override.

Member Emkey stated she has had several discussions with Town Manager Lemieux and the School Committee to close the gap for the needs-based budget. The gap has since been closed. Member Emkey stated she honestly believes everyone shared the common goal of working together to close the gap. The School Department as well as other departments in town have budgets that are under significant strain, which is why the Proposition 2 ½ override has been brought forward by the School Committee. It is asking people to pay more money through a property tax increase.

Member Emkey formally submitted an action item for the Select Board after the May 21st meeting to formulate a task force that consists of stakeholders to address the financial situation across the town so it can be part of the next budget season.

Member Tom Alonzo stated he remembers when, in this town, there was a big division that existed and it took many years of working together to become unified again. Taking shots at leadership is one thing but when you take aim at employees who are doing what they can to come up with solutions is not helpful. Member Alonzo stated he is hopeful everyone can refocus energies getting through the budgets.

Clerk Caesar Nuzzolo thanked everyone for being patient with his remote participation and thanked everyone who reached out over the last five months expressing support and words of encouragement, he is very grateful.

Vice Chair Lou Franco stated he endorses comments made by both Member Alonzo and Member Emkey. Vice Chair Franco stated he commends those who came forward and fought for something they felt was important. Every member of every board works very hard and dedicates their time to this town.

Vice Chair Franco stated he wanted to thank everyone who did step forward to run for office at the caucus. It is disappointing that there were zero contested seats. Every seat at every level should be contested every time. There are a lot of commenters out there, many who are very constructive, but when it comes time to step up and run for a seat there is crickets.

Chair Jeffreys stated this morning he was reminded that spring is in the air and he encourages all to reflect on all the many things in our lives that we should be grateful for. Each day is an opportunity to have the best day of your life. Chair Jeffreys stated let's be mindful of the positives that we encounter every single day in our lives.

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Town Manager Heather Lemieux stated that she would like to address comments made at last week's finance committee meeting. She stated she is very cognizant of the fact that when you are in a public position it is expected that you will receive occasional criticism and you should have thick skin. However, she would like to respond to a comment that she feels was an attack on her integrity. Town Manager Lemieux stated she values education and understands the critical impact it has on their residents and the impact it has on attracting people to relocate here. Town Manager Lemieux stated to insinuate that she is the reason the school is in this position is inflammatory and it does not acknowledge how much cooperation and collaboration there has been to get to this point. The preliminary budget and the needs-based budget have been closed. They have had unanticipated items that affected that outcome. Town Manager Lemieux stated she did not orchestrate this outcome or collude with the Chair and she finds it offensive that this is the narrative being spun.

Dave Passios, 56 Whiting Street stated he is here regarding the Cemetery Commission. They concluded that Article 21 in 1979 created the commission and identified Chapter 40 Sec 8D as being the Chapter it was created under. If Section 8D has not changed since 1979, then it was already accepted back in 1979. The section does speak to alternate members and the Town Manager being the ones to select and the Select Board is to ratify. Mr. Passios is proposing that they either clarify whether or not that section has changed since it was accepted in 1979 or Town Counsel Costa suggested a cleaner way would be to add the acceptance of this section into the article at Town Meeting.

Debbie Lincoln, Chair of the Council on Aging, 46 Hemlock Drive thanked everyone for all their hard work during this budget process. Ms. Lincoln stated she heard this afternoon that the

request from the Council on Aging for \$6,648.42 to make a 19.5 hour employee to a benefitted 24 hours has been removed from the budget. Ms. Lincoln stated, as the COA Chairman, they have been short changed for the longest time. When they had their patio, it came back with the lowest bid and the pavilion and the sod was removed. It's a beautiful site but it would not be if they did not have the pavilion and sod donated, it would be mud. It's a beautiful spot for the whole town. They have been relying on donations for the Lunenburg Adult Center for a long time. Ms. Lincoln stated she felt this ask was very reasonable. They did not ask for anything that they did not really need. Ms. Lincoln stated she is heartbroken that this was taken out of the budget and she is imploring the board to please try to find a way to make this work. This is one-third of their population and they deserve the board's consideration.

Sibyl Kaufman, 27 Oak Ave stated she is here on behalf of the group known as Save Our Schools Lunenburg. She read into the record the statement they made on their social media.

Shoshana Mulé, 139 Cove Road stated she got involved with the school budget process to support the music program. She stated she attends dozens of public meetings and it is clear to her that the town finances need a review. Her family has lived in Lunenburg since 2010 and like most families their home is their biggest asset. Ms. Mole stated she supports the creation of a task force to analyze the operation and capital budget process and determine which services get funded and how. They are hosting a meeting tomorrow at 7pm in the library.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Town Manager Lemieux stated due to an issue with MUNIS, the tax bills will be going out the last day of March. Chair Jeffreys asked Town Manager Lemieux to elaborate on the issue.

III. APPOINTMENTS

7:05 PM Discussion with Town Counsel on Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles and Proposition 2 1/2 Override Ballot Question

Town Counsel Adam Costa joined the Board for discussion. Town Manager Lemieux stated they have invited Town Counsel Costa here to address a variety of questions regarding the override and ballot question.

Chair Jeffreys stated they would like to confirm that the language in Article H is correct and appropriate. They did receive a revised number from the school committee in the amount of \$948,136. Town Counsel Costa stated MGL is very specific when it comes to ballot questions, they include specific language with no opportunity for revisions. When it comes to Town Meeting warrant articles that is not the case. There are multiple approaches as to how it can be done. Town Counsel Costa stated they could adopt an override as a single warrant article when reviewing the budget or alternatively take the contingencies aligned with the overrides and put them into separate warrant articles. Chair Jeffreys asked if he recommends replacing an 'additional sum of money' with the specific dollar amount. Town Counsel Costa stated they could, it is a matter of preference, but they will need an accurate number in the motion so there is an accurate number appropriated. Chair Jeffreys proposed to his colleagues that they include the dollar amount in the warrant.

Vice Chair Franco stated to the extent possible, the language of the warrant article should parallel the language of the ballot question with the exception of the additional dollar amount. Town Counsel Costa confirmed.

Town Manager Lemieux stated the Board has to vote on the ballot wording next Tuesday so that the ballot questions are in the booklet that goes out to residents.

Member Emkey asked for Town Counsel Costa to clarify the sequence of events and what is possible to amend at town meeting on the floor. Town Counsel Costa stated there can be no amendments to ballot questions at town meeting.

Chair Jeffreys stated the Board needs to consider if the warrant article fails but the ballot passes, that the next action could be for the Select Board to call a Special Town Meeting and a re-vote. Town Counsel Costa confirmed and referred to Appendix D (page 20 of the guidance document).

Chair Jeffreys moved to submit and amend what is currently identified as Article H to read as follows: to see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate \$948,136 to supplement the Lunenburg public schools operating budget for fiscal year 2025 contingent upon the passage of a proposition to a ballot question or take any other action thereto. Second by Member Tom Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Chair Michael-Ray Jeffreys stated it is his understanding that the School Committee is meeting tomorrow and that there may be some discussion on this dollar amount. It is the difference between the needs-based budget and the level service budget, minus the ESSER, plus the money identified from the Select Board to be identified by ARPA to be added into the school budget. What they appropriating is not a full 5.44% increase and their starting number next year will only reflect the 4.44% because the ARPA funds will not be included.

Brian Lehtinen, Vice Chair of the School Committee stated he would refer to the Superintendent and Town Manager Lemieux on the specific number but he believes it was 5.34%. Town Manager Lemieux confirmed.

Laura Brzozoski, Member of the School Committee stated 8.51% without the ARPA funding for the ESSER cut level funded budget. Chair Jeffreys confirmed.

Chair Jeffreys asked if there is a possibility that tomorrow's meeting will result in a change to the number. Vice Chair Lehtinen stated he couldn't say as of today.

Amanda Gilman, 186 Reservoir Road stated should it not pass at town meeting but pass on the ballot, the Select Board could have a Special Town Meeting to see if it passes and asked if there is a time limit. Town Counsel Costa stated it would have to be done prior to the tax rate being set. Ms. Gilman asked for confirmation that a group of citizens could request a town meeting, and Town Counsel Costa confirmed and stated there is a provision in the statute.

7:45 PM Meeting with Personnel Committee Representative on Personnel Committee Annual Town Meeting Articles

Town Manager Lemieux stated we are looking at Articles I, J and K.

Wendy Bertrand of the Personnel Committee provided an overview of the Articles and why they are before the Select Board. The charter is reviewed every 3 years looking at the salary grid. They looked through many comps to get their employees to a more competitive wage.

Clerk Nuzzolo read Article I and Article J for the Board.

Vice Chair Franco referred to Article I for the Council on Aging Meal Site Manager being assigned to grade seven. Ms. Bertrand stated those positions were ones they looked at with their revised job descriptions and their grades were significantly lower than the 8 comps they looked at.

Member Emkey asked if any of the grades were reduced and Ms. Bertrand stated they were not. Ms. Bertrand stated they looked at the scope of their responsibilities and everyone is being bumped up, there were no decreases.

Clerk Nuzzolo stated upon his review, the way he understands it, these positions are below average and Ms. Bertrand confirmed and stated it was their goal to get them to the median. Ms. Bertrand stated they are also receiving a 2.5% COLA on top of that.

Member Alonzo asked what the average increase is and Ms. Bertrand stated that it varies grade to grade.

Sue Andrews of the Personnel Committee stated in 2024 they asked for the grid to be changed by 2.5% and this is asking them to do almost 3% this year. There are 8 steps at a 3% increase.

Member Alonzo asked if everyone got at least 5.5% and Ms. Andrews confirmed.

Chair Jeffreys stated at the town meeting presentation it would be helpful to identify what the rate was when started and what the rate is when ended and also maybe a dollar amount would help people get a better understanding.

Member Alonzo stated he wants to keep good people and make sure they feel as though they are being treated fairly without breaking the town budget. It's not an easy position.

Assistant Town Manager Julie Belliveau (via ZOOM) stated for FY24 they are dropping the first 2 steps and begin with step 3 as the new starting point at \$15.50. In FY25 they are starting at the new existing step 2.

Chair Jeffreys proposed to add clarifying verbiage to the sick time leave so they can continue to accrue vacation time and Ms. Andrews stated they won't stop accruing.

Member Emkey asked if FMLA is unpaid and Ms. Andrews confirmed. PFMLA is different.

8:00 PM Meeting with Planning Board Representative on Planning Board Annual Town Meeting articles

Matthew Brenner Chair of the Planning Board provided an overview and purpose of Articles Y and Z. One relates to the water supply protection district and the other relates to battery solar arrays.

Mr. Brenner stated that the water supply protection district is really old. It previously went to town meeting in the fall and was tabled to the spring. He indicated after receiving input from Interim Land Use Director Richard Harris he pared down the article for easier understanding while keeping the meat of the article essentially the same. Mr. Brenner stated that the current protection bylaws are "older than dirt". Technology and engineering has changed.

Chair Jeffreys stated they had a site walk for a body of water and it was well attended. When we remember the town meeting that had to be moved to the high school it was relating to water. Chair Jeffreys stated it seems that when the most people come out is when we're talking about water. If the work that needs to be done before town meeting is zone 1 then is a month really enough time to resolve all these concerns.

Mr. Brenner stated he believes the concerns can be addressed by either pointing to clear explanation of the law or if there is an issue by reinstating the town's control over zone 1. Chair Jeffreys stated they are putting an issue on town warrant without having it resolved and asked if this is premature. Mr. Brenner stated he feels the issues are very limited and will be resolved and he does not feel it is premature.

Mr. Brenner gave a brief overview of Article Y. According to the state, battery storage systems are necessary for function on the grid, they count as solar installations and get all the rights and benefits. A company came before the ZBA and stated the systems aren't allowed in Lunenburg and the State says that they have to be. They have come to them and stated they can work together and craft something that works for everyone. Mr. Brenner stated that this legislation gives them some control over battery storage systems, making sure they are not an eyesore or cause a noise issue for the town. Mr. Brenner stated that overall there has not been a big public response about this at all.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

1. Review Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles and Vote on Recommendations

Vice Chair Lou Franco moved to place Articles A-Z on the town warrant. Seconded by Chair Jeffreys. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval of Article A. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval for Article B -Revolving Funds for departments, boards, committees, agencies, officers, etc. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval for Article C – Local Wetlands Protection bylaws fees at \$50,000. Second by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Articles D- K were held until next meeting.

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval for Article L – Town to raise \$100,000 for stabilization fund. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Chair Jeffreys moved the town to recommend approval for Article M – \$250,000 from free cash for special purpose stabilization fund. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval for Article N – Other post employment benefits funds for \$187,110. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Article O – Held until next meeting.

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval for Article P – Sewer Capital Reserve stabilization fund. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Article R and S– Held until next meeting.

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval for Article T – \$10,000 Cemetery lot. Seconded by Member Alonzo. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Article U – Held until next meeting.

Article V – Held until next meeting. Vice Chair Franco stated this is relating to decreasing the age of exemptions from 70 to 65 under Chapter 40C. Vice Chair Franco would like them to consider raising the exemption from \$750 to \$1000.

Chair Jeffreys moved the town to recommend approval for Article W – create a Declaration of Trust. Seconded by Vice Chair Lou Franco. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Chair Jeffreys moved to recommend approval for Article X – relating to Historical Commission. Seconded by Member Alonzo.

Discussion: Mr. Passios, 56 Whiting Street, stated he has concerns with Article X because he is unsure if they need to reaccept the paragraph in Chapter 40 that is also in this Article. Members decided to hold this article to be placed on a future agenda.

Article Y and Z – Held until next meeting.

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

Town Manager Lemieux stated that they have worked with the Superintendent and the School Committee and have closed the budget gap, the final gap was approximately \$41,000. Town Manager Lemieux stated historically, her budget style is to be conservative.

Town Manager Lemieux stated in the preliminary budget proposal there were various increases in hours for the meal site manager, IT administrative position, the rec director position and the part time accessory data collector as well as a half year position at the police department. Town Manager Lemieux stated that due to recent conversations with EL Harvey there is up to a 70% increase to extend the bid so they are going to put that contract out to bid to see what they get. They are going to look at a cart options which are less intensive. There are companies that won't even bid on towns not using a cart system. The contract has been extended for 90 days. As of now there aren't funds available to enter into a contract in September and so they need to pull back on those other positions for right now to prepare for that impact.

Chair Jeffreys asked for confirmation that those positions total \$195,000 and Town Manager Lemieux stated they would be \$150,000 with health insurance. Town Manager Lemieux stated the only position currently moving forward is the accessory data collector position because she feels strongly that it is a corrective action they need to take for that department.

Town Manager Lemieux stated that the salary reserve line was at \$100,000 but based on the SAP impact the wage was at around \$111,000. They also need to budget for the DPW union negotiations that are forthcoming this year so Town Manager Lemieux stated she is increasing to \$155,000.

Member Alonzo stated he understands all of the adjustments Town Manager Lemieux has explained. Member Alonzo stated he would be in favor of adding back the data collector in the accessory department to maintain revenue coming in and also the meal site manager. The Board agreed.

V. UPCOMING MEETING/EVENTS SCHEDULE

April 2nd, April 9th, April 23rd

Chair Jeffreys stated they have received a request from the register of voters regarding in-person voting. It has to be posted at a public hearing and it is scheduled for next week. Town Manager Lemieux stated they do need to have a public meeting next Tuesday and Annie is taking care of the notice. The board has to vote to opt-out on voting by mail for the town election. Chair Jeffreys stated the request is to not allow by mail voting, absentee voting will still be allowed. Chair Jeffreys stated he is inclined to support that request.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

- **TOWN MANAGER:** None

- **PUBLIC:** Dave Passios, 56 Whiting Street referred back to the discussion earlier with the Personnel Committee and their attempt to mitigate the issue with sick leave and vacation time. Mr. Passios stated that he thinks this is a good fix but there should be a deeper dive. Mr. Passios stated corporations use PTO.

TJ Loughlin, 207 Rolling Acres Road referred to Town Manager Lemieux's recognition that health insurance and transportation costs are an actual problem.

Sybil Kaufman, 27 Oak Ave stated that if the town wants people to run for the different boards they need to make it so they can. Ms. Kaustated she has kids in school, the Board meetings are very late and long.

Laura Brzozoski, 21 Francis Avenue stated she is here as a resident, not a school committee member. Ms. Brzozoski stated she is asking the Board to support the override as a parent. They need enough money to run the schools. There were going to be drastic cuts this year and she is so appreciative.

- **BOARD:** Member Alonzo announced this week's upcoming committee meetings and suggested to pack lunches. They are bound by open meeting law so if they want to discuss things they have to speak about things within the meeting which can result in lengthy meetings.

Vice Chair Franco stated you would be hard pressed to find someone more in support of robust school funding than him.

Chair Jeffreys thanked everyone for watching the meetings. Everyone has a life and responsibilities with or without kids. There are several boards that meet during the day and several that meet 30-60 minutes. We have said often that these jobs need to be approachable to both women and men.

Chair Jeffreys thanked Town Manager Lemieux for all her hard work and stated he enjoys working with her.

VII. ADJOURN

Chair Jeffreys moved to adjourn at 10:27 pm. Second by Vice Chair Franco. Call for the vote: Five-aye. The motion passed unanimously (5-0-0).

Respectfully Submitted,

Leanna Harris
Minute Clerk

These Minutes were reviewed and approved by the Select Board on:
Tuesday June 17, 2025

Chair Nuzzolo made the Motion to Approve the minutes from March 26, 2024. Seconded by Vice-Chair Moore. Call for the vote: Four-aye. One-abstain (McLeod). Motion passed (4-0-1).