

**HOLLIS BROOKLINE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT
BUDGET COMMITTEE
JANUARY 26, 2023
MEETING MINUTES**

A regular meeting of the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District (COOP) Budget Committee was conducted on Thursday, January 26, 2023, at 6:33 p.m. at the Hollis Brookline Middle School Library.

Chairman, Darlene Mann, presided:

Members of the Budget Cmte. Present: Raul Blanche, Vice Chairman
 David Blinn
 Matthew Maguire
 Brian Rater
 Anthony Stanizzi
 Tom Whalen

Members of the Budget Cmte. Absent: Cindy VanCoughnett, School Bd. Rep.

Also in Attendance: Kelly Seeley, Business Administrator

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Mann lead in the Pledge of Allegiance.

AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS - None

APPOINTMENT OF MEETING OBSERVER

Chairman Mann appointed Tom Whalen to serve as Meeting Observer.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

COOP Budget Committee December 22, 2022

MOTION BY MEMBER BLANCHE TO ACCEPT AS PRESENTED

MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER STANIZZI

MOTION CARRIED

6-0-1

Member Blinn Abstained

PUBLIC INPUT – None

GENERAL BUSINESS

Chairman Mann noted the Committee would meet in a joint meeting with the COOP School Board on February 2, 2023 at the Hollis Brookline Middle School for the Public Hearing at 6:30 p.m. Following the Public Hearing, the Committee will take positions on the proposed warrant articles.

1 • Financial Update

2
3 As of 1-9-23, the projected fund balance is \$316,571. On the expense side of the ledger, areas where
4 savings are being seen include teacher vacancies, hiring savings, unpaid leaves, and savings in special
5 education (\$550,377 savings in out-of-district services). Also included are the corresponding benefits,
6 taxes, and insurance due to vacancies and lower salaries.
7

8 On the revenue side, we're showing \$90,000 more in revenue than budgeted. A new line to the report is the
9 State, NHRS reimbursement, which was an unexpected reimbursement from the State. House Bill 1221,
10 enacted in 2022, requires the State to reimburse 7.5% of local employer contributions to NHRS made in
11 FY22. That is a one and done deal (\$135,000).
12

13 • School Board Update

14
15 Noted was the K-12 math curriculum review presentation given at the 1-18-23 meeting (can be viewed [here](#)
16 beginning at tape counter 5:06). The presentation provided an update on the review, which is ongoing.
17

18 Chairman Mann remarked, as we move towards the FY24 budget, one of the things that will come up is the
19 recommendation on what will be included in the Lease Purchase Agreement. A communication from the
20 Superintendent was included in the [agenda](#) packet for the last school board meeting.
21

22 ***There being no objection, the agenda was amended to include discussion of budget/warrant overview.***
23

24 • Budget/Warrant Overview

25
26 Article 1 is related to the lease. At one point in the discussion, the lease included boilers in both schools
27 and the transition from heating oil to propane, LED lighting in both schools, and the science lab in the
28 middle school. After further consideration, the recommendation is to postpone the science lab renovation
29 and package that with the expansion of the cafeteria when that proposal comes forward (proposal would
30 result in additional classrooms and may also include a few renovations at the high school).
31

32 State environmental laws will require the district to upgrade the piping that connects the underground tanks
33 to both the middle and high school boilers. This piping upgrade is mandated and will cost approximately
34 \$150,000 per building should this renovation project not move forward.
35

36 As a lease purchase agreement, the article requires a majority vote to pass. Asked what the impact would
37 be to the operating budget should the article not pass, Ms. Seeley spoke of the theatre improvements
38 identified within the budget and the likelihood that project would be pushed out so that the monies
39 allocated to that could be utilized to address the piping.
40

41 Asked about the interest rate, Ms. Seeley stated the rough estimate on a 15-year lease to be 5%, and on a
42 10-year lease 3.8%. The life expectancy of the boilers is 20⁺ years.
43

44 Article 2 is the third year of the support staff contract, which included the subsequent negotiation of the
45 step tables. The cost for 2023-2024 is \$162,006.
46

47 Ms. Seeley noted the retention stipend that was utilized in the current year. The amount identified is the
48 negotiated amount for the coming year. An additional year has been added to the contract (will now end in
49 FY25). Asked about the cost of the additional contract year, Ms. Seeley stated her recollection is that it is
50 in the area of \$70,000.

Article 3 is the operating budget of \$26,499,039. Compared to this year's discreet operating budget, it is a 3.5% increase. The proposed budget comes in \$66,000 below guidance.

Vice Chairman Blanche congratulated the Administration on the budget brought forward. Chairman Mann commented on her belief, among all of the districts in the SAU, the increase to the COOP operating budget is the lowest.

Article 4 is the SAU budget. The [public hearing](#) on this was conducted on December 15, 2022. The COOP's portion of the proposed SAU budget is \$1,140,822. The COOP portion of the default budget, should the article not pass by a majority vote of all the school district voters voting in this school administrative unit, would be \$1,132,174.

Article 5 is the Maintenance Expendable Trust and an appropriation of \$300,000. The allocation would cover projects including paving of the dirt lot at the entrance to the driveway, an additional roof section at the high school, flooring in the middle school for the library, music, computer science, and teachers' room, additional HVAC upgrades and retrofit of the elevator.

Asked about the fund balance, Chairman Mann stated it to be \$123,000. Vice Chairman Blanche commented the article indicates the appropriation would come from the Unassigned Fund Balance (UFB) available on July 1, 2023. He questioned what would occur if the UFB was not sufficient to cover the allocation. Ms. Seeley explained articles are funded in the order they appear. In this case, the Maintenance Trust article comes before the Special Education Trust article. It would be funded up to the amount available. The School Board has the option of changing the order of those articles at the public hearing if so desired.

Chairman Mann stated it to be the School Board's warrant. The Board can change the order before it is approved as the posted warrant. At the Annual Meeting any of the articles can be taken out of order.

Article 6 is the proposed allocation to the Special Education Trust in the amount of \$25,000. The trust currently has a balance of \$231,000. Discussed at the start of the budget season was whether, moving forward, the \$250,000 target is truly the range that trust should be funded in, and to direct the Director of Student Services to review whether that amount is adequate given changes in rate structures of out-of-district placements and needs of students; on average, is that representative or something that needs to be reconsidered? The expectation is a determination can be made during the next budget cycle.

Article 7 is the language for the Retained Fund Balance (RFB). The district currently has the authority to retain up to 1% RFB. State law has changed to allow up to 5% retention. The article proposes retaining up to 2.5%.

Ms. Seeley noted the language of the article was provided by legal counsel. Legal counsel has advised if this article does not pass, it does not mean the district would revert back to the 1% previously approved. There is a need for a contingent article should article 7 fails, which will address going back to the 1%.

Chairman Mann noted the changes in State law also impact the manner in which the funds can be accessed. In order to access the funds, the School Board is required to first conduct a public hearing.

Article 8 is the establishment of a Contingency Fund with an allocation of \$125,000.

The last day for petition warrant articles is February 6, 2023.

1 • Metrics for Public Hearing

2
3 The Committee was given a copy of the presentation from last year's public hearing. It was not updated, in
4 any way, to reflect the proposed FY24 budget. The final draft of the FY24 presentation will be provided in
5 advance of the public hearing.

6
7 Chairman Mann went over the various slides explaining what the presentation will entail.

8
9 Vice Chairman Blanche spoke of the challenge of relaying the information to the citizenry for the Annual
10 Meeting. If limiting the amount of information shared to stay within a specified timeframe, it could
11 become less insightful. He suggested the number of charts may be able to be reduced; however, the
12 knowledge the presenter possesses needs to be shared.

13
14 There was discussion of the benefits of consistency in terms of how the information is relayed.

15
16 Ms. Seeley commented on the information being presented at the public hearing and then being available
17 for the public to digest in advance of the Annual Meeting.

18
19 Member Stanizzi commented on the ability to provide a comparison of what was forecasted for previous
20 years against actuals. How the district compares to other districts of a similar size, etc. would be a helpful
21 comparison.

22
23 Chairman Mann commented on part of the annual meeting presentation including information on cost per
24 student for the district as well as 8-10 comparable districts for comparison.

25
26 Member Whalen spoke of a slide that would show what is paid into taxes versus the real cost of educating
27 children.

28
29 Member Whalen suggested it would be nice to add a line to the State Aid slide that shows the impact of the
30 school voucher program; taking \$8 million out of our school systems every year. Chairman Mann noted
31 last year's presentation included legislative actions coming up as there were significant impacts. There are
32 some very significant recommendations for legislation with regard to the school voucher system in this
33 session.

34
35 • Pending Legislation

36
37 There are at least 6 bills that address increased funding for schools. One is increased funding for special
38 education by changing how special education aid is calculated; currently aid is provided if the district's
39 liability is 3½ times the Cost Per Pupil (CPP). Being considered is reducing that to 1½ times the CPP,
40 which would significantly increase the amount of special education aid we would be eligible for.

41
42 In the last session, there was legislation that put the age of covered students to 22. There is now a proposal
43 to push that back to 21.

44
45 There is legislation around increasing the adequacy portion of funding to half of the State average CPP,
46 which would be a huge increase.

47
48 There is a recommendation to restore the disparity aid, which was a one-time event, depending on the size
49 of your community and the number of students.

50
51 Legislation is also proposed to repeal the Statewide education property tax.

1 There are various pieces of legislation that address the school voucher program including changing the
2 poverty line and increasing it significantly. Some say they are taking out any kind of poverty increment to
3 just make anyone eligible.

4
5 There was an interesting statistic that said that 70% of the amount paid out in vouchers goes to people who
6 are currently home or private schooled and only 23% are for those who are being out of the public school
7 system. It may be that, at the time, there was the belief this would encourage more students to leave the
8 public school system, but in fact a much larger percentage of those that receive the vouchers are those who
9 are already educating their children by home schooling or private school.

10
11 There is legislation around school building aid that talks about increasing the available amount anywhere
12 from \$50-\$60 million.

13
14 There is legislation that puts up a very small amount of money for projects already in place; expanding by
15 another \$5-10 million for projects that were already approved, but maybe not to the maximum amount.

16
17 There is legislation around parental and student bill of rights, repealing the divisive concepts legislation,
18 and teacher loan forgiveness.

19
20 There is interesting legislation around composition of boards. One Bill says you cannot be a member of a
21 municipal governing body and serve on another board. There were those that would prevent, specifically
22 COOP budget committees and COOP school boards from retaining their officers. For the COOP Budget
23 Committee you would have to alternate chairmanship between a member of one town with a member of a
24 different town unless members of the other town don't want to hold the position. For the school board side
25 it was every officer needs to change every year.

26
27 There was legislation for the NHRS to make permanent the 7.5% reimbursement that the district received.

28
29 Chairman Mann commented on the amount of legislation and how generally there is a lot that just doesn't
30 move forward.

31
32 **ANNOUNCEMENTS** - None

33
34 **PROCESS OBSERVER READOUT**

35
36 Member Whalen spoke of the amount of information presented and discussion that ensued.

37
38 **ADJOURNMENT**

39
40 **MOTION BY MEMBER RATER TO ADJOURN**

41 **MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER BLINN**

42 **MOTION CARRIED**

43 **7-0-0**

44
45 The January 26, 2023, meeting of the COOP Budget Committee was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

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50 Date: _____

Signed: _____