

**HOLLIS BROOKLINE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT
BUDGET COMMITTEE
JULY 1, 2021
MEETING MINUTES**

A regular meeting of the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District (COOP) Budget Committee was conducted on Thursday, July 1, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. at the Hollis Brookline Middle School Multi-Purpose Room.

Chairman, Darlene Mann, presided:

Members of the Budget Cmte. Present: Raul Blanche, Vice Chairman
 David Blinn
 Matthew Maguire
 Brian Rater
 Cindy VanCoughnett, School Bd. Rep.

Members of the Budget Cmte. Absent: Tom Enright
 Lorin Rydstrom

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 David Blinn to serve as Process Observer.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

COOP Budget Committee [May 27, 2021](#)

MOTION BY MEMBER BLINN TO ACCEPT, AS PRESENTED

MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER BLANCHE

MOTION CARRIED

5-0-1

Member VanCoughnett Abstained

PUBLIC INPUT - None

GENERAL BUSINESS

- Food Services Overview

Kelly Seeley, Business Administrator, provided a presentation (copy attached). She commended Amy Cassidy, Director of Student Nutrition, for all she has accomplished, particularly during this past year.

Pre-COVID, employees of the program included a head cook in each school, 4 food service workers at the Hollis Brookline High School (HBHS) and 3 at the Hollis Brookline Middle School (HBMS). Administrative support (9 hrs./week) was split between all districts.

Asked about the distribution of costs between the districts (45% COOP, 30% HSD, and 25% BSD) and whether it is based on enrollment, Ms. Seeley was uncertain noting the distribution has been in place for many years, and her belief it is attributed to usage (enrollment in a general sense).

All Hollis Brookline districts participate in the National School Lunch Program having the primary focus of providing nutritionally balanced lunches to children each school day.

Vice Chairman Blanche commented on the program having run in the red several years prior. Part of the reason was unpopular items due to preparing meals in accordance with Federal standards. Ms. Seeley spoke of improvements, e.g., offerings, scheduling, management, etc. Director Cassidy has overcome all those obstacles by being creative with the offerings and providing options previously not available.

The school benefits through receipt of subsidies when families partake in the free and reduced program, USDA sourced foods, access to free training, and other resources. In exchange, districts are required to meet the Federal requirements and must offer the free or reduced priced lunches to those eligible.

Program expenses include salary, food, non-food, and equipment. Revenue includes local (parent paid), State, and Federal. Revenue (whether more than expenses or not sufficient to meet expenses) is added to or subtracted from the food service fund balance. Each school can hold an average of 3 months' operating costs in fund balance.

A Revenue & Expense Analysis was provided (going back 10 years).

The effects of COVID-19 include the greatest cost of meals being reimbursed through Federal revenue (free to all). Meal counts have increased dramatically (due to being free). Three resignations in the COOP could not be filled. There was strain on the food service staff in all three districts. Staff hours increased due to some of the schedules requested by the middle and high schools, addition of a 3rd lunch in the middle school, lunches served in both the café and gym at the high school, breakfast outside at the high school and grab and go at the middle school.

In all cases student/staff safety were maintained by ensuring all meals were packaged to go as a complete meal, lines were kept to a minimum, and meal service was contact free.

Other effects include multiple trips up and down stairs because of not having the proper equipment to service in two different locations at the high school, food service staff offering meal delivery to other building staff, no vending service or revenue, minimal a la carte in January to increase revenue, half-day Fridays; lunch was grab n go resulting in loss of meal counts despite trying to hand out as students left, and staff covered in elementary schools many times.

Asked how reimbursement occurred, Ms. Seeley explained reimbursement is not based on # of prepared meals, but number of meals taken. Asked if free meals were provided to students or students and staff, she stated meals were prepared for students and staff; however, staff was required to purchase the meals.

Some of the accomplishments since the time of the last update were noted. The program nearly doubled lunch participation in the last 2 years. The results of the FY19 Administrative Review (done every 3 years) had no findings. The reviewer was impressed with the program. The FY21 State COVID-19 review resulted in no findings and excellent comments on compliance. Health inspections continue to pass with praise. Reduced costs due to utilizing the NH Buying Group. Marketing utilizing Twitter and Instagram has had great results.

Monthly theme days are well received. Increasing offerings has been successful, e.g., real world choices and standardized recipes across all districts.

Provided was information on meal counts dating back to FY10. If in April, May and June of FY20 we had used FY19 numbers for April, May and June and added them to the numbers experienced in FY20, we would have had 70,000 meals, which would surpass the numbers of free meals from this past year.

Asked how meals worked for remote students, Ms. Seeley stated lunches were offered to remote students. There was a period when those lunches were delivered.

Strategies moving forward include returning to normal operations, redesigning of serving line at the high school, equipment upgrades (likely utilize some of fund balance), increased participation (particularly breakfast), increased marketing and the creation of a forum for student and parent input.

Asked about the reimbursements for next year, Ms. Seeley stated meals are free for all of next year. Asked about the planned equipment upgrades and potential cost, Ms. Seeley responded work in that regard has just started. Some of the expenses may be incurred in FY23 and FY24. The likely starting point is the kitchen design and associated upgrades. Asked about summer programs, Ms. Seeley noted the Nashua School District provides a summer program. The Food Services Director ensures our families know where they can continue the program during the summer months.

Chairman Mann commented on the magnitude of the number of meals served and the circumstances surrounding that.

- Financial Update

Ms. Seeley provided an updated Revenue & Expense Report (copy attached). Expenses are running under budget by approximately \$1,810,887 (80-90% related to circumstances resulting from COVID). The FY20 carryover of \$167,280 brings that total to \$1,978,167. Revenue came in under budget (shortfall of \$47,044).

Projected, as of 6-8-21, is an FY21 Unassigned Fund Balance (UFB) of \$1,931,123. Reducing from that balance allocations to the Athletic Trust Fund (\$50,000), Maintenance Trust Fund (\$115,000) and the Retained Fund Balance (\$180,760) results in a projected fund balance of \$1,585,363.

The School Board has approved the requested expenditures from the Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. As a result, the section of roof (Phase 4 of 10) and the road paving at the HBHS will be completed. The anticipated FY22 balance remaining in the Trust (after the approved expenditures) is anticipated to be \$97,575, which does not include the \$43,000 being held for the future elevator expense.

The current balance in the Special Education Trust Fund is \$205,271. There are no allocations or expenditures planned at this time.

Requested expenditures from the Athletic Expendable Trust total \$46,636.27. That will result in an anticipated FY21 ending balance of \$32,375, which will be transferred to the new Athletic Revolving Fund. The Athletic Expendable Trust Fund will be closed out.

Asked if the \$1,585,363 would be returned to the general fund, Ms. Seeley noted the decision of the School Board to utilize some of that balance.

- School Board Update

The recommendation of the Superintendent was to encumber \$546,000 to cover the cost of the HBHS main office security renovation (\$91,000), the HBHS roof section (\$190,000), HBHS paving to complete the circular drive (\$65,000; monies identified in the Maintenance Trust Fund was intended to bring the paving a portion of the way around), project scope for enrollment increases (\$30,000), HBHS teacher lot paving (\$65,000) and replacement of the oldest section of roof at HBMS (\$105,000). The total approved encumbrance was \$546,000.

The total of \$546,000 reduced from the anticipated \$1,585,363 results in an anticipated amount to be returned to the tax base of \$1,039,363. That number can change up until the end of the fiscal year; June 30, 2021.

Asked about the enrollment audit, Ms. Seeley stated the desire to study infrastructure needs based on anticipated enrollment increases.

Member Blinn spoke of the anticipated expenses in the coming year and questioned if requests in the coming year would be reduced by allocating some of the UFB at this time. Chairman Mann explained the projects identified would simply move ahead in the schedule. She used the roof section as an example; addressing the most expensive section through use of the UFB. Next year the next section of roof would be looked to be addressed through the budget. With the next budget cycle, the third phase of the technology plan will be considered. There are no contracts to be negotiated in the fall. Asked about the status of staffing, Ms. Seeley noted there are several retirements anticipated next year. A lot of the teachers said they did not want to go out on a year like this. An overview of the direction of the upcoming budget cycle will be reviewed in September.

Chairman Mann questioned if the summary of available grant funding could be provided for the August meeting.

Asked about the typical amount returned to the tax base, Ms. Seeley stated the district typically budgets between \$200,000 and \$300,000. Chairman Mann noted, at this year's Annual Meeting the amount of \$650,000 was identified. The taxpayers did not approve the requested allocation to the Contingency Fund (\$100,000). The expectation would be a return of \$750,000.

Chairman Mann will revise the UFB historical summary for the August meeting. Noted was that in FY20 slightly over \$1.1 million was returned to the tax base. Prior to that it was slightly under \$500,000 for 2 years, around \$750,000 for a year, \$350,000, \$300,000, \$175,000. The two years where the district has been impacted by COVID have resulted in returning around a million dollars. Ms. Seeley noted the year that the \$750,000 was returned was the result of special education students moving out of the district as well as an extremely high turnover of staff.

Asked, Ms. Seeley stated within the SAU there have been a good many retirements. Asked if teachers are being lost to other towns, Ms. Seeley stated the data could be gathered. Not everyone shares the reason for leaving.

Vice Chairman Blanche spoke of budgeting as close to actual as possible, and that it bothers him that year after year the district has a large amount unexpended and returned to the tax base. He understands there are factors outside of the district's control. Ms. Seeley reiterated, as part of the budget process, the district plans the return of \$200,000 - \$300,000 to the tax base at year end. The budget process could instead be based on the end goal of zeroing out the budget. Vice Chairman Blanche cited the large amounts returned in recent years. Chairman Mann noted the past two years have been aberrations. We have been running the district in such a different fashion that it is difficult to use that time in a comparable way. She is uncertain how you reconcile the past two years.

Vice Chairman Blanche stated the desire to see the return of smaller amounts remaining at year end. Ms. Seeley commented one way to get there is to stop budgeting for a \$300,000 return. Special education costs are always the unknown factor. You cannot know when a student will leave or enter the district.

Member VanCoughnett commented part of the audit that is being done will consider housing development and the potential impact on the schools.

Chairman Mann questioned if the enrollment audit would be performed by NESDEC. Member VanCoughnett stated it will identify some NESDEC numbers but will not be based on NESDEC. It will be based on our communities. Ms. Seeley stated the district would utilize the same two companies the Brookline School District is using for the same purpose; Banwell Architects and EEI. EEI is focused on more of the energy part of the audit and Banwell will utilize NESDEC numbers, analyze our community, etc.

Chairman Mann questioned if the audit/report is anticipated to identify an enrollment projection for the next 5 years like what NESDEC does. Will the report produce enrollment data that will be used for budgeting purposes instead of NESDEC data or will their enrollment data be an applied factor to the NESDEC numbers?

Ms. Seeley stated the goal to be to come up with designs for potential increase in enrollment. NESDEC will be one of the sources used when identifying potential enrollment, but she is uncertain what they would be producing as a view for future enrollment.

Chairman Mann remarked, in general, enrollments have been down in the COOP. Existing facilities can accommodate the needs of an increase in enrollment. Enrollment has gone up and down, and the district has not cut staff because of population changes and other factors. She is of the belief there is a lot of room, with what we have, to accommodate at least the starting phases of enrollment increases.

Ms. Seeley commented, if just looking at the population of Hollis, natural increases that happen, yes, but Brookline is faced with some workforce housing (also present in Hollis). There is concern that would bump enrollment up unusually high.

Member Blinn spoke of the current housing market. Vice Chairman Blanche commented in essence this study will look at all the factors that will contribute to future populations. Ms. Seeley stated that to be her understanding.

Member Maguire questioned, and was told the study would identify future infrastructure needs/design(s), e.g., based on anticipated enrollment, does the size of the cafeteria need to be adjusted, number of classrooms increased. Member Rater questioned if what is meant by designs is building floorplans, class sizes, etc. Ms. Seeley stated class sizes would be part of the data gathering that is done, but the architectural design is what is intended. Enrollment in kindergarten has increased largely in both communities. Understanding anticipated timeframes for increased enrollment and the associated infrastructure needs would allow the district to plan appropriately.

Member VanCoughnett noted during the last School Board meeting, Vice Chairman Solon mentioned, and others agreed, that he was not opposed to expending funds, but he is opposed to utilizing funds from the Maintenance Trust Fund in the same year they are allocated. He is concerned it sets a bad precedent for using the Trust as a means of making changes in the budget.

Chairman Mann questioned if there was discussion of the re-opening plan. Member VanCoughnett responded a lot of detail was not discussed, but the plan is to be back to in-person. The biggest concern is with the wearing of masks. Assistant Superintendent Thompson presented the plan, which identifies, should there be the need to, the district could return to requiring masks be worn.

Chairman Mann commented on all emergency orders having been lifted and a requirement for receipt of grant funds being the submission of the re-opening plan. Those plans can be updated.

Noted was that the district has a lawsuit filed against it because of students being required to wear masks.

The bleachers at the HBHS are in. Member VanCoughnett stated the only remaining item, at the time of the last School Board meeting, was the lower (under) structure of the press box. Asked about the potential for summer use of the field, Member VanCoughnett stated the fee structure is in place and the Athletic Coordinator is working on that effort.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman Mann informed the Committee of her receipt of a letter of resignation from Lorin Rydstrom. In his letter, he states he tenders his resignation, effective at the close of the 7-1-21 meeting, *“to pursue other interests. The Committee does good work and is pivotal in educating the voters. It has been an honor to have served on the Committee for these many years. It has been a good and enjoyable experience working with the entire dedicated Committee. I do particularly also want to acknowledge your professional leadership of the Committee. Thank you.”*

Chairman Mann noted Mr. Rydstrom has served on the Committee for 8 years. She expressed gratitude to him for his service and contribution to the Committee and community-at-large. She spoke of appreciating the perspective he brought to the Committee.

There is the need for the Committee to move forward with the process of posting a notice of the opening on the SAU website and identify a date by which resumes/letters of interest need to be received so that they can be reviewed at the August meeting. In the past, the Committee has invited interested individuals to attend a meeting and participate in a question/answer opportunity. The belief is those elected members of the Committee who reside in the town for which the open position represents, are the ones who choose the candidate.

AGENDA BUILDING

The next meeting will be conducted on August 26, 2021 (Library). Chairman Mann will determine the availability of the Auditor to attend.

PROCESS OBSERVER READOUT

Member Blinn stated the meeting ran phenomenally.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY MEMBER BLINN TO ADJOURN
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER RATER
MOTION CARRIED
8-0-0

The July 1, 2021, meeting of the COOP Budget Committee adjourned at 7:39 p.m.

Date: _____

Signed: _____