

**BROOKLINE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ANNUAL MEETING
FIRST SESSION (DELIBERATIVE)
FEBRUARY 5, 2025
MEETING MINUTES**

APPROVED
3/26/25

as amended

The First Session (Deliberative) of the Annual Meeting of the Brookline School District was conducted on Wednesday, February 5, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. at the Captain Samuel Douglass Academy.

Moderator Peter Webb presided:

Members of the School Bd. Present: Colleen Micavich, Chairperson
Tracy Perry, Vice Chairperson
Alyson Manion, Secretary
Johanna Shriver-Halligan
Kelly Zakar (arrived after the start)

Members of the School Bd. Absent:

Also in Attendance: Andrew Corey, Superintendent
Gina Bergskaug, Superintendent-Elect
Lauren DiGennaro, Director of Student Services
Kelly Seeley, Business Administrator
Donna Smith, Assistant Business Administrator
Daniel Molinari, Principal, Richard Maghakian Memorial School
Dulce Lara, Clerk, Brookline School District
Katherine Elkins, Secretary, Brookline Finance Cmte. (arrived after start)
James O'Shaughnessy, Esq., Drummond Woodsum
Jonathan Verity, Curriculum Administrator
Meg Peterson, Special Education Administrator

Moderator Webb led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members of the School Board and Administration were introduced. Members of the Administration are not members of the Town, and, therefore, technically not permitted to participate. However, given what they could add to the discussion, the Moderator requested anyone objecting to allowing them to speak make that objection known. No objections were stated.

Moderator Webb noted this to be an SB2 meeting under RSA 40:13 also known as the Official Ballot Referendum System. The School Board has created a Warrant having several articles. There is also a Petition Warrant Article. Under SB2, the Warrant is effectively the Ballot. Before the voters was the opportunity to discuss each of the Warrant Articles and to consider any amendments. Although the Ballot could be changed, it could not be approved until before the voters on Tuesday, March 11, 2025. Town Meeting is Wednesday, March 12, 2025. A second day has been scheduled for Thursday, March 13, 2025.

Moderator Webb noted that, under the Statute, the legislative body (taxpayers) cannot eliminate the subject matter of an article; it can be supplemented but not eliminated.

A presentation was made providing detailed information on each of the articles presented (can be viewed [here](#)).

Article 1 – Election of Officers

To elect all necessary School District officers for the ensuing terms by official ballot vote on March 11, 2025, Captain Samuel Douglass Academy, 7:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.:

- To choose a Moderator for the ensuing year.
- To choose a Clerk for the ensuing year.
- To choose a Treasurer for the ensuing year.
- To choose two (2) members of the School Board for the ensuing three (3) years.

Article 1 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

Article 2 – Lease Purchase Agreement

To see if the School District will vote to authorize the School Board to enter into a 20-year lease purchase agreement for \$1,131,750 to finance the acquisition and installation of energy conservation equipment (CSDA boilers and LED lighting and controls at both schools) and related building improvements at Captain Samuel Douglass Academy and Richard Maghakian Memorial School; and to raise and appropriate the sum of **\$90,565** for payments due under the lease purchase agreement during the 2025-2026 fiscal year; the annual lease payments over the 20 year term is estimated to be \$90,565 per year. This lease purchase agreement will contain an escape (non-appropriation) clause. (Majority vote required.) Estimated Tax Impact: \$0.08/\$1,000. **The School Board recommends the appropriation 3-1-0. The Finance Committee recommends this appropriation 2-0-0.**

**MOTION MADE BY TRACY PERRY TO MOVE ARTICLE 2 TO THE WARRANT, AS WRITTEN
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Gina Bergskaug, Superintendent-Elect, stated the Captain Samuel Douglass Academy (CSDA) was built 25 years go. While it is the newest building in the SAU, we cannot ignore maintenance and replacement of the mechanical, electrical, and structural components. CSDA has two boilers with oil fueled burners. The main components of these boilers are the boiler body, oil-fired burner and the delivery system, including an underground storage tank located outside. Preventative maintenance has been completed annually, but they have reached end of life. In November, 2019, a crack in the boiler was repaired and the seals were replaced on both. That was a temporary fix, and we need to move forward with full replacement or risk facing a breakage mid-year and an inability to find replacement parts or to fund an urgent repair.

By switching to a propane system, we will gain efficiency and experience cost savings. Oil underground storage tanks and associated piping currently have higher standards than they did previously, which create additional concerns for our existing systems. Switching to propane will allow us to benefit from a greater purchasing power as we can combine our efforts with our high school, potentially our middle school, the Hollis School District, the Town of Hollis and the Town of Brookline.

This article also includes upgraded controls for the HVAC systems at both the Richard Maghakian Memorial School (RMMS) and CSDA. Our existing controls are antiquated, have limited functionality, and it is difficult

to find a vendor who can navigate an antiquated DOS system. Upgraded controls will allow us to improve climate control, reduce isolated issues, and allow for remote monitoring.

Finally, this article includes upgrading our existing lighting at both RMMS and CSDA to the industry standard, LED lighting. Not only is this a superior lighting solution to optimize the educational experience for all students, but it also provides significant energy savings year after year.

The intent behind combining these items was to create a cost-neutral warrant article. Installing LED lighting in FY26 allows the district to benefit from a rebate estimated to be \$70,000. This rebate is likely to go away in the near future increasing the urgency of the article. In addition, the expected annual savings are estimated to be \$31,000 year after year.

The total cost of the project is \$1,131,750. The first year payment for a 20-year lease would be \$90,565. The annual energy savings would total \$48,000, and the FY26 potential rebates \$42,565. The net impact to the budget is actually zero dollars.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Concerned with using a lease with an escape clause for things that you install. This is a very expensive way to finance any kind of project because you are paying for the flexibility of an escape clause that you really cannot exercise. At the COOP School District budget hearing, they saw the wisdom of that and changed two proposed leases to bonds saving on the first one, \$1.4 million in interest by going from a lease to a bond and on the second it was about \$500,000 in interest savings. Going for a lease with an escape clause is a premium, expensive mechanism for the financing of this project.

Asked to address an escape clause, he explained it means each year you can decide whether you want to escape or not. You could say the legislative body (voters) don't want to do this anymore and you return the equipment, presumably. The reason it doesn't make sense is how do you return the boiler? What do you do with the LED lighting? It is really not practical. It is only in there so that you could propose it and pass it with a simple majority. It is a very bad and expensive mechanism.

**MOTION BY ERIC PAUER TO AMEND ARTICLE 2 BY REPLACING THE AMOUNT OF
"\$1,131,750" WITH "\$0.00" AND THE AMOUNT OF "\$90,565" WITH "\$0.00" IN BOTH INSTANCES
IT APPEARS**

MOTION SECONDED

ON THE QUESTION

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

At the COOP meeting, discussing one of the reasons for the move from a lease to a bond was the preferable interest rates for bonds. He questioned why this would then continue to be a lease.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

When we went out to look at the projects we are doing, at that point, leases and bonds were approximately the same rate. As a result of being an SB2 town, our calendar is much quicker. As an annual meeting town, the

COOP School Board has more time. They were actually able to change their article and schedule a bond hearing for next week.

In comparing leases and bonds, bonds will give you an artificial decrease in the first year because you are only paying 6 months of interest. The lease is going to have one consistent payment over the 20 years. The bond has a larger upfront cost than the lease and cannot be refinanced if rates were to go down. Ultimately, the rates have to be brought to the School Board and the School Board has to approve of the rates. If they don't approve of the rates then the project doesn't go forward.

Mr. Rater asked if changing the amounts to zero, would that prevent us from taking out the lease or is that a valid thing to do?

Superintendent Corey responded if changing the amounts to zero there is no funding appropriated for the first year's payment. The Board could not enter into that agreement.

Mr. Rater asked for clarification whether it would authorize the Board to do it in future years but not this year.

Superintendent Corey responded the vote on the ballot would decide, and if not passing at the ballot, it would be telling the School Board no, we are not doing that for this year, and they would have to bring it back in whatever shape or format next year.

Mr. Rater commented the motion is effectively defeating this and was told that is the case.

Robert Rushton, 19 Flint Meadow Drive

Although the justification for this amendment as well as nullifying the article essentially, is that a bond would be better, note that the amendment does not authorize a bond. The one element, if it did, would be that a bond would also require a higher margin for passage. You might as well remove this article although we cannot do that tonight.

Moderator Webb asked if a bond requires a preliminary hearing, and was told a bond hearing would have to be conducted.

Another thing about SB2 is we are not allowed to eliminate the subject matter. He asked if zeroing this out eliminates the subject matter.

James O'Shaughnessy Esq.

There is a Statute directly on point; reducing the dollar amount to zero is legal. It does not constitute eliminating the subject matter.

Gregory Darbonne, 65 Cleveland Hill Road

Asked what the cost of the escape clause is.

Attorney O'Shaughnessy replied typically the escape clause means you have to return all of the equipment, at the district's expense, to the company, and where you are replacing necessary equipment you would have to find a way to replace it.

Mr. Darbonne continued by asking if the boilers turn out to be lemons, is the burden on us to give it back or the manufacturer?

Attorney O'Shaughnessy responded that it is more of a warranty issue. If they turn out to be lemons they replace the boiler. If the voters vote not to appropriate money (the next year's payment), which is the escape clause, you have to return all the equipment. You may not actually be able to do that or there may be a high cost associated with that.

Mr. Darbonne spoke of being hopeful when the time comes, our Board has examined the best vendor. The need for an escape clause is understood, but it will be hard to do that. If we are not paying any extra for this aspect it is a moot point.

Webb Scales, 49 Dupaw Gould Road

Before we can enact a bond we have to have a hearing? What is the sequence of events? His understanding with SB2 is that the bond would come before the voters in March. It seems like if tonight we requested a bond there is plenty of time to have a hearing before March.

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

The bigger issue at hand is that an amendment to turn a lease purchase agreement to a bond would be a change in subject matter and wouldn't be a valid or lawful amendment. The question of whether there is sufficient time under the Municipal Finance Act he can look up, although he does not feel that it is necessary as he does think it unlawful to change it from a lease to a bond here.

Mr. Scales continued by stating his belief it would be a gross mismanagement to zero out these numbers. It would be a disservice to the voters who have to vote in March.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Leases do cost more because of the escape clause. In the case of the COOP, you are talking about an interest rate that is about 1.6% higher and on a smaller bond it is 1.9% higher. You're paying for this flexibility that you really cannot use. He believes a bond to be a much better approach. We should vote this amendment so that next year we can come back for a bond and do this at a much lower cost. He estimates a savings of about \$300,000 in interest if doing so.

Stefanie Gray, 24 West Hill Road

The current state is that it has been zeroed out and someone has seconded that motion.

Moderator Webb responded that what was being discussed is whether you support the motion to zero it out.

Ms. Gray stated she does not support the motion. If we kick this can down the road, we will end up paying higher prices. We all know tariffs are coming, If we are not getting this material now, we are definitely paying 25-50% higher costs. This isn't optional equipment. Our schools need this. Your kids need heat. If we end up paying some ridiculous repairs or cannot produce the funds to replace it mid-year, we are doing the entire community a disservice.

Melanie Levesque, 2 McDaniels Drive

Is against the amendment. Our School Board has voted on this, our Finance Committee has voted on it. To come up this evening with a totally different solution is unfair to our School Board and our citizens.

Brady Halligan, 17 Birch Hill Road

This budget process begins in December, if not earlier. While the idea is not a bad one, unfortunately the question of timing coupled with the fact that this is an SB2 meeting means that the timing is non-existent to make this change. This is one of the negatives of SB2 is it reduces flexibility that the COOP School Board does have due to short-term changes in interest rates that have created an opportunity. It is an opportunity that we simply don't have. It would have been great had we known interest rates were going to be what they are today three months ago when this was being developed, but we didn't. that is just the nature of SB2. He strongly opposes the amendment.

Ed Perry, 4 Muscatanipus Road

Rose in an independent capacity to call malarkey on this amendment. Here is what was said at the end of it; let's look at this next year. Usually when you listen to people long enough they will tell you what their real intention is, and the intention is to kick this boiler out another year. Unless you are talking about Arizona Ice Teas or rotisserie chickens at Cosco, there is nothing that remains the same price every year. We either buy the boiler for this year's prices or we get next year's prices. Common sense dictates it will cost more.

He spoke of a Brookline resident who had their boiler fail. What happens if over the course of that year the boiler just fails? Well, for his friend in town who doesn't have a boiler right now, nobody is coming for 4-5 days. We would have schools closed for 4-5 days on some random nonsense that got brought up into a meeting for something that does nothing. This doesn't amend an article, it negates it. Even though it is legal, it is chicanery because at the end of the day, nobody will sell us a boiler for zero dollars. Let's shut this down at some point so we don't have to spend the rest of the evening arguing whether or not we want to pay for a more expensive boiler in a year on the off chance it doesn't fail mid-winter and put us in a real crisis.

Thomas Durand, 21 Meetinghouse Hill Road

There is discussion of expansion for the school. Does this boiler include additional capacity for expansion?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The boiler is somewhat larger and will have some capacity but is not intended to support a complete new addition because that addition is still in discussion format. It could look in the same form as the portables that are already in place, which come with their own heating units.

Mr. Durand asked if the expansion planned to occur during the next 20 years? You have a 20-year lease, but you may be adding to this school. Is it smarter to go with a shorter lease where we can then budget a larger boiler?

Superintendent Corey stated his belief that the boiler being proposed will sufficiently handle what exists for CSDA today and slightly more. When we are talking an addition we are looking at, at most, four classrooms or

about 4,000 sq. ft. If you go with portables, the heating unit comes with it. Typically, with a lease you are looking for the useful life of the new item you buy to be in excess years of what you are purchasing, e.g., we anticipate the life expectancy of the boiler to be 30-40 years.

MOTION MADE BY MELANIE LEVESQUE TO MOVE THE QUESTION
MOTION SECONDED
MOTION CARRIED

Moderator Webb permitted those standing in line the opportunity to provide input.

Robert Beaulieu, 56 Pepperell Road

Supports the proposed amended. Mr. Pauer is one of the few he knows in town that is conservative and wants to save the taxpayers money. There are a lot of people here who are obviously not conservative. That is okay, but it saves all families money if we save money. He does not know all the details of this as much as others do. He supports it because Mr. Pauer is bringing it up and he trusts him.

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

Point of Order...is this a non-partisan meeting? Are we allowed to talk politically and identify our political parties when making comments at the microphone?

Moderator Webb responded he believes it to be empty, but yes you can do that.

Rebekah Liebling, 63 Averill Road

Wished to have information on the condition of the current boiler repeated and an opinion on whether it is believed it will make it or break.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The existing boiler is at end of life. In 2019 it had a substantial crack. We were able to repair that. At that time, we were told we should be looking to replace the boiler. It is becoming very difficult to get part. When a boiler gets to be that age it struggles to make the efficiency level and once it doesn't make the efficiency level companies stop making parts. He reminded the voters a proposal was brought forth in 2022 to replace the boiler. Approved was a contingency bond for \$1.5 million when the full request was for \$2.5 million. That extra million dollars was for the heating system. We have asked for this once before. Could it survive another year; it may, but it may go next January and we don't have a great enough margin to fund a \$700,000 boiler. We would have to conduct a special meeting and we would have students at home for a number of days while we approved that funding and waited for the repair.

Ms. Liebling stated three hundred thousand dollars is not nothing. These are very good points that were raised whether you are conservative or liberal. Thank you for the further information.

Vote on the motion to amend
MOTION FAILED

Susan Haight, 17 S. Main Street

Asked the Finance Committee and School Board, when discussing this article and the need to replace the boilers under the lease, did you also consider it as a bond? What was the reason to not present a bond?

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

We did talk about it, but the bond rates, at that point, were not comparable. This is what we could afford and what was in our budget.

Ms. Haight questioned what would occur if articles 2 and 3 did not pass.

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

Were the boiler to fail next October or November, we would have to call a special meeting to replace the boiler and school won't be running. It is a pretty catastrophic failure if the boiler goes and we don't have a plan in place to replace it.

Robert Beaulieu, 56 Pepperell Road

How long is the warranty on the proposed boilers?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

If this passes, the project has to be put out to bid. We need to acquire three bid proposals to bring to the School Board. Part of that information is the warranty.

Mr. Beaulieu asked what the expected warranty is on an average project of this size.

Superintendent Corey responded typically there are parts and labor that are usually the first five years and then major failures beyond that. Each proposal has to come in and we would be speculating in hypotheticals until that is known. Just by passing this doesn't mean it happens. Let's say the proposal came in and the cost is much more than we expected, then we have to figure out the next solution.

Mr. Beaulieu remarked the possibility of failure in January were this not in place would also be true 7 or 12 years from now if past the warranty.

There was mention of a rebate that is available now, but it might go away. If that goes away does that stay for all 20 years guaranteed even if it goes away 3 years from now?

Superintendent Corey the \$48,000 energy savings is for the entire life and could actually increase if costs increase. The rebate is a one-time rebate, which is why the project is cost-neutral in the first year.

Katherine Elkins, 95 Mason Road, Brookline Finance Committee

Asked for clarification of the \$42,000.

Robert Beaulieu, 56 Pepperell Road

Stated the amount to be the potential rebate. The cost for this year may be lower, but that is only a one-time thing.

Gina Bergskaug, Superintendent-Elect

Referring to a chart that was displayed noted the project is broken down into various one-time rebates and annual savings. For the LED lighting, there have been rebates for many years. Everyone, except for us, has already converted to LED lighting. Therefore, there is no incentive to continue to give rebates. It still exists now but won't for much longer. It is the \$70,000 that if we don't take advantage now, won't be around. At the bottom of the slide, the \$42,565 is a portion of the \$85,500 total in available rebates for all aspects of the project. The intent was to demonstrate how there is zero impact to the budget if the article passes.

Stephen Brogan, 9 Hollis Lane

The lease is over 20 years. It is kind of like a car lease where if anything breaks they fix it?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

There is a lot of leverage if something were to go wrong because the lease company is also on the hook. Historically, when we have had an issue it is the school district and lease company going back at the vendor. There is a lot of power there. Whereas with a bond it is just the school district.

Mr. Brogan questioned the security of the companies we are using not just for the equipment but the actual leasing company.

Superintendent Corey stated the companies that we have leased with in the past have been around for many years. They are very familiar with schools. Not knowing the prediction, but it is very interesting that the latest bond rates came down. Historically lease rates have also fallen after bonds because otherwise there is no business for the leasing companies. It wouldn't shock him if he saw the lease price come down, but we won't know that until after March when we are out to bid.

Mr. Brogan commented we are always very reactionary. Is it possible that we could have a fund to save for replacement of the boiler 25-down the road?

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

We do have a Facilities Maintenance Trust Fund, which we will be talking about later on. That is partially why we have that. She does not know that we would have enough in that to replace a boiler. We also use that for funding items such as roof replacements, windows, etc.

Eric Bernstein, 8 McIntosh Road

Relative to the DDC controls, is that specific to the heating system? Is it both buildings or just RMMS?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The control systems would be across both buildings and the lighting would give us much greater control than we have now. Let's say a teacher leaves at the end of the day and forgot to put the lights out; they will dim after

a certain number of minutes and then will go off in a number of minutes. That is what we have done in the other buildings within the SAU.

Mr. Bernstein asked if that \$45,000 has functionality for both the heating system and lighting if all of this were to pass, and was told, in the control systems, yes.

It was noted earlier that lease terms are based on the life expectancy of the item. Article 3 has a lease term of 15 years whereas article 2 has a 20-year lease. With the primary purchase being the heating system, why the difference between the terms?

Superintendent Corey noted in Article 3 we are talking about \$616,000. You will not get a 20-year lease on that dollar amount. They just won't finance that. Asked, he stated in either case you are leasing for a shorter period than the expected life of the items.

**MOTION MADE BY JESSICA HARTMAN TO MOVE THE QUESTION
MOTION SECONDED
MOTION CARRIED**

No further discussion was offered on Article 2.

Article 2 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

Article 3 – Contingent Lease Article

Article 3. This article will be null and void if Article 2 passes. To see if the School District will vote to authorize the School Board to enter into a 15-year lease purchase agreement for \$616,250 to finance the acquisition and installation of boilers, controls and related building improvements at Captain Samuel Douglass Academy; and to raise and appropriate the sum of **\$51,013** for payments due under the lease purchase agreement during the 2025-2026 fiscal year; the annual lease payments over the 15-year term is estimated to be \$51,013 per year. This lease purchase agreement will contain an escape (non appropriation) clause. (Majority vote required.) Estimated Tax Impact: \$0.04/\$1,000. **The School Board recommends the appropriation 4-0-0. The Finance Committee recommends this appropriation 2-0-0.**

**MOTION MADE BY JOHANNA SHRIVER-HALLIGAN TO MOVE ARTICLE 3 TO THE
WARRANT, AS WRITTEN
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Gina Bergskaug, Superintendent-Elect remarked to clarify, this is here because of the absolute need for a boiler. Article 2 includes the boiler, controls and LED lights (for both RMMS and CSDA). This article simply includes the CSDA boiler and the associated controls for the CSDA boiler.

We already asked you for the boiler in 2022 after being advised in 2019 there was the need to plan for its replacement. We have been trying to plan for it. It failed in 2022. We are here now in 2025 very concerned about the boiler. It is a 15-year lease for \$616,250 with a \$51,013 first year payment. The energy savings (\$14,500) and potential rebates (\$10,500) are much smaller because we are only looking at the boiler. This

actually has a tax impact because we are not benefitting from additional rebates and annual energy savings. With the FY26 energy savings and potential rebates, the impact to the budget would be \$26,013 (first year).

Addressing the idea of putting funds aside for planning/future expenses, the district does have a Capital Improvement Plan, we do talk about it at our meetings. This is not the only thing that we need to replace and repair in the Brookline School District. She spoke of the household boilers in RMMS (many of them) that need to be replaced with a functional boiler than can handle the size of the building. We cannot keep kicking the can down the road. We have this contingent article because of the need for this item.

Robert Rushton, 19 Flint Meadow Drive

When you talk about associated controls for just the boiler, are we talking about a similar system to the DDC controls mentioned in the previous article just not covering or eliminating the LED lighting?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

That is correct.

Susan Haight, 17 S. Main Street

For clarification, when we get to the voting booth we have two articles related to the boiler. As a voter do we vote yes on both?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

Would love taxpayers to vote yes on both, but you also have the option of voting yes on the first one if you wanted to do the lights and the controls at RMMS as well. If you believe that all that can be afforded as a community is the \$612,000 then you would only vote for Article 3. When you go into the voting booth they will tally the results of Article 2. If Article 2 passes, they will not worry about Article 3. They will count it, but it won't be valid. If Article 2 is counted and it fails then they will move to Article 3 to see if that passes.

No further discussion was offered on Article 3.

Article 3 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

**MOTION BY ERIC PAUER TO GO OUT OF THE REGULAR ORDER OF BUSINESS TO TAKE UP
ARTICLE 9
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTON

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Believes there to be a lot of people in attendance who are interested in the article and wish to vote on it early.

MOTION FAILED

21-47

Article 4 – Operating Budget

To see if the Brookline School District will vote to raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling **\$12,911,654**. Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be **\$12,378,381**, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the school district or by law or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. Majority vote required to pass. Estimated Tax Impact: \$7.63/\$1,000. **The School Board recommends the appropriation 4-0-0. The Finance Committee recommends this appropriation 2-0-0.**

**MOTION MADE BY COLLEEN MICAVICH TO MOVE ARTICLE 4 TO THE WARRANT, AS WRITTEN
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Colleen Micavich, School Board Chair

Key budget changes include Academics, which is primarily year 2 of the Literacy Program at a cost of \$96,860, regular education personnel (2 critical positions) at a cost of \$206,642, special education personnel (5 critical positions) at a cost of \$203,106 (as we continue to bring students back into our we are in need of special education personnel), computer equipment replacement (year 3 of 4-year replacement cycle) at a cost of \$72,450, shared services/software at a cost of \$4,280 and facilities/safety items totaling \$177,700.

An overview of major changes was provided. As a result of program needs, the following are proposed: reductions in special education contracted services \$263,920 (bringing our students back into the least restrictive environment not only benefits them but the community/their peers, and is a financial benefit (cost avoidance)), special education transportation \$185,956, and special education out-of-district services \$119,081 and increases in special education new positions \$203,106, regular education new positions \$186,212, and special education out-of-district tuition \$182,634. Due to plan choices, a reduction will be seen in health insurance \$110,064, and per the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), an increase of \$168,646 for classroom teachers. The result is a total increase associated with major changes of \$61,577.

The default budget is the amount of the FY25 adopted operating budget of \$12,063,731 increased or decreased as the case may be by costs required by law or contractual obligations, which represents an increase of \$339,361 and reduced by one-time FY25 expenses of \$24,711 resulting in a total default budget of \$12,378,381.

The default budget details include wages and benefits at a cost of \$648,735, a reduction in special education services/transportation of \$381,323, an increase in health/dental/FICA/NHRS of \$35,235, regular education transportation at a cost of \$9,248 and regular education contracted services at \$2,755.

Moderator Webb noted the budget we revert to if the proposed budget is defeated at the polls.

Colleen Micavich, School Board Chair

Were the default budget to come into play, items removed from the budget would include: Academic positions of Pre-K Coordinator (proposed to manage growing program) \$35,000, Environmental Science (to provide

schedule/CBA requirements) \$93,106, teaching position(s) (could affect class sizes) \$93,106, and Interventionist (to support student learning needs) \$93,106, the Reading Literacy Program (year 2 of program) \$60,000, SAU-wide walkies (for safety) \$19,200, Grade 6 Annual Culminating Experiential Experience (provided from the UNH Browne Center) \$13,000, ADA access for soccer field (not in use due to accessibility issues) \$20,000, Life Skills Renovation (needed to meet the needs of special education students) \$45,000, replacement tables, doors & flooring (end of life replacements) \$46,000, and counter lamination, portable skirting, painting (end of life replacements) \$15,755 for a total of \$533,273.

Gregory Darbonne, 65 Cleveland Hill Road

Has been here long enough to know that people move into our community, get their kids through our school system, and then they leave, and they raise the taxes because it is for the children. He always wants someone to get up and ask what about the grandparents who have been here for ages.

He understands the ADA access for the soccer field. He would vote for that or the life skills renovation. He understands the need. He asked about Environmental Science and whether the cost is for a person who will go from grade to grade teaching environmental science.

Colleen Micavich, School Board Chair

It is. It would be a special.

Mr. Darbonne asked why a 2nd grade teacher who has been teaching all the subjects they do now cannot add that to the science they teach.

Colleen Micavich, School Board Chair

A 2nd grade teacher is bound by the curriculum standards, which are not environmental science. This is a full-time position. This person would be teaching a whole curriculum.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The environmental position does a couple of things; it allows us to get the proper number of specials for growing enrollment. We are starting to see some grades at RMMS with 5 sections and some with 4. We are going to need an extra special education. It actually is kind of replacing Spanish, which we did away with a few years ago. The reason for eliminating Spanish was there is simply a lack of teachers. We live in the community of Brookline, similar to Hollis, who has environmental science. It is probably one of the fastest growing fields there is, and we need to take advantage of our local resources. We are purchasing a number of conservation acres, and it would be nice to teach children why we do that. It will allow our teachers to get a level of experience that a generalist doesn't hold in science.

Mr. Darbonne spoke of the added costs with each new position, e.g., retirement, insurance. His 2nd grade teacher could teach a whole bunch of subjects. They would go out in the woods and look at the environment there. He believes the operating budget can be reduced without hurting too much.

With the Interventionist, how do we do that today where is the need to hire this one special person? He is aware of its importance, but how do we do it today?

Colleen Micavich, School Board Chair

As we have a growing population, we also have special education increases. We have growing needs. It is similar to what was spoken of in regard to the life skills renovation, you just don't bring students back in-district with unique needs and expect them to be able to learn in the same way as their typical peers. In some ways the Interventionists can help with that. Interventionists are also looking at overall progress, ensuring our students are learning appropriately, students that might be falling behind. There are many uses for Interventionists.

Mr. Darbonne cautioned about the hiring of more people. He looks at where we are today with the same number of students we had a few years ago. How many more teachers and administrators do we have today? He is an anti-administration person. We need more teachers. We have a lot of administrators that supervise the many teachers, but if we eliminate every administrator except maybe the Principal we probably could still run an efficient school. We have given the teachers that ability before.

Katherine Elkins, 95 Mason Road

Noted the items being discussed were identified as potential cuts. She asked if the Superintendent could speak to how these suggested cuts came about.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The difference between the recommended budget and the default budget is about \$600,000. As a result of that, we went through and outlined some of the recommendations the administration would make to the School Board. Ultimately, the School Board would make the choices of what would need to be cut based on the budget passed by the voters.

We would recommend some of these because they would be new positions we are asking for now. That is why they would be looked at and scrutinized, but the Board could choose to go a different way.

Colleen Micavich, School Board Chair

The process of creating the proposed budget included four rounds of review/consideration. In every area, adjustments have been made along the way to get to what is believed needed by the district. The budget has been carefully considered month after month to get to this point. She provided the example of the Round 1 review in the area of academics for both buildings, the proposals were for \$121,339 and it was cut to \$96,860. In the area of personnel, the request was approximately \$320,000 and was reduced to \$206,000. We have already gone through extensive cuts to balance the needs of the students and taxpayers. The one area where costs did go up, as it is mandated, is special education personnel. Again, we have talked about the other side of that and the least restrictive environment for the students as well as the cost avoidance benefit.

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

To the point brought up concerning personnel increases, she spoke of changes in regulations. If unable to hire, there is the need to contract out for the position(s), which can be at 2-3 times the cost of hiring.

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

Everyone is aware there is an increase of behavioral and mental health issues. There have also been many who have left the teaching profession after the pandemic. The stress on our staff and administrators and on our students is actually pretty high. When considering items we have cut from the proposed budget, we have done that having reviewed behavioral/incident reports and having seen that many of these behavioral issues have occurred on school buses. We considered monitors to help monitor that activity. That had to be cut. We are really cognizant of the stress on the taxpayers. Our principals are often substituting in classrooms because of the lack of substitutes. You cannot just have one administrator in the building. There are little fires everywhere that have to be put out. Sometimes that Principal in the building is doing lunch duty or substitute teaching for the day.

Our administrators and teachers have done amazing work with very few resources. This is a really lean budget, and we are trying to add salaried positions, to keep more students in our buildings/district/community and stop paying so many contractors. There are resources that we are required by law to provide to students and if we cannot hire those positions we are going to pay for them at 3-4 times the cost.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

With every single round of review, the School Board requested the administration make reductions, and every single time those efforts resulted in the administration identifying areas that could be reduced while maintaining what is believed needed to run the district effectively and efficiently for the coming year.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

In 2019, we passed an 8% local tax cap, which means the proposed tax effort cannot go up more than 8% from one year to the next. The tax effort part of the law states the requirement to bring forward the fund balance from the previous year, which is \$338,650. That means the total tax effort, with that fund balance, would be \$8,924,995. If you do that with the tax effort shown in the presentation of \$9,951,620, it is an 11.5% increase that has been proposed going to the meeting where we have an 8% tax cap. He questioned why the tax cap is being exceeded.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

At the October 23, 2024, School Board meeting, Attorney O'Shaughnessy provided a presentation on the tax cap. The Administration and Board followed the advice of legal counsel on the calculation. The question presented by Mr. Pauer was posed to legal counsel and the response he received respectfully was that his interpretation of the law doesn't make it the correct reading of the law.

Mr. Pauer stated in the first few years of the cap; this was the methodology that was used. All of a sudden it has changed. He is concerned about that. In the tax cap calculation used there was the operating budget and the warrants. There was nothing about revenue in either the current or previous year. It was just adding up all of the expenditures like it was a budget cap. We do not have a budget cap we have a tax effort cap. He is concerned that we are not following the tax cap that was passed.

**MOTION MADE BY ERIC PAUER TO AMEND ARTICLE 4 TO A TOTAL AMOUNT OF ELEVEN MILLION FOUR HUNDRED SIXTY-SEVEN THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED NINETY-EIGHT DOLLARS (\$11,467,198)
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

In FY22 we had 587 students. We are down to 571. There has been inflation of about 21%. We lost 3%. That is a net of 17.9%. People cannot afford the taxes in this Town.

Ed Perry, 4 Muscatanipus Road

Commented on the previously stated desire to move efficiently to get to the items later on that people wanted to entertain. He will provide information on how the rest of the night will go having been to a few of these meetings. We will have a long line of people who will discuss this operating budget and at the end of it, we will pass the operating budget. The same handful of people that disapproved of the last thing will be in the minority again. We will do this lather, rinse, and repeat for the next three hours. Some people will complain about the length of it, but he wished for it to be noted that the people who will complain about the length of it are the people who are taking up the most time talking about things that don't make a heck of a lot of sense.

The idea that someone could stand up in a public meeting and in the back of a brown paper bag produce a number...

Moderator Webb cautioned speakers not to make comments personal but rather speak to the merits of the motion.

Mr. Perry responded that he could speak to any person. That is within the law. I am not speaking to a specific person.

Moderator Webb replied it is not a matter of law. I am the law here. You will be civil and respectful, and you do not have to target anybody. The merits of the issue are the only things you guys will talk about.

Mr. Perry continued by stating the idea that anyone could come up with a better number than a group of people who have been looking at these numbers for months and months and have tossed the numbers back and forth with legal and come up with ways to reduce it, the idea that they don't have the fuller picture of this considering that they know every other element of the school budget is a little bit preposterous.

Beyond that, the other part that we heard here is that we have to contain these budget costs. You are not going to do that here tonight. You are going to know that because you will look at these numbers and divide them by 265 taxable plots and that is basically all you can save yourself. Some people might not know this, but 71% of your tax bill does go to the schools, 20% covers your local taxes the Selectboard handles, 3% we kick over to County, and then there is the State portion. In the State of New Hampshire, the Constitution says that the State has to provide adequate funding to the schools as well. We're putting in 71% so that must be a high figure right? It's 5%. They are going to give us less now. They will give us less on special education and we still have Federal mandates. The Federal mandates say there is a certain amount of money that is going to have to be paid on special education. The State is supposed to reimburse that money to us. They don't reimburse all of it and they don't do it all at the same time. Every year in Concord they discuss how they can put less money into the schools.

Taxes are not sustainable, but if you really want to save money call Concord and talk to your State Representatives. Tell them to produce some other formulas for that 5% because it is kind of weird that you are taking your 5% portion out of my property taxes as well.

On the merits of the motion, just changing the number isn't going to do a lot, but it is going to cut a lot of those programs out of there. People are going to talk about those programs as if they are all extra things that we don't need, but something that you have heard a lot tonight is the term end of life. End of life floors, boilers, etc. That is not fiscal responsibility. Fiscal responsibility used to not be just tax cuts it was savings, buying things when they were cheap. Had we bought those boilers three years ago we would have saved a heck of a lot of money, but no we kicked them down the road.

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

Could you explain how the \$12.9 million that is proposed satisfies the cap that is in place?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The \$12,911,654 proposed operating budget represents a 7.86% increase. The BESSA warrant is zero whereas in FY25 it was \$93,370. The SAU warrant is \$493,606, Maintenance Expendable Trust \$360,000, lease at \$90,565 plus the \$100,000 fund balance we anticipate returning to the tax base, and we are at \$13,955,825 for FY26. Comparing that to the tax cap amount for FY25 of \$13,032,036, the result is a 7.09% increase.

That is the calculation legal counsel approved. We incurred the cost of having legal counsel attend a meeting to provide a presentation for both the School Board and public explaining the tax cap calculation. Mr. Pauer's question was sent to legal counsel. A review was done and the opinion provided that it is a different way of interpreting something. They feel the way we did it was legally correct.

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

So, the funds the school returns to the tax base are part of that calculation. I must have misheard.

Dawn Albertson, 21 Pigeon Hill Road

Felt this whole conversation was losing context. She understands the budget went through a review process consisting of four rounds of review. Families move here for the amazing school district. It is a huge draw and a more affordable option than Hollis. We are holding our own on all of the rankings. School needs to be considered in par with other things, but fundamentally the context she was hoping to speak to was the idea that outside of grades 1 and 2 we are working well above the state average in terms of class size. If you look we are spending about 20% less than the state average per student. While this might be positioned to seem like a wild budget, these people are working very lean and thoughtfully to make sure to deliver the continued school education, which brings families in and raises everyone's property values. This is investment in our community that is beyond just for the children, but it is also for the children. Those are perfectly acceptable things to say aloud because it is why we are here. We are already working 20% below the state average. There is a huge delta between the conversation around the wild inflammatory pricing and what is actually happening here.

Brady Halligan, 17 Birch Hill Road

If you torture numbers long enough they will confess to anything. I could make this budget say had a net tax impact of zero dollars or that it had a net tax impact of 40%. It all depends on how you do the math. As we all know, the reason attorneys have jobs is because there are discussions and disputes about the law. Debate is natural and healthy and we should not be running around accusing other people of violating the law because that is not what people do around here.

To the woman's point, yes Brookline is actually 20% lower than Hollis in our cost for the school district. We do a pretty good job around here. There is a public meeting every single night these days. The School Board has all of them on YouTube for free and every single one archived. You can look at them and review all of this information before coming to the meeting and know exactly what is going on and how these decisions were made. He opposes the motion because this work has already been done. This is a bare bones budget that is already 20% lower than the State average.

Stacey Esposito, 26 Pepperell Road

Within the presentation at the COOP School District public hearing around the tax cap it was noted that at any point it can be amended or changed. She questioned if she could ask about the rules around the tax cap. It does seem as though the way it was presented at the COOP meeting made it sound a little bit more flexible than it is seeming right now.

Robert Rushton, 19 Flint Meadow Drive

If he heard the numbers correctly this amendment to the article puts us in a rather odd position again where if we defeat the budget we pay more. If we pass the budget we pay less. If that is confusing to anyone here imagine it will be fairly confusing to voters come voting day. That in itself is enough to say we are making things more difficult for the rest of us. We need to make things as simple and direct as possible. Without this amendment we have a good choice in front of the voters; a perhaps somewhat less than ideal default budget or a budget that better meets the needs of our school system. He recommended voting against the amendment.

Thomas Durand, 21 Meetinghouse Hill Road

About 15 minutes ago \$365,000 in interest wasn't made a big deal and suddenly add \$200,000 to it and it is. He is in favor of the amendment.

Bill Graham, 37 Averill Road

As a taxpayer of 40 years, he supports the work that has been done. They do their best to try to deliver a good school and environment for those who reside here. As a taxpayer he supports the proposal for lower tax bills. As a country it is pretty clear we are spending more than any other country in the world and we are ranked around 40. The kind of education, at a national level, that we are giving our students is inferior to what is happening in the rest of the world. Think about the system that is going on here that is giving you your job that you are doing admirably but also think about the money we are spending and why we are at this impasse. Seems the tail is trying to wag the dog a lot. Think also about the change happening in the country. If the DOE goes away all of this stuff changes.

MOTION FAILED

Susan Haight, 17 S. Main Street

Clearly the biggest part of any budget is salaries and benefits. There is not much that can be done about benefits, but in most corporations salaries become a key part, and there is such a thing as a reduction in salaries. She has been involved in this district for the past 50 years. The argument is we need good teachers and it is for the benefit of the students. Basically, she does not have a problem with that, but at some point in time it has to be said enough is enough, maybe we need to hold salaries. The unions require certain things, but there has to be a way around some of that. She does not know what the answer is, but we need to try to control the biggest part of the budget.

No further discussion was offered on Article 4.

Article 4 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

Article 5 – SAU Budget

Shall the voters of the Brookline School District adopt a school administrative unit budget of \$2,438,355 for the forthcoming fiscal year in which **\$493,606** is assigned to the school budget of this school district? This year's adjusted budget of \$2,389,654 with \$483,748 assigned to the school budget of this school district will be adopted if the article does not receive a majority vote of all the school district voters voting in this school administrative unit. Estimated Tax Impact: \$0.42/\$1,000. **The School Board recommends the appropriation 4-0-0. The Finance Committee recommends this appropriation 2-0-0.**

**MOTION MADE BY ALYSON MANION TO MOVE ARTICLE 5 TO THE WARRANT, AS WRITTEN
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

The total increase over the FY25 approved budget is \$12,510 or 0.5%. We have savings in the salaries of Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent with the pending retirement of the Superintendent and movement in the position of Assistant Superintendent. There is a reduction in the New Hampshire Retirement System of \$27,885 and increases in proposed benefits of \$31,696 and 4% salary increases. (contractual). It is relatively a flat budget.

Robert Rushton, 19 Flint Meadow Drive

Stated his understanding this particular article is not subject to amendment.

Moderator Webb stated that to be correct.

Mr. Rushton suggested the meeting move on.

Moderator Webb stated the Statute says we cannot tweak these numbers; therefore, it will go to the voters as written unless anyone violently objects.

No further discussion was offered on Article 5.

Article 5 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

Article 6 – School Facilities Maintenance Trust Fund

To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate a sum of up to **\$360,000** to be added to the previously established School Facilities Maintenance Trust Fund from the June 30th unassigned fund balance (surplus). No amount to be raised from taxation. Estimated Tax Impact: Foregoing a potential rate reduction: \$0.30/\$1,000. **The School Board recommends the appropriation 4-0-0. The Finance Committee recommends this appropriation 2-0-0.**

**MOTION MADE BY JOHANNA SHRIVER-HALLIGAN TO MOVE ARTICLE 6 TO THE WARRANT, AS WRITTEN
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

The current balance is \$33,317. The requested allocation of \$360,000 less the FY26 proposed use of \$339,000 would result in an anticipated FY26 ending balance of \$54,317. Proposed uses include the RMMS intercom/bells/phone (end of life – year 2 of 2 savings) at a cost of \$50,000, creating STEP program spaces at CSDA at a cost of \$104,000, RMMS bathroom renovations – Phase I at \$100,000, and RMMS roof replacement – Milford Street for \$85,000.

The STEP program spaces will allow for programming spaces for students moving up from RMMS. RMMS has STEP programming where CSDA does not currently. RMMS bathroom renovations would address ADA compatible issues.

Robert Rushton, 19 Flint Meadow Drive

How does the appropriation to this fund this year compare with the past few years?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The Maintenance Trust is up significantly this year. Of the projects coming due, the two major items are the space for the STEP program, which will allow us some cost avoidance and moving forward with the bathroom renovations to become ADA compliant. We were closer to about \$180,000 last year.

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

Looking at last year, we asked for \$156,000. That was foregoing a potential rate reduction of \$0.13/\$1,000. We do have different needs. Creating the STEP program here at CSDA is allowing for what was referenced earlier with least restrictive environment. Also, because students are coming up from RMMS, programming is coming with them and spaces are needed for that. That allows us to service students in-house, which is important in terms of integration and quality of life. Out-of-district placements can be upwards of \$200,000/year per student.

Mr. Rushton commented more money this year, but all going to necessary and appropriate purposes.

Superintendent-Elect Bergskaug

Noted the article is only funded if there are funds remaining at year end. By approving this you are foregoing a potential tax rate reduction. If only \$200,000 remains at year-end then only \$200,000 gets funded, if approved. At this point, it looks as though there will not be any funds remaining at year end.

Webb Scales, 49 Dupaw Gould Road

The facilities are critical to our operation and need to be maintained and provide the capacity and capabilities to meet student and staff needs. Seeing this trust fund funded with the full intention of depleting it again during the year suggests that these are important considerations that ought to be in the main operating budget as normal expenditures.

When we started doing this trust the idea was we could save money over several years for large expenditures and avoid fluctuations in taxes from year to year. He would expect to see something in here like the roof. Part of that is, but we are now doing the roof piece meal pretty much every year. He would have liked to have seen something in here for the boiler. We knew this expense was coming three years ago. Why didn't we put money toward that? To have this as just another funding mechanism so that we can claim that the operating budget is flat and then we can turn around and say we are going to spend all of this money on maintenance, it sounds like a shell game.

Worse yet, if we actually don't have money remaining at year-end and we cannot fund these things now I feel like that was mismanagement, not that we didn't save the money but that we didn't provide the money that we need to spend. Having you come to us and say please allocate money for these expenditures is very frustrating because if we need to spend this why isn't it in the budget?

Brady Halligan, 17 Birch Hill Road

To the gentleman's point, there is a reason for that, and he believes there is a proposal to address that in Article 7. He also would like to propose an amendment. You said there is not going to be any money in the fund?

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

Current projection is that is a possibility.

MOTION MADE BY BRADY HALLIGAN TO AMEND ARTICLE 6 BY REPLACING "UP TO \$360,000" WITH "300,000" AND DELETE "FROM THE JUNE 30TH UNASSIGNED FUND BALANCE (SURPLUS)"

MOTION SECONDED BY STEFANIE GRAY

ON THE QUESTION

Brady Halligan, 17 Birch Hill Road

If there isn't any money in the Unassigned Fund Balance (UFB), we will raise it through taxation. These items need to be addressed and if the article does not pass we don't have the funds.

Stefanic Gray, 24 West Hill Road

Supports the proposed amendment.

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

If we are raising this in taxes as opposed to taking it from the UFB, would that put us over the tax cap?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

This body has that ability. If you, as voters make that change and it is moved from here then that is what goes to the ballot.

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

Wished to draw attention to the four rounds of budget review that have occurred. In the first round there was \$100,000 allocated in the facilities maintenance line for the bathroom renovations. There was \$85,000 allocated for the Milford Street roof and \$30,000 for classroom floors. All of those things are in the budget. We have heard that feedback many times and many of us are frustrated with that as well. We really wanted to put forward a budget that did include all the things that we need to do to keep our facilities up to date, safe, and working properly. Then we had to take it out. She appreciates the amendment and thinks if this legislative body is willing to put that forward to the voters that is a great idea.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

If amended at this Deliberative Session, does the School Board and Finance Committee revisit their potential recommendations at a public meeting after this before it is put on the ballot?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

As far as positions, the Board opens a meeting. They can take a position on any article that has changed. The Finance Committee has that option as well.

Mr. Pauer stated the desire to see how the School Board votes given this new number. He is against the amendment as he thinks it will go against returning funds to the tax base. It will actually raise taxes by \$300,000 instead of using potentially leftover money.

Moderator Webb asked if the School Board has the option of using the surplus or needs specific authorization to use it.

Superintendent Corey responded that the existing budget is in about the same place as was the case this time last year. Last year, because of a couple of special education changes that occurred prior to year-end, we went from a negative projection to \$330,000 returned to the taxbase. That is how volatile special education is. What would happen is we continue to go through our revenue and expense reports. If this project is funded through taxation then he does not envision the School Board utilizing a surplus but may have a surplus and does have that right to spend it.

**MOTION CARRIED
44-19**

Asked to repeat the language, Moderator Webb stated it to be “To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate a sum of \$300,000 to be added to the previously established School Facilities Maintenance Trust Fund.”

No further discussion was offered on Article 6.

Article 6 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

MOTION MADE BY KELLY ZAKAR TO RESTRICT RECONSIDERATION OF ANY OF THE PREVIOUSLY ADDRESSED ARTICLES

Moderator Webb stated uncertainty in SB2 reconsideration can happen.

Attorney O’Shaughnessy

It is specifically addressed in the Statute. It just means that if it passes it goes right to the ballot and cannot be raised later on during the Deliberative Session. Without it, someone could raise a motion to reconsider something that has already been passed on.

**MOTION SECONDED
MOTION CARRIED**

Article 7 – Rescind Tax Cap

Shall we rescind the provisions of RSA 32:5-b, known as the tax cap, as adopted by the Brookline School District on March 12, 2019, so that there will no longer be a limit on increases to the recommended budget in the amount to be raised by local taxes? (3/5 majority vote required). **The School Board recommends the appropriation 4-0-0. The Finance Committee recommends this appropriation 1-0-1.**

**MOTION MADE BY JOHANNA SHRIVER-HALLIGAN TO MOVE ARTICLE 7 TO THE WARRANT, AS WRITTEN
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

This article is being presented because a recent State law change has made the tax cap more restrictive than what voters originally approved. When the tax cap was first implemented under RSA 32:5-b, it limited school budget increases to 8% a year, but applied only to the operating budget; not warrant articles for teacher contracts, capital improvements or special programs. However, a recent change in State law now extends the cap to the entire budget imposing limits that Brookline residents never voted for.

To put this into a broader context, Brookline is now one of only 4 towns in New Hampshire with a School District Tax Cap. Other districts with caps like Manchester and Nashua are large municipal districts unlike our

small town. No other small towns in the state now face the same financial constraints under the new law. We all know that costs rise every year. They rise due to inflation, special education needs and necessary academic investments.

Without the ability to budget correctly, we risk cutting essential programs, expanding class sizes, reducing teaching staff and limiting resources for all of our children. Rescinding the tax cap does not mean unlimited spending. It simply restores local control over our school budget ensuring we, the voters, decide what is best for our schools, not a state imposed restriction. By voting yes on Article 7 we would ensure Brookline has the same flexibility and opportunities as other districts. The School Board does recommend this article 4-0. The finance Committee recommends this article 1-0.

Susan Haight, 17 S. Main Street

Is there any other reason besides putting us in the same category with every other district in the State?

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

The new law puts additional restrictions on us. When we first adopted this in 2019 it was just on the operating budget. This new law passed in Concord has us include warrant articles so when there are years that we have teacher contracts or things like that, that will very quickly eat up that 8% cap. The State law changed. We didn't change our tax cap. It is no longer what we voted for.

Ed Perry, 4 Muscatanipus Road

Is in support of the article. Finally, tonight we have an opportunity to save some money. There was a gentleman earlier who had a question; why are certain things not in the budget? We had this \$300,000 worth of needed items, why aren't they in the budget? The answer is because right now we are operating under an 8% cap. To stay under the 8%, you have to kick these other things to a separate section. Ideas like that don't save us money. It puts us into a position where we buy boilers three years later at end-of-life when we can't take advantage of costs that would have been in place three years ago.

It also does a different phenomenon when we don't hire people but we end up with contractors and they end up being a lot more expensive. One thing he has always been impressed by in Brookline is how incredibly smart our voters are. People who come to these rooms for the Deliberative Session and Town Meeting craft things spectacularly and they understand the subject matter. What we understand because we budget this way at home is that sometimes it makes sense to pay for something now so that you don't pay more later on. Sometimes it makes sense to save money over the long term so you can buy a big item. These are all common things, but they are not necessarily possible when we put an artificial 8% cap on things.

The reason this is being changed is because the people in Concord have decided that they now want to include all the warrant articles as consideration for the total budget amount. Whether they pass or not has no consequence. They have also limited how much they want to give us towards special education and there are several other considerations at the State level that will decrease the amount the State contributes towards education, which means we all have to pick up the balance out of our property taxes. In addition to that they have all manner of science experiments going on that are untested in other states, e.g., the charter school debacle that is several million dollars over budget currently and has not resulted in any of our property taxes going down.

At the end of the day when you have 47 students in a school instead of 50, if the boiler is at end-of-life, you still have to pay for it. It didn't change anything. If you get a classroom with 30 students and 2 go out of district to go to one of those charter schools you still have 28 students and teacher raises are still going to happen. To speak to what was stated earlier of maybe we will just freeze wages, where all is that happening? Who would take those jobs? Let's be serious and have adult conversations here, that is just something that doesn't happen anywhere. We just freeze the salaries and say let's see who we can get especially for something like training the future of our country.

A lot of people talk about changes in the country but that is one that he would never want to see change especially not here. We always defend our schools in this town and there is a reason for that. Look at your Town hall, it is an old school. It was put there because a woman strongly believed in education and the husband decided to dedicate it. The condition was it always have an educational tie to it, which it still does to this day. We are a schools town since inception.

Someone spoke to the idea that people come here for the schools and then they leave. That is one of the fables that I have heard so many times about this town, but when I look at the data it is not necessarily true. There is a percentage of people who come here, they come for the schools and stay for the period of time that they are here. Some costs go up as a result because people want what they came here for. When they leave their property value has increased as such that there is no other investment in the U.S. stock market that grows at that rate. This investment has been incredible if you leave. If you don't leave, like many don't and grow older in this community there are things we do to offset your taxes. We always think about these things.

But, if we don't consider that and start to do things that are negative for the school like capping how much money we can spend, it will lead to a depreciation in our infrastructure and quality of education and the types of people we will be able to keep. What will happen is that fewer people will move here and as less people move here our tax base will shrink, but guess what, the fire truck will still be a million dollars you are just going to have less people to help you pay for it.

Robert Rushton, 19 Flint Meadow Drive

What would be the net effect if at the polls Article 7 were to fail, but Article 9 that also addresses tax caps were to pass?

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

That was a question the School Board brought up at the public hearing. What we were told is that it would most likely be a budget cap on top of the tax cap. That would be a much stricter restriction, which would make it really difficult to provide funding for special education that is mandated, e.g., contracted services, etc. We would have our hands tied in regard to that.

Mr. Rushton remarked that would be quite a combination, which is one of the reasons he wished we could settle the whole issue here and now.

Webb Scales, 49 Dupaw Gould Road

As he understands the RSA, the tax cap binds the Board not the legislative body (the voters in this room). We are not bound by the tax cap. If we keep it or get rid of it, it doesn't make a difference to what we can enact in this room. The difference that it makes is that the Board has to present us with a budget willy nilly that meets

the tax cap. If this Town gets into really dire straits the Board has to come to us and say okay here is the budget it is woefully inadequate, but it meets the tax cap, and by the way if one of you people would please amend it upwards to this other number which is what we actually need then we could step to this microphone and fix the problem. But that is ridiculous. That means that the board has to present us with two budgets, the one that meets the tax cap, which is inadequate, and the one that we actually need to ratify.

What the tax cap really does is make the board do double duty. That sounds like a really bad deal. As a voter, he wants to be presented with the real number and the real justification. He is supportive of the article to remove the tax cap.

Brady Halligan, 17 Birch Hill Road

A point that has not yet been made is the idea of compounding interest. The tax cap at 8% actually encourages the Board to spend the full 8% every year because as we all know from compounding interest you get that 8% plus 8% the year following, plus the compounded 8% and that compounds very quickly over the years. If you get rid of the tax cap it is entirely possible we could have a budget well below the cap because the board doesn't have to spend that 8% in order to keep the 8% for the following year.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Is opposed to the article. This tax cap was passed with a super majority vote back in 2019. There are currently 8 towns and school districts that have adopted RSA 32:5-b. It is not 4. A tax cap is enabling legislation that the Legislature has provided us. It is really a local tax cap because it is local control. If voters want it they should keep it. If they don't want it they don't keep it but you need 3/5th to move away from it and for it.

The Legislature does a lot of work to clarify laws. If you look across the state with the tax caps, 6 of those 8 were interpreting the tax cap, before the law changed, as encompassing all warrant articles. There were 2 that were taking a different interpretation so the Legislature went to clarify that. That is where we are today. He hopes people vote against this article and that we continue the tax cap because he believes an 8% tax cap is a very generous tax cap and a good guardrail for Brookline taxpayers.

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

There is concern given when the cap was on the operating budget alone things like CBAs and special education expenditures, that were beyond what was budgeted for, were included in the default budget as contractual obligations. When this legislative body voted for the tax cap in 2019, we were voting under the auspices of the cap being on the operating budget alone. As a Board, we want to make sure everyone is aware, that they have watched the presentation from the October 23, 2024 School Board meeting (available online and in meeting minutes). We are not necessarily opposed to a tax cap, but we want the l to be able to fully understand what they are voting for. If the legislative body says that is not what we thought we were voting for in 2019, we want to repeal this tax cap by a super majority there is nothing that then prevents this that body from bringing forth a warrant article next year to put in a tax cap, which would then be based on an understanding of the broader law that our State Representative here in Brookline did propose and bring forward to the Legislature in Concord. She encouraged people to view the video of the October 23rd meeting as there was a very robust discussion of the nuances of what this new legal interpretation means for our future potential budgets.

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

This warrant article would never have been up for a vote this year were it not for the changes in State law. We are not saying that we want to rescind the tax cap, we are saying that the new changes to the law are punitive for us here in this small rural town and that we did not vote for that in 2019.

Lynn Powers, 2 Parker Road

Supports the article. She is reading this and believes it may be misunderstood by a voter. She suggested an amendment whereby the language following “March 12, 2019” would read “so that the recommended budget may adequately reflect the operational needs of the district.” She questioned if that was an acceptable amendment.

James O’Shaughnessy Esq.

Unfortunately, it is not. There is specific language in the Statute that provides the wording for a vote to rescind a tax cap. The law says you cannot amend language when it is prescribed by law.

Brendan Denehy, 31 Mason Road

He was here 6 years ago when this legislative body discussed the petition warrant article for a tax cap of 4%. We were able to amend it to 8% because the legislative body at the time felt 4% was a punitive tax cap. If we went to 8% we’re not going to get to 8%. We were looking forward saying from our vision in 2019 things aren’t going to change. Everyone knows what happened in 2020 and what happened to inflation in 2020. On top of that we now have these changes made by the Legislature. This tax cap that we currently have does not work for the Town of Brookline. He supports rescinding the tax cap.

Clarence Skidmore, 42 Oak Hill Road

If this RSA changed and it is no longer just the operating budget but the entire budget, how does that differ for you? Now you get to include everything from this year’s FY26 budget as your base for the next year. Now you are held at an 8% tax at a larger number.

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

We run a fairly flat aggressive budget to meet our needs. If we add the warrants to this 8% and we have a teacher contract or an emergency need we will hit that 8% very quickly. Adding in the warrants is punitive and was done at the State level. This is not what Brookline voters voted for. We have run an 8% budget or something to that affect for years now and it has been fine. Adding in the warrants and all of the other extraneous portions that were added in by the Legislature are not going to work for Brookline.

Mr. Skidmore remarked the point is you are going to have a larger base number to work with, right? It is not an 8% on your budget it is the impact to the taxes right, that is the tax cap. Is it not?

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

We have to present a budget that is up to an increase of 8% over last year’s budget.

James O’Shaughnessy, Esq.

I think what I hear him saying is that the new base will be all the articles with the tax impact this year for next year. That the base will increase that the 8% is applied to is I think what I am hearing him say.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

I don't disagree that the base will increase, but next year you will have a teachers' contract and that will quickly get you to that 8%. The following year my base will increase with that teachers' contract that will no longer be in there, and it gives you an artificial inflation for me to work with. You don't have a teachers' contract every year. Let's say it's half a million dollars next year and my base goes up 8% on that half million dollars, that is not going to be in the following 2028 warrant. We agreed on one set of things, 8% on the operating budget. There was a change that encompasses everything. The Board believes, and he agrees, that we should send that back to the voters. If they agree, that is how we operate. If they rescind it then that is how we operate. The legislative body needs to decide that at the ballot because we are an SB2 town.

Mr. Skidmore noted he first learned of this Legislative change through the information provided tonight, and questioned how many voters in this town know that? If they don't know it, they may read it as he did; don't want to change the tax cap. Without this knowledge, he would not vote in favor of it.

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

That's why I think listening to the meetings and coming to the meetings is so important because we discuss these things and we want voters to be informed and have the resources to make educated decisions when they vote. It is not pulling wool over your eyes. We live here too. We are taxpayers. We are working for the benefit of the entire town. It is difficult when we have such strong handcuffs sometimes that are out of our control like when the State changes the law.

Mr. Skidmore remarked again, you go back to a change in legislation. You don't think that you could put together a budget that still meets the 8% tax cap after you include all of these things. The way I am reading this is that your budget the next time you present it will be everything instead of just an operating budget. You will come in with one great big thing here.

Colleen Micavich, School Board Chair

The reason we put this as an article is out of respect for your 2019 vote. You did not vote for this. I did not vote for this. For the State to decide they are going to change something that local voters decided on, to change the meaning of a tax cap and what is included in it is a violation of your rights as a taxpayer. We're not here to argue about the tax cap, we are here to rescind it because it was not voted on. It is inappropriate that the State changed what you voted on. You were not even aware of it. We could sit here all night and debate whether the 8% would or would not work. It depends on the warrant articles. Sometimes they are for significant expenditures that are either unpredictable or not something that is in an operating budget.

Mr. Skidmore remarked, just to clarify we are not talking about an 8% increase of the operating budget, that is not what a tax cap is. You are talking about the tax effort, how you impact the taxes.

Moderator Webb stated each side has been very eloquent in expressing their position. I don't want to beat a dead horse. Please try to wrap it up.

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

I think we have discussed it to this point and we can only tell you what we can, which is none of us can see the future. We are doing what we as a Board feel is best after discussion and a very informative presentation on the tax cap with legal counsel. We don't know what regulations are coming down, what contracts will need to be, what special education students may move in. We are doing what we feel is best in this moment to provide for the future of both the taxpayers and schools.

Clarence Skidmore responded we agree to disagree.

Gregory Darbonne, 65 Cleveland Hill Road

Your explanation of this thing was excellent. I did not realize. Now I will look at the Board and say please stop telling me to attend the meetings and watch on YouTube. I sat on the COOP Budget Committee for 6 years so I know how hard it is. No beating on you, but to tell us here you should attend the meetings and watch YouTube, it is not getting the message out. There is a lot better way. Facebook; there is a Brookline Facebook page. It would be great if you put something there. The Hollis Brookline Rotary Club puts out a wonderful email every week. I don't think it is helping your cause by telling the public you should be attending meetings.

If we are held to this tax cap and something catastrophic does happen what do we do then? If we need another \$200,000 is there a special meeting method? If we leave this in place and there is a catastrophic event we know how to do that. Otherwise, the cap has really no impact. Oh, by the way we are a Constitution Republic so the Legislature in Concord passed this change, we were there, which means our Representatives who represent us passed it.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

We would have a special meeting and come together in this format and the voters would decide after the Board informed them of the need.

Mr. Darbonne replied so there is a method. We the public should be aware of that because things happen.

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

Wished to point out she posts the links and everything in the Facebook pages.

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

I think what he is saying is that he would prefer and is suggesting a digested synopsis so that people don't have to click on a link and watch a video. She absolutely concedes the point that we have talked as a district probably at nauseum about communication strategies and ways to effectively communicate with the community that don't count as an unofficial meeting and result in exchanges of that nature. She appreciates that and the next Board will have to figure out a way to put that into action.

Katherine Elkins, Finance Cmte.

Also completely agrees with the previous speaker. That is why you select and elect a trustworthy school board and finance committee members that then go through four rounds of budget review as we heard tonight. That is the staff, school board and finance committee looking at this budget. We then have this Deliberative Session

and then voting. If we cannot find a way to produce a lean budget during that time then the tax cap is not our issue. We have what she considers a very good mechanism for checks and balances in place to provide the taxpayers with a budget that is fiscally responsible. To everyone's point, no she does not want to go to the meetings either. That is why she thinks you should trust those you elected and their recommendations.

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

He has never been a fan of tax caps as opposed to budget caps because taxes depend on your revenues as much as your expenses and the revenues can be highly variable. They are based on what the State does and a lot of other factors that are out of our control. You have to make estimates of what you think the revenues are going to be in order to guess what the tax impact of it is going to be.

As an example, we talked about how you could have one big expense that blows your tax cap out the window. He provided the example of a proposal a few years back to have Brookline withdraw from the COOP and have our own middle school. That proposal would have cost tens of millions of dollars to build a new school that would be just a Brookline middle school. The first year's bond payment of that would have blown way past the 8% tax cap and it would force the school board to present us with a budget that is completely ridiculous in order to meet that cap. That is just an example of the sort of thing that can happen.

This is a very complicated issue and the problem that we are facing right now is that there are only a few of us in here that are discussing this and reaching a common understanding of what the implications of this are. It is going to be a completely different set of people who are not paying attention to this at all who only see what is in front of them and will be voting on this. We really need to go back to a traditional school district meeting where we can have these discussions, get an understanding of the issue, and then be able to vote on it based on a common understanding of what the pros and cons are.

Jesse Bassett, 8 Rock Ramond Road

This rescinds the tax cap that the school board can provide, but we have some very enthusiastic members of the community who will correct it if it is too high and traditionally have done so. He has every faith that should this pass and the budget be too high a corrected version would be immediately proposed.

If the voters passed this once they can always pass it again. There is another tax cap on the ballot this year. Should this article pass, the voters can always pass another cap with a higher percentage that is more appropriate to accommodate everything next year.

MOTION MADE BY CLARENCE SKIDMORE TO MOVE THE QUESTION
MOTION SECONDED
MOTION CARRIED

No further discussion was offered on Article 7.

Article 7 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

Article 8 – Cooperative Study Committee

Shall the voters of the Brookline School District form a cooperative study committee to study the advisability of fully joining the Hollis-Brookline Cooperative School District, and to submit a report of its findings and

recommendations to the Brookline School Board. This article to be funded from the FY26 operating budget, not to recede \$10,000. There will be no tax impact. **The School Board recommends the appropriation 4-0-0. The Finance Committee recommends this appropriation 1-1-0.**

**MOTION MADE BY MICAVICH TO MOVE ARTICLE 8 TO THE WARRANT, AS WRITTEN
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

During discussion of the SAU Governing Board budget, was an understanding that one of the reasons why the costs tend to be higher is because we have 6 different budgets that are managed by our business office, 6 different CBAs, etc. For each of the three school districts there are both professional staff and support staff. A lot of times the Governing Board will question why we can't get some sort of great ADP software that does the payroll instead of payroll specialists, etc. The answer is because there are literally 6 different payrolls.

Many of us wonder about the economies that could be achieved if we had one professional contract and one support contract. Obviously, Hollis would need to act on this on their own. This article is for Brookline to study the possibility. Look at what the economies of scale look like. Would the Brookline taxpayers actually save money if we were able to join with the COOP district and not just for 7th through 12 grades but K-12.

This does not lead to any action other than studying it, creating a report, making recommendations, and then being able to discuss that hopefully next year again as a legislative body to see if this is something that might make sense for the Town and the district of Brookline.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

Reiterated what is being proposed is a study. This is simply for us to gain a responsible understanding of different ways that it may or may not make sense, to be fiscally responsible and provide a stronger education for our students here in our town.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Just looking at the beginnings of this, a study might be okay. He is uncertain we would want to do it, but Hollis already spends a great deal more money than we do in an elementary district so if we join them it will raise our costs. Right now, we spent \$23,000 ish per student and in the COOP it is about \$27,000. Normally across the state when you go to an upper level school your costs go down because of economies of scale and we have the reverse because Hollis is even higher than that. He served on the COOP School Board for three years and knows a lot about that board. They had 4 members from Hollis and 3 from Brookline. If you do this, Brookline is not going to have a say just like in the COOP. It will be basically Hollis telling us how much we are going to be spending. Mason has a 20-year contract with Milford, and he believes they are in year 16. Looking at having a school district with Mason makes a lot of sense to consider.

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

We are not looking at joining with the Hollis School District, we are looking at joining the COOP School District. I think you are extrapolating it to certainly a potential. One of the things that we would have to look at

in this study is would the apportionment of seats be different because right now it is a 7-12 district in the COOP. What Mason has with Milford is an area agreement and not a COOP agreement. You are comparing apples to oranges.

Mr. Pauer responded I went to Milford area senior high school and know what an area agreement is. It is not an area agreement anymore. Mason has a tuitioning agreement for their grades 6-12. Mason is coming up to a decision point in about 4 years and looking at them joining us as a COOP makes a lot of sense.

MOTION MADE BY ERIC PAUER TO AMEND THE ARTICLE BY INSERTING “OR FORMING A COOP DISTRICT WITH MASON” FOLLOWING “HOLLIS-BROOKLINE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT”

ON THE QUESTION

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

Questioned if the proposed amendment represents a change of subject matter. Now you are asking for two studies. You would have to do a study of what it looks like to join the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District as it stands today and now creating a whole second study.

MOTION SECONDED

ON THE QUESTION

Mr. Pauer noted the title subject matter is cooperative study committee. Believes it appropriate to look at a cooperative school district with Mason and one with Hollis Brookline.

Brady Halligan, 17 Birch Hill Road

Thinks the article is a little premature as it only binds Brookline. It does not bind Hollis. There would not be economies of scale in Hollis K-6 joining Brookline K-6. He would suggest we defeat the motion as well as the article. It is a little premature. Some discussion between the boards needs to occur including possible looping in Mason in order to present something that is more actionable. I don't think I need \$10,000 right now to tell me what I don't know.

Moderator Webb reminded those in attendance, as an SB2 process, we cannot defeat it. It would go forward to the ballot.

Mr. Halligan stated he was speaking against the amendment and the article itself. Agrees with the idea, but it is premature.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

When we look at the SAU as it stands today there are three districts. When we talk about wanting to conduct a study to see what economies of scale look like in terms of cost savings of joining the COOP, it means taking our SAU down from running 3 to 2 districts. Grade levels would be expanded in the COOP to serve K-12, which means we would have one teacher contract for the COOP versus 2 when talking about the COOP and Brookline. The Hollis School District is not in this conversation because they are not currently part of the

COOP district. She stated she has personally spoken with our partners over in Hollis, and if we are interested in engaging in a study, they would be willing to as well.

Moderator Webb reminded the audience that the discussion was around the motion to amend.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

But they bring up some points here about this amendment and talking about how it doesn't make sense. I want to be clear that just because a COOP is 7-12 doesn't mean it cannot be extended to K-12. I just want to be clear about that. Our intention is to try to reduce costs by reducing the number of districts that our SAU runs. It is an unfair statement to say that Hollis spends more money when Hollis is not in this conversation. The COOP is in our conversation with the study and joining to understand economies of scale as it pertains to benefits and salaries ...

Moderator Webb reiterated what is on the table is the motion to include Mason. That is the only thing we are talking about right now, not the merits of this overall issue or the original article. We're talking about his motion to amend. We have to dispose of that and then we can get into these things.

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

Mr. Moderator, 99 out of 100 times I am asked the question by the Moderator whether an amendment is lawful or whether it constitutes a change in the subject matter. I'm really on the fence with this one here because although the title is COOP study committee that is not the subject matter. I tend to be pretty sort of narrow in what I think and typically think most things can be amended. This is to form a cooperative study to study the advisability of joining the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School district. That school district exists. There is such an entity. I do agree that this would then require the formation of a second study. I'm just not sure personally that it is the same subject matter to add that. The purpose of that is you really have to specifically say in the warrant what the subject matter is so the people at home can decide whether they are going to come or not. Starting to add other another district into the mix, to me, really pushes that limit. I'm just giving you that legal advice because it is an issue of notice to the public.

Robert Rushton, 19 Flint Meadow Drive

Whether or not this amendment passes I was hoping that the people who would volunteer for this committee would be a lot smarter than I am. Even without this amendment, we're talking about much more than economies of scale here. We are talking about structural differences. I would be against the motion to amend because it further complicates the issue to be addressed and would require people with even more capability than was originally proposed.

Melanie Levesque, 2 McDaniels Drive

As a representative, I helped Mason leave the Mascenic School District. They didn't have as many students. I still feel that Mason does not have as many students as we do. I think introducing Mason into this kind of study lacks any synergies at all and don't think it is appropriate. I also wonder what Mason thinks about that.

Max Beaulieu, 56 Pepperell Road

Asked Attorney O'Shaughnessy if the joining of the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School district would be considered to be separate or similar to the formation of a new district with Mason and/or Milford?

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

That is the gist of my concern; joining an existing district versus studying the formation of an entirely new entity with which you don't currently have a relationship, just feels like a new thing entirely.

Moderator Webb remarked the concept is that the published articles tell the world what we are going to talk about and any motion under that article has to be about that subject matter. The people are ill informed and have no advance notice if you move into territories which are unrelated.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The concern I have is the Superintendent of Brookline and the Superintendent of the COOP is aware of the discussion. I think it is quite taking a leap of faith to put a community in and have something in our warrant that they know nothing about. I think it would be a common courtesy not to do this. How would you feel tomorrow if you woke up reading that Mason was adding you and had never asked you? There has been no conversation. It may not be a bad idea, but I think that could offend someone and may lead to not being able to look at something down the road that may be beneficial to both communities.

Ed Perry, 4 Muscatanipus Road

If we add another town then we are really talking about a \$5,000 study per town. Not sure that makes a ton of sense. Additionally, there are about 1,500 who live in Mason. We have about 6,000 people here. Pairing us with Hollis makes a lot of sense. Pairing us with a town that has 1,400 people is specifically designed, in his humble opinion, in the same way as our marriage to them legislatively. It is to water down our voice in this town. When we got legislatively married to places like Greenville and Mason, it was a redistricting that was meant to water down the voice of this town. When you speak about a representative government, I would really like to know how they thought that was in our interest because anyone that I voted for would not have done such a thing. This is just a furtherance of that, let's see what we could do if we combine with Mason whose got very few school children and only has 1,400 people in the whole town. Hey, what if all of our decisions had to be paired with them, wouldn't that be a neat way to water down the voices in this room? Last time I looked this was Brookline.

Webb Scales, 49 Dupaw Gould Road

If the voters in March were to turn down this article would that enjoin and prevent the School Board from pursuing this?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

I think it would prevent the School Board from funding it.

Mr. Scales asked how. According to what he read in this text the operating budget already includes money for this.

Superintendent Corey stated he wouldn't recommend it because they would have heard the will of the voters. Does not think it is good to go against the will of the voters when it has been known to them.

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

At the public hearing and the recommendation of the Finance Committee, the article was amended to include the funding from the operating budget. The operating budget was not created with a study in mind. That language was added as we were trying to be mindful of how much a study might cost and cap it.

Mr. Scales noted this article is not asking the legislative body for permission to spend the money or even to raise it. He believes the board has the power to do this without the approval of this body.

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

I can give you a legal answer on that. RSA 32:10, we call that the no means no law. It is not just an appropriation, but it is a purpose. If this weren't funded, you couldn't expend any funding on the study. You could still do the study. The board has that unilateral authority to do whatever study it wants, they just couldn't pay, me for example, to help them with the study or pay someone else to put together figures for them. They couldn't expend any money on the study. They could still do it though.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

In trying to be transparent in how we spend the operating budget, we, as a Board, want to do this study. During one of our budget conversations we discussed historical costs for such a study. We asked where the funds came from and were told the operating budget. We sat down and said realistically where can we maneuver money around in the budget to pay for this. We are willing to give up some things in the operating budget here and there to cover this, but we didn't want to just do that. We wanted the community to have a say as to whether you are interested in us even pursuing a K-12 study. Yes, it is at no extra cost. There is wiggle room, we can find the funds. We didn't want to do that blindly. We didn't want to just say hey we ran this study, got an outside entity to help us with it to ensure that we have good data to share with the community....

Jesse Bassett, 8 Rock Ramond Road

Point of Order.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

...we wanted to be forthcoming as to what we were...

Moderator Webb acknowledged the speaker.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

...spending the operating budget on...

Moderator Webb recognized the speaker and his point of order question.

Mr. Bassett reminded the audience being discussed was the amendment.

Moderator Webb agreed.

Mr. Bassett commented it is a good conversation, but we are discussing the words “and Mason”.

Moderator Webb agreed and reminded the audience to limit the discussion to that.

Webb Scales, 49 Dupaw Gould Road

The board has the power to conduct this study whether they study Hollis Brookline or Mason or the formation of another coop. I believe the board has this power without the voters’ approval.

Moderator Webb stated his personal opinion to be if it is a special warrant article addressing a specific issue and the voters say no, that makes it different. Might they have the license out of extra money to do something, yes. Once they have brought it before the people and the people said no do not do that, Mr. Corey says politically or out of fairness it wouldn’t be right. I think legally it is a problem.

MOTION FAILED

Melanie Levesque, 2 McDaniels Drive

Wished to reiterate the idea of a cooperative study between the Hollis Brookline district that we are already in and the Brookline school has always been a conversation. She sat on the COOP School Board and even before that we have been talking about economies of scale. Why do we have three different payrolls? Wouldn’t it be better if we had one and then you prorate to each town? It only makes sense. It is worth spending \$10,000 to possibly save \$100,000. We don’t know the number but you will find out. She supports the article.

Clarence Skidmore, 42 Oak Hill Road

I would like clarification with respect to who forms the study. It says the voters, but the voters aren’t going to form the study. Who forms the committee, how many people on it, who do you expect that they should be?

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

The school Board, working with the administration, would form the committee. Typically, when we form committees we have members of the Finance Committee, the School Board, community members, we would ask the Selectmen because this is a decision that would affect it. We would probably put out some sort of advertisement and see who has interest in it and then formulate the committee. Once the committee was formed we would develop a Charge for the committee, establish some delivery dates of material and then complete the study and release the findings.

Mr. Skidmore asked about the number of members.

Superintendent Corey responded we would probably keep it 10-12 because much larger than that and you can get sidetracked.

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

In the past, we have had questions come up about the wording of the recommendations at the end of it and have decided that the article itself does not really include the recommendations. The recommendations are basically individuals go off and write the specific language of that. The reason I am bringing that up is because I have some heartburn here when it says the Finance Committee recommends this article 1-1-0. That means one person voted in favor and one against. I would like to see that language changed to the Finance Committee does not make a recommendation on this article.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

We can take care of that.

Mr. Rater noted Article 3 references a Budget Committee recommendation when it should state Finance Committee.

Robert Beaulieu, 56 Pepperell Road

I believe we are possibly saving money by doing this. Discussed earlier in this meeting was local control of things. Joining the Hollis Brookline school district would absolutely increase the costs to every single taxpayer in this town. The cost per pupil is higher in Hollis. I don't think anyone even disputes that. It will cost more money. We will not save \$100,000 or a million or anything. It will probably cost us \$5 million or more. We would lose local control. Again, we don't have control right now in the cooperative. Whatever Hollis does is what it is going to be. It doesn't matter what Brookline says. We have a seat at the table so we can listen and try to influence them, but it is whatever Hollis decides happens.

I do want to compliment the board for making this an article to be transparent. I appreciate that it is a separate article. It says what it is. It is likely that some people want to join the Hollis School District completely regardless of whether it costs more money, probably because it costs more money because it will be spent on each kid here because we would be mandated to by the Hollis vote of 4-3. He recommended voting against this.

Judy Cook, 10 Main Street

Does not know why anyone in their right mind would ever want to join everything into the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District. As we stand right now the only budget that the Town of Brookline has any control over is the Brookline School District that contains our own elementary schools. It has always been that way. We control this budget, and it always comes in better than any other budget namely the COOP budget for our high school and middle school. I don't understand why we would ever consider this. I'm not basically a conservative but this is a no-brainer.

Tracy Perry, School Board Vice Chair

I would like to point out we are just considering the study, not joining.

Ms. Cook asked why we would even waste our time studying it. This is the only thing we have control over. The money that we raise and appropriate for the elementary schools has always been far less than anything Hollis does. I don't want to get in bed with them any further than we already are. I say vote against this if you want any autonomy at all.

Heather Reardon, 4 Eastman Drive

Just wanted to clarify, we have not in any way shape or form said we are going to join Hollis. This is a study; it is a review of how we could potentially leverage bulk. I cannot believe in this day and age that we have 6 different payroll systems. That does not sound like getting in bed with anybody, it sounds like working with scales. I just want to confirm I've got that correct.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

Yes.

Thomas Durand, 21 Meetinghouse Hill Road

I don't know if it is possible to change this, but it is confusing with the "not to exceed \$10,000", and there will be no tax impact. I notice everything else that has money attached to it has the little this cost per \$1,000. Is it possible to add that?

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

If you see the sentence that says this article to be funded from the FY26 operating budget, not to exceed \$10,000; so, the operating budget is in its own warrant article with its own tax impact. You don't have to add that on because this is not an additional expense. This would come out of the budget if we chose to spend up to \$10,000. There are professionals that help to aid in these types of studies.

Mr. Durand stated understanding. He added, he was simply saying for the common folk that are not here hearing all of this, they will be scratching their heads.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

That is why the last part says there will be no tax impact.

Moderator Webb remarked there is no tax impact other than that of the operating budget.

Tracy perry, Schol Board Vice Chair

To the speaker's point, could we have \$0.00 impact?

Mr. Durand stated he would like to motion to amend to include the language "funds come from the operating budget, therefore there is no tax impact and include the \$0.00/\$1,000.

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

There is the amendment to the language and then there is a request to have a tax impact notation. That is not an amendment, that is a decision of the Board whether it wants a tax impact notation on there and whether it is required to put that under Statute. The Legislative body doesn't get to dictate that. He asked how the amendment would be worded.

Moderator Webb restated at the end of the sentence where it says there will be no tax impact, add "other than that of the operating budget".

Attorney O’Shaughnessy commented, to him, that makes it more confusing. It doesn’t really matter. You can make whatever amendment you want, but whether there is a tax impact notation is something the board decides when it puts the ballot together.

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

What if it were, there will be no tax impact as this would be drawn from the operating budget?

Mr. Durand was pleased with that suggestion.

James O’Shaughnessy, Esq.

I would strike all the stuff about the article to be funded from the operating budget not to exceed...it is just redundant and creates confusion and it makes people wonder what it is. You typically don’t reference in another article that you are using money from the operating budget to fund it. I’m a purist. I would rather that just be taken out. If you want something in there, I can write something that makes sense.

Moderator Webb asked if it was a legal opinion or a subjective opinion. The gentleman is saying he wants some clarity on the issue.

Attorney O’Shaughnessy stated his legal opinion the amendment would make it less clear.

Moderator Webb remarked according to you. He is the voting party.

Mr. Durand stated he wanted to make it so that everyone that walks into the ballot doesn’t look at that and scratch their heads for 5 minutes going there is no tax impact, but it is going to cost \$10,000.

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

I think to Mr. Scales’ original point; the intent of the board was to get a sense of the Legislative body. Is there an appetite in the community to see whether or not this is something we should study. At our budget hearing certain people thought we should identify where the money would come from. This language was added. I agree with legal counsel that really we are not looking for permission to spend the money to do the study, we are looking to see whether or not the community has any interest in us looking at this.

Moderator Webb commented that the board has put an article out there and these people have the right to amend that article within the boundaries of the law whatever your intentions were.

**MOTION MADE BY THOMAS DURAND TO AMEND THE ARTICLE BY DELETING THE LANGUAGE THAT FOLLOWS “SCHOOL BOARD”
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

That also gets to Mr. Rater's question because if there is no appropriation, we don't have to add that the Finance Committee does not make a recommendation.

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

The Finance Committee is not bound to just warrant articles that have a tax impact. They decide for themselves which ones they provide a recommendation on. There are special circumstances where they do vote on other articles. I think it should be up to the Finance Committee as to whether or not they want to remove their recommendation from it.

Moderator Webb asked counsel if they were in agreement that the language about these committees recommending is not part of the article?

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

It is not part of the article.

Peter Cook, 10 Main Street

The whole concept of a two-town coop where one town has half as many votes than the other doesn't strike me as being overly cooperative because there are issues other than the economy of scale.

Todd Perkins 24 Ames Road

By deleting those last two sentences, does that give you a blank check to spend whatever you want on this study?

Alyson Manion, School Board Member

Essentially, yes, but only what is already approved in the operating budget. We are not going to go and spend so much that we destroy our school budget for the year. I would hope that the community would have enough confidence in the boards that it elected not to be irresponsible. If we put that in there, we will adhere to that because that is what we felt was appropriate.

Todd Perkins 24 Ames Road

We just spent a lot of time arguing about the budget and this is baked into a budget that is now coming out and saying you could go to \$50,000. I don't agree with leaving those out. We should have a cap on this.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

We passed RSA 32:5(b) making the tax impact statement mandatory. How does that impact what we are doing here?

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

It doesn't. there is no tax impact because that is already referenced in the operating budget.

Mr. Pauer stated the desire for the \$10,000 limit because need to know it is not going to be zero. It is going to come from something. He would vote the amendment down. It does put a limit on what you are going to do. We don't need a new school board to come in and spend \$50,000 on something that we don't necessarily want to do if we thought it was \$10,000.

MOTION FAILED

Peter Cook, 10 Main Street

The general concept of a two-town coop where there is one big town and one small town; don't get me wrong there is no problem with the education that is received. When it comes to voting we will lose some of our independence because people vote, believe it or not a great deal of the time by their pocketbook. More voters will vote for their pocketbook versus the smaller number of voters.

Fully joining the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District may be a good way of getting out of SB2.

MOTION MADE BY BRIAN RATER TO MOVE THE QUESTION

MOTION SECONDED

MOTION CARRIED

No further discussion was offered on Article 8.

Article 8 will be placed on the official ballot as written.

Article 9 – (by Petition)

Shall we adopt the provisions of RSA 32:5-d, and implement a budget cap whereby the school board (or budget committee) shall not submit a recommended budget that is higher than 25,000 dollars per pupil cost times the average daily membership in residence of the school district as of October 1 of the year immediately preceding the proposed budget year plus an annual increase for inflation using CPI-U for the Boston-Cambridge-Newton MA-NH area published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as of January 1. Requires a 3/5ths majority of the school district. **The School Board does NOT recommend the appropriation 4-0-0. The Finance Committee does NOT recommend this appropriation 2-0-0.**

Moderator Webb stated his notes indicate to him that the language is dictated by Statute so we have perhaps a limited ability to tweak.

James O'Shaughnessy Esq.

Yes, The form of the question is dictated by Statute. There are parts of it that can be amended.

MOTION MADE BY ERIC PAUER TO MOVE ARTICLE 9 TO THE WARRANT, AS AMENDED BY CHANGING THE RSA REFERENCE TO 32:5-E

MOTION SECONDED

ON THE QUESTION

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

This article is a school district budget cap, which is a budget cap that goes by \$25,000/pupil. This is a very generous cap, and we are not likely to run into it any time soon. If you take the number of students we are expecting next year, according to NESDEC (571) and multiply by \$25,000 you get \$14,275. That is a very high number, and this will adjust with inflation over time. If enrollment changes so does the cap. It adjusts slowly over time generally upward because of inflation, and you won't hit the maximum probably for a while. It also has an override mechanism and you need to adopt it with a 3/5th vote like you do with the local tax cap.

Webb Scales, 49 Dupaw Gould Road

Once again the tax cap is looming over the board and potentially will make the board present two budgets. It is lovely that the cap is pretty high up so that it probably won't be a problem until it is. Then we will have to go through the motions of getting around it when we need to. I feel like we the voters have the ultimate power to choose what the budget is. We don't need this cap, and the cap doesn't actually constrain us, the ones who approve the budget.

The other problem here is that only part of the expenses of the school is related to the number of pupils. Really we need sort of a two-part cap; one that is part pupils and the other that is sort of fixed expenses and other obligations. Then of course the school costs don't follow the CPI-U so adjusting it for inflation based on that really isn't appropriate. We really should have some other adjustment for it. This formula doesn't match the formula that we actually need. This is a solution that doesn't fit our problem.

This being SB2, we have the power to pull the teeth out of this thing. He proposed changing the dollar per pupil to something more comfortable. Lets pick \$35,000. That ought to give us plenty of breathing room.

MOTION MADE BY WEBB SCALES TO AMEND THE ARTICLE BY REPLACING “\$25,000” WITH \$35,000”

MOTION SECONDED

ON THE QUESTION

Jesse Bassett, 8 Rock Ramond Road

Wasn't the motion to change the letter “d” to “e”?

Moderator Webb noted that changed was included in the motion under the article.

Melanie Levesque, 2 McDaniels Drive

Whether it is \$25,000 or \$35,000 this tax cap idea is a bad one. This is an article that is being proposed in just about every town in the State. Our school, we are at \$18,000/pupil; so, we manage ourselves very well. I don't think we need a tax cap to tell our people how much we can spend. We are going to go lower than that.

Moderator Webb stated whether we like the idea or not, this will go to the voters. Our job today is yes to air opinions about whether in general it is a good idea, but your ability to do something tonight is by amending this thing. He has made his motion to amend. That is what is on the floor.

Brady Halligan, 17 Birch Hill Road

As we just discussed in article 7, we've had a tax cap, which was amended on the floor to double it from 4% to 8%, and then 6 years later we're trying to get rid of it because it is already not working. We could amend this to \$100,000 and at some point in the future it will stop working. We have a budget cap, it is these five individuals, and if you don't like their decisions you can get rid of them. He would argue against the amendment as well as the article.

If this article were eventually breached, how would that impact special education or would it not impact special education and/or instead impact general education?

Kelly Zakar, School Board Member

My understanding is that unless something changes at the federal or state level with how special education funding is allocated to towns and what is required to be provided for students who have special education needs, general education will always suffer when there is a shortage of funds. If special education costs go up and especially if there are out-of-district placements where one year of tuition can be at a cost of \$80,000 - \$100,000 so that one student would equal general education students in this equation. It could very well detrimentally effect the general education of our students.

The point with article 7 is that this statute that we're referencing was just passed in August of 2024 and become effective October 1st for this budget season. There is nothing preventing the State Legislature from changing the rules of the game once we pass another budget cap. This is a budget cap, not a tax cap, but we can vote on one thing and then the State Legislature could retroactively change the rules of the game.

Mr. Halligan commented that this is a new law, and it is very common for laws to change in the first couple of years as wrinkles are ironed out. I would fully expect this to change possibly as soon as next year. That is a fairly substantial risk to further instability.

Eric Bernstein, 8 McIntosh Road

I understand this is a petition warrant article but am curious about the dollar amount. When I looked at RSA 32:5-e, it seems as though the calculation is based on the current average per pupil cost, and if that is the case, I just am afraid people might be under the misperception that there is this extra fluff in there that really doesn't exist were this to pass.

Andrew Corey, Superintendent

As Superintendent, I have asked legal that exact question because cost per pupil is defined by the State. The \$25,000 I have no idea where it comes from. If you look at the way the Statute was written, that was a blank. Now was that blank to put any number you want in or was that blank to put your town's cost per pupil in? The Legislature never talked about that. I have no idea what average daily membership means, and the words "in residence" does that mean if I have a student who is out-of-district, are they included in this or not because that could be some of my most expensive students. There are a lot of legal concerns. After just experiencing supporting the tax cap and have it go from the operating budget to the entire warrant, I'm also concerned that the definition may come after the fact. You may pass something thinking \$25,000 or \$35,000 and it might actually be \$18,000 what we are at right now, and that could be devastating to your school district.

**MOTION MADE BY BRIAN RATER TO END DISCUSSION ON THE AMENDMENT
MOTION SECONDED**

MOTION CARRIED

ON THE QUESTION

Clarence Skidmore, 42 Oak Hill Road

Opposes the amendment believing it to be a ludicrous thing to just throw a big number in there as it takes away from what the purpose of this is, and believes the voters are smart enough to understand what is going on here. You have a 3/5th majority, take your chances.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Also, against the amendment. The \$25,000 provides more than enough headroom and making it \$35,000 just is not really sensible. I'm glad the School Board and Finance Committee haven't taken a position on this article.

Vote on the motion to amend

MOTION CARRIED

38-12

Johanna Shriver-Halligan, School Board Member

The School Board did take a position on this. Apparently it is in the packet, but not on the slide. The position of the School Board was not in favor 4-0-0 and the position of the Finance Committee was not in favor 2-0. Neither recommended this article.

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

Going back to the wording of the articles. We have always put the number of votes in favor of the article, the number opposing and the number abstaining. He wished to see the language changed to the School Board does not recommend the article 0-4-0 and the Finance Committee does not recommend the article 0-2-0 to clarify that.

Stacey Esposito, 26 Pepperell Road

I would like to amend by adding that it will be reevaluated yearly so the annual increase for inflation..... as of January 1st and will be reassessed annually.

James O'Shaughnessy, Esq.

Mr. Moderator, I wasn't really specific when I answered your question about what can and cannot be amended. The Statute states "The form of the question shall be...." So that means it is required. Let me make it really simple, the blank part before dollars and the other part where it says for inflation using the index so you name the index, published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics or American city and country. You can literally name one of the indexes and that is it. You cannot add or take away stuff because it is not allowed.

Ms. Esposito asked if she could say and it will not be applied to costs associated with".

Attorney O’Shaughnessy replied no. the Legislature does not allow that.

**MOTION MADE BY ERIC PAUER TO AMEND BY REPLACING “CPI-U FOR THE BOSTON-CAMBRIDGE-NEWTON MA-NH AREA” TO “THE MUNICIPAL COST INDEX” AND REPLACE “U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS” WITH “AMERICAN CITY AND COUNTY”
MOTION SECONDED**

ON THE QUESTION

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

The MCI may be a better metric for a school district because it is a municipal cost index and will more closely model what is happening in a school district.

**MOTION MADE BY ED PERRY TO END DISCUSSION ON THE MOTION TO AMEND
MOTION SECONDED
MOTION CARRIED**

Vote on the motion to amend

MOTION FAILED

**MOTION MADE BY BRIAN RATER TO MOVE THE QUESTION
MOTION SECONDED
MOTION CARRIED**

No further discussion was offered on Article 9.

Article 9 will be placed on the official ballot as amended with the reference to RSA 32:5-e, and the change from \$25,000” to \$35,000”.

Article 10

To transact any other business which may legally come before said meeting?

Brian Rater, 31 Mason Road

Wished to acknowledge that Superintendent Andrew Corey will be retiring this summer, and he wished to thank him personally for his many years of service.

**MOTION BY KELLY ZAKAR TO ADJOURN
MOTION SECONDED
MOTION CARRIED**

The February 5, 2025, first session (Deliberative) of the Annual Meeting of the Brookline School District was adjourned at 10:34 p.m.

Colleen Micavich, Chairperson, Brookline School Board

Date: _____

Tracy Perry, Vice Chairperson

Date: _____

Alyson Manion, Secretary, Brookline School Board

Date: _____

Johanna Shriver-Halligan

Date: _____

Kelly Zakar, Brookline School Board

Date: _____

Dulce Lara, Clerk, Brookline School District

Date: _____