

GROTON BOARD OF EDUCATION  
FINANCE/FACILITIES COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES  
NOVEMBER 5, 2025 @ 6:00 P.M.  
CENTRAL OFFICE, ROOM 11/HYBRID

**Members Present:** Dean Antipas, Jay Weitlauf (remote), Jennifer White

**Also Present:** Susan Austin, Rita Parciak, Sam Kilpatrick, Ernie Koschmieder, Laurie LePine, Beverly Washington, Katie Shelton, Sherri Facas

Chairperson Antipas called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

1. Review October 7, 2025 Meeting Minutes - The committee reviewed the minutes; no corrections were submitted.
2. Director of Finance Report
  - Discussion on Preliminary Operational Review Audit Priorities - Susan Austin stated that a document was created to respond to auditor recommendations. Many of the Town Councilors' priorities that were forwarded by John Burt were already addressed or are currently under review.
  - Review FY27 Budget Calendar - Rita Parciak stated that she has met with the principals and directors on how to fill out the template showing what's been budgeted and encumbered already this year. The completed template is due back to Rita on November 14. The budget calendar closely parallels last year's calendar. The meeting scheduled for January 22 on the budget calendar will be moved to the following week. Rita stated that focusing on the object code is the best way to review the budget with the Board.
  - FY25 Unpaid Meal Balances - Food Service Director, Ernie Koschmieder, shared a document (attached) showing an unpaid meal balance of \$23,989.74 as of November 1, 2025. He is concerned that by June, we may have an unpaid meal balance of \$85,000 - \$100,000. Per state, USDA regulations, and the Non-Shaming Act, communications have been sent out to parents through ParentSquare, emails, U.S. mail, school café alerts, and weekly reminders. Multiple payment options are offered (i.e. cash, check, online), and, in extreme situations, payment plans have been set up for struggling parents. Ernie stated that other districts are also having the same issue with unpaid meal balances. He stressed that students who have unpaid balances are always fed. There was discussion regarding the option of securing a debt collection agency, which comes with a cost. Rita Parciak stated that she will reach out to the CASBO group (Connecticut Association of School Business Officials) to see if any other district has started talking about a collection agency. Jen White stated that Senator Heather Somers would be willing to do a fundraiser event; Susan Austin will reach out to Senator Somers.
3. Director of Buildings & Grounds Report
  - Discussion re: FHS Solar Panels - Katie Shelton of Connecticut Green Bank stated that she has received utility bills and is waiting for a few more bills from Rita Parciak in order to do a final detailed analysis of the existing project. John Burt will be contacted to see if we are required to get the town's approval for the project before it moves forward.
  - CB Roof Update - Sam Kilpatrick stated that he and Rita Parciak are working on getting documentation requested by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) for the CB roof application. Jay Weitlauf shared his concern as to the number of times the application has been returned by DAS and how long the application process is taking as this project needs to take place this summer.

3. Director of Buildings & Grounds Report (cont'd)

- Robotics Team Move Update - Sam Kilpatrick stated that our electricians are working on the wiring. The open house is scheduled for 11/6/25. Susan Austin stated that a closet has been partially cleaned out for use as storage. Sam said they are waiting for final approval from the town regarding the storage container at FHS which will store additional items that the team won't be using right away. A site plan has been submitted for the container. Sherri Facas thanked everyone for their support.
- Maintenance Matters - Sam Kilpatrick stated that two of our vehicles went in for maintenance and have been deemed not road worthy. We have one truck that is getting undercoated. The committee requested a list of all vehicles with their mileage. Maintenance staff shortage was discussed. Sam stated that our maintenance staff fills in for absent custodians; absenteeism is a problem.
- Feedback re: Mary Morrisson Memorandum of Understanding - Dean Antipas reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and asked for comments or concerns. Dean will send the MOU to Board members for review, and it will be put on a future Board meeting agenda for approval.

The meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

# Unpaid Meal Debt Overview

## Current Unpaid Balances

Unpaid Meal Balances 11/1/25	
School	Negative Balance
FHS	-\$15,467.39
CB	-\$4,678.45
NEA	-\$3,843.90
TOTAL	-\$23,989.74

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## Approved Communication Methods for Payment Reminders

- **Email Notifications:** Direct emails to parents/guardians
- **ParentSquare Messages:** Regular reminders through the ParentSquare platform
- **Mailed Letters:** Notices sent via U.S. mail for negative balances
- **School Café Alerts:** Parents can **set up balance alerts** in *School Café* to receive notifications when their child's account drops below a chosen amount
- **Weekly Reminders:** Every **Friday**, Food Services sends balance reminders to all accounts with balances below **\$0**

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## Payment Options

- **Cash or Checks:** Accepted directly at the school
- **Online Payments:** Parents may use *School Café* for convenience, but it is **not required**

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## Not Permitted

- **Removing Food:** Meals may **not** be taken away from a student due to unpaid balances
  - **Public Discussion:** Staff should **not** tell students they owe money in front of peers
  - **Stigmatizing Practices:** Any communication that could embarrass or single out a student is prohibited
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## Meal Service Procedures

- **First Meal:** Students are **always allowed** to receive their first meal, even with a negative balance
  - **Second Meal / À La Carte Items:** Students **must have funds** in their account to purchase a second meal or any à la carte items
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## Current Proactive Measures

- Distribution of **Free/Reduced Meal Applications** at the start of the year and as needed
- **ParentSquare reminders** about balances and payment options
- **Parent-controlled balance alerts** available through *School Café*
- **Weekly Friday reminders** sent to families with negative balances
- **Direct family outreach:** Food Services will contact families at all three schools with negative balances and encourage them to submit a **Free/Reduced Meal Application**
  - If a submitted application qualifies the student for **free or reduced-price meals**, Food Services will **cancel the existing meal debt** and the student will receive **free or reduced meals for the remainder of the school year**
- **Payment Plans:** In **extreme situations**, Food Services works directly with families to create **weekly payment plans** to help settle outstanding debt in a manageable way
- Encouraging families to **set up online payments** for convenience (optional)
- Ongoing reminders: families may **submit a new application anytime** if their income changes
- **Monthly Updates:** Food Services provides a monthly report of negative balances to the **Business Manager** for all three schools