TOWN OF WENHAM
Wenham Select Board joint with H-W School Committee
138 Main Street
Meeting of October 21, 2025

Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, MGL Chapter 30 A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk & delivered to all Select Board members, a meeting of the Wenham Select Board was held Tuesday, October 21, 2025 at 6:01 pm in-person and via Zoom.

The Select Board serves as the chief executive body of the Town. The Board's duties include in part appointing the Town Administrator & other board/committee members, developing goals & policies, preparing the town report, the annual budget, & presenting the warrant for Town Meeting. The Board typically meets monthly on the first & third Tuesday. Wenham has a five-member Board elected for three-year terms: Deirdre Pierotti, Clerk, (2026); Gary Cheeseman, Vice Chair (2026); Karen Anger (2027); Peter Clay, Finance Officer (2028); Benjamin Tymann, Chair (2028).

Call to Order –*With a quorums present, B. Tymann called the Select Board meeting to order at 6:00 pm, identified the meeting was being recorded & those present:* B. Tymann, G. Cheeseman, D. Pierotti, P. Clay. K. Anger
Also present: Steve Poulos, Town Administrator; Joe Pessimato, Assistant Town Administrator; Michelle McGovern, Executive Assistant

Public Input- There was none.

Reports & Announcements

- Town Administrator's Update & Town Announcements – S. Poulos
  - Staff move from 2nd floor to 1st floor during 2nd floor HVAC renovations: Staff moved successfully to accommodate 2nd floor HVAC renovations. Reminder that all offices that residents would normally go to the 2nd floor for are located on the 1st floor in the Select Board room.
  - Native American Heritage Month: The Wenham Human Rights committee has put together a self-guided tour around the town for landmarks that are related to indigenous people. The town will be posting this information on the website and social media.

- Chair's Report – no updates to report

- Select Board Members Report – P. Clay remarked on the grand opening of West Wenham Park, which was held on Saturday, October 18th. The event was well attended and P. Clay praised Kate Mallory for doing a great job. G. Cheeseman seconded this comment and said it was a beautiful day with close to 200 people in attendance. D. Pierotti echoed both P. Clay and G. Cheeseman's comments and added that it was a fabulous turnout and glorious day for the Town of Wenham.

- K. Anger thanked everyone who participated and supported the Buker Fun Run. They raised over their goal of $35,000 to help with educational services.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Hamilton-Wenham Cultural Council Appointment: Jean Boudreau

Vote: *The Board voted unanimously to appoint Jean Boudreau to the Hamilton-Wenham Cultural Council for a term effective October 21, 2025 through June 30, 2026.*

NEW BUSINESS

B. 6:10 PM: Conduct public hearing regarding the Renewal of Cable Television License of Comcast Cable Communications Management, LLC and potentially vote to accept.

S. Poulos addressed the board to explain the town's cable licensing and how it funds local community media services, Hamilton-Wenham Community Access & Media Committee (HWCAM). Cable companies like Comcast and Verizon pay the town licensing fees to use public poles and rights-of-way. This revenue covers audiovisual equipment, operations, and staff. The payment structure recently changed from a flat fee to a per-subscriber model, about $125 per subscriber, totaling around $7,500 per year. In addition, the town receives 5% of Xfinity's gross revenue from Wenham.

Bill Melville, Executive Director of Hamilton-Wenham Community Access & Media Committee (HWCAM) spoke to this and noted that HWCAM has served both Wenham and Hamilton for an estimated twenty years and continually invests in updated technology to stay ahead, choosing high-quality equipment. He also noted that Wenham was one of the first cable stations to have HD (high definition) via YouTube and the HWCAM app. There is a growing focus on Americans with Disabilities Act compliance (ADA) including federal pushes for closed captioning. HWCAM has already begun implementing live captioning at town meetings and plans to expand this with in-room caption displays in the coming year—all part of a long-term effort to modernize and plan for the next 20 years.

Attorney William Solomon joined the meeting and presented details of the new Comcast Cable License Agreement. He noted that this is a strong agreement negotiated under challenging conditions for cable TV, as revenues come only from cable service—not internet or phone. The town will continue to receive 5% of Comcast's gross cable revenues (the legal maximum) for public, educational, and government (PEG) access. There is an increase to $1.25 per subscriber per month, higher than before, which helps offset declining subscriber numbers. Comcast has 491 subscribers in Wenham and Verizon has 397. Wenham operates their own fiber network linking public buildings and the HWCAM studio, which protects the towns from potential FCC rules that could reduce payments if Comcast bore those costs. Comcast will continue to provide free cable service to schools and municipal buildings and has not sought to deduct those costs from the 5% franchise fee. Attorney Solomon emphasized that the license provides excellent financial and legal protections for the town, ensures future HD capability, and maintains full-service coverage despite the industry's ongoing subscriber losses.

K. Anger questioned the 10-year license length, noting how much the cable industry has changed over the past decade. She expressed concern that as more residents switch from cable to streaming, the number of subscribers—and therefore the revenue from the $1.25 per-subscriber capital fee and the 5% operating fee—will likely decline significantly. What is the financial risk the town faces if it locks into a 10-year agreement while subscriber numbers continue to drop? Attorney Solomon responded that a **10-year license** is in the town's best interest despite the changing media landscape. He explained that the Cable Act of 1984, which governs these agreements, is outdated and could be changed or repealed in the future—potentially eliminating local cable licensing altogether. Therefore, locking in favorable terms now provides long-term legal and financial stability while conditions are still good.

Vote: *The Board voted unanimously to approve the Cable Television Renewal License of Comcast Cable Communications Management, LLC effective November 1, 2025 through October 31, 2035.*

C. 6:45 PM – School Committee call to order into joint session with the Wenham Select Board

Call to Order – *Chair Dana Allara called the meeting to order at 6:47 PM and reminded everyone the meeting was being recorded and live streamed.*

D. Allara welcomed interviewees and noted Ms. Lambert was not going to be able to attend the meeting.

D. Conduct Interviews and Jointly Appoint a Wenham Resident to the SC with the Wenham Select Board
   a. Julie Holbrook
   b. Will Hanson
   c. Kristen Noon
   d. Lauren Lambert

Candidates were given an opportunity to make an opening statement:

W. Hanson stated he is a corporate attorney and father of three students in the district. He emphasized his experience in finding balanced solutions, working with diverse viewpoints, and helping divided groups move forward. A former Eagle Scout with a strong record of community service and pro bono work, including for a Boston charter school. W. Hansen said he wants to give back to the community and help maintain the district's excellence in education.

J. Holbrook introduced herself as a long-time resident who moved to Hamilton-Wenham in 2012 specifically for the strong school district. She shared that her daughter felt very well prepared thanks to the schools, and her family has been active supporters of school initiatives over the years. With her children now more independent, J. Holbrook said she has the time and desire to give back by serving on the school committee. Drawing on over 20 years in education administration, she noted her familiarity with challenges such as research constraints, capital improvements, planning for infrastructure, and negotiating contracts. She said the

most important thing is to figure out how to educate our children and students so that they are happy, healthy and productive engaged members of the community.

K. Noon introduced herself as a long-time Wenham resident and parent of two Buker School students. She highlighted her deep ties to the community through her 12 years as executive director of the Wenham Museum, where she combined education and community engagement. A lawyer who works exclusively with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, Noon emphasized her experience building consensus among diverse groups and her commitment to public service. She described herself as fair, calm, and optimistic, with strong local relationships. While recognizing the importance of addressing school facility needs, she also expressed interest in advancing other district priorities—such as AI policy, supporting all learners through a multi-tiered approach, and school start times. She closed by affirming her dedication to serving the town in any capacity.

1. What are your three top priorities for the school district and how would you work on the committee to focus on these priorities?

W. Hansen expressed addressing urgent facility needs at Cutler and Winthrop elementary schools and seeking additional state funding for capital improvements while promoting community engagement and consensus. He highlighted the importance of maintaining strong contracts with teachers, staff, and administrators to attract and retain top talent. He also advocated for updating and strengthening the regional agreement between the towns and the district to clarify roles, build trust, and ensure stability moving forward.

J. Holbrook stated the importance of maintaining the excellence of the Hamilton-Wenham School District and said that clarity and consistency in mission are essential to achieving that goal. Drawing on personal experience in strategic planning, she stressed that every decision should align with the district's mission—and that everyone, from staff to students, must understand and embrace it. She noted that the district's mission statement is difficult to find on the website, suggesting it should be more visible and central to all discussions and decisions, especially as the community faces challenging issues like school consolidation. Finally, she suggested bringing the mission and vision in action back to the forefront as a way to rebuild unity and overcome current divisions or negative feelings within the community.

K. Noon emphasized that the district's primary focus should remain on education, pointing to the portrait of a learner initiative as a strong example of community input and shared vision under the superintendent's leadership. She viewed this effort as a valuable foundation that could continue guiding future work. She underscored the need to ensure equity and consistency in the educational experience across all schools by providing teachers and special education staff with the resources and support they need, recognizing that such support is not always just financial. Finally, she stressed the importance of developing an inclusive, transparent process to align facilities with program needs, noting that financial decisions should be guided by a well-defined, community-supported plan that fosters consensus and unity moving forward.

2. What do you see as the role of the school committee?

J. Holbrook said the School Committee needs to be the experts on many things and make difficult decisions. She acknowledged that others often have more expertise and emphasized a commitment to learning from them. She said she was data-driven and believes the role of the school committee is to analyze the data to make informed decisions and recommendations. She expressed respect for those who serve on local boards, recognizing the scrutiny and challenges they face, and underscored the need for the community to maintain trust and confidence in these elected officials to make well-informed decisions on their behalf.

K. Noon explained that the school committee's role has several key functions rooted in its statutory authority, including overseeing the district, supporting the budgeting process, managing the superintendent's contract, setting policy, and handling collective bargaining. She noted that challenges often arise when the community expects the committee to intervene in matters that belong to staff or administrative operations. She emphasized the importance of clearly distinguishing between the committee's oversight responsibilities and the superintendent's operational authority, while recognizing that some areas, such as policy, can fall into a gray area. In those instances, she highlighted the need to consider the perspectives of students, community members, and staff to guide balanced and well-informed decisions.

W. Hansen described the school committee's work as encompassing five main areas: developing policy, developing the budget, overseeing the superintendent, advocating for public education, and community engagement. He likened the committee to a board of directors and the superintendent to a CEO, an analogy he found helpful. Community engagement comes naturally to him as an active parent involved in local schools and town life. He said the budget is a major priority and he will advocate and push for it.

3. What do you see as your qualifications and experience that make you a good fit for a position on the school committee?

K. Noon described extensive experience building and fostering consensus. She noted that board members and community members often bring deep passion and that effective decision-making requires time, active listening, often hearing people multiple times, and taking concerns seriously. She emphasized that consensus is not unanimous but a general agreement that makes everyone happy and can live with.

W. Hansen said he is well suited for several key responsibilities of the school committee, especially developing the budget, overseeing the superintendent, advocating for public education, and engaging the community. He explained that budgeting comes naturally to him because he regularly works with budgets and financial statements and would only need to learn the district-specific details. He said he is a hard and diligent worker and noted that, as a non-courtroom attorney, his job is centered on negotiation and finding consensus between parties on different sides of an issue.

J. Holbrook explained that she is well suited for the school committee due to her work at a major university, where she spends her days negotiating and interfacing with faculty and students who have strong opinions, and all expect to be heard. She emphasized that this work requires building consensus while still making difficult decisions that not everyone likes. She noted that the issues she handles such as planning for capital projects, figuring out how to deliver education in a world where students are more fluent with technology than adults, and modeling respectful dialogue and disagreement, are the same kinds of challenges school committees face. She said she is in the trenches with these questions every day, working with college students, their own teenagers, and younger children, and see this as directly relevant experience for serving on the school committee.

4. How would you get up to speed on the governmental aspects of the school committee and municipal budgeting?

W. Hanson said the municipal budget aspect of the role would be very easy for him. He would just need to learn the specifics of the school committee budget. While he is not a municipal attorney, he is confident he can understand and work within the regional agreement, the role of the school committee, and the requirements under Massachusetts law and town bylaws, and feels he fits well with his existing skills and experience.

J. Holbrook explained that over the last year and a half she has had to spend a lot of time working with budgets and dealing with the impacts of federal government decisions that have significantly affected funding, including doing contingency planning amid many unknowns. She is confident in her ability to review and understand budget materials and to ask informed questions of experts. She said her approach on the committee would be to carefully read the budget, absorb the details, and ask a lot of questions.

K. Noon said she feels comfortable in getting up to speed. She sees the committee's role as an oversight body that asks probing questions of the superintendent and finance director about changes and increases in budget lines. She mentioned online resources are available and other materials that she would be reviewing in the lead up to budget season.

5. Reflecting on the recent votes on the Cutler School expansion where there was a differential in voter support between the two towns, do you have ideas about how to promote greater unity between the towns on major district projects?

J. Holbrook said that both towns ultimately want the same thing, excellent schools, but disagree on the best path to achieve that. There will eventually be one path forward, which not everyone will love. She stressed the need for a fair, transparent process where people feel heard and also relying on experts to work out the technical details once the community has done its due diligence. She noted that the town, like the country, is divided and that local committees and boards such as the select board, school committee, and finance committee, need to demonstrate that they are acting with good intentions, even when their decisions are unpopular.

K. Noon said for the two towns to move forward together, they should look at where there are bright spots and build upon them, such as the opening of the high school fields, which was a positive community event. She said these events should be expanded on. On deciding which school to rebuild, in what order, how much it will cost, how much each town will pay, etc., another round of community feedback will be necessary, along with putting new kinds of solutions put forth. She mentioned an example from

Newburyport, where elementary schools are organized by grade level across different buildings, acknowledging that such an idea would be unpopular with some and appealing to others, but using it to illustrate that plan B options for the facilities need to be openly discussed.

W. Hanson described consensus-building as one of his key strengths, especially when people disagree. He noted enhanced community outreach is essential both to explain district policies and priorities. When evaluating a problem, he tries to understand all points of view and find ways to work with people who have opposing viewpoints. Reflecting on conversations with residents, many Hamilton citizens are reluctant to fund school projects without some assurance of reciprocity for Wenham, and vice versa. Any solution can't favor one town or just the district; it must be something both communities and their residents, not just boards and committees, can support. He acknowledged this is a difficult problem and says the school committee has significant work ahead to find and implement solutions, and that he wants to help do that work, with community outreach and trust-building at the center of moving forward.

6. **What is your understanding of the current status of the regional agreement and what are two or three issues that you believe are important that are covered in the regional agreement?**

K. Noon said as the vote on the new school approached, she reviewed the regional agreement and believes it is likely time to revisit it. She cautioned that making major policy changes when people are upset can create the perception that rules are being changed to force a desired outcome, so any revisions must be handled carefully and fairly between the two towns. She identified the required voting threshold for incurring debt on major expenditures as a key point of contention, noting that the sequence of town meeting and ballot votes created confusion and eroded trust. Clarifying the process for future expenditures in a way that aligns with community interests and state law should be a significant part of the agreement. She also pointed out that the enrollment balance between the towns is shifting and questions whether the current three-year rolling average used in the agreement is still appropriate, suggesting this should have a second look at. Finally, she proposed revisiting basic elements of the agreement such as how often it is reviewed and how it can be amended, to reduce conflict and make future decisions less fraught.

W. Hanson agreed with the previous comments and said the current regional agreement is sloppy, outdated, and not very wholeseome. When he reviewed it during the recent votes, he noticed it doesn't explain what happens if a vote fails. Any strong agreement between two towns should have answers to that. He agreed that changing the agreement in the middle of a vote is a very difficult thing to do. Community outreach is going to be extremely important and a much more wholesome agreement put in place.

J. Holbrook noted that most residents don't really understand the regional school agreement because it's boring and dry, so people don't want to take the time to read it, yet it has real impact. She feels people feel somewhat suspicious, with some feeling that because the desired outcome wasn't achieved the first time, it was just tried repeatedly. While the process was above board, there wasn't a lot of guidance about what was allowed, leaving people confused. She said there needs to be better communication such as clearly explaining what the agreement is, what it includes, how it affects people, and what's possible going forward, in a way that makes its importance understandable even if the document itself isn't exactly exciting reading.

Additional questions from the school committee were:

7. **In April, the interim appointee will have the option to run for election to continue on the committee. Do you intend to run?**

W. Hanson said he intends to run and understand the time commitment and sacrifice.

J. Holbrook intends to run. She would like to make sure she is helpful to the board and the right fit.

K. Noon said she intends to run.

8. **There's a substantial time commitment to serving on the school committee. We meet in person twice monthly, generally on Thursday evenings. Members serve on at least one subcommittee as well. There's a significant time investment in preparing for meetings. Please speak to your ability to commit to this level of participation.**

J. Holbrook responded she has more free time in the evening as her children are older now.

K. Noon feels she has the time; she works slightly less than full-time and is at a place now where she can invest time back into the community or volunteer.

W. Hanson understands the time commitment and what is required.

Vote: *The Select Board and Hamilton-Wenham School Committee voted to appoint Kristin Noon to the Hamilton-Wenham School Committee for a term effective November 4, 2025 through April 16, 2026.*

OLD BUSINESS

E. **Other matters, as may have not been anticipated by the chair (discussion only)-** There were none.

DOCUMENTS:

- Comcast Cable Communications Renewal License

Adjournment: *The Hamilton-Wenham School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:50 pm.*

Adjournment: *The Select Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:53 pm.*

Respectfully Submitted By
Michelle McGovern