



Town of Paxton
Board of Selectmen
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Regular Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 25, 2024

**Meeting Location: Training Room of the Public Safety Complex
576 Pleasant Street, Paxton, MA 01612**

Members Present: Julia N. Pingitore, Chair
Kirk R. Huehls, Vice Chair
Carol L. Riches, Clerk

Town Administrator: Heather M Munroe, Town Administrator

Attendees: see Attendee List

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:07pm. We will enter into Executive Session and will return to the regular meeting only for the purpose of adjourning.

CONSENT ITEMS

- 1. Approve the meeting minutes from the Regular Meeting held on March 11, 2024.
- 2. Approve the request from the Paxton Lions Club to hold their annual Toll Road on March 30th from 8am to 12pm.
- 3. To approve the request from the Paxton Boy Scout Troop 105 to use the Town Common on May 4, 2024, from 9am to 12pm for a bottle and can drive.
- (JP) Hearing no other comments, all consent items have been approved.

School Zone Speed Limit Signs

- Travis Thibault** In FY23 we were awarded a grant for school speed limit signs from Mass DOT. I am here to seek permission for replacement of these signs. The standard from Mass DOT is that we are supposed to have 850 feet from the school property to where the signs sit. We are about sixty feet on one side and 480 feet on the other. The new signs on the west bound side will be moved about sixty feet so it is as far away from the intersection as possible to give motorist ample time to see the signage. The other sign would be moved about eight hundred feet away, but we had some resistance from the neighbor, so we had to move down further to #71 West St. It does have speed feedback that police can use, and it does have some other reporting that we can utilize as well. This new placement would put us in compliance with Mass DOT.
- (KH) **Concern** that 10 West Market sign may block the school sign.
- Travis Thibault** The speed zone will sit higher in elevation than the sign for 10 West Market.
- Mark Love** How much was the grant for?

- **Travis Thibault** The signs were free. There was no dollar amount associated to the grant. We will spend a couple of thousand dollars out of our FY24 budget for installation.
- **(JP)** Will there be any impact of the solar power. Would we run into the same issue as the sign on the common when it is cloudy?
- **Travis Thibault** Other communities have these signs and have not had an issue. We will keep the current sign in place till the end of the school year.
- **Motion (KH) seconded (CR) to approve the installation of new Solar Powered Speed Feedback and School Zone Speed Limit Signs at a new location that will comply with the current standards set forth in the MA DOT Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Unanimous, all in favor. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**

Review Warrant Articles

Article #1 - Revolving Fund Bylaw

(KH) motion (CR) recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #1 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article# 2 - Council on Aging Bylaw

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #2 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article# 3 - Recreation Commission Bylaw

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #3 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #4 - Chapter 90

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #4 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #5 -Repurpose Article

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #5 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #6 – Revolving Fund Expenditure Limits

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #6 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #7 – Free Cash – Transfer – Police Cruiser Outfitting

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #7 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #8 – Free Cash – Transfer – Opioid Funds

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #8 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #9 – Ambulance Receipts Reserved – Transfer – Lucas & Cardiac

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #9 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #10 – Water Enterprise – Water Department Receipts

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #10 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #11 – Water Enterprise – Water Tank Maintenance

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #11 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #12 – Appropriate Funds to Road Improvement

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #12 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #13 – use Funds from Road Improvement

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #13 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #14 – Wachusett Greenways

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #14 on the warrant. All in favor.

Article #15 – Budget – Bay Path

(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.

(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #15 on the warrant. All in favor.

(JP) Discussion on the next two articles is whether or not we have one or two articles on the warrant. Town and school together or separate and joint or separate overrides. In the past with smaller overrides, we split them out but now that we are looking at a large deficit, I would suggest that we have them all together.

(HM) I would recommend putting the town and Wachusett together and leave Bay Path out of it. You usually want the warrant to mirror the ballot question so I would recommend one for both the warrant and the ballot questions.

(KH) If that does not pass and we go to a contingent budget it affects the school as well.

(JP) If it passes at town meeting but fails at ballot you have 90 days to go back to a ballot again.

If we were not the only other town to turn down the school budget, then the school would have to meet again to reduce their budget.

(HM) In my discussion with town counsel we did agree that it would be best to put the two items on one ballot questions.

Meeting was recessed at 7:00pm for Wachusett Regional School District to set up their presentation. Meeting called back at 7:05pm.

UPDATE FROM TOWN BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

Presentation from Wachusett Regional School District on their FY25 budget

- **James Reilly and Michelle Grise** to present for the Wachusett Regional School District. The full presentation is on the Towns website and on file in the Select Board office.
- FY25 Budget Discussion Acknowledgements.
- District Financial Status
- FY23 Recap
- FY24 Status
- FY25 Unexpected Challenges
- FY25 DESE Hold Harmless Status
- Historical Chapter 70 Increases
- Special Ed Tuitions
- Excess & Deficiency use (FY22-FY24)

- Town Share of overall budget
- FY25 Funding Overview
- FY25 Initial Budget Development Process
- Originally Planned FY25 Investments
- FY25 Revised Budget Approach
- FY25 Revised Approach: Essential Needs
- FY25 Budget – Enrollment Update
- FY25 Minimum Local Contribution
- FY25 Budget by Appropriation
- FY25 State & Local Revenues
- FY25 Preliminary Town Assessments
- Foundation Budget vs Actual Spending
- Capital Improvement Projects
- Considerations and Next Steps
- Personnel Impact with Further Reductions
- Staffing Analysis
- FY25 Budget Calendar

James Riley We do need to look at our special ed and maybe we can accommodate some of those students in the district. Looking at joining a collaborative where we already send students. In the long term this could give us some cost savings.

(JP) School choice we have been back and forth with that. In what ways can you direct school choice so that you do not end up overcrowding classes and ultimately needing to hire more staff?

James Riley, We have the ability to look at where we could add students. When we add students at the element level, we have to keep them all the way through the high school level. The trends are getting higher with losing students from eighth grade to the high school level, so there is the ability to add students and not lose the integrity of the school. We may be okay in the academic area but some of the other services might be a little pressed.

(JP) The focus on capital planning. We have been asking for a long time for this and I am glad to hear that we are going to get that and the focus on fixing the small things before they become a big thing.

(CR) What level are you at with counselors?

James Riley, We have counselor that work with crisis. They work with basic social emotional support systems. We are not quite to the level that we have one person in every school. Those would have been some of the positions that we would have advocated for. We have a social emotional grant, and we are going to look at some programs that we are going to implement into the schools. Similar experience in all our schools. Even though we are the 25th largest school district we do not get the financial support that the larger urban communities receive such as title 1.

Mark Love In the past couple of year things were not done the way they should have been. You inherited a train wreck and in getting us out of this I hope the school committee is supporting you and appreciates you bringing us as far as you have.

James Riley We are trying to have more confidence in how we are moving forward. I am nervous about the future, and I do not want to leverage the towns. Bottom line it is the taxpayer's decision. The school committee is very supportive of us, and they have worked with us to try and get us in a better place.

Jeremy Richards - where do athletic fees fall in your revenue?

Michelle Grise They go into a revolving funds.

Jeremy Richards there is some potential there for a better way to collect fees.

(JP) We are going to be discussing an override and because we are passing an override, I want to make sure we are covered for FY26. Any idea what to expect?

Michelle Grise Take the top two lines we are contractually tied to with a 2.5% increase. This is 80% of our budget. Looking at a 4 to 6% increase for next year.

Meeting was recessed at 9:25pm. Meeting called back at 9:33pm.

(JP) Who should be part of the override. We need to support the town departments and the school equally.

(CR) I agree, and I think the Superintendent will help us get the word out and that is what Heather has proposed.

(KH) I agree it is the best approach. If we break them up, you are putting them against each other. We should all be in this together.

Mark Love I do not want to get ahead of the Finance Committee, but my first reaction is to have two. The point was made this evening on the right to choose. My initial reaction would be two.

Jeremy Richards I would lead towards one. Neither one is responsible for this. Doing one is what makes sense in my head. The school budget is very hot for some and not others. Everyone loves the town budget. You need to be one on this.

(JP) If you have a good school system it helps your property value. As far as Bay Path being a part of the override, they are functioning within their limits so they should not be included.

- **Motion (KH) seconded (CR) to have the override as a single override to include the Town and the Wachusett Regional School Districts budget . Unanimous, all-in favor. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**
- (JP) What are we going to have the override amount cover. It does not make sense to put yourself in the same position next year. If we go with the deficit and free cash that would be very helpful and we could start putting money away. We are looking at adding \$460,000 of ambulance receipt. What we are doing with that is making our level of service dependent on our receipts. Some of our reimbursements do not even cover our service. It was intended to help support the ambulance service and now we are depending on revenue that is not guaranteed. Roughly a million six if we do deficit, ambulance, and free cash.
- **Mark Love** Fearful override is so big that it fails with no guarantee we are not back here next year. I like the idea of getting into a ten-year program rather than doing it all in one year.
- (HM) Still working on some formulas to get a better idea on how much time this would buy you depending on the amount of the override. Utilize the DLS website to put in what the estimated bill impact would be. You could put a calculator on the front page of your website so people can go in there and see what the impact to their property would be.
- (JP) It is possible that you put a number out there and it may fail, and you may need to come back with a lower number. Will we place one or two budgets on the warranty? If we place an override and it fails, then we need a second warrant article which is a reduced budget warrant article.
- (HM) You could accept both at the town meeting and if the override does not pass then the reduced budget goes into place. Pros and cons to both. We have to have what that reduced services budget looks like.
- **Motion (KH) seconded (CR) to have two articles pertaining to the budget with one being the override and one being the contingent budget. Unanimous, all in favor. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**
- (HM) We need a decision before 5pm on April 8th with the amount for the override.
- (JP) An additional meeting for the Select Board on April 4th at 6pm. We need to start getting the word out on the informational session.

- (HM) Maybe on the April 8th meeting we could have the department heads come in and let people know what they are facing with budget cuts.
- **Article #16 – FY25 Override Contingent Budget - Town**
(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.
(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #16 on the warrant. All in favor.
- **Article #17 – FY25 Budget not Contingent on override – Town**
(KH) motion (CR) second to recommend approval of the article. All in favor.
(KH) motion (CR) second to place as article #17 on the warrant. All in favor.

Annual review for the Town Administrator

- (JP) I went over the reviews with Heather earlier today. If she has any questions, she will reach out to you. Happy to report that the average places her into the meet's requirement category.


ADJOURN

- **Motion (CR) seconded (JP) to leave the regular meeting and entered into Executive Session at 10:16pm and we will return to the regular meeting for the purpose of adjourning. (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**
- **Returned to Regular Session at 11:19pm**
- **Adjourned Meeting at 11:19pm, Unanimous all-in favor. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**
- **The next meeting is scheduled for April 4, 2024, 6:00pm.**

Documents from the Meeting filed in BOS office:

Agenda
Attendance list
Wachusett Regional School District FY25 Budget

Respectfully submitted,



Donna Graf-Parsons, Executive Assistant