

BOF March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 Special Meeting Minutes

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TOWN CLERK

# Minutes of Board of Finance March 25th, 2024, Special Meeting - 03/25/24

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**Date and time:** 03/25/24 05:30 pm to: 03/25/24 07:02 pm

**Present:** Brooke Stevens, Rec Secretary (\* Ms. Stevens was not in attendance), Jay Ginsberg, Richard Steel, Lauren McNamara, John T. Birmingham, Paul Maxfield, Denise Hall, Chairperson

**CC:** Kevin Gervais, Finance Director, Dan Cunningham, First Selectman, Jeffrey Newton, East Lyme Superintendent of Schools, Maryanna Stevens, BOE Finance Director, Eric Bauman, Board of Education Chair

**Location:** East Lyme Town Hall, Upper Conf. Room, 108 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Niantic, CT, 06357.

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## Topics

### 1. Call Meeting to Order & Pledge

**Note** Chairperson Hall called the March 25th, 2024, Special Meeting of the Board of Finance to order at 5:31 p.m. and led them in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 2. Delegations

**Note** There were none.

### 3. New Business- Budget Reviews

#### 3-1. BOE

**Note** Eric Bauman, BOE Chair, came forward and said some of the following:

He appreciates everyone who was able to tour the High School today.

seeing the school visually tells a lot more when you actually see it versus, looking at pictures or hearing about its condition.

In putting together the budget, they've balanced fiscal responsibility with maintaining and continuing a high-performing district.

You'll see we have over a million dollars in grants, despite not having a dedicated grant writer.

Every time a role is vacated for retirement or such, they do look at these roles.

He referenced an EMT class as an example of creative education delivery that also generates revenue for the town.

This class includes students from Lyme, Old Lyme, and Waterford.

Tuition in the amount of \$24,000 will be received by the town.

A broad range of student achievements was highlighted, showcasing the district's success in fostering diverse talents.

Emma Frisbee, state champion for Poetry Out Loud.

Tom Matlock, New England shot put champion.

Science Bowl team, regional champs going to nationals.

Nadia Lira, who published a book called "The Crystal Quest," in the 6th grade.

10 students from the High School were selected and performed in the New England Music Festival.

They also had three state championship teams in the fall and winter seasons, and a bunch of ECC championships.

**Note** Mr. Bauman discussed the need for investment in school facilities, including the high school's auditorium, locker rooms, and library, to enhance the learning environment.

**Note** Jeffrey Newton, Superintendent of Schools, discussed and detailed some of the following:  
The process of budget preparation which involves workshops and collaboration with various town boards for transparency and efficiency.

An increase in special education prevalence rates necessitates additional resources and staffing to maintain optimal support for students.

Their grant funding success- the district has successfully obtained significant grant funding to support various initiatives, including mental health services and tutoring programs.

Efforts to collaborate with neighboring districts and the town on shared services and projects to optimize resources and reduce costs.

The need for major capital improvement projects, including roof replacements and facility upgrades, with potential state reimbursement.

The operating budget, including adjustments and allocations for various educational needs and resources.

Per pupil expenditure, highlighting the financial resources allocated per student.

Staffing needs, including the number of social workers, school psychologists, and speech pathologists, and the provision of stipends for team leaders.

Class sizes, the diversity of program offerings at the high school level, and the challenges of accommodating all students in desired classes.

A regional remote learning project and its potential impact on staffing needs and course offerings.

Details on the financial contributions to a consortium for course offerings and the financial mechanics involved.

The need for auditorium renovation, the concept of large lecture courses, and the overall space limitations at the high school.

Information on grant funding received and its allocation over a three-year period.

Mention of existing partnerships with local colleges for student advancement and course offerings.

An explanation regarding the increase in costs for substitute services.

The pros and cons of using artificial turf versus grass for school sports fields.

Capital items, including new roofs for the Aquatic Center, Niantic Center School, and Lillie B. Haynes School, interior door replacements, ongoing HVAC work, and building repairs at the Middle School, a new floor for the South Gym.

The total proposed capital project amount is \$9 million, with an estimated state reimbursement of almost \$2.7 million.

**Note** Ms. Hall said after watching the BOE presentation to the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Finance contributed some questions, which included the following:

- 1) 118 - Other Certified Salaries – What is driving the 7.95% increase?
- 2) 125 - Supplemental – Is the assistant athletic director a new position?
- 3) 127 – 30.84% increase- Can you provide details? Are we adding staffing?
- 4) 201 – Health Insurance – can we bring this down to SPP rate of 2%?
- 5) 204 – Is this State Pension (MERs) and Town pension? What is driving the increase?
- 6) 206- Unemployment – What’s driving the increase?
- 7) 210 – Other Employee Benefits? 25% increase- details?
- 8) 212- Retirement Severance – up to \$325k- is this temporary?
- 9) 436- up 32.86%- Should these be capital items? What types of work is being performed?
- 10) 437- Can you provide project details for:
  - a. Flanders Project Maintenance: \$27,500 proposed, \$0 this year.
  - b. Haynes: \$9,650 to \$27,500- what is the project?
  - c. District Wide: \$19k to \$44,500- what project is happening?
- 11) 560- Tuition- DW Tuit ext pl sped up \$320k
- 12) 615- HS Grounds up 37.75% from \$84k to \$115k
- 13) 641- Increase of \$160k to DW Textbooks- is there a plan for this? It doesn’t appear allocated to other schools like rest of budget.
- 14) 694- What new software is being added to drive \$150k increase?
- 15) 750 – Site Improvements – This sounds like a capital item for \$250k. What is this project? Is this a one time or recurring item?

**Note** Ms. Hall added that Mr. Gervais has circulated those answers to them.

 [3-21-24 BOF Questions.pdf](#)

**Note** Ms. Hall asked if parents have the ability to send their children to a different elementary school if they’re not happy with the class size. Mr. Newton said no, that when they redid the elementary schools, they redistricted the three schools, which they really try to keep balanced and if they permitted such changes, they wouldn’t be able to achieve that balance.

**Note** Ms. Hall asked how tuition is tied per student for Salem enrollment and Maryana Stevens, BOE Finance Director, explained that based on the agreement, there is a calculation that she prepares every year, and they’re always a couple years behind with the tuition, but then we catch up; within that reconciliation, she reconciles the previous year’s tuition and if they’ve overpaid, we refund them and if they’ve underpaid, we add it to the to the tuition.

**Note** Ms. Hall said during the High School tour one of the things that was mentioned was doing something to differentiate the common space from the cafeteria space, and that there would be money available from the state to help offset that cost.

She noted that it’s not part of not in the capital improvement project, so she’s wondering what those dollars would be through the revenue that the food service program generates.

**Note** Mr. Newton replied that what students pay for lunch goes into their food services revenue account, they get reimbursements from the state, but can’t use that money for anything other than cafeteria or kitchen-related items, so they can’t use those funds to divide the area.

**Note** Mr. Ginsberg asked if that barrier is listed anywhere else in the budget and Mr. Newton replied no, it’s just preliminary consideration of something they could do, but Dr. Lund will need to price it out.

**Note** Ms. Hall asked Mr. Newton to speak to the 50% or more increase in textbooks and he offered the following remarks:

The textbooks and about ties in with the reading program.

The majority of that increase is coming from a state mandate associated with the Right to Read Act.

They're charged with adopting a primary resource, K3.

But their Integrated Curriculum Committee really wanted to create a K5 adoption, so it was really vertically articulated from K all the way through 5.

So, we are on our third pilot and will be making a decision Wednesday afternoon.

What's budgeted is the initial cost associated with the adoption of a primary resource for literacy, K5.

That includes all the textbooks associated with the adoption, the software licensing, and the consumables.

So that cost wouldn't necessarily continue year after year.

There would be a cost, but it wouldn't be that large because this is an initial buy-in year essentially.

**Note** Ms. Hall asked if our students woefully behind in reading and Mr. Newton said no, our students are very competitive, and in the top third of our DERG for literacy across the board. He added that the state mandate is making them spend this money even though we didn't have a problem.

**Note** Mr. Newton briefly discussed fundraising efforts in the works and how they don't want those funds to supplant what they might need across the schools.

**Note** Mr. Ginsberg asked how they determine what stipends they offer to teachers that do extra, and Mr. Newton explained that it's laid out under contract negotiations.

**Note** Mr. Ginsberg said Mr. Newton mentioned the mental health specialist, how it's a three-year contract, so what happens after that?

**Note** Mr. Newton replied that it will have to come into the operating budget, but they're hopeful that they'll have a retirement of some sort a position, which they won't fill.

**Note** Mr. Ginsberg asked about the tutoring positions and Mr. Newton replied that it's a temporary contracted service with an outside company, which will end and not continue.

**Note** Mr. Steel asked how many social workers, school psychologists, and speech pathologists they have, that warrants a stipend as a team leader? Mr. Newton replied that they have at least five in each group, and they're spread across the schools.

**Note** Mr. Steel asked if there is a maximum for class size in the High School, as well as that 10 minimum? Mr. Newton said it really depends on the size of the room and that they do have students who aren't able to take a particular class due to size constraints.

**Note** Mr. Steel asked if there is potential for the wide, diverse curriculum that we have at the high school, that some of those needs could eventually be met by the regional remote learning? Mr. Newton replied in the affirmative and Mr. Steel asked if that might also reduce the need for additional staff.

**Note** Mr. Newton said he wouldn't say it would reduce staff, it's providing a different avenue for students to go off and experience other opportunities that we don't offer, without us having to hire additional staff.

**Note** Mr. Steel asked what our contribution is to the consortium and Mr. Newton said they're still working out the final fiscal analysis, but it will be roughly \$8,000. He added that on the other end of it the teacher will be paid \$8,000 for the course offering, so this isn't a moneymaker.

**Note** Mr. Steel asked about the \$250,000 renovation of the auditorium, said he understands the need for more space, but does he really think that kids need large lecture style courses?

Mr. Newton said he thinks it would be phenomenal and it could potentially more kids to take a course that they otherwise might be missing. He added that the \$250,000 is solely dedicated to the auditorium.

**Note** Mr. Steel asked if he feels like they're really in a classroom crunch at the high school and Mr. Newton replied that space is at a maximum.

**Note** Mr. Maxfield asked about the grant funding and if that amount is per year, and Mr. Newton explained that it's over a 3-year period.

**Note** Mr. Newton reported that they received word today that they did receive the PEG-PESHA grant again, for next year, which will offset some costs for the sound system in the auditorium.

**Note** The Board briefly discussed per pupil expenditures, and the financial resources allocated per student.

**Note** Mr. Birmingham asked about staffing needs, including the number of social workers, school psychologists, and speech pathologists, and the provision of stipends for team leaders, which Mr. Newton briefly discussed.

**Note** Mr. Newton explained the increase in retirement severance costs due to contractual obligations.

**Note** Ms. Stevens, Mr. Gervais, and the Board discussed the financial strategy of using bonds with lower interest rates and longer amortization periods (5, 10, or 20 years) compared to leasing for funding projects, and the consideration of appropriate amortization periods for bonds based on the lifespan of the assets being financed, with a preference for 5 or 10 years over 20 years for certain projects.

It was explained to the Board that the strategy of moving \$250,000 to capital from the operating budget is to reduce the budget and address capital needs through bonding.

**Note** Mr. Birmingham briefly discussed the merits of artificial grass as opposed to turf.

**Note** The Board discussed prioritizing roofing projects for various school buildings based on the severity of their conditions.

## 4. Public Discussion

### 4-1. Jamie Barr-Shelburne of 31 McElhaney Drive

**Note** Ms. Barr-Shelburne asked about finding the whereabouts of the \$60,000 from the Purdue Pharma for drug rehab and counseling services and a suggestion to reconsider a non-lapsing account for the Board of Education.

## 5. Board Comments

**Note** There was none.

## 6. Adjournment

**Note** MOTION (1)

Mr. Maxfield moved to adjourn the BOF March 25th, 2024, Special Meeting at 7:02 p.m.

Mr. Ginsberg seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

**Note** Respectfully Submitted,

Brooke Stevens, Recording Secretary