

**Sudbury Finance Committee
Virtual Meeting Minutes
October 19, 2023
7:00PM**

ATTENDANCE

Members of the Finance Committee present were: Co-Chair Joachim, Colin Wang, Susan Berry, Ryan Lynch, Henry Sorett, Michael Ferrari, and Maura Carty. Andrew Bettinelli arrived late.

ABSENT

Co-Chair Poch

ALSO ATTENDING THE MEETING

Finance Director Dennis Keohane and Town Manager Andrew Sheehan

ITEM 1: Welcome and Member Roll Call

Co-Chair Joachim called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00PM, declared a quorum present, and roll-called members present. He read the Municipal Remote Meeting Disclaimer.

Opening Remarks by Co-Chairs

Co-Chair Joachim reported that the Committee will discuss warrant articles.

ITEM 2: Public Comment

There was no public comment.

ITEM 3: Discuss Fall Town Meeting Articles

ARTICLE 8: FUND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT - FIREFIGHTERS

Co-Chair Joachim welcomed Town Manager Sheehan to the meeting.

Discussion included the following highlights:

- No pending retirements.
- Sick leave buyout at retirement benefit varies across communities, but the current Town policy brings the contract in line with other bargaining units.
- All backup financial materials are included in budget hearings in February for deliberations through March and April prior to Town Meeting.

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Ferrari and seconded by Mr. Lynch, it was voted to recommend approval of Article 8. Roll call vote: Co-Chair Joachim-Y, Ms. Berry-Y, Mr. Wang-Y, Mr. Bettinelli-Y, Mr. Ferrari-Y, Mr. Lynch-Y, Ms. Carty-A, and Mr. Sorett-Y. Motion carried 7-0-1.

Co-Chair Joachim read from a written statement submitted by Co-Chair Poch of his intention to vote in favor of Article 8.

ARTICLE 7: FAIRBANK COMMUNITY CENTER SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDS

The Committee engaged in further discussion of this Article because its prior vote recommending approval was split 5-4.

Discussion included the following comments:

- Given the information available at the present time, the Town has not explored all alternatives to reduce the \$900K to a lower amount, and we as a community need to be thoughtful and prudent with resources.
- Given where the project stands today, we must bring the project to completion.
- Given the fact that all construction is subject to inflation, it would be “penny smart and pound foolish” to stop the project at this time.
- Rather than taking the amount from free cash, funds could be taken from the stabilization fund.

Following discussion, it was the consensus of the Committee not to take a new vote on this Article.

ARTICLE 11: NIXON ROOF ARTICLE

Discussion of this Article included the following:

- Approval of this article gives the SPS flexibility if it becomes clear before Town Meeting that MSBA funding will not be available: design of the project could go forward and a proposal made at Town Meeting to repair the roof.
- Insofar as roof replacements are standard maintenance of any structure, this is a cost of “doing business” and although a large sum of money, it is fiscally responsible to extend the life of the structure.
- Accompanying the roof repair, similar to the DPW building and community center, should be the proposal to provide solar as a source of direct or indirect revenue and energy savings. Solar-ready is not sufficient.
- In light of the untenable situation of the present condition of the Nixon roof and other roofs, going forward at this time in planning for debt service over the next ten years is fiscally responsible.
- Insofar as it has been confirmed that the building will be sustainable for the life of the roof, and the strong advance capital planning, this is a worthy project.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Berry and seconded by Mr. Bettinelli, it was unanimously voted to recommend approval of Article 11. Roll call vote: Co-Chair Joachim-Y, Ms. Berry-Y, Mr. Wang-Y, Mr. Bettinelli-Y, Mr. Ferrari-Y, Mr. Lynch-Y, Ms. Carty-Y and Mr. Sorett-Y. Motion carried 8-0.

Chair Joachim read from a written statement submitted by Co-Chair Poch of his intention to vote not to recommend approval of Article 11.

ARTICLE 12: CHAPTER 70 MONEY

Co-Chair Joachim reviewed background on creation of tax rates: a) the tax rate is estimated at the beginning of the fiscal year; b) at the end of the calendar year, which is mid-way through the fiscal year, the aid to be received from the state is known, and the exact amount of tax needed from taxpayers in order to meet the budget voted at May Town Meeting can be calculated. He added that all the Chapter 70 monies go to SPS, but because the state gave more to the Town this year than anticipated, less would need to be raised from taxpayers if no further budget changes were made.

Mr. Wang left the meeting.

Discussion ensued including the following highlights:

- If the vote is “no,” taxes are lower, and if the vote is “yes,” taxes are higher by an estimated \$35.00 for the average house.
- Re-evaluation is needed as part of the upcoming budget discussions and the regular process next year to commit additional resources at that time.

- Insofar as there was a well-vetted rationale behind the override passed in the spring, there was a clear need to support the override coming out of a pandemic; however there was not a substantive reason for the additional \$232K which becomes the base for the FY25 budget and not sustainable going forward.
- While there is no question that members of the Committee are in support of Sudbury's public education, its responsibility is a fiscal one allowing for full and open expression of the impact of these articles.
- If Town Meeting votes in favor of adding \$232K to the school budget, that amount will carry over to the next year and become the new base and the decision will be made by what percentage that number is increased.
- The school has designated funds to be used for a) student facing initiatives; b) adjusting caseload management for smaller groups; c) mitigating class size increase; d) reach items on the published list of tier 2 list; e) world language review; and f) more project-based learning.
- Relief to the taxpayers given by the state in the amount of \$232K represents one-third of the amount initially pledged by the taxpayers of \$750K.
- Insofar as there are many upcoming capital projects, the burden on the taxpayers will be exacerbated by asking for more money from the taxpayers now.

Ms. Carty moved to approve Article 12, and Ms. Berry seconded. The motion failed by a vote of 1-6, as follows: Co-Chair Joachim-N, Ms. Berry-N, Mr. Bettinelli-N, Mr. Ferrari-N, Mr. Lynch-N, Ms. Carty-Y and Mr. Sorett-N.

Chair Joachim read from a written statement submitted by Co-Chair Poch of his intention to vote not to recommend approval of Article 12.

ARTICLE 13: FUNDING OF STATE APPROVED SPECIAL EDUCATION OUT-OF-DISTRICT TUITION COST INCREASE

Mr. Bettinelli read the edited version of Article 13 as follows:

To authorize the School Committee to accept and expend any additional monies that may be made available in FY2024 to the Town by the State Legislature pursuant to Chapter 70 or otherwise and from any other federal, state or local grant program to school departments.

Discussion included the following:

- If the money comes from a grant, there is no need for a warrant article; however if the money comes from Chapter 70, then it is the same issue as Article 12.
- Insofar as there is no assurance that the Town will receive the money and in what form, it is premature to vote on the article.
- Although the funds are unlikely to come from Chapter 70, discomfort was expressed by having that language in the article and the language may be revised at the May Town Meeting; in any event strike the reference. If a pass-through to the schools, it will negate the need for an article.
- Insofar as the taxpayers voted yes to provide an override to cover increased out-of-district costs, should not these monies be returned to the taxpayer.

Ms. Carty moved to approve Article 13, and Ms. Berry seconded. The motion failed by a vote of 1-6, as follows: Co-Chair Joachim-N, Ms. Berry-N, Mr. Bettinelli-N, Mr. Ferrari-N, Mr. Lynch-N, Ms. Carty-Y and Mr. Sorett-N.

Chair Joachim read from a written statement submitted by Co-Chair Poch of his intention to vote not to recommend approval of Article 13.

Review of votes on Articles

Co-Chair Joachim assigned members to write explanations of votes on the articles as follows:

- Mr. Ferrari – Article 13
- Ms. Berry and Co-Chair Joachim – Article 14
- Mr. Lynch – Article 11
- Co-Chair Joachim – Article 8

He also reviewed the summary of explanations already submitted and changes were suggested.

ITEM 4: General Business

- **Transfers and other business**
There were none.
- **Calendar**
Next meeting: October 23 at 6:45PM Conference Room B, LS
- **Approval of Meeting Minutes of September 19**
Upon motion duly made by Ms. Carty and seconded by Ms. Berry, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of September 19, 2023 as amended. Roll call vote: Co-Chair Joachim-Y, Ms. Berry-Y, Mr. Bettinelli-Y, Mr. Ferrari-Y, Mr. Lynch-Y, Ms. Carty-Y and Mr. Sorett-Y. Motion carried 7-0, unanimous.

ITEM 5: Public comment

There was none.

ITEM 6: Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Sorett and seconded by Mr. Lynch, it was voted to adjourn. Roll call vote: Co-Chair Joachim-Y, Ms. Berry-Y, Mr. Bettinelli-Y, Mr. Ferrari-Y, Mr. Lynch-Y, Ms. Carty-Y, and Mr. Sorett-Y. Motion carried 7-0, unanimous.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Martin Barraford
Recording Secretary