

Approved: February 24, 2025

TOWN OF WINCHENDON

Tri-Board Meeting Board of Selectmen-Finance Committee-School Committee

Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes

Thursday February 13, 2025, 6:30pm

Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium, 109 Front St., Winchendon, Mass.

Board of Selectmen Present:

Rick Ward, Chair, Andrew Beauvais, Vice Chair, Audrey LaBrie, Melissa Blanchard, and Erika Eitland

Also Present: Bill McKinney, Town Manager and Debra Dennis, Executive Assistant

Finance Committee Members Present: Tom Kane, Chair, Dr. Maureen Ward, Vice Chair, Charles Corts, Doug Delay, Diane Coulter, Adam Gardner, and Mike Giovannucci

School Committee Members Present: Karen Kast-McBride Chair, David Iannocone, Vice Chair, Jake Catlin, Mike Barbaro, and Eleni Marinelli

Also Present: Dr. Marc Gosselin, School Superintendent, and Liz Latoria, School Business Manager

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- Draft FY26 Town Budget Presentation
 - Draft FY26 School Department Budget Presentation
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6:30 PM School Chair Karen Kast-McBride called the School Committee to order. Board of Selectmen Chair Rick Ward called the Board of Selectmen meeting to order at 6:31pm. Finance Committee Chair Tom Kane called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:31pm. All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance. School Committee Chair asked if anyone would be audio or video recording this meeting tonight to which there was no response heard.

The MSBA Requirements and Next Steps was taken out of order first.

1. **TOWN MANAGER FISCAL FORECAST**-This was discussed during #5.
2. **MSBA REQUIREMENTS AND NEXT STEPS**-Superintendent Gosselin went over the MSBA accelerated repair program. He said we applied last year and we had a visit this fall. We have been accepted into the program to replace the roofs, windows and doors. He said we can't do Murdock because it's not 30 years old. There are three key actions: forming the project team, schematic design, and funding the project. Right now if moving forward would have to have a certified funding vote for schematic design. Selectwoman LaBrie asked what the dollar amount for funding vote of schematic design. Superintendent Gosselin said we wouldn't know until we put it out for bids. Selectwoman LaBrie said she is concerned with potentially putting on warrant article, warrant is already open and closing April 7th. Board of Selectmen Chair Ward asked about the funding by MSBA for the schematic design. Superintendent Gosselin said if we don't do the project then they don't reimburse us for the schematic design. The reimbursement is normally 80 to 90 %. Chair Ward said he is concerned even if they cover 80%. The town has to come up with a couple million dollars. I don't think the residents can handle it. I'm looking at dollars and impact of the residents. Selectwoman Eitland said what important about MSBA is this town can't

afford a new school. What are the age of buildings tonight? We all went through the boiler failing. If we have these resources available to us we need to do it. This project is only going to get more expensive. School Committee Member Michael Barbaro said Toy Town and Memorial was built in the 60's. There have been some on-going repairs of the schools over time but not major repairs. All we are asking is for the seed money. We are trying to spread it out over a twenty year period. It extends the life of these buildings for another thirty years. Selectwoman Eitland said funding MSBA uses a sliding scale. Accelerated repair program investment now benefit from it. Superintendent Gosselin urged everyone to strongly consider the plan. Finance Committee Chair Tom Kane commented from time to time there has been talk of consolidating the school building from three to two buildings. Is there flexibility in the terms if one of the school buildings are closed? School Committee Chair said the School Committee has no plans to close any schools in the district. It is only the purview of the School Committee. Finance Committee member Mike Giovannuci asked how many students do we have. Superintendent Gosselin said roughly 1200. Every room in the building is used now. We don't have the capacity to merge two schools into one.

3. **TOWN MEETING SCHEDULE FOR MSBA-** This was discussed during MSBA Requirements and Next Steps #2.
4. **IMPACT OF GOVERNORS DRAFT BUDGET ON OUR TOWN SCHOOL BUDGET-** This was discussed during #1.
5. **DRAFT TOWN AND SCHOOL BUDGET DISCUSSION School Budget Presentation-** Superintendent Gosselin said he has been working closely with the School Business Manager Liz Latoria on the budget. This is a preliminary budget. We will eventually get down to a final budget that will be presented at Town Meeting. Superintendent Gosselin went over the School Budget presentation. The three budget models are Level Service Model \$18,685,715 and increase of \$1,252,789 which is a 7.19% increase, Level Service Plus Model \$18,869,623 an increase of \$1,436,697 which is a 8.24% increase, and Program Improvement Model \$19,287,470 an increase of \$1,854,544 which is a 10.64% increase. Finance Chair Kane you as the Superintendent and the Town Manager focus on how much money do we have. What do we need to add, what is the cost of an override? Looking at the numbers we see there is a big gap of what the school needs. It needs to be done together. Board of Selectmen Chair Ward said he is concerned looking at the three models assume the push is the top model. The amount of an override has an effect on the community. If we can get the amount down we have a chance of getting an override. He said he will not support an override that is not level service funding. Encourage School Committee and Town Manager to look at level service model. We also need to make cuts of money that hasn't been used. He said level service funding has an increase of over one million dollars. School Committee Chair Kast-McBride said we are funding six town positions with the indirect costs we pay. Selectwoman LaBrie said that's a discussion for another day, we don't have those numbers. Mike Barbaro said he is fearful if we start pointing fingers. We need to promote to this community that we are in a financial conundrum. Selectwoman Eitland said all department can't take the cuts. We need to do more than the Level Service Model for the town. Selectwoman LaBrie said it would be helpful to break down the request for the Level Service Plus Model.

Town Budget Presentation-Bill McKinney Town Manager went over the town budget. Pension, Health insurance and debt. Between those three items we will be around a million dollars in the hole. Put together a level service budget. Health Insurance went up 16.4% increase. Expenses have increased 3.95 million dollars which includes the school. Revenue has increased 757,864. Take expenses –revenue we are short \$3,958,002. He said we need an override. We need to find out what amount will be acceptable to the town. Mike Barbaro commented we should look into

couples plan for health insurance. Selectwoman LaBrie said she attended the MMA conference and they had a workshop on overrides. School Committee Chair Kast-McBride said we need to start talking about the override. We need to come up with and message the override correctly.

Five minutes recess at 8:40pm. Returned at 8:53pm.

Finance Committee Chair Kane moved to pass over #3 and #4 since they have been already discussed in #5. Selectwoman LaBrie seconded. All aye.

6. MEMBERS COMMENTS

Superintendent Gosselin said MSBA has deadlines.

School Committee Member David Iannacone, said for so long the Town of Winchendon has done just enough, barely the minimum. We need to add value to the town.

School Committee member Eleni Marinelli said we need to invest in students you need to invest in teachers, and staff.

Selectwoman LaBrie commented substitute teachers get paid \$100 a day which is \$14.81 an hour.

Selectman Beauvais thanked everyone who came out tonight. It is important we have a united front. A lot of information was shared tonight. It is time we invest in our students and our town.

Board of Selectmen Chair Ward thanked Superintendent Gosselin and Town Manager McKinney for their presentations. As a selectmen I represent the students but I need to represent Senior Citizens and people struggling in the town. We have fixed costs that we don't control. There is going to be an override. I'm going to fight for reductions and in the end we will have a final plan. The information we are looking for is to see the plan as to what we are asking and what will happen if the override doesn't pass. We need to know where the cuts need to be made. He said he expects the Town Manager to give every resident if override passes the amount of increase on their taxes if house is valued at \$200,000 or \$300,000. We will come up with a final plan to present to the town.

Selectwoman Eitland said we need to know what the communication strategy is. The Town Manager said I haven't put out what would happen if we don't get an override because it would be bad on staff morale.

7. PUBLIC INPUT-School Committee Chair Kast-McBride went over the guidelines for public comments.

Tina Santos-concerns/questions/suggestions. 14 person van in budget scenario-WCAC has van use after school program. Share resources/staffing. Concern indirect costs Medicaid reimbursement with the town help the school. Both budgets are tough. Think outside the box work together more. Department/Staff other resources to share. Capital Projects-back burner remind these building School/Fire Station/Town Hall. Don't agree with closing a school it was a huge issue when discussed in the past. Administrators focused on school choice and programs. We can't keep cutting. We need to focus on school choice.

Marc Dorwart-Finance Committee saw accounts weren't getting balanced. Finance Committee's responsibility is oversight. Did research. DLS says Finance Committees in the town are financial watchdogs.

Tiffany Newton-questioned budget proposed today. Presented today all assumed there would be an override. Is there going to be a budget A no override and budget B what we are asking with an override. Town Manager McKinney said we are going to have at least two budgets. With the override we might have a high number and a lower level and also one without the override. School Committee Member Mike Barbaro commented about the timeline for the election first prior to Town Meeting. Give time to reach out to people about the override. Move election to after the Town Meeting. Finance Committee Chair Kane said he agrees but we need to have a plan and get the information out. Sit down come up with a timeline, when we will have a budget. Protect programs and add value. Selectwoman Eitland said the Ad Hoc Committee meets next week and now we know what we are working for. Question now is how much and how do we get the information out.

Christine HG-Haven't heard how we are going to fix the problem. How are we going to fix it so it doesn't happen again?

Marc Dorwart-As a resident what is the dooms day scenario if we don't have an override.

Selectwoman Eitland thanked Tina, Mark and Tiffany this is the kind of communication we need. If people have suggestions send to the Town Manager's office either to Town Manager McKinney or Debra Dennis. They can forward them to the Ad Hoc Committee.

8. **ADJOURNMENT:** Selectwoman LaBrie moved to adjourn. Selectwoman Eitland seconded. Vote: All aye.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:03pm.

Respectfully submitted

Debra Dennis

Debra Dennis, Executive Assistant

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