



TOWN OF NORTON  
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Select Board  
Joint Meeting Minutes  
April 11, 2024

I. Call to Order by Chair

The April 11, 2024 joint meeting of the Norton Select Board, Norton Finance Committee, and Norton School Committee was held in the Gymnasium of the Henri A. Yelle Elementary School, 64 West Main Street, Norton, MA 02766 as well as remotely (Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83225589285>; Phone: 646-558 8656; Webinar ID: 832 2558 9285), and Mr. Kevin Snyder, Chair of the Select Board; Ms. Paula Daniels, Chair of the Finance Committee, and Ms. Sheri Cohen, Chair of the School Committee called their respective meetings to order at 7:06 P.M.

Member(s) present:

**Select Board:** Ms. Denise Luciano, Ms. Megan Artz, Mr. Alec Rich, III and Mr. Steven Hornsby. Also in attendance: Mr. Michael D. Yunits, Town Manager and Mr. James Puello, Town Accountant.

**Finance Committee:** Mr. Paul Schleicher, Ms. Sandra Ollerhead, Mr. Zack Tsilis, Mr. Cody Thompson, Mr. William Rotondi, Mr. Frank J. Parker, III, Mr. Stephen Evans, and Ms. Bonnie Yezukevich.

**School Committee:** Mr. Nicholas Schleicher, Ms. Justine Callanan, Mr. Deniz Savas and Mr. Daniel Sheedy. Also in attendance: Dr. Jennifer O'Neill, Superintendent of Schools and Ms. Kristine Hadfield, School Business Manager.

Mr. Snyder advised that the protocol the Select Board, Finance Committee, and School Committee agreed to was that Mr. Snyder would Chair the joint meeting and that due to the large crowd, each speaker was limited to 3 minutes to speak at a time.

• Review of 1 Percent Budget - Superintendent of Norton Public Schools

Dr. Jennifer O'Neill, Superintendent of Schools, stated that with a 1% budget, it would be a total reduction of \$3,457,324 to their request for FY25 for their level-services need, which would be a cut of 29.4 staff members or a total of \$2,359,847 in staffing reductions. She emphasized that their FY25 budget request is for level-services and that there are no additional staff included in the budget presented. Dr. O'Neill stated that these 29.4 staff members go across teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and other bargaining units as well. Dr. O'Neill expressed that there are positions in their budget that are truly needed for students to get what they need academically as well as socially and emotionally.

Mr. Thompson asked Dr. O'Neill of the 29.4 positions how many are they projecting would be student-facing and what impact it would have to class sizes. Dr. O'Neill replied that almost every single position is student-facing when you think about the role that these professionals have in their classrooms. She expressed that these positions are providing enrichment to their students,

some provide academic support to students and also working day-to-day with staff to improve their instructional practice. Dr. O'Neill stated that when they look at class sizes, they have made every effort to keep the cuts away from the elementary classrooms because they know that class size matters, especially in the earlier years, such as the crucial years where they are learning to read and write. She advised that there are more middle school and high school positions within this budget, which will really impact the class sizes. Dr. O'Neill stated that they will see a classroom size, they will go from 23-24 students per classroom to somewhere within the 30s for high school classrooms depending on the way the schedule works out. She advised that with the Middle School, they have a smaller cohort of rising 6<sup>th</sup> graders, so this budget also includes some schedule changes and some reformatting of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Mr. Hornsby thanked Dr. O'Neill for her response and stated that he just wanted to clarify because the question was a little vague and specifically asked how many teaching positions versus how many administrative positions would be cut and asked her to elaborate because at their last meeting it was approximately 40 positions estimated to be cut and now it has been cut down to 29 positions. Dr. O'Neill replied that the 40+ was an average, so when they took a look at the number they had to get to, typically they project with a new staff member a certain level (Master's Degree and Step X, etc.) and that was their "best guess at that time." Dr. O'Neill further stated that to determine what positions these will actually be, they started looking at who is retiring because those retiring typically make a lot more; so, when those retiring staff who are \$35,000 to \$40,000 more than newly entering staff, that affects those cuts. Dr. O'Neill stated that there would be approximately 19 real teaching positions on that list of cuts. Mr. Hornsby then asked of those 19 positions if any of those were the temporary ones that were paid for with the ESSER funds and Dr. O'Neill answered "yes."

Mr. Tsilis asked if the State and Federal funding has been locked in at this point. Dr. O'Neill stated that all of the Federal grants that the School Department received they don't know the numbers until the third week of July, so they make a projection off of a best estimate of numbers. Dr. O'Neill noted that the House Ways and Means Committee recently met and they have recommended that the minimum funding per pupil increased from \$30 per student to \$104 per student and if that actually comes to fruition, that is an extra \$74 per student that they would receive from the State. She stated that there are still several cycles of hoops to go through before it reaches the Governor's desk.

Ms. Daniels asked what happens in September if their School Choice money has decreased because less School Choice students are coming to Norton and then the potential of more Norton students going out of district, specifically where the out-of-district tuition was increasing how that would impact their budget. Dr. O'Neill stated that the School Choice funds in the FY25 budget are funds that they are receiving for this year; so, they have payments throughout the year and then they have a larger payment at the end of June based on some of their Special Education costs and other things they tweak up until the very last day. She stated that if School Choice tuition reduces, it will impact the FY26 budget and the out of district Special Education. She pointed out that they do have the benefit of the Circuit Breaker Program, which is their reimbursement from the State for some of those Special Education costs and that is something they are always advocating that they increase. She noted that right now, it is a 75% reimbursement rate.

Mr. Snyder referred to staff reductions and asked what that means for activities and transportation as far as the impacts. Dr. O'Neill stated that the 1% budget has significant reduction in supplies, software, moving a few salaries into revolving accounts, increase in high school athletic fees and increase in club fees as well as for transportation fees. Mr. Snyder asked if extra curriculars would be cut and used examples of band and chorus. Dr. O'Neill stated that those enrichment programs would be moved to after school, so it would be something that is no longer offered during the day and is offered after school. Dr. O'Neill informed the Committee and the Board that she made a commitment to her staff that she would let her staff know by April 26<sup>th</sup> of the cuts and thanked the

Board and Committees for being understanding to the lack of specifics to certain things, such as positions. Ms. Daniels asked what the increase in fees would be for clubs, athletics, and transportation. Dr. O'Neill advised that the proposed fees, which still need to be voted on by the School Committee, would increase to \$300 for athletic fees for the High School; Middle School would increase \$50 per sport; and a \$50 increase for transportation.

Mr. Paul Schleicher asked if the State does increase the per pupil by \$74 how much that would mitigate some of the layoffs. Dr. O'Neill stated that it wouldn't and they would still need all of the layoffs to take place because it would be a benefit of being able to recall staff. She advised that legally, they are required to notify staff if they are being laid off by no later than June 15<sup>th</sup>, but what they would do, based off of what that calculation is and while also working closely with the Town Manager and his department to make sure that the funding is able to come right to the School Department, they would be looking at positions that they would be able to bring back, which would likely require a vote at town meeting in the Fall because it wasn't initially part of their budget that was approved. Dr. O'Neill pointed out that typically, it is more challenging to bring back staff in the middle of October, so they would be looking at the most beneficial way to restore services to their schools. Mr. Thompson asked in reference to previous discussions on transportation that the School Department would be implementing Massachusetts General Law (MGL) requirements and potentially eliminating transportation for 7th grade and up for those within a 2-mile radius of their school and asked if that was still true. Dr. O'Neill replied that they have looked at a lot of options to try and make the 1% budget work and this option is still on the table, though it was not as much of a total savings as they originally anticipated because they would be losing those fees that they currently take in, which right now is around \$130,000 in fees that would go away.

- Review of 1 Percent Budget - Town Manager

Mr. Yunits explained that a 1% budget for the General Government side would be a reduction of \$1,145,004. He advised that the impacts from a 1% budget include the elimination of the Public Health Nurse position, one position in the Highway Department, the Council on Aging (COA) Van Driver, the Department of Public Works (DPW) director, the COA Program Coordinator (not funded), a reduction in all educational seminars, Police Department reduction of \$108,128 in salaries, which would result in the elimination of the Elementary School Part-Time School Resource Office (SRO) and reducing the hours of the Full-Time SRO, reduced response time, periodic station closure, hiring freeze in positions vacant due to retirement not being filled, backlogs in firearms licensing, evidence processing, case dispositions, court case discovery and tracking, and a decrease in availability of personnel for active ongoing investigations.

Mr. Yunits advised that with this 1% budget, the Fire Department would close the Chartley Station, decreased ability to handle simultaneous calls, response times would increase across the western side of town, inability to operate 2 ambulances at times, increasing response times, and reducing ambulance receipts, decrease in ability to handle non-emergency services to the public, potential deterioration on the Town's Insurance Services Organization (ISO) rating, which could increase insurance costs for homeowners and businesses. The Town Manager mentioned that the Fire Department's salary account was reduced by \$233,120. Mr. Yunits informed the audience that he left a handout for those would like one and stated that as they are all aware, they have to adhere to the limits of Proposition 2 ½ and outlined what a 2 ½ increment for FY25 would look like and itemized as follows:

Increment	\$1,141,693.00
Health Insurance	(\$322,000.00)
Retirement	(\$229,038.00)
Dispatch Assessment	(\$150,000.00)
Other Insurance	(\$78,520.00)
<b>Available for Budget</b>	<b>\$362,135.00</b>

He emphasized that the \$362,135 remaining is what is left to fund all of the budgets, both for both the General Government and the School Department.

Mr. Nicholas Schleicher clarified that at town meeting, it was voted to fund a DPW Director. Mr. Yunits corrected him and stated that at town meeting, it was voted to establish this position, but they can't establish a position that cannot be funded.

Ms. Daniels asked Police Chief Brian Clark to speak to reducing the SRO positions, what that would mean, and what schools may not have them. Chief Clark responded that it is a fluid situation. He stated that from what he sees, they have to close the station on weekends and there isn't a way around it. He pointed out that custody exchanges are usually done in the parking lot of the Police Station, so that will be impacted, and proposed being open from 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. on weekends. Chief Clark stated that he was against the SRO position because it wasn't going to be sustainable. He explained that if all of their officers are healthy, they don't need as much, but if they are not healthy, there is a higher demand for overtime. He advised that they might have to pull an SRO and stated that he doesn't want to get into specifics of what they do in public, but broadly explained that they provide security and a secure environment at the schools, deal with mental health issues, security at schools, and things of that nature. Chief Clark emphasized that they have a robust SRO Program and described them as "rock stars." He pointed out that if something slips through the cracks by reducing or removing some of these SROs that there could be serious repercussions.

Mr. Parker asked Chief Simmons the potential increase in insurances for homeowners. Chief Simmons stated that he doesn't have those figures and explained that it is an equation based off of the type of equipment, how much equipment, number of stations, etc. Mr. Sheedy referred to emergency services and asked if this could impact mutual aid for other communities if their staffing levels are low and if Norton might be relying too much on them to assist us. Chief Simmons stated that he was correct on both accounts. Chief Simmons pointed out that they had a 2-alarm fire to respond to last week where they had several communities come to assist with putting it out.

Mr. Kevin O'Neil, a resident of the Town and member of the PBC, asked if the unemployment cost has been estimated with the layoffs. Mr. Yunits answered that with a 1% increase, they did put aside an amount for unemployment. Mr. Snyder asked the Finance Committee with the 1% budget if it includes any use of Free Cash or Stabilization. Ms. Daniels answered that they would be using \$1.2 million of Free Cash and no Stabilization funds.

Mr. Brian Stalters of 7 Stony Field Road, came to speak on behalf of the Norton Public Library and informed the Board and Committees that he is on the Board of Directors. He reminded the Board that they asked for a 3.8% increase to increase from 45 to 50 hours to be certified and get

back on track; however, if they get a 1% increase, that will be reducing the number of passes they have and they are going try to keep everyone that they can, but if they stay at 45 hours, they may be decertified. Mr. Stalters stated that it would cost around \$17,000 to have the Library open 50 hours per week and they would then be certified. He pointed out that it takes 2 to 4 years to be recertified. Mr. Stalters noted that the money the Library is asking for from the Town is for salaries only. He further stated that \$150,000 comes from donations and anything else they need they are scrambling for money. Mr. Yunits pointed out that the \$46,000 in State Aid wouldn't be available either if they are decertified. Mr. Stalters replied that this year, the Library got \$40,000 for being open 45 hours per week and they lose 12% because they are not at 50 hours. Mr. Stalters stated that next year if they don't increase the hours, the State might not be as lenient and they could see a potential reduction in the State Aid. Mr. O'Neil expressed that if the after-school programs and offerings get reduced as well as SROs and other services, the Library becomes even more important because there are less options for things to do for the kids.

Mr. Thompson asked Mr. Yunits to explain the impact of the removed position for the COA and the Van Driver position. Mr. Yunits stated that the new Senior Center will open and the hope was to have a functional Senior Center, but he emphasized that the Director for the Council on Aging/Human Services, Ms. Beth Rossi, is dealing with a lot of people with needs and the employees there help with food and housing and that is her main focus. The Town Manager expressed that she was really hoping for a Program Director to coordinate the programs and the Van Driver. Mr. Yunits pointed out that with the new building, Norton will be one of the few communities without a Van Driver and will be relying on volunteers again. Mr. Yunits stated that a lot of the services provided at the COA are confidential and volunteers can't do that side of things, so it is really going to stretch their work load. Mr. Thompson stated that there will be no way for people to drive themselves to this facility and with no Program Director so no programs with nothing to do even if they can get there. Mr. Yunits responded that it will be very similar to what is currently offered at the COA and they will keep the programs the same. Ms. Cohen clarified that the Van Driver wouldn't just being take seniors to the Senior Center, but to doctors' appointments and Mr. Yunits confirmed that was correct and he added that it would also be used by Veterans to go to the VA in Brockton and take people to the stores, especially since we don't have a grocery store in town anymore.

- Discussion of Proposition 2½ Override Procedures with Town Counsel

Mr. Yunits introduced Attorney Lauren Goldberg of town counsel. Attorney Goldberg explained that Proposition 2 ½ is a very complex statute and set of rules. She advised that she was going to explain the requirements to start, which is comprised of two parts. She stated that the first part is the appropriation needed at town meeting and the second a vote of the residents on the ballot at the polls. Attorney Goldberg pointed out that it is not effective if there is a rejection of the Proposition 2 ½ on the vote and that there is no particular order in regard to the ballot question and town meeting and that is up to the Select Board to decide. Attorney Goldberg stated that the Select Board is restricted to call for an election for a ballot question at least 35 days prior to the date of the election. She emphasized that the exact form of the question has to be voted on by the Select Board and written notice has to be delivered to the Town Clerk no later than 35 days. She reiterated that the Town can call for special election at any time, but again, no sooner than that 35 days prior to the date of the special election. Attorney Goldberg noted that if the election comes before the appropriation, there is an information aspect to what the Select Board, Finance Committee, and School Committee produces where there needs to be more public discussion and what it looks like (more publicity) and votes by the various boards because there wouldn't have been a discussion at town meeting. Alternatively, when town meeting is first, she pointed out that there are lots of discussions of what the budget will look like with or without the override. She stated that if the election goes first, it leaves two options: 1) go to town meeting with 1% budget

without override if the override fails; and 2) go to override again and vote override budget contingent with a ballot question. Attorney Goldberg advised that they can go to the voters as many times as possible with 35-days-notice. Attorney Goldberg suggested that they may want to factor in the State election and determining when to hold this special election. She further stated that the override can be presented at town meeting a couple of different ways: 1) budget chart having columns with "Recommended 1%" in one column and 2) additional amounts for each department if the override passes. Attorney Goldberg noted that if it passes at the election before town meeting, they can vote on the override budget at town meeting. She explained that town meeting controls how much money is appropriated, but town meeting isn't required to fund up to what has been requested and isn't prohibited from funding something different as long as it is within the scope of the article. She advised that you could go to town meeting and use a different funding source, but it could affect the amount being appropriated, but it wouldn't change the amount of the override request.

Mr. Nicholas Schleicher asked for brief overview of an override versus a debt-exclusion. Attorney Goldberg stated that an override is a permanent increase in the Town's ability to raise taxes; in the first year, the override is used for the purposes for which it is appropriated and in future years, it is available for appropriation like any other tax dollar. In contrast, Attorney Goldberg explained that a debt-exclusion is a temporary increase in the levy limit and exists only as long as the loan related to the project is outstanding. She added that with a debt-exclusion, it allows just enough for the amount of the principal and interest of the loan to be raised outside of the levy limit. Mr. Nicholas Schleicher questioned with a hypothetical \$3 million override, which he stated was clearly not enough for the School Department, if there is a limit on the number of overrides a town can pass. Attorney Goldberg stated that as long as they don't exceed the levy ceiling, which is essentially the most that the Town can raise under State law, then they can do as many overrides as they want, but it is only the Select Board that can put the override on the ballot. Mr. Sheedy asked if once an override amount is written, if that amount can that be changed; i.e. if they pass a \$3 million override, if someone at town meeting can motion to reduce it to \$2 million. Attorney Goldberg stated that it can still be changed at town meeting as long as it is within the scope of what was recommended. She explained that is usually very difficult to reduce an override amount because you would have to reduce it by line and you cannot just say let's decrease everything by one-third because that is not how that works. Attorney Goldberg noted that there is a way to get an override amount to change and pass with no detail, but then you still need to come back because you still need to appropriate the money. She emphasized that it is very unusual and is something that the Town Moderator would have to okay ahead of time as well as the proposer would have to be prepared to do a lot of math. Ms. Luciano asked if it was more common for a specific dollar amount or a percentage. Attorney Goldberg answered that it is more common for it to be a specific dollar amount, and even if it were a percentage, it would translate the same in dollars. Ms. Daniels asked if at town meeting they vote to pass an override of \$3 million and then the Select Board has to vote to put an override on the ballot with a specific amount if that number could be different than what was voted on at town meeting. Attorney Goldberg answered that it depends. She explained that if town meeting votes to approve an override contingent upon approval at the polls, then a change in the amount for the ballot wouldn't be for the amount that the Town intended it to be; if you already had an override amount on the ballot, the election went first, and they had voted an amount, the Department of Revenue (DOR) stated that as long as the Town spends the amount of the override that was specified in the ballot question for that purpose, then you have the override and could raise the levy-limit/tax higher, but it would still be up to town meeting to decide whether to do that. Mr. Nicholas Schleicher clarified that at town meeting any resident can say a figure and asked if this would be like any regular budget item and they can give a recommendation or is it a "free for all." Attorney Goldberg replied that she would like to say that town meeting would not be a "free for all" and that if a motion was made at town meeting, it would have to be within the scope of the article; if the article that is presented includes a base-



budget of say \$1 million and an override budget of \$1 million, if there is a motion at town meeting to then have the override budget be at \$5 million, that she would say that the Town Moderator would say that's outside of the scope, which Mr. Jack Conway (Town Moderator) confirmed. Mr. Parker stated that they would still have to have the amendment in writing, and Attorney Goldberg stated that it would have to follow the same procedure as amending an article at town meeting. Mr. Parker asked if they would be voting by line-item and Attorney Goldberg answered that it has to be by line-item.

- Town Meeting Logistics

Mr. Yunits asked if they are going to do an override, how they want to handle town meeting; do they want to start the first night and do the budget and then determine if they can finish that same evening or continue to Wednesday. Mr. Yunits suggested that the first night they take up the budget. The Town Manager explained that if town meeting moves quickly, they can take up some articles, but expressed that he believes it would be smoother to do it that way. Attorney Goldberg explained that there are 2 ways to handle town meeting with base budget in one article and override article in another.

- FY25 Budget Discussion and/or Vote on Override

Mr. Yunits noted that he had sent out to everyone the different budget scenarios so people can start thinking about if they were to do an override while also showing what will happen over 5 years. He pointed out that the first 2 years have surplus, then their funds start to become significantly reduced. Mr. Yunits referred to the show Shark Tank when they were talking about 5-year projections and quoted Mark Cuban when someone was presenting their 5-year business plan and he stated "Are you kidding me? 5-year business plan? What business prepares a 5-year business plan that actually meets that?" Mr. Yunits advised that Mr. Cub said he was out of there after that. Mr. Yunits emphasized that the figures put before them this evening are based off of their best projects and advised that they don't know what is going to happen in 5 years. The Town Manager stated that if everyone did 3% increases, after FY25, they would have a surplus of \$544,391, which they don't have to spend, but they could use it for Capital, Stabilization, or OPEB. Mr. Yunits stated that right now, they don't have money to set aside for Capital. Mr. Yunits advised that another scenario is based off of a \$3 million override is with a projected 4% annual increase, which shows a deficit starting in the third year of \$813,000. The next option the Town Manager explained was a \$3.5 million override with 3% annual increase, which would be fine until FY28 where they would run into a deficit. The next option discussed was a \$3.5 million override with 4% annual increase, which showed a deficit starting in FY26. Mr. Yunits discussed the \$4 million override with a 3% annual increase and that scenario didn't show a deficit until FY28 totaling \$4,489 and then FY29 \$640,267. The Town Manager noted that if the Town did a \$4 million override with an annual 4% increase, they would run into a deficit in FY27. Mr. Yunits continued the overview of the different 5-year budget projection scenarios. Mr. Yunits thanked Dr. O'Neill and Ms. Hadfield for meeting with himself and the Town Accountant to go over these numbers. Ms. Luciano asked for clarity in reference to the presented models and asked for them to show what the School Department's portion would be and the General Government's portion. She noted that with these projections an eventual \$3 million deficit and asked what it would look like with level-services funding. Mr. Yunits stated that these scenarios are not showing with level services and simply showing what the Town would have for revenue. Dr. O'Neill noted that like Mr. Yunits stated, 5-year projections are hard to do because there are so many factors to consider that are sometimes not within their control. She thanked Mr. Yunits and Mr. James Puello, Town Accountant, for meeting with them to try and go over this information. Dr. O'Neill informed everyone that when they prepared their projections, they also considered the 2.75% cost of living adjustment (COLA) increase, steps and lanes increases, and referred to Ms. Luciano's comment

about level services and stated that with the 1% budget and a 1% increase year-over-year, they would eventually be \$9 million short of where they would need for level services.

Mr. Thompson noted that after looking at these numbers referencing the 5-year projections that even with an override with increases ranging from 3% to 5% every year, it is unsustainable because they can only increase the levy by 2.5%; so, if they do anything higher than that, the Town is always going to be upside down. Mr. Thompson stated that they need to consider how they really budget in this town and emphasized not budgeting 3% to 5% increases every year. Mr. Thompson further stated that they are level-setting going forward so that they are not upside down. Mr. Yunits pointed out that the one sheet showing a 1% every year they couldn't do either without Free Cash.

Ms. Savas asked for clarification that with the example of \$4 million with a 3% annual increase and referenced Years 4 and 5. He questioned that if they are not appropriating in prior years if they do not maintain that to levy "in the pocket". Mr. Savas pointed out that they have a \$1,544,391 surplus in FY25 and stated that they can do 1 of 2 things: they can either not appropriate it or they can use some or all of it for Stabilization. He stated that in Years 4 and 5 of this projection, it is showing a \$640,000 deficit, so if they haven't actually appropriated it in prior years, he questioned as to whether or not those funds are retained in the pocket and if they can levy those funds. Mr. Savas stated that they don't actually hit the deficit in Year 5 because they could theoretically raise those taxes up. Attorney Goldberg reminded everyone that they are limited where they can't increase tax limit higher than 2.5% of what it could have raised from the year before; so, if the Town decides not to tax up to the levy limit, that means if they all of a sudden need to, they are going to be taxing way more than 2.5%. Mr. Thompson clarified that if they didn't allocate \$1.5 million and were running a surplus and didn't tax that or raise the amount, then the amount they are raising 2.5% off of the following year is the reduced amount; in other words, they don't to add that back in. Attorney Goldberg replied that it was the opposite and they can tax 2.5% on what they could have raised the year before. Mr. Snyder stated that what he saw from these projections is there is more volatility as they go farther out say 3 to 6 years. Ms. Luciano clarified that these projections are showing a surplus, but that is still not level funding, which Mr. Savas replied that he understood and agreed. Mr. Thompson expressed that pulling from Stabilization for ongoing expenses is something they don't want to get in the habit of doing and they need to make sure that they aren't doing what they have done in the past and continue to pull from Stabilization. Mr. Savas just wanted to point out that they don't hit the deficit as it looks on the sheets because there is a surplus in the early years. Mr. Hornsby agreed with Ms. Luciano's point about how these projections don't show level-services. Dr. O'Neill stated that the School Department's 5-year projection provided level-services and also with the essential unfunded requests would be a \$5 million increase (total of \$39,721,727 or a 12.63% increase). Mr. Hornsby stated that with the School Department's document, it shows 12.63% increase with the \$5 million increase and noted that the math doesn't add up with the Town's. Dr. O'Neill clarified that the \$5 million would be just what the School Department would need and didn't want to speak on behalf of any other department.

Mr. Tsilis stated that this is a political issue at this point and noted that an override has never passed in Norton, and posed the question of what they think the Town will pass. Mr. Tsilis advised that he would suggest a small override with \$2-\$2.5 million with \$1.7 million going to the School Department with the alternative being nothing.

Ms. Daniels asked why new growth reduced in the 5-year projection and Mr. Yunits explained that the Building Commissioner and Assessor went through this and they noted that there is only one more building to be developed at Blue Star Business Park and other than single-family homes going in there really isn't much else.



Mr. Parker stated that he is going to respectfully disagree with Mr. Tsilis and wants to still be in their town where they can fund their schools, Fire Department, and Police Department and that there are other reasons to live in town other than the tax rate.

Mr. Thompson informed the Committees and Board members that when he was preparing for this meeting earlier today, he was looking at all the documents that he had prepared when they were weighing out before they decided to move into Norton. He stated that these spreadsheets showed the tax amount, the quality of the school system, and the location and the schools weigh heavily when making that decision, so they were willing to pay more and they were looking at much higher tax-based locations as well. Mr. Thompson noted that while everyone enjoys the basis of the taxes they pay, they can't continue this way and the schools contribute to the wealth and growth overall; so, if the school department is good so is the Town's value.

Ms. Luciano referred to the tax rate and the debt-exclusion and asked what the impact would be on average per household. Mr. Yunits answered that the average impact of the debt-exclusion is \$363 per year on an average home of \$510,000. Mr. Snyder did note that the past two years the Select Board has split the tax rate. Mr. Schleicher referred to a comment he believed Mr. Puello made at a previous joint meeting that most taxpayers are going to see another significant raise in their taxes on January 1, 2025 much like they did before on January 1, 2024, which he believed to be because they were only paying interest of the debt-exclusion not the principal on the new Senior Center and new Town Hall. Mr. Yunits stated that the figure he provided to everyone was from the Assessor's Office for FY25.

Mr. Hornsby emphasized that they should determine a number at this point. Mr. Snyder expressed his opinion that the problem they are faced with here is there is no way they are going to get close to level-services and at this point, they are really resetting how the Town budgets going forward. Mr. Snyder stated that they can't continue to keep spending the way the Town has been spending. Mr. Snyder advised that he would be in favor of a \$4 million override with a 3% annual increase. Ms. Daniels referred to Mr. Snyder's proposal and questioned what that would mean for the Town's budgets: would there be half of those cuts or none? Mr. Yunits replied that he was going through some items today and if the 3% budget was approved, they would be able to add back the Police Department's and Fire Department's requests for overtime funds where \$40,000 would go to the Police Department and \$60,000 to the Fire Department. The Town Manager stated that they would also be adding back the Public Health Nurse, giving the Library 3%, adding back the position in the Highway Department, the Van Driver, and the COA position. Mr. Hornsby asked about the DPW Director and Mr. Yunits responded that they could look at that. Mr. Nicholas Schleicher asked with the \$4 million override with the annual 3% increase rate what the breakdown would be between the Town and the School Department. Mr. Yunits replied it would be that the General Government would get \$15,942,277 and the School Department would get \$35,747,636. Mr. Nicholas Schleicher asked where that would leave the School Department for a deficit and Dr. O'Neill answered they would still be \$3 million short, which would result in 22 staff being cut plus the fee increases that they discussed as well as the cut in general supplies and software. Mr. Hornsby pointed out that with this projection scenario, the Town still would not have the DPW Director and Mr. Yunits replied that they would have to look at that because right now, they don't even have a place to put the DPW Director. Mr. Hornsby asked how long they have to act on that in reference to DPW Director. Attorney Goldberg answered that town meeting decides on how money is allocated and positions can exist in theory that are never funded, so there is no timeline with them. Mr. Thompson summarized the shortfalls outlined in the impact letters and numbers presented and stated that they are still within that \$4 million figure. Dr. O'Neill advised that their level-services budget number is \$38,510,831 and if they were able to get to that place, they would be extremely grateful. She wanted to be clear and emphasize that there are still

potential cuts. Mr. Thompson pointed out that these numbers are not including the additional \$74 per student if it does pass with the State and that would affect the budget.

Mr. Robert Welch of 341 South Worcester Street stated that the \$4 million is a number they are trying to make palpable to the public, but asked what is the number that they would need to cover everything and Mr. Yunits answered that the reduction for what was originally requested for level-services is \$1,145,004 for the Town side. Dr. O'Neill answered that they would need 3.8 million this year. Mr. Welch replied that this would mean that the Town as a whole would need \$5 million roughly to keep everything. Mr. Yunits pointed out that this would just cover this year. Mr. Yunits explained that if they voted that [being the \$5 million override] this year, that raises the levy limit, but that only goes up 2.5% next year. Mr. Snyder stated that for FY25, the additional funds need would be around \$5 million and for future years, you would need a higher number for increases and they want to have a plan in place in order to keep these items. Mr. Yunits explained that if they got the \$5 million override, they wouldn't use the \$1.2 million of Free Cash and they could set it aside. Mr. Parker clarified that from what he is hearing tonight, the figure is \$5 million but questioned if everyone else recalled a figure of \$6.5 million to which several members confirmed they had. Mr. Snyder replied that the only way they get the Town to vote for and approve a \$6.5 million override is to get everyone on these boards/committees to agree and support the override. Mr. Parker explained that he was just trying to get the answer to Mr. Welch's question of what the Town would need. Mr. Welch expressed that he is not afraid of \$6.5 million override if it gets the job done.

Ms. Mary Ann Walsh informed everyone that she is not a resident in Norton, but a long-time Norton teacher and will be retiring at the end of this year. She stated that she has worked for 40 years for the schools and emphasized that the schools are important because these kids will be the ones taking care of them and the true future; so, the more they can do to fund the schools and what they need for kids the better.

Ms. Yezukevich stated that they are talking about a figure and they have been discussing this cliff for the past 7 years. She stated that she has lived in Norton since 2006 and her kids are almost through the school system, but advised that she doesn't plan to go anywhere, and she is still in support of this override and noted that it is a community issue. Ms. Yezukevich referred to the override attempt in 2016 and the amount requested then was \$3.7 million and it lost by 93 votes. She expressed that she doesn't think \$6.5 million is a palpable or realistic number and that they need to look at this like they have to get themselves somewhere rather than 1% where they will have to cut everywhere.

Ms. Daniels made a statement about the teachers within this town and emphasized that she is a firm believer of getting what you pay for and that they should be investing in those that are going to keep them safe and teach their children. She expressed that they are lucky that her kids have had great teachers and she wants that for those in the future. She stated that at this point, they either do nothing and deal with the same pains, or they come to a compromise because asking for \$6.5 million is not going to work. She lastly stated that \$4 million seems reasonable.

Mr. Nicholas Schleicher stated that the difference between a \$4 million override and a \$6.5 million override would be approximately \$271 more a year in taxes for the average resident and keeps them from coming back here in 2 years and questioned why they wouldn't go for more. Ms. Val Cabral of 50 Mansfield Avenue stated that for the first time, she was going to agree with Mr. Nicholas Schleicher. She stated that the thing she always does is look at the numbers. She advised that for her, a \$4 million override would be around \$500 more annually and a \$5 million override would be closer to \$1,000 increase and for smaller properties, it would be well below those numbers. Ms. Cabral stated that there is Senior Tax Program for those over 60 and the Norton

Cares Fund established by the Select Board that can help with increasing taxes. She advised that those wishing to donate can mail donations to Norton Cares at 70 East Main Street, Norton, MA 02766. She stated that she has said this in the past that if a few hundred dollars isn't affordable (per year) for someone that she is willing to help and cover the cost. She stated that \$5 million is closer to cover what they realistically need.

Mr. Savas stated that they are all trying to figure out a number that will pass and right now, but presenting a number that isn't going to get them to level-services doesn't seem right. He expressed that he thinks they should go with at least \$5 million and further stated that he doesn't see how they start under that.

Mr. Mark Sweeney of 14 Laura Lane summarized the level-services requests that came in around \$5 million to \$6 million. He stated that he is not going to live in a community that doesn't have a Police Department or a Fire Department open. Mr. Sweeney stressed that they have to look at figure that will pass and he thinks \$3 million is the number and emphasized the need to present a figure that is palpable to the people. Mr. Savas agreed and voiced that Mr. Sweeney was absolutely right.

Mr. Joe Swinley, President of Norton Teacher Association, urged them to consider and provide a budget that creates a future that they can sustain within the schools. He heavily emphasized a desire to keep and bring back programs that they lost and give the students a place where they have the best things that they can.

Mr. Parker asked if they could, for lack of a better term, present a multiple-choice option with the override amount, which Attorney Goldberg answered that they could.

Mr. Snyder stated that the override will be dead on arrival if the leaders of this town aren't supporting it as well, and instead, are going out to the public stating that they aren't going to support an override.

Mr. Thompson referred to Mr. Parker's question and asked if they have a multiple-choice budget option at town-meeting if they could do the same on the ballot with different amounts and Attorney Goldberg confirmed that they could. She in contrast posed the question of what is palpable as far creating confusion. Mr. Thompson stated that he would like to hear from each of the elected officials as far as whether or not they are in support of the override and accused some of the elected officials of padding the override for the budget so much that it fails at the polls. Mr. Stefanelli stated that they aren't to answer that question because you aren't to ask their vote ahead of the election/town meeting.

Mr. Sheedy asked after listening to the School Committee, Finance Committee, and residents if they were prepared to give a number on the override amount. Mr. Snyder expressed that he would be willing to put before town meeting 3 budget options: 1) a 1% budget increase; 2) a \$4 million override; and 3) a \$6.5 million override. Mr. Hornsby agreed with Mr. Snyder and stated that he would be in favor of putting these options before town meeting. Mr. Hornsby clarified that he was not playing a political game of trying to pad the override to shoot it down as was insinuated. Mr. Rich agreed with Mr. Snyder and Mr. Hornsby that they should leave it up to the residents. Ms. Artz stated that she agreed with her other Board members and added that she has lived in Norton for 22 years and has had 3 kids in the school system, one who already graduated and another one who is a senior, and she is supporting this. Ms. Luciano agreed with her board members and asked with regard to wording for the options how that works. Attorney Goldberg stated that the way that the pyramid budgets work is whatever gets more than 51% of the votes wins. Attorney Goldberg

advised that as far as “contingent contingencies,” the DOR is really against these and it really goes back to how the Town is going to explain this.

**MOTION was made by Mr. Hornsby to put the 1% budget, \$4 million override and \$6.5 million override on the warrant. Seconded by Mr. Rich. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.**

Mr. Brian Gustafson of 9 Allen Drive thanked everyone for all of their work tonight. He explained that his daughter Olivia came before everyone at a previous joint meeting. He informed everyone that he is a teacher and he asked his daughter to draw her brother who is 6 years old and paint a portrait of him and kept making cuts as far as time and resources and showed how it progressively diminished in quality and satisfaction of the results to demonstrate how cuts would affect this town and the budget.

Mr. Ralph Stefanelli of 12 James Street suggested having another vote of a written definition of what they voted on from Kopelman & Paige and stated that he thinks that they broke the law. In response, Attorney Goldberg stated that it is within the Town’s ability to present multiple budgets at town meeting. Secondly, Attorney Goldberg clarified that there is no Kopelman & Paige and that it hasn’t existed since 2016. Lastly, she stated that if the Board would like a legal opinion in writing, they would provide that.

### III. Old Business

There was no old business to discuss.

### IV. Open session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance.

### V. Adjournment.

**MOTION was made by Mr. Hornsby to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:43 P.M. Seconded by Mr. Rich. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.**

**MOTION was made by Mr. Paul Schleicher to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting at 9:43 P.M. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.**

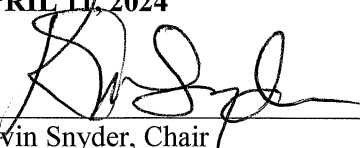
**MOTION was made by Ms. Callanan to adjourn the School Committee meeting at 9:43 P.M. Seconded by Mr. Schleicher. Vote: Unanimous. MOTION CARRIES.**

URL Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wzyfiehhGs>


Respectfully Submitted by:

  
Jennifer Reid, Office Administrator

**SELECT BOARD  
MINUTES OF JOINT MEETING  
APRIL 11, 2024**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kevin Snyder, Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Steven Hornsby, Vice-Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Alec Rich, III, Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Megan Artz

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Denise Luciano

Minutes Approved by Board on: April 25, 2024