

**SELECT BOARD/SCHOOL COMMITTEE/ADVISORY COMMITTEE JOINT MEETING MINUTES**  
**APRIL 25, 2023, AT 5:30 PM**  
**LEICESTER SENIOR CENTER, LEICESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01524**

**ATTENDANCE:**

Chair Allen Phillips	Present	Chair Donna McCance	Present
Vice Chair Rick Antanavica	Present	Vice Chair Scott Weikel	Present
Second Vice Chair Dianna Provencher	Present	Secretary Dylan Lambert	Present
Herb Duggan	Present	Nathan Hagglund	Present
John Bujak	Present	Jonathan Boisjolie	Not Present
Chair Peter Cusolito	Present		
Bill Brennan	Present		
Dorothy Dudley	Present		
Ashlyn Coyle	Present		
Bob Mercer	Present		
Sandy Wilson	Present		
Mary Kay Hannant	Present		

**ADMINISTRATORS:**

David Genereux, Town Administrator  
Chris Vitale, Assistant Town Administrator  
Brett Kustigian, Superintendent of Schools  
Beth Auger, Director of Finance and Business

**CALL TO ORDER/OPENING**

Select Board Chair Allen Phillips called their meetings to order at 5:30PM.

**1. EXECUTIVE SESSION (SELECT BOARD)**

**Motion 042523-SB1.1:** A motion was made Mr. Duggan to go into Executive Session, seconded by Second Vice Chair Ms. Provencher at 5:33 PM. **Motion carries 5-0-0. (Roll Call Vote)**

- a. **To consider the purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real property if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(6) – Disposition of Former College Victorian Properties & DHCD Lease of Three Former Dormitories**

**Motion 042523-SB1.2:** A motion was made by Ms. Provencher to exit Executive Session, seconded by Mr. Bujak at 6:27PM. **Motion carries 5-0-0. (Roll Call Vote).**

## 2. OTHER ITEMS

*School Committee Chair, Donna McCance, called the joint meeting to order at 6:21PM. The Select Board was still in Executive Session at this time.*

Peter Cusolito discussed a \$26,000 transfer from a postage account. Chair Donna McCance stated that she was uncomfortable with this discussion until the Board of Selectman was present.

**Motion 042523-SC1:** A motion was made by Mr. Hagglund to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Lambert.  
**Motion carries 5-0-0 at 6:25PM.**

*Mr. Phillips reconvened the Select Board's open meeting at 6:30PM. Mr. Phillips announced that the DHCD Contract Vote and Disposition of Former College Victorians discussion would not take place and would be rescheduled for a future meeting.*

a. **Vote to Approve the Fire Panel, Mass Evacuation System and Outdoor Speaker Strobe Installation Quote (9 Washburn Square)**

Mr. Genereux provided an overview of the project memo provided in the Select Board meeting packet.

**Motion 042523-SB2a:** A motion was made by Mr. Bujak to approve, seconded by Mr. Duggan.  
**Motion carries 5-0-0 at 6:30PM.**

b. **Statement for funds received via the override to remain in the school budget**

Mr. Genereux stated that he received a request from a resident regarding the override request. Mr. Genereux stated that in the first year of an override, per Mass General Laws, the funding must be applied toward what was requested. After the second year, funds can be applied toward any legal purpose. Mr. Genereux explained that the town does not ask for a budget override often. Because of that, Mr. Genereux stated that the town wants to make it clear that, by signing this document, the town will be applying the funds towards the school district year in and year out. Mr. Genereux stated that this does not limit future Select Board decisions or votes.

**Motion 042523-SB2b:** A motion was made by Mr. Bujak to approve signing the statement, seconded by Mr. Duggan. **Motion carries 5-0-0 at 6:33PM.**

c. **DHCD Contract Vote**

*This agenda item was passed over.*

d. **Disposition of Town-Owned Victorian Properties**

*This agenda item was passed over.*

**Motion 042523-SC2:** A motion was made by Mr. Weikel to reconvene the School Committee, seconded by Mr. Hagglund. **Motion carries 5-0-0 at 6:34PM.**

**e. FY2024 Budget Overview and Discussion**

Mr. Genereux began the discussion by stating the town was a week away from town meeting. The boards and committees have taken their votes. Mr. Genereux stated that department heads are at the meeting and encouraged board members to engage them for any questions that are had about the budget. Looking forward to FY25, Mr. Genereux stated the town will be adopting a new budget strategy which involves a zero-based budget in August. Mr. Genereux stated that, historically, the town has always waited for the Governor's budget to be released. To foster community involvement and put something forward for discussion, Mr. Genereux stated the town wants to start earlier. The first budget draft released in the early Fall will strictly be salaries. Expenses will start at zero. Before the Governor's budget, the town will know what its limitations are and know what adjustments need to be made when the State budget comes out. Mr. Genereux thanked those for coming out and are happy to answer any questions that may be had.

Mr. Bujak stated he has questions on the budget.

Mr. Bujak stated that on the revenue side and property tax levy, the town only shows budgeted numbers. Are there actual number out there?

Mr. Genereux stated the town started showing actuals on the expense side but not the revenue side. Taxation is ongoing so it is harder to show actuals year to year. Mr. Bujak asked if FY24 budget numbers are based on actual or estimate for the property tax levy.

Mr. Genereux stated the town uses a conservative formula. If the town's numbers are off, the town can vote on changes at the fall Special Town Meeting. The Town always budgets conservatively so surplus can go to Free Cash. Mr. Genereux stated the town could budget 100% of the levy and give more money to departments. However, the town currently funds items out of free cash. The town has to have a balance of funding departments and free cash.

Mr. Cusolito stated it would be helpful to see how the town's collection is going. Mr. Genereux stated the town can run a report showing what was collected versus currently collected using Vadar. Mr. Cusolito stated Vadar is a great tool, and the report could cover those things, but he did not ask for it when they previously met.

Mr. Genereux stated this budget did not exist 5 years ago, but the town can continue working on it to answer the questions needed.

Mr. Bujak stated more is needed for departments that has been cut.

Mr. Genereux stated that has been going on for years. If you hit your 100% estimates, you have to go to fall town meeting and cut. However, if there are budget holes, the town can address them at fall town meeting using free cash.

Mr. Bujak requested a list of what was not in the budget.

Mr. Genereux stated he does not get a lot of those request based on budget allowance by department. Anything over and above that is included as part of department's budget narrative. Mr. Genereux stated it comes down to does the town want to sacrifice capital or the money. The Town has not been able to go beyond funding the basics in the municipal budget. This year, the two things that helped the budget were merging the Facilities Director and Highway Director job into a DPW Director and the EMS Enterprise fund.

Mr. Bujak asked about cannabis sales tax amount for 2023. Department Head Allison Lawrence stated the town have not gotten the HCA agreements for this year yet. Mr. Genereux stated he has never budget cannabis revenue because it is a declining receipt.

Mr. Bujak stated he appreciates the conservative budget, but something should be put there to help us fund certain items.

Mr. Genereux stated it is harder to dig up funding then appropriate from free cash for the need. Ms. Beth Auger stated one of the reasons the school budget is in the shape that it is in is moneys not guaranteed were used to pay for yearly expenses.

Ms. Auger stated that perhaps a revenue analysis of what is paid out of free cash, history will show the best use of free cash going forward.

Mr. Bujak stated he is mindful of 2 ½ impact, but the town should look at the conservative budgeting amount.

Mr. Cusolito stated one of the things in the article in the bylaw amendment for finance committee is reasonable projections looking out several years looking at revenue and needs. If the town can do that and build that, the town can drive the budget to support its needs. Mr. Cusolito stated a stabilization account could help with reduction of free cash.

Mr. Bujak asked about Office 365 licensing under the IT budget. Mr. Vitale stated there is funding to migrate to a new government Office license that will result in long-term savings. Mr. Bujak asked the Police Chief about the overtime budget amount and additional details. Mr. Bujak asked the Fire Chief about a missed DFS grant opportunity. Chief Dupuis stated he missed one grant last fall while trying to get kids in the new school and he is tracking it for next fiscal year. Ms. Donna McCance and Dr. Kustigian thanked the Fire Chief for making the students a priority and getting them into the new school.

Mr. Hagglund stated the questions from Mr. Bujak should have been provided ahead of time so department heads could have been somewhat prepared. Nate: This line of questioning had a heads up on the questions, so they could have been somewhat prepared.

Mr. Bujak stated that unfortunately this should not have been done in this forum.

Mr. Phillips stated in the interest of time, maybe departments can answer the bigger ticket questions and send the other questions to them.

Mr. Bujak asked about the EMS Enterprise Funds. The fund generated \$250K surplus funds in that account. Does the town expect it to balance or have a surplus?

Mr. Genereux stated after reviewing this year collections, the town will see if the fund can get to point of covering its own costs and covering general fund expenses for town facilities it uses and takes up.

Mr. Bujak stated he is concerned the town is missing things coming down the road, such as Borger and Swan, and how they will be paid for. Mr. Bujak stated it may need a debt exclusion. Mr. Bujak stated he is nickel and diming, so the town does not have to raise taxes, but he understands the need to support the schools. Mr. Bujak stated he did his own pro forma of expenses over next five years and it is tough. Mr. Bujak stated it's a risky plan.

Mr. Duggan stated its important to keep departments in mind. He stated the town should hold them accountable, but it cost a lot to replace a department head.

Mr. Phillips asked for any further questions. Mr. Cusolito asked departments to be mindful of spending at the end of the fiscal year. If they do not spend it, it does not mean departments will not get those funds next year. Mr. Cusolito stated the town bought 30% of its office supplies in June.

Ms. McCance addressed Mr. Bujak's comments about the school's plans being risky. Dr. Kustigian encouraged residents to watch the one hour six-minute video on LCAC which was recorded earlier in the day. In that discussion, the school laid out its clear plan and revenue forecast. Looking back, people will say it was the right decision.

Mr. Phillips suggested doing that presentation with the EDC Committee.

Mr. Scott Weikel asked if Mr. Bujak is for the override or not. Mr. Bujak stated 100% yes. Mr. Scott Weikel stated that every meeting, Mr. Bujak casts doubt. Mr. Weikel stated everything Mr. Bujak says take jabs and undercuts the plan.

Mr. Bujak stated he is 100% behind the school, but he is also 100% for transparency and extremely sensitive to the taxpayers.

Ms. McCance asked Mr. Bujak without taking their clothes off, how much more transparency does he need.

Mr. Hagglund stated he agrees with the questions, but the forum he chose. Mr. Hagglund stated Leicester's property taxes has to be in the bottom 15%. To deliver the services the town needs, \$12.86/thousand will not do it.

Mr. Cusolito stated the town cannot compare to other communities.

Ms. Ashlyn Coyle stated Dr. Kustigian came before the Advisory Committee with a five-year plan. Ms. Coyle stated he has a plan, and he should give that out to everyone.

Mr. Brennan stated if the town is watching pennies, the dollars will take care of themselves. Mr. Brennan asked if any of Mr. Bujak's statements were incorrect or untrue.

Mr. Weikel stated the comments about a debt exclusion is not on any radar.

Mr. Bujak stated the town has half a campus that needs improvement. Mr. Bujak asked how it would be pay for.

Dr. Kustigian stated they applied to the MSBA program, but they are a couple of years away from getting funded. When he thinks of risk, he thinks not funding the budget and losing thirty-five positions is the greater risks and should be avoided at all costs.

Ms. Hannant stated the town just voted a debt exclusion two years ago with no mention of an override. Ms. Hannant stated a lot of residents have a hard time managing their own finances.

Mr. Weikel stated bringing up another debt exclusion is a scare tactic.

Mr. Duggan stated there are options for residents with hardships in town. Ms. Auger stated she went to the Assessor Office for the hardship requirement, and there is a form to fill out with the list of requirements.

Ms. Auger stated she has only received 2-3 emails on the budget. If someone has questions, email [augerb@lpsma.net](mailto:augerb@lpsma.net).

Ms. Hannant asked if the school budget is zero-based, to which Ms. Auger said yes. Ms. Auger stated salaries are a big part of how they got where they are.

Dr. Kustigian stated they went line by line with Principals and they found \$273K in savings.

Mr. Phillips announced effective after this meeting, Mr. Phillips is stepping down as Chair of the Select Board and Vice Chair Antanavica is stepping up as Chair.

*No motion was made by the Select Board on this agenda item.*

**Motion 042523-SB3:** A motion was made by Ms. Provencher to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Bujak. **Motion carries 5-0-0 at 7:51PM.**

**Motion 042523-SC3:** A motion was made by Mr. Hagglund to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Lambert. **Motion carries 5-0-0 at 7:51PM.**

**ADJOURN**