



## REPRESENTATIVE TOWN MEETING

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Active Employee Benefits: Carlton Lindgren from AON explained the review of prior claims experience and how there was a significant suppression of claims for 5-6 months because of Covid19, but experience is back to normal levels. The premiums employees pay vary by CBA but it's in a range from 15% to 17%.

Human Resources: Jim Haselkamp said he filed an appeal of the BOF reduction of the Human Resources budget; he explained the increases for additional software which will provide means to disseminate information such as Town policies and track & archive that employees acknowledge receipt of same. He explained that the time management system that is in the FY22 budget will be under the purview of the Finance Department as there are issues that must be worked out with the interface with MUNIS.

Mr. Haselkamp addressed questions regarding his resignation and how he will stay on until a new director is hired, his role in drafting the budget and the lack of resources that must be addressed to lead the department forward.

Insurance: Insurance Consultant Robert O'Connor explained CIRMA insures most of the municipalities in the state. Property and errors & omissions insurance increased 5%; excess liability and flood insurance estimates increased 15-20%. There is a higher threat of cyber attacks as well. The interscholastic sports insurance costs of \$70,000 have been shifted to the BOE budget.

Mr. Schmitt noted that the Risk Management line had been zeroed out by the BOF as it is swept into the internal service fund. He has filed an appeal of the BOF action for a restoration of \$500,000 as this is an area that the credit rating agencies review. In response to Mr. Kuhn, Mr. Schmitt said the fund had been severely underfunded several years ago and had been a topic of concern for the ratings agencies. There has been a stronger focus on a healthier status for the fund; in 2010 it had been at -\$10,000,000 and has grown to \$6,000,000. Mr. Kelley said we are constantly defending against cyberattacks, but there have been none that have cost us money.

The supplemental contribution for workers compensation has decreased 12% to \$1,468,790.

Fire: Chief McCarthy explained funding for the increases in sick & injury reverted to using the 3-year average; training OT is for new employees replacing retirees. The department-wide software system is being retired by the company so a new system is necessary. A lower rate for physicals for uniform personnel has been negotiated and the department will be direct billed. There was a reduction of \$125,000 for capital outlay for radios which will be bonded instead. They are replacing two command vehicles.

Emergency Management: Chief McCarthy said there is great coordination among departments and a high level of readiness in the community. Ms. Havey asked if it is economical to not have our own ambulance service. Chief McCarthy said we receive paramedical and transportation services at no cost from AMR whereas it could be \$1 million as a Town service. AMR's response performance is reviewed monthly which has been over 90% since September. It is not economically feasible nor is it necessary for the Town to provide its own ambulance service as the Town is comfortable with the level of safety provided by AMR.

Police: Chief Kalamaras said the overall budget is a .5% decrease over the current year budget. The IT position and crossing guards have been moved to the IT and BOE budgets, respectively.

They have requested 2 additional officers to increase staff from 108 to 110 after review and comparison with similar-sized municipalities. A new parking license plate reader has resulted in more efficiencies and more revenue. 9 cars are anticipated to be replaced using the outside jobs fund which has significant funds due to the gas line and fiber optics installations throughout town. As long as this funding request is approved the department will have sufficient vehicles.

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In response to questions, Chief Kalamaras explained the importance of the school resource officers and traffic division, follow-up and significant investigations, and finding efficiencies and a good balance of all resources to provide services to the community.

ECC: Mr. Schmitt said all revenue and expenses for the ECC have been moved to its own self-supporting fund from the general fund.

### Board of Education:

Chair Christine Vitale said the budget as it stands currently is pretty much what the BOE requested following the BOF vote which is a 5.42% increase. This budget will take us past the pandemic and is funding the district improvement plan, taking us to the next level of student achievement and engagement.

Superintendent Mike Cummings noted the school safety unit is a great comfort to the staff, students and families. It is critical to the district and all credit goes to the FPD. The budget supports investments in social emotional learning, referrals for special education, mental health issues and early literacy. Many people across the town are in crisis.

This year's increase is higher than average; major budget drivers include special education costs, IT equipment that has lagged behind schedule, anticipated fuel increases and a majority of the budget is dedicated to staff salaries & benefits, transportation costs and utilities.

An increase of 7.3 staff was due to the increased enrollment in elementary school which is believed to be a result of parents who kept kindergarten age kids out of school because of pandemic and enrolled them this year and the influx of new residents who moved to town.

Change in the number of students requesting services has been accelerated by the pandemic; they are looking to make a correction in this budget for the special education shortfall. Statewide trending shows an overall enrollment decline but an increase in special education. Dyslexia, developmental delays, emotional disturbances are most areas of increase; want to be more pro-active in area of dyslexia with the adoption of an early literacy academy that would double the size next year. In addition, utilization of grants in grade 1 for training for phonics that will expand to grades 2 & 3. This must be given earlier for success. The budget has been aligned to the district improvement plan goals. Budget enhancements include expanding instructional periods in middle school especially math resource and language arts to address the proficiency gap, instituting an American Sign Language course and the statewide requirement for world language.

Mr. Mancusi said the district has been specifically targeting dyslexia; currently there are 97 students with dyslexia with 7 at the early literacy academy this year representing 5 schools. Mr. Cummings explained the internal budget process within departments and buildings to the executive directors. Ms. Leborious explained the analysis of drivers and trends in special ed, outplacement, utilities, contract obligations, insurance, and maintenance costs over the past 5 years. Supply chain issues were addressed in the maintenance budget.

Discussion ensued regarding sustainable increases year after year, the internal budget review and reporting to the BOE & BOF including grants updates and the Covid19 funds that were received and expended as well as student performance compared to other towns.

Mr. Tallman asked for a status update on the Ludlowe scoreboard. Mr. Papageorge said \$140,000 for a multigame scoreboard is in the budget. If funds are available after the project is completed the BOE would decide where that money would go. The build out of the second floor concession stand has been delayed

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twice because the cost of the project has doubled due to materials cost increases and lack of labor available to do the job. There were minor improvements to the dugouts at the ballfields. The grounds crew contract has been renewed and is more inclusive as to grounds improvements.

Ms. Georgiadis asked how the recognition of dyslexia as a disability was incorporated into budget. Mr. Cummings noted that the school district did not invest in systemic phonics instruction in years and now we're paying for it.

Mr. Mancusi said dyslexia is one of the primary disabilities that require structured type of literacy program. With the universal screening program we can monitor progress and provide intervention and determine when students were not achieving certain parameters. The severity of overall cost of special education has increased but there has been a decline in enrollment.

Ms. Gale noted there's something to be said about the original approach of phonics. There are more creative ways of introducing reading to children rather than putting a label on them. These increased costs put more stress on the town and especially the parents of these children. She asked why the communications position go to someone at a lower salary. Mr. Cummings said last year there was a particular need to offer a response to Covid19 on a daily basis. We had different scheduling iterations, communications from the State that had to be broken down that was an inordinate amount of information. The communications director monitors the Covid dashboard and works with the school nurse coordinator and is working on the district improvement plan communications.

Ms. Vitale said the Prismatic audit suggested a communications officer that the Board hoped would assist with developing a communications plan. It was a priority for the BOE that was unanimously approved. Mr. Cummings said communication is the root cause of inefficiencies and creates stress among staff and families and hopes the original intent of the position will make the district more efficient and effective.

Ms. Longo questioned consolidating teams at the middle school particularly with enrollment declining. Mr. Cummings noted the concern about the impact on students; initially they wanted to do it in grade 6 but were concerned about the core function of the team and the same 4 teachers in a closed environment within the larger school. That team would be split between 2 middle schools and would need to get across town to meet to plan and support students. It's a challenge and changing it in other grade levels would compound the challenge.

Mr. Mancusi said if students begin to display behaviors and they suspect there could be a learning disability they have an intervention in grades 1-3. Ms. Longo advocated that social and emotional wellness be addressed for the students. Mr. Cummings said there are mental health issues among children nationwide that have been exacerbated by Covid19 that must be responded to by this budget and in the improvement plan.

Ms. McCormack asked if similar districts have the same budgetary pressures how is this increase justified. Mr. Cummings said although he cannot speak for other towns, the budget drivers are not the same such as our special education costs and existing transportation contract. Ms. Spolyar said the budget is still down half a million dollars because of the increased insurance costs to which Mr. Cummings explained they are still looking at staffing including central office staff and leasing instead of purchasing technology. In response to Mr. Petise, Ms. Leborious said if the trend continues with utilities there may be a savings of \$400,000. Staff leaving and the associated insurance costs are also driving savings in those accounts. Retirements were budgeted for 17 and are currently tracking in the high 20s.

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In response to Ms. Zezima and Mr. Steele, Mr. Cummings described investments in training staff and curriculum improvements regarding mental health, social-emotional learning and wellness.

Ms. Iacono urged Mr. Cummings to return to the BOE find savings in the budget to help residents as it was acknowledged that people in town are in crisis.

Bus Transportation: Ms. Leborious said there was an increase in the number of buses to the private schools because of the long length of the routes.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth P. Browne, MMC, MCTC  
Town Clerk