

**JOINT MEETING OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE, SELECT BOARD, AND
WARRANT COMMITTEE
SELECT BOARD'S MEETING ROOM
NOVEMBER 18, 2019**

Present: Ms. Susan Burgess-Cox, Chair
Ms. Andrea Prestwich, Secretary
Ms. Kate Bowen
Ms. Amy Checkoway
Mr. Michael Crowley
Ms. Tara Donner
Mr. John Phelan, Superintendent

1. The FY21 Town Budget

The Joint meeting was called to order at 7:58PM.

Ms. Patrice Garvin, Town Administrator, gave an overview of the FY21 operating budget, starting with the timeline. In February the proposed budget goes to the Select Board, is reviewed by the Warrant Committee before going to the April Town Meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to plan for the FY21 budget and a likely override in November of 2020. FY19 and FY20 budgets both relied on some one-time cash revenue sources and FY21 has a \$5-6M structural deficit just to maintain town and school services at their current levels.

The FY 21 structural deficit is being addressed in several ways. In particular, the Town side spending will decrease by 1.7% in FY21 over FY20. This is achieved by rolling over all town departments expenditures (no new spending) unless there is a contractual obligation. In addition, the health plan for town workers has been re-designed, minor capital expenses have been deferred, the water enterprise will offset water and IT costs, and the town administration is working with Belmont Light to increase revenue. It is a priority for the town not to decrease staff. The Town is planning to use \$2.0 million of Free Cash (amounts left over from the prior year's budget), and likely will need to use an additional \$1.4 million, leaving a balance of \$2.4 million. There are several Items still pending that could change the plan put forward at this meeting, including Minute Man costs as a non-member town and the final school budget.

Superintendent Phelan addressed the question of how much and whether the schools can help close the budget gap by spending down funds that have accumulated in the Special Education Circuit Breaker area, thereby decreasing the town's contribution from the General Fund. Funds for the circuit breaker are reimbursed by the state based on the previous year's expenditure, creating a "lag" between when the funds are spent and reimbursement. In addition, the SPED line is notoriously volatile: one or two new students with significant needs can impact the SPED

budget. For these reasons, the State recommends the SPED circuit breaker fund to keep at least one year's worth of funding. Any SPED funds spent down to close the FY21 budget should be replaced in the override. In the long run this protects the town budget.

Respectfully Submitted by Andrea H Prestwich
Andrea Prestwich, Secretary