

TOWN CLERK'S STAMP

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MEETING MINUTES

TOWN OF ROCKLAND



Board or Committee

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING

Date & Time of Meeting

Monday, March 10, 2025 At 6:30 PM

Meeting Location:

DAVID CABLE-MURPHY STUDIO

or

Remote Information:

Meeting ID:

Passcode:

Requested By:

Noelle Novio

OF PAGES (including cover sheet) 6

REVISED

☐

Yes

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No

**ROCKLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ROCKLAND, MASSACHUSETTS
MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2025, 6:30 PM
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MINUTES
The David Cable-Murphy Studio**

In attendance: Chair Mrs. Maroney, Vice Chair Mrs. Hennessy, and members Mrs. Bissonnette. Also in attendance were Superintendent Dr. Cron, Assistant Superintendent Ms. Hackett, Mrs. Novio, and Ms. Carpine in the audience.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Acceptance of the minutes of the February 24, 2025 School Committee Meeting, a motion to approve by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

We will now go into our public hearing at 6:33 pm on March 10. Hearing was posted as advertised as required at the Town Hall and the Patriot Ledger. Motion to open by Mrs. Maroney, motion to open public by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

Dr. Cron presented a powerpoint slide presentation. "I'm just going to give a little context to the budget presentation that I hope is helpful. I think anyone who keeps up with the news knows that it's been a very challenging budget season, not just public municipalities but in general on the South Shore; increases to health insurance and retirement costs, inflation, limited new revenue growth, and an increasing percentage of high needs students are limiting our School District's ability to grow or even maintain level services. Rockland is not alone - many area towns are making substantial cuts to offerings or town services and many have turned to Proposition 2 ½ overrides. Some override attempts have succeeded while some have failed and many are pending. I am not recommending an override at this time in Rockland. Tonight's proposed budget requests a 3.9% overall budget increase from FY25 to FY26. This increase reduces but does not eliminate our need to realign and reduce existing positions to meet available funding realignment. Reductions are substantially fewer than we experienced last year in FY25. A final note for context, we are seeing a decrease in the year to year percentage increase for Out of District, Foster and homeless transportation. Currently the Rockland Public Schools Out of District is projected to increase by 13% vs. the 28% experienced last year. When I say a 13% increase or a 28% increase, I would like everyone to remember that taxes can only increase by 2.5% so whenever an increase that we are experiencing exceeds 2.5%, we have a challenge. I want to remind everyone of the staff reductions that we experienced last year, this is the list of the positions that have been removed from the Rockland Public School for over the last two years (see slide). These reductions have been absorbed quite surgically. People have retired and we have not replaced them. Class sizes were right on the verge. We may have expanded our

class sizes a little bit here and there. We are living with fewer paras, fewer tutors. Coaches we have replaced went back into the classroom so they didn't lose their job. We no longer have people with teachers to help support them with students who are struggling; so it's just one less safety net in place. Although a very long list, and we are feeling them, it was done very carefully along with retirements. We have added a part-time Special Education Coordinator at Phelps. We did this so that we would have a Special Education Coordinator in each of our buildings. A coordinator essentially helps the school decide and define what is and what is not an IEP. We are watching our special education services and trying to control where we have IEPs and when we don't and trying to reinforce the idea that if there is an on-ramp to special education there should also be an off-ramp. We also added a part time English Language Coordinator which has helped us deal with many of the compliance issues that we have to face with regard to the Department of Education and to make sure that our more than 300 English language learners are being properly served. We added one Preschool Teacher. If we had the space, we could add five preschool teachers and fill those classrooms, but we don't. By adding a teacher we also add to enrollment which adds to our chapter 70 numbers. It's providing the town of Rockland with no cost preschool. It's a service that we provide again with support from the town. Free kindergarten is also not a given in and throughout Massachusetts. We have free full day Kindergarten in Rockland. I want the town to be proud of it because they should be; makes a difference. The more preschool students we have in front of our incredible Preschool staff means a well-educated Rockland community but those who need a one on one paraprofessional; there is no way around it. We purchased a van and hired a driver which was actually a cost savings. Kudos to Ms. Novio for saving the District approximately \$455,000 this year by putting routes out to bid and dropping prices. Creative things that we have come across to maximize our use of Rockland taxpayer money and to keep from ever having a cut list. The current budget as presented shows a \$53,000 shortfall with a proposed plan to close that gap which I will get to on the next page. The plan includes an increased use of circuit breaker and revolving utilization by \$100,000 each, about our originally budgeted number for FY26 and a request to the town for an additional \$300,000 of support as opposed to what was currently asked. The solution continues our progress as a school district toward reducing our use of one-time revenues and providing stability for the 26 and FY27 budget season. We are budgeting not just for this year and for next year but we are looking ahead to stay on track with the town who is also looking at healthcare costs, and what things are going to look like, and the town needs. We need a fire station. We all agree, so we are trying to be part of that solution by being fiscally responsible. If we do not implement this plan we face the possibility of eliminating as many as eight more existing positions beyond what is in the current realignment plan and that would significantly increase our unemployment costs which would be a shame. (slide) What we are left with is approximately a \$500,000 deficit in the budget that we are proposing today for a plan to close. It's a total increase of 3.9%. The salary number includes reductions, lane changes, retirement payouts. Our out of district costs are up 133%. We currently have 27 students out of district. This is down from FY25 where we had 28%. We feel it's beginning to stay stabilized and I will say we did project this. The expenses

realize a reduction in our homeless, foster, unemployment and legal costs and we have few maternities so our sub numbers are down. The proposed budget - this is our plan to close the deficit. First we have asked the town to increase their allocation to us by \$300,000. Secondly, we are looking at increasing our use of one-time money, revolving and circuit breaker, by \$100,000 each. That gives us the \$500,000 we need to close that gap and be able to live this budget that we are presenting. It continues most importantly to decrease our utilization of free cash, circuit breaker and revolving. In the world of public education, I cannot budget for folks who move into Rockland and have students who go to schools out of district. The 70/30 split you will see is the new revenue that we share and you will see in the red that these are shared expenses that the school incurs that the town pays and we share them. You get to the net increase and then the 70/30 split. At the bottom that gives us our increase over last year \$932,387 so that is a 3.18. Jane has worked very hard at making sure that every expense is in its proper line and that allows us to truly compare year to year to make better decisions moving forward. When we look at our audited vs. actual vs. estimated; these are very solid numbers and there is very little movement between lines. I'd really like to point out the top number which is the salary over the last three years. The salary line is increased by 6%, that means we are paying 2% per year above what we paid the year before. At this point, the final number I am asking for the school committee to vote on tonight is \$37,355,069. Mrs. Maroney, with no questions I would like to make a motion to close the public hearing. Mrs. Hennessy a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

Mrs. Maroney - I would like to make a motion to take new business number 5 FY26 budget and number 6, FY26 Capital out of order. Motion to take FY26 budget and FY26 Capital out of order by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

Dr. Cron continues by saying – part of making ends meet for this coming year's budget was a request to finance committee into the town to reappropriate \$500,000 that had been set aside from town meeting article 36 for the school HVAC project and move it instead to offsetting costs for our FY25 out of district tuition so I would ask for a vote for your approval to move. Mrs. Maroney, I will entertain a motion to vote to reappropriate a \$500,000 FY25 Town Meeting article 36 from \$500,000 Esten School HVAC and electrical improvements to FY25 Out of District tuition, motion to approve by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous. Dr. Cron asks that the school committee vote to reduce our free cash and capital request from \$1,950,000 to \$540,000 to be spent on the following items: \$50,000 for a sidewalk plow and sanding equipment, \$100,000 for Chromebooks and IT needs, \$90,00 for van leases and \$300,000 for FY26 out of district tuition costs. Mrs. Maroney - I'll entertain a motion for what Dr. Cron said, Mrs. Hennessy – motion to reduce free cash and capital request as noted, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

Dr. Cron - Finally I would ask for a vote to approve the school department FY26 school budget of \$37,335,069. A motion to approve the school department FY26 budget by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

Now we will go back to our monthly reports from the administrators; Ms. Schipper, Mr. MacAllister, Ms. Scheufele, Ms. Sheehan, Guidance Ms. Black, Nurse Ms. Davis and Pupil Personnel Services with Dr. Maniglia; 7 motions to approve the monthly reports by Mrs. Hennessy, 7 seconds by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous. We have school newsletters from Esten, Phelps, the middle school and the High School.

On to Old Business - we have completed fundraisers - Phelps PAC had a D'Angelo's/Papa Gino's night and they raised \$385, so congratulations to them for raising that money.

We have new fundraisers - RMS SGC 5th & 6th Grade Social. Proceeds to purchase EOY supplies for RMS SGC events/activities to be held on March 11, 2025, 2nd Annual Cross Country Track 5K Race to be held on June 7, 2025, Phelps PAC Dominoes Night to be held on March 12, 2025 – three motions to approve the stated fundraisers by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

No changes to the 2025 graduation procedures - Motion to approve by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

Important change regarding Firearms - the legislation by the state prohibits all individuals except for qualified Law Enforcement Officers during and in connection with their employment from possessing loaded and unloaded firearms while in certain prohibited areas. Prohibited areas include property that is owned, leased or under the control of County or Municipal governments including Municipal buildings, school buildings, parking spots and vehicles used for transporting students to and from school. This is a state law in terms of prohibiting.

School application for a student that just moved into Rockland - motion to approve by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous.

Superintendent's Report - This is the most challenging time of the year for me and Jane. I think especially when finances are tight. I say this all the time that it is very easy to do our jobs when there's plenty of money. It's very easy to say yes, it's very difficult to say no and it's very difficult to cut away things that you have put in place to be safeguards for kids or things to grow their learning. I could not ask for a better school committee, Assistant Superintendent for Business/Finance and everything else, Town Manager, Board of Selectmen, Union, Staff, and Leadership Team. I am the luckiest Superintendent on the planet and I'm incredibly grateful for all of the support as we go through these difficult times. We are going to get through it and I'm

just really proud of everyone and thankful and grateful. Secondly, congratulations to Dan Biggins, Mike Mullen, Mike O'Loughlin who are the head of a very large group who put together the Blarney Brunch. Money this year is going to support the Rockland Food Pantry.

Public Service Announcements. Ms. Hennessy - March is one of the only months we don't have any holidays so it's a very long month, but also is the middle of term three for most of the schools, so progress reports went out. I know there are some parent teacher conferences happening for the Middle School and the Elementary Schools. So definitely be involved and connect with your teachers. Two reminders on March Fundraisers and different events - Rogers Middle School Shamrock Classic on the 19th, Rockland High School Athletic Boosters are putting on two fundraisers which are a mattress sale on Saturday, March 22nd and then another basketball game - the Harlem Wizards are coming to Rockland on 3/26 where our staff/teachers will be playing some Wizards. Mrs. Bissonnette - SpongeBob SquarePants musical is coming up and it's the 20th and the 21st at 7:00 at the High School. They are usually a really good time.

Mrs. Maroney - we are going to the next item on the agenda which is into executive session to discuss strategy with respect to litigation. I declare that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the School Committee. I will now entertain a motion to enter in executive session to discuss strategy with respect to litigation and to not go back into open session. All those in favor to move by Mrs. Hennessy, seconded by Mrs. Bissonnette, unanimous. Time: 6:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Jill Maroney, Chair, on behalf of
Emily Davidson
Secretary