

Town of Hubbardston

Finance Committee – Minutes

April 11, 2022

6:30 pm

SLADE BUILDING

Meeting called to order: 7:14 PM
Members present: Susan Rayne, Charles Reed, Peter Russell, Peter Walker
Other attendees: David Nixon, Acting Town Administrator
Selectboard members: Dan Galante – Chair, Jeff Williams – Vice Chair, Katie Young – Clerk, Kris Pareago – Member, Heather Munroe – Member
QRSD Representatives: Cheryl Duval – Director, Administration
Dr. Sheila Muir – Superintendent
School Committee members: Mark Wigler, Debbie Chamberlain

1. *Convene.* Meeting called to order: 7:14 PM
2. *Open Session.* No persons in attendance for open session.
3. *Minutes.* Tabled.
4. *Joint Meeting with the Select Board and School Committee to discuss and take action on the proposed FY 2023 budget and capital plan.*

Acting Town Administrator Nixon presented a balanced budget on March 7, 2022 in advance of getting the Town's assessments from QRSD and Monty Tech. The assessment from QRSD was \$5,704,582, an increase of 12.9% and more than Mr. Nixon's estimate, resulting in a budget that is not balanced.

Selectboard Chair Galante stated there have been several meetings presented by QRSD to explain how they came to these numbers and that the Board needs to understand why the budget came in this high.

Ms. Duval said that the QRSD budget is up by \$3 million - 4.7% - in part because the school didn't do any capital improvement projects during COVID and in part because of declining enrollment in the District. There has also been an increase in low income enrollment from last year to this year by 32% and with this comes more expenses.

Ms. Young asked why there is a different dollar amount from a low income student as opposed to a non-low income student. Ms. Duval said this is state mandated and is non-negotiable. The reason a foundation budget is important is because it determines how

much aide the state will give the school. The Department of Revenue also calculates what the town is required to pay. The state is only willing to pay 41% of the bill.

Mr. Galante stated that back before COVID, he had gone to three of the four other towns and was on their agenda, attended their meetings, and spoke about getting together early with the Fistrict to say this is our preliminary budget and discuss what they could afford. It's so hard for towns to get a number from the district and figure out what to do next. If there is any way the Select Boards can join in the process sooner, that is what they'd like to do. Chair Galante stated he understands that QRSD has a responsibility to the students and that QRSD has a model to follow, but the town does too.

Mr. Wiggler stated that in the past, Hubbardston was looking for a five year projection with their budget which is very difficult for Quabbin to project.

Mr. Galante said the five year projection is not something they need as they understand the difficulty but would like to be included in the discussion process earlier.

Ms. Duval stated that a five year budget plan was feasible but the District was unable to give any information that would help the towns determine their individual assessments. Dr. Muir stated that the district would be amenable to coming to meetings to share any information they have.

Ms. Munroe asked about the E & D budget. Ms. Duval explained how the District has used the E & D budget in the past to reduce the budget. Ms. Munroe asked how the district can expect a town to come up with such a large amount of money and suggested that in the future there should be more discussion in regard to where the town is at with their budget and where the school needs to be at and meet somewhere in the middle so there isn't all this going back and forth.

Mr. Galante asked Ms. Duval to explain the FY23 assessments increase and total assessment impact. Ms. Duval noted that these assessments were likely not final and would decrease as they have historically. Dr. Muir stated that QRSD is being very transparent and trying to be open in their communication and asked for the Select Board to be patient as they continue to work on the budget.

Finance Committee Member Peter Walker asked how declining enrollment related to staffing. Ms. Duval stated she has a historical chart showing the declining number of teachers. Mr. Walker asked if these are created positions or needed positions? Mr. Wiggler stated they are state mandated positions.

Finance Chair Rayne asked when the School Committee starts working on gathering information so that there can be more meaningful conversation. Ms. Duval stated that it begins in October, but discussions start in January. Ms. Rayne said January may be a good time to meet with the district to begin talks. Ms. Duval stated she'd love to see people come to the public hearing when she goes through everything but not many come

to those. Mr. Galante stated that he appreciates them coming in and realizes that they are not going to come to any conclusions tonight.

5. *Review and action on draft Annual Town Meeting Warrant.* Tabled.
6. *Town Administrator Report.* Tabled.
7. *Matters not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.* None.
8. *Public/Press questions.* None.
9. *Adjournment.* On motion duly made by Mr. Reed and seconded by Mr. Russell, it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn.

ADJOURNED at 8:26 PM.

Minutes submitted by:
Minutes approved by:

Susan Rayne, Clerk *Pro Tem*
Susan Rayne, Chair


Susan Rayne

3/13/23
Date