

HOLLIS BROOKLINE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

FEBRUARY 21, 2019

PUBLIC HEARINGS

MEETING MINUTES

Public Hearings were conducted by the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District on Thursday, February 21, 2019 at 6:30 p.m. at the Hollis Brookline Middle School Library, Hollis

Andrew Corey, Superintendent, presided:

Also in Attendance:

Holly Deurloo Babcock, Hollis Brookline Cooperative School Board
Darlene Mann, Chair, Hollis Brookline COOP District Budget Cmte.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Citizen's Petition Warrant Articles

Superintendent Corey explained the purpose of the Public Hearings was to gather public input on Citizen's Petition Warrant Articles that will appear on this year's ballot.

"Because there is the possibility that Article 1 will be defeated, or that other considerations will result in the space created by Article 1 not being adequate or available for the HBHS Robotics Team, to see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$550,000 for the purpose of funding a facility for the Hollis Brookline High School and Middle School Robotics Teams. Funds to be transferred to the Hollis Brookline Robotics Boosters for this purpose. (Majority vote required)"

Superintendent Corey opened the public comment period at 6:31 p.m.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Stated his opposition to the article, which would raise \$550,000 in a single year, and would have a substantial tax impact. It appears to be competing with the bond article of the School Board. The language of the article puts to question whether it is the right plan for the robotics team, which is one of the motivators for the project. Obviously, there is disagreement about the expansion plans and how it would work.

He stated his understanding, if the article passes, it would not obligate the School Board to utilize the funds for this project. It would be half a million dollars added to the School Board operating budget. They could choose to do the project or not.

The public comment period was closed at 6:34 p.m.

"Shall we adopt the provisions of [RSA 32:5 V-b](#), requiring that the annual budget and all special warrant articles having a tax impact, as determined by the school board, shall contain a notation stating the estimated tax impact of the article? The determination of the estimated tax impact shall be subject to approval by the governing body." (submitted by Citizens Petition)

Superintendent Corey opened the public comment period at 6:35 p.m.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Provided a presentation, which can be viewed [here](#) (beginning at tape counter 6:00).

A slide was displayed with the language of the State RSA, which reads: "Any town may vote to require that the annual budget and all special warrant articles having a tax impact, as determined by the governing body, shall

contain a notation stating the estimated tax impact of the article. The determination of the estimated tax impact shall be subject to approval by the governing body.”

Mr. Pauer remarked the idea is that the tax impact would be included in the warrant. This is something that could be done today, but the School Board and Budget Committee haven't chosen to. Were the article to pass, it would become mandatory.

He provided an example of how the language would appear/read based on this year's warrant article for the proposed FY20 budget. The example provided is one of many formats that could be used. Mr. Pauer remarked what it does is provide clarity on the impact of each article.

The tax impact notation helps to increase transparency by providing the estimated tax impact in the warrant articles and the posted warrant. Residents have expressed a desire for that information in the warrant. Tax impact is estimated by the Budget Committee, and the figures approved by the Governing Body (School Board). If SB2 is adopted, the tax impact would be included on the ballot.

This will be voted on during the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District Meeting on March 6th and 7th at the Hollis Brookline High School.

The public comment period was closed at 6:38 p.m.

“Shall we adopt the provisions of [RSA 32:5-b](#), and implement a tax cap whereby the governing body (or budget committee) shall not submit a recommended budget that increases the amount to be raised by local taxes, based on the prior fiscal year's actual amount of local taxes raised, by more than 2%?” (Submitted by Citizens Petition)

Superintendent Corey opened the public comment period at 6:39 p.m.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road, Brookline

Provided a presentation (can be viewed [here](#) beginning at tape counter 10:08) on the proposed tax cap.

Mr. Pauer stated the Petition proposes a 2% tax cap. The Article requires a 3/5 majority to pass and a ballot vote of a minimum of one hour.

Language in the law states the “legislative body may override the cap”. It is really a starting point. He provided a listing of towns and cities as well as school districts across the State that have adopted a tax cap since the law's inception in 2013; information he gained from the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration.

He has resided in Brookline since 1994. Since 1995, Brookline property tax increases have averaged 3.47% annually. The CPI-U (inflation) has averaged 2.17% annually. His personal property taxes are up 127% since 1995. If property taxes tracked inflation, annual property taxes would be up only 67%, and if under 2% tax cap, 61%. Taxes paid in Town, which includes the schools, have been almost double the rate of inflation (over the course of 24 years). A graph was shown depicting this historical trend.

Mr. Pauer commented the COOP District is on an unsustainable spending trajectory. There is a level to decreasing student population. NESDEC numbers indicate a reduction in enrollment over the next five years. This year there will be a large increase, if all articles pass in the COOP; tax increases of 9.5% in Hollis and 12.1% in Brookline.

A graph was displayed depicting enrollment and budget history trajectory in the COOP District. Mr. Pauer reiterated the budget is on an upward trajectory while enrollment is decreasing. The graph also showed a comparison of the budgetary increase based on the current trajectory in comparison to the rate of increase were the tax cap in place.

The reason for a tax cap is to get back to zero-based budgeting; method of budgeting where all expenses must be justified for each new period. He commented non-discretionary items can be controlled; it is an affordability question. If you have rapidly increasing (uncontrollable) costs per staff member, you can actually control that by reducing the number of staff. If the cost of a teacher gets too high, we might not be able to afford as many teachers. That is just reality. The tax cap provides the School Board with a baseline from which to negotiate future Collective Bargaining Agreements. He reiterated, the tax cap can be overridden at District Meeting subject to the 10% rule the Budget Committee has on the proposed budget.

Mr. Pauer stated the desire to preserve the future of the Hollis Brookline COOP by bringing spending in. At some point, this COOP may not survive if the increases continue this way.

The public comment period was closed at 6:49 p.m.

“Shall we adopt the provisions of [RSA 40:13](#) (known as SB 2) to allow official ballot voting on all issues before the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District on the second Tuesday of March?” (Submitted by Citizens Petition)

Superintendent Corey opened the public comment period at 6:50 p.m.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road

Provided a presentation (can be viewed [here](#); tape counter 20:21).

SB2 (Official Ballot Referenda) is a form of town meeting that has two sessions. The first session (deliberative session) is for explanation, discussion, debate and amendments to the proposed operating budget and warrant articles. The second session (voting session) allows voters to cast their votes for local elections and all warrant articles. Voters would have the choice between two budgets, the one approved at the Deliberative Session and a default budget, which is calculated by a State approved formula.

Passage of this article to adopt SB2 as the form of governance requires a 3/5 majority vote of those voting (at the polls), and if passed, would take effect at the next annual or special meeting.

Mr. Pauer provided an explanation of the SB2 process. The Deliberative Session is conducted in February. The discussion that occurs allows for amendments to be made, and results in those present finalizing the warrant for the voting session. The final vote to approve or disapprove the warrant articles occurs during the ballot voting on Town election day (2nd Tuesday in March). It is a private ballot vote on each warrant article from the Deliberative Session. Voting can happen any time the polls are open (yes or no vote) and voters can obtain an absentee ballot if traveling, etc.

Voters would have the choice between two budgets, the one approved at the Deliberative Session and a default budget, which is calculated by a State approved formula; the amount of the same appropriations as contained in the operating budget authorized for the previous year, reduced, and increased, as the case may be, by debt service, contracts, and other obligations previously incurred or mandated by law, and reduced by one-time expenditures. The proposed operating budget can be higher or lower than the default budget. This year, in Brookline, the proposed budget is lower than the default budget so if you want a lower budget you vote yes.

Advantages of official ballot voting were identified. An increase in voter participation with two opportunities to participate; Deliberative Session and ballot voting session. A large advantage is the opportunity for a 30-day period to discuss and understand the warrant articles. Mr. Pauer spoke of the privacy of ballot voting. He reiterated the opportunity to vote any time during the polling hours or by absentee ballot.

The School Board, Budget Committee, and proponents of warrant articles need to communicate the merits of the warrant articles, and would have 30 days to do that. Another valuable aspect is that articles cannot be tabled. All warrant articles are placed on the ballot and are voted on. Reconsideration of warrant articles is not permitted.

Mr. Pauer provided a slide depicting the history (# of sessions) of annual meetings beginning in 2014.

Mr. Pauer noted the adoption of SB2 in Brookline in 2016. He provided graphs showing voter participation between 2013 and 2019 at both Deliberative Sessions and District Meetings. There were 12-18% of voters participating in Town elections and 17.5 - 21% after SB2 was adopted. Some people say you don't get good attendance at the Deliberative Session; however, he believes it falls in the same range.

Mr. Pauer encouraged voters to support the official ballot voting for the COOP. It provides longer and more informed discussion on the warrant articles, and serves privacy and the ability to vote for all voters including those who are out of Town and cannot make it to the night meetings. Increasing voter participation leads to more fiscally responsible spending and reasonable property taxes.

He provided lists of the towns/cities and school districts that have adopted SB2, and stated no town or school district has ever rescinded SB2 once adopted, because it works.

Mr. Pauer noted this is not decided at the District Meeting, it is on the ballot for March 12th.

Superintendent Corey informed the viewing audience, SB2 is on the School District Warrant Article, but is not typically discussed at the Annual Meeting. It is up to the discretion of the Moderator as it appears on the ballot.

The public comment period was closed at 7:00 p.m.

Eric Pauer, 12 Westview Road

Urged the School Board to keep the introduction at the Annual Meeting to a minimum. Superintendent Corey spoke of efforts underway to reduce those elements of the meeting. The starting time has been changed to 6:30 p.m. There are four mandatory ballot questions; bond, budget, tax cap, and SAU budget. The ballot votes take the longest amount of time. The Moderator will do his best to move through those.

The Public Hearing was declared closed at 7:01 p.m.

Date _____

Signed _____