



Lunenburg Public Schools

Dr. Jodi Fortuna, Superintendent of Schools

MEETING MINUTES
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday, September 3, 2025
Town Hall
7:00 – Hybrid

School Committee

Anthony Sculimbrene Chair - Present
Laura Brzozoski, Vice Chair - Present
Emily Young Secretary - Present
Mandy Gilman, Member - Present
George Yapp, Member - Present

Superintendent

Dr. Jodi Fortuna

Recording Secretary

Courtney Fuller

Guests: Tim Santry –LMHS Principal, Norman Yvon – THES Principal, Carla Squier _Primary School Principal

In accordance with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law, please be advised that this meeting is being recorded and broadcast live over the Lunenburg Public Access channel, on Facebook Live on the Public Access Facebook page.

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The agenda lists all the topics which may be discussed at the meeting and those reasonably anticipated by the Chair. Votes may be taken as a result of these discussions. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by Open Meeting Law

- 1. Call to Order at 7:00 by Mr. Sculimbrene**
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Public Comment Dave Rodgers, 82 Highland Ave,** I am here because of a memo I received, there are multiple paragraphs and there needs to be one more, in my opinion and that is that the previous superintendent was not as upfront, forthright, and honest as I would have liked her to be, and hopefully this will be sorted out tonight.
- 4. Chairs Report** – Mr. Sculimbrene read a prepared statement regarding a memo sent by Dr. Fortuna to him, the Town Manager, and the Chair of the Finance Committee regarding a budget surplus that was recently discovered in the amount of \$582,115.44. An explanation of general expectations of the school committee and the unhappy discovery of this surplus. The memo explains the plans going forward to ensure this does not happen again and how they plan to make sure policies and practices are followed as they move ahead.
- 5. Student Representative Report** We started school last week. The Primary School will celebrate “dot” day on September 15th to celebrate creativity, it is inspired by Peter H. Reynolds book Dot. Picture day will be September 11 and 12th at the Primary School and open house will be September 18th. Turkey Hill picture day is September 10. Penny wars will be starting soon and open house is September 17th. At the Middle School, student government will start on September 15th, their first school dance is October 3rd. The High School open house will be September 11th, fall athletics will begin shortly.

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6. Review and Approve Minutes

- a. **Regular session 8/6/25** – postponed until next meeting as not everyone has the minutes available for review

7. Review and Approve Line Items, Transfers, Warrants

- a. **Line Item Transfers** - FY 25 \$174.05 from athletic dues and fees and move to special detail, \$4900 out of business manager salary account to the stipends account, \$53,395.19 out of building maintenance to cover sewage disposal, electricity charges and telephone charges, a discussion of transfer accounts regarding a double budget amount for paraprofessionals in the amount of \$243,000, and a transfer of funds from High school specialized paraprofessionals into HR director thru over time for the high school custodians **Ms. Brzozoski makes a motion to approve line item transfers as outlined by Mr. McNamara, Ms. Gilman seconds the motion all approve**
- b. **Warrants 6/16/25 -8/28/25 \$1,753,054.41**
- c. **Donations** – None

8. Superintendents Report

Dr. Fortuna explains the theme of Ohana, a Hawaiian word meaning Family. Schools are more than a place of learning they are a community where everyone belongs, unity, inclusivity, responsibility and love. My commitment is to ensure that every student and family in Lunenburg feels, seen, supported, and valued. I have sent out a survey to help with my entry plan. Early survey feedback highlights strong pride in our teachers and in the sense of community that defines our schools. To date as of 6 pm we have received 184 responses, if you have not completed the survey, please do, I am really interested in hearing your voice. Senior sunrise was well attended and is a tradition that marks the beginning of their senior year. An example of the resilience Lunenburg School District has, was experienced on day 1, when an unexpected fire occurred at Lunenburg Middle School, staff responded calmly and effectively ensuring that every student was safe. We welcome Jennifer Traverso as our new K -8 Literacy Coach Specialist, who is already partnering with teachers as they implement HMH and a new reading version. Our team submitted entitlement and competitive grant application, we have launched a new website for staff and families to keep everyone informed more easily, thank you Dr. Bookis for your work on this. Professional development this year will be building and department based, making it more relevant to day to day practice. Our schools continue to grow and evolve to meet student needs. I would like to welcome Amy Monahan - HS Art, Anabel Sauer - Primary School Kindergarten, Beth Robinson - Primary School MTSS Support K-2, Jen Traverso - district Literacy Coach, Amanda Lucy -TLC Program, and Kayla Dwyer – Primary School Kindergarten. We have 1,593 students enrolled across the schools including the ACE program. Our new Business Administrator, Chris McNamara, has begun his work with energy and focus as you have seen tonight, through reviewing expenditures dating back to FY22, he is developing a multi-year projection through FY29. Our maintenance and facilities teams worked tirelessly through the summer to get our school ready. Turkey Hill received fire alarm upgrades, the security upgrades are nearly done, additional parking, office improvements at Central office moved to Turkey Hill. New doors and hardware and we replaced a freezer. The Primary School finished HVAC upgrades, installation of new cameras, a grease trap, a dishwasher and a table at the primary school. We created a kitchenette for the ACE program. Juliana Hanscom represented Lunenburg and federal level advocating in Washington DC ensuring our districts voice was included in national discussions about special education funding and staffing. We have received DESE approval for our 240 262 federal grant as well as some Title 3 funding.

9. New Business Action

- a. **Appointment of SC Representative to Building Redesign** Committee determines Ms. Brzozoski is currently the appointed member.

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- b. **Budget Timeline** Committee has a budget timeline for FY 27 in their folder. Dr. Fortuna goes through the dates and expectations. Committee discussion their plans for information to be supplied and transparency expectations. **Ms. Brzozoski makes a motion to approve the budget timeline, with the exception of a possible edit of the March 16th date after conferring with FinCom, Ms. Gilman seconds the motion all approve.**

Discussion

- c. **Back to School Updates** Ms. Squier reports they have 394 students at the Primary School, not including the ELC. August 26th we welcomed first and second graders, September 2, we welcomed kindergarten, preschool and ELC, and today we welcomed our second set of preschoolers. Yesterday we had Hank, Officer McNamara, and Officer Munroe in our building greeting students. We are working on the one Ohana, so it is a family that supports, respects, and uplifts each other. Today we worked with our fire department for our first fire drill, it was successful and everyone got out. One more new staff member we have at the Primary School is our full time evening custodian, Daniel Johnson. Additionally we have had some moves, we welcomed Derek Guimond, who was the physical education teacher at the high school and is now shared between the Primary School and Turkey Hill. We have Ms. Thompson, who was a paraprofessional at Turkey Hill, and also Miss Smith who was a paraprofessional through the ACE program and is now in our building. Some of our upcoming events are we will be having picture day. We will be having “dot” day, which is a celebration of creativity, courage, and collaboration through the book by Peter Reynolds, The Dot. We will have our first community meeting as a school. Open house will be September 18th from 5 to 7. Mr. Yvon reports this opening at Turkey Hill was the best one he has seen in 40 years of education, we had a great first day and first few weeks. Over the summer we had Central Office, ACE and morning extended day all into Turkey Hill. As of this moment we are coexisting nicely and I expect that will continue. I want to give a special thanks and shout out to our custodial and maintenance team, Jimmy, Paul, Scott, Norm, Tom, Ryan and Chris. We had 4 doors replaced, they now all open and close correctly and securely, our fire alarm system was replaced, and we tested it this morning with our first fire drill. Our security system was also upgraded over the summer, new cameras and swipe cards for more than one door. Over the summer we did lose some students, we lost 8 third graders, 2 fourth graders and 7 fifth graders, we wish them well wherever they ended up. We did have a paraprofessional resign due to another opportunity, that position was filled by a member of the high school, we are at full staff. Over the summer we also had transfers in, we gained 6 third graders, 9 fourth graders and 5 fifth graders, they are fitting in well and have been welcomed by the teachers and their classmates. We have started this year with 357 students and an average class size of 23/24 for third grade with 113 students, 135 students in the fourth grade with an average class size of 27, and 109 students in the fifth grade with an average class size of 22/23. Last Thursday I did visit the Middle school to check in on the sixth grade students, they looked comfortable and ready to rock the school year. I want to thank our faculty, our staff, our students, and our families for the best start ever. Mr. Santry reports our first day of school was certainly not boring. We had a small fire, we evacuated 834 students and 130 staff members, the whole process from pulling the fire alarm until last student was picked up or on the bus was 1 hour and 13 minutes. I really want to thank Dr. Fortuna, our staff, our students, everyone was so calm and level headed. We have 388 students at Middle School class size 23-26, our 7th grade is at 155 which is the largest class size I have had here. We welcome John Malloy from the high school to the middle school TLC. We have a Washington DC parent meeting scheduled for September 25th, our open house is tomorrow night at 6 pm. The high school students are settling into their courses with 446 students, we are in the middle of add/drop so we don’t have an accurate class size. We welcome Amy Monahan, she is

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our Visual Arts teacher. Our largest class is 31 which is because of a reduction in foreign language. Fall sports and clubs are underway. Class advisors are underway with homecoming plans, homecoming will be November 1.

Old Business

Discussion

- d. **FY 25 Budget** The committee shares some questions that have come in, Dr. Fortuna and Mr. McNamara provide the answers and explanations of how situations occur, surpluses, debt, and how budgets are planned and prepared for. A discussion of new processes with purchase orders and how they are monitoring funds. Ms. Squier shared some of the things her students are missing out on and how hard it has made it, which is disappointing and frustrating based on an unknown surplus of money that was not spent and instead was given back to the town. Mr. Yvon shares some of the positions that were cut and left unfilled and the ability to meet all the students' needs is harder. Mr. Santry shares we had drastic reductions in services to students. We really could have used those funds to keep some of the positions. Dr. Bookis reports from a curriculum perspective all of the programs that were cut in order to meet the budget.

- 10. **Subcommittee Reports** Ms. Young reports the Master Planning Steering Committee has met several times over the summer, we did have to adjust quorum in order to start our meetings again, new positions have been filled as well, but we are still looking to fill a member at large position if anyone is interested. The committee is working hard to encourage growth while preserving what makes Lunenburg, Lunenburg. We are trying to find a balance between development and preservation though the initiatives asked for by the town and what the committee feels are "must haves" vs what are "nice to have." Currently the committee has reached out to other committees and board in town to gather input related to the draft of the goals for the master plan and public meeting. A presentation will be coming soon.

Ms. Gilman reports the PTO, (Parent Teacher Organization) will have our first meeting of the year next Monday at 7 at the Middle High School in the project room. I encourage any parents who are listening and want to come to join us. We are a low pressure organization and we are planning some really fun things for the year.

Ms. Brzozoski reports the Lunenburg Municipal Design Committee has met twice, they talked about what they wanted going forward, I wasn't aware of the second meeting, so I will follow up on that.

Mr. Sculimbrene reports the Athletic Advisory Committee has not met, Peter and I talked to Yanina about scheduling a meeting. We are scheduling a meeting for the High School Advisory as well, it is the 26th at 3:00.

- 11. **Public Comment for Issues Discussed Tonight Mr. Rodgers** I don't think that there are 12 people in the hierarchy of Lunenburg that could put together the budget that you folks look at, not because they are not smart, but because of time constraints, families are traveling. What you have to do is trust the people that work with you and if they aren't doing what they are supposed to do, it is like shoveling sand against a tide. The people in the town are overworked, but this is the scenario we have to work with. It really is not easy. You really need a forensic accountant to go through all of this information. The previous Superintendent was a very capable person. I really miss not having Cassidy here. I have lived in Lunenburg for 50 years, I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly, I would be remiss if I didn't thank each of you for what you do, it is a volunteer position and you put lots of hours in. The good news, this is a nice community made up of wonderful people, just because we had a catastrophic event, doesn't mean it is not salvageable and still a nice place to bring up your family. We have to work together and realize we will not get everything we want, but we will get this squared away because of people like you.

Renee Emkey 6 Iris Court I am a member of the select board but I speak as myself tonight. I learned of this surplus last night, and it was gut punch, I was not happy and did not sleep. I know the superintendent who I have had the pleasure of meeting at the first tri-board meeting and Mr. McNamara are the messengers, you walked into this mess. I want to give a slightly different perspective. The first thing I thought of was the override year, the amount of money is 61% of that override amount, that is going back to the town, well the increase in taxes for that override 61% higher than needed. As timing would have it, there was fire on the first day of school, at the first tri-board meeting the chief presented what a fourth shift would cost, something that the fire department has been asking for, for a few years, I will round it up, it was \$470,000, that surplus would have more than covered this amount. On the day of the fire there had been a serious medical incident going on and when the first engine arrived it only had one person on it because of the other medical emergency, this could have been much worse, and that money could have gone to that. We have had some turnover, superintendent, business manager, the school committee, majority of the members have turned over. I know you guys are aware of this, but this cannot happen again. I am stating the obvious, but, I need to get it off my chest. Leading up to this in the past 6 months or so there have been things that have come up, athletic revolving fund was running in a deficit, I was told over \$100,000, there was the ski team, Lunenburg was paying more than their fair share, a one month copy fee of \$19,000, a line item transfer. There is 2020 hindsight, I think there were signs that things weren't working. You spoke to the trust and the confidence, it has definitely been damaged, I am speaking for myself and I don't think I am alone, and I think you guys feel the same way. I ask you please, please put eyes on this. Please ask the questions and provide the answers. This cannot happen again, we can't go back, but I would love to know more of what we didn't get. Please be extra diligent, I know it is a lot of work, I sat through the rainbow budget season, and we all sat in this room far too many nights. So yeah this hurts.

TJ Loughlin, 207 Rolling Acres Road I really do resonate with a lot of what Ms. Emkey said, she took the words out of my mouth. What I think is getting mixed up here in this meeting is the FY 25 and FY 26. My understanding is this is a FY 25 surplus, which is the override year, which the cuts that were made were ESSER cuts. So we didn't cut beyond ESSER, which is a really important thing to remember, because if we made only ESSER cuts, and then we dug in with \$500,000 into that budget, what does that mean? Does that mean we didn't offer the services or did we actually make cuts that we as a town did not approve? That is important, what I have learned after the override passed, is that the school is budgeted money and then the school can do what they want with the money. When schools make decisions after the budget, we as citizens don't actually know how the funds were spent. We had a list of "saves" and at the end of the day we don't know if those positions were actually saved. The cuts that are listed don't actually have to be cut, other cuts could be made, other transfers could occur. The budget is one thing, but now we are talking about the actuals that we do not have access to and we are not really informed of it after the fact. I was criticized personally going into FY 26 – did the schools actually spend all of the override money and it was never an outright easy answer. The other question that I personally asked and probably Mandy too was, did all the teachers and paras actually get saved that we said we were going to save? This is alarming and erodes trust, especially for people like me that put a lot on the line, two years in a row for overrides. I went to bat for the school committee in front of the finance committee to say we all trust what they're saying. We have to trust them they are the experts, and now I find out that we couldn't. What could you even show us that makes us trust you now? I think we need answers, because what was cut in FY25, I know what was cut in FY 26, we need to figure out what was not provided in FY 25 and then we can figure out the major implications to the FY 26 budget. Should we have actually decreased that budget by \$500,000 and started with less money? Would we have cut more? Did we not have to make cuts? It is all very not clear to me.

Peter Beardmore, 282 Pleasant Street As a former member of the school committee, I share in some amount of responsibility here. I feel like we didn't ask the right questions at the right time, particularly as FY 25 was getting into the latter months. Lets not lose perspective here, I think the right question

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was asked, was this a budgeting problem or was this an operational problem? Was this a management problem? I believe it was a management problem, but I also believe the school committee actually put a lot more on the administration in the last several months of FY 25 than they could handle. Let's keep in mind some context here, at no time in the last two years have I ever heard that Munis is good, not once. The school department shares Munis with the town, not once did I hear we are caught up on PO's, payments or invoices. There has always been a backlog for the last two years...why?...because we are efficient, we are tightly knitted with the town, we work together really well to save on cost. We are not saving a damn dime doing it that way in my opinion. Everything requires a phone call, someone is out for the day, town hall is closed on Friday, and it is one thing after another. The operational part of this really needs a look. Yes I do think we need to look at FY25 and see what didn't get spent, but I actually disagree with the previous speaker. I think we really need to look at FY 26 and make sure that we don't need to redo the budget. We need to make sure we are doing the budget. Is Munis updated, is Munis coded correctly for FY 26? I suspect it is not. And if it is, and if you believe it is, I would say please double check. The administration has a responsibility to carry out the budget that the school committee votes for and I think ultimately that is where we have fallen short. I want to make sure going forward we are intent on doing that. That means the budget, but it also means all of the functions of the school, such as spending when it comes to grant funds as well. Postings, hiring's they should be approved by the school committee before they are made when they are funded off the budget. With respect to the unspent money, the money is not lost. The money is still there, it is free cash and it is going to roll over. It is going to be appropriated in one fashion or another. It now falls under a different fiscal policy, but the money is not gone, this is nowhere near as bad as what happened here 23 or so years ago. The money is still here, so let's keep that in mind.

Peter Beardmore, Capital Planning Committee, Thank you for appointing me. The first meeting was held tonight across the street. The town manager outlined the capital plan requests to the CPC are due by October 1st. The good news is I think a lot of that work has kind of been done because if you recall last year we flipped FY27 and FY26 to deal with the Primary School air conditioner. I would encourage you to get moving on that and to whatever extent I can be helpful or consult with you folks I am happy to do that.

Mr. Sculimbrene There were three people that are emeritus members of town government that I consulted with before talking tonight. I want to thank each and one of them. One asked not to be named, one was Carol Archambault, and one was Dave Rodgers. I do not like delivering bad news, but they gave me really helpful insights. I was not feeling great about talking and Mr. Rodgers say "you got to do it" Thank you

12. Topics for Future Discussion

13. Adjournment Ms. Brzozoski makes a motion to adjourn at 9:38, Mr. Yapp seconds the motion all approve