

Town of *Dunstable*  
Joint Meeting of the Selectboard & Advisory Board  
November 3, 2014  
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

**Convened:** 7:01 pm

**Present:** Walter F. Alterisio, Chair, Kenneth J. Leva, Daniel F. Devlin, members; Madonna McKenzie, Town Administrator; Dana Metzler, Chair, Harold Simmons, Kevin Welch, Pamela Crocker, Advisory Board members

**Joint Recommendations & Guidelines for Budgets in FY16**

*Greetings and Salutations from the Selectboard to the Advisory Board*

Following greetings from the Boards to each other, both Boards moved to focus on the joint issues being brought before them by the Town Administrator. Ms. McKenzie requested recommendations and guidelines for the budgets. She has already begun the process of preparing for the Annual Town Meeting and the FY2016 budget. Ms. McKenzie briefly explained what she's looking for from each of the Boards. The Advisory Board started off by noting that there is still quite some time between now and the normal budget season and those things are still in a very early stage. Ms. McKenzie inquired on their position on salary, including the pressing school budget requests. The Advisory Board indicated that it has not yet taken a position on the salary question. The Advisory Board noted that the rate in the past few years has been at 2 percent roughly, for the last two years and 1 percent the year before that.

Ms. McKenzie explained to the Advisory Board that she's looking at 2.9 percent. She noted Groton is giving the school district 2.3 percent. The Selectboard noted that sustainability is a high priority, elaborating that sustainability with respect to Dunstable is critical in the years moving forward given the residential basis of the tax base for the town. A concern going forward with respect to the school district is that negotiation may be primarily between the school district and Groton. Ms. McKenzie informed the Boards of a meeting she is scheduled to have with the school district involving the budget. Dr. Rodriguez, the superintendent, has asked to go over Dunstable's budget to better understand the town's position. Ms. McKenzie has agreed to do so with her and inquired of the Advisory Board whether they would provide a member to attend. The Advisory Board did not have an immediate response but determined to make a decision at a later time.

The two Boards then turned back to the issue of building the budget for the next fiscal year. The Advisory Board advised that if Ms. McKenzie uses 2.9 percent, she should use it as a starting point with the understanding and knowledge that once revenues become clearer in February and March the number may have to change. Anticipated growth is roughly 2.5 percent currently. Ms. McKenzie expressed that she'd like to put a budget out for the departments with a 1.5 percent increase for the operating budget, as a beginning. The Advisory Board counseled that she use last year's number and seeing how each department reacts and what they ask for instead of giving them an automatic increase. Ms. McKenzie agreed to this guideline. There was some discussion of how the process was done last year and a notation that some information will need to be brought to the fore from Mr. Dean, who used to sit on the Advisory Board and was a point person for the budget process. Mr. Metzler told Ms. McKenzie that he would address this need with Mr. Dean.

**Town Accountants Introduction & Report**

Ms. McKenzie introduced the new Town Accountant for Dunstable, Lorraine Leonard to the Advisory Board. After formal introductions, the Advisory Board inquired with Ms. Leonard about the breadth of

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her knowledge as a school business manager and her work in the Town of Harvard. Specifically, they inquired if she was familiar with the school budgeting process. Ms. Leonard assured them she indeed was and spoke briefly about her relevant background on the subject matter. Ms. Leonard then proceeded to talk about how Harvard conducts its budgetary process. In Harvard they use level service, which means that unless you know of an increase you can't add any people or services. What this does is effectively work as a reality check to budgets and helps to keep them close to level funding from year to year. She elaborated that what most departments do, with the exception of police, is leave the number alone and when Harvard's Selectboard and Finance Committee decide what number to use, they simply plug in the number and it populates the line items.

### **Town Administrator's Budget Line**

Ms. McKenzie announced to the Boards that she will be asking for a budget line item for the position of Town Administrator. She noted that Dunstable will be advertising for the position in coming months since her agreement with the town will be coming to a conclusion. The Selectboard noted that the exact number remains up to discussion at this stage and will need to be based in part the feedback from all of the effected parties. Both Boards agreed that this feedback will help determine how we will operate and at what level and what price. The transition process has allowed the town to settle into what it is comfortable with and likely who they will be hiring as a replacement. Ms. McKenzie asked the Boards what skill sets they feel are needed for the future going forward? The Selectboard responded by noting that they heard from virtually every department on the subject of the Town Administrator, with virtually all reporting happiness with the results as they stand. The Selectboard again reminded the Administrator that they respect the deal they made with her, but would be happy to keep her longer if she were willing to stay beyond the end of her term in June.

### **School Budget, Further Discussion**

Discussion returned to the school budget. The school district has its own reserve numbers for its budgetary process which it considers to be more or less proprietary according to the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board noted that part of its primary role in the budgetary process is to manage increases in cost. They noted that unfortunately the town has no authority over what the school district may ask. It is the agreed strategy of both the Boards that this stage to simply keep kicking the proposed school budget back until the requests are reasonable and sustainable. The Boards favor looking at the school choice situation as well in all of this.

Turning on this subject both Boards considered the Lowell Tech situation and how it works out. The Selectboard also made note to the Advisory Board of what it learned from David E. Tully, Dunstable's member of Lowell Tech's school committee. Mr. Tully revealed to the Selectboard that Dunstable's students who attend Nashoba are treated like Lowell Tech students, Lowell Tech pays Nashoba, than bills Dunstable at the Lowell Tech rate *and* they get funds from the Commonwealth for the kids going to Nashoba.

Returning to the Groton-Dunstable School District, the Boards touched on how the school said that when they got the override last fiscal year, they put a number out that they said they could live with for the next two years. Now they appear to be reversing this and it could force Dunstable into another override vote which is untenable. Ms. McKenzie feels that the number the school district gave the town that that is the one she should use in the budget. She further noted that if we had an agreement at the end that there was a number of what would be asked, than we have a number to use now. The Advisory Board reminded that it was elected officials on the school board who gave this number to Dunstable, and that the number should hold true. Ms. McKenzie suggested the school committee members be invited to attend a joint meeting of the Advisory Board and have the Selectboard and asked the Advisory Board to consider the matter and advise her of available times to do this.

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The Boards concluded the matter of the school district by noting that Dunstable needs step up the issue because it is so significant to what we will talk about for the rest the towns budget. This issue must be resolved. The Boards agreed that the school district should be reminded that Dunstable upheld its part of the bargain, and that we are asking the school and Groton to hold true as well. Ms. McKenzie underlined the importance of getting this process moving now, so we have an idea of what we are looking at and can start negotiating sooner rather than later.

### **Personnel Board Conducting Salary Survey's**

Ms. McKenzie reported that she has been working with the Personnel Board to compare salaries and pay for similar positions in other towns. The concept is to find out what the compensation should look like in comparison to what Dunstable actually pays. The Boards noted that Dunstable has many well-meaning volunteer people and that a primary purpose for a full time Town Administrator will be to manage and help such individuals and the boards they serve on find out what grant monies there are to help manage and improve compensation and augment budgets.

### **School Choice**

The two Boards agreed that it might be wise to give the school district a checklist of what the town wants to see, including a contingency budget. From there discussion moved to school choice. There are approximately 59 students using school choice. About 55 appear to be "in-school" placements that don't cost that much according to the school district. The school administration is uncertain on its favor for the school choice. The school committee is, but the administration is not as "gun-ho" about it. The Superintendent wants more in house services rather than out of house ones by all reports. There was discussion about exactly how much Dunstable is paying for special needs school choice students. It was resolved by the Boards that there are clearly issues that need to be addressed on this topic moving forward.

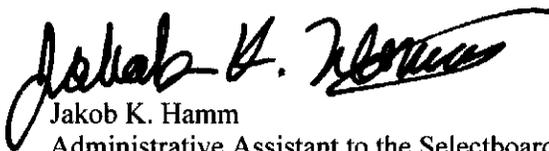
### **The Accountants Salary**

Ms. McKenzie brought the Boards attention the issue of the salary for the Accountant. Previously, the town paid an assessment to the Town of Townsend and shared an Accountant with them. Now that the former Accountant has moved on to another town and Townsend and Dunstable have concluded their agreement, Dunstable needs to have a salary for its new Accountant. There is no line item for the Accountants salary currently. As a result, Ms. McKenzie requested the Advisory Board approve a reserve fund transfer between now and April to pay for the Accountant now. \$11,000 is roughly needed between now and April apparently. Some of the transfer funds will need to cover a buy back for the outgoing accountant. The Advisory Board noted there is approximately \$28,000 in the reserve fund now and that it should be sufficient to cover the needed funds and leave some left over.

At this point, Mr. Devlin made a motion for the Selectboard to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed unanimously. Adjourned 8:04pm

The Advisory Board continued its meeting after the Selectboard adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Hamm  
Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard & Town Administrator

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