

**HOLLIS BROOKLINE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL BOARD  
JANUARY 10, 2020  
PUBLIC HEARING  
MEETING MINUTES**

A Public Hearing was conducted by the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School Board on Friday, January 10, 2020 at 6:31 p.m. at the Hollis/Brookline Middle School Library.

Chairman, Holly Deurloo Babcock, presided:

Members of the Board present: Tom Solon, Vice Chairman (arrived at 6:40 p.m.)  
Beth Janine Williams, Secretary (arrived at 6:33 p.m.)  
Melanie Levesque  
Cindy VanCoughnett  
Krista Whalen

Members of the Board Absent: Elizabeth Brown

Also in Attendance: Gina Bergskaug, Assistant Superintendent  
Bob Thompson, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services

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**PUBLIC HEARING  
APPORTIONMENT**

Chairman Deurloo Babcock explained the purpose of the Public Hearing was to review and gather public input on the proposed amendment to Article 5 of the Articles of Agreement, which is proposed in the Special Meeting Warrant for the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District.

The guidelines for the Public Hearing were reviewed.

A [presentation](#) on apportionment, and the proposed amendments to Article 5 of the Articles of Agreement was provided.

The COOP School District was formed in 1991 through a signed Article of Agreement by both towns. The purpose was to build a high school, and offer outstanding academic, arts, and athletic programs.

Apportionment is the formula used to determine how to share costs of the district between the towns. It is set by a simple majority vote at either an annual or special district meeting. Once a change in the formula is adopted, it is set for five (5) years (repose).

Used to create a formula is the Average Daily Membership (ADM); daily attendance record of pupils averaged over one year, Equalized Valuation (EV); the State's valuation adjusted by a ratio of total assessed value for properties in a community to those properties' true market value, and Tax Effort; dollars raised by property tax (total cost; revenues, grants and aid).

Sixty eight percent (68%) of the COOP School District budget is made up of the operating expenses for the high school and thirty two percent (32%) for the middle school. That total is put through the apportionment formula. A portion of that is given to Hollis as their tax obligation and the other to Brookline. After the apportionment is calculated, State aid is taken out.

The school Board is recommending a change to the current formula. The current formula (in place for 5 years) is 95% ADM/5% EV on the operating budget, and 100% EV for capital costs (debt). Proposed is the addition of \$1.00 on the Hollis tax effort (beginning FY21).

It was determined by the School Board that it was time to discuss apportionment and to bring it to the forefront given the five-year period is expiring. A joint meeting of the COOP School Board and the COOP Budget Committee was conducted, and resulted in the recommended \$1 change. The recommendation was approved by the School Board (6-1) at its meeting on 12-11-19. A vote on a change to the current formula (adding \$1) would reset the clock on the five year repose.

In FY15, the Apportionment Committee spent a year researching the formula and breaking down many different options. Committee membership consisted of members of the COOP School Board, COOP Budget Committee, Hollis Budget Committee, Brookline Finance Committee, Selectmen and community members.

In 2013-2015 there had been shifts in ADM/EV from the prior formula that resulted in the public looking for a change. The committee proposed the current formula. The current formula was supported by a vote of 672 / 351 (63% in favor). Since 2015, ADM and EV have remained stable.

The Board is of the opinion adding the \$1 would maintain the current formula with a small change.

In providing an explanation of the apportionment formula, Chairman Deurloo Babcock stated there are 2 components; one having two parts. The first portion is capital debt, e.g., bonds, leases or loans. It is apportioned on a ratio that is based on 100% EV. The rationale for this is that capital debt and expenses are improvements on the buildings and properties. Since these facilities are located in Hollis, the committee, at the time, recommended that EV would be used for this portion of the budget simply due to the fact that there was a thought that Hollis benefits from the convenience and possibly increased property value of having the schools in their town.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> component of the formula is broken into two pieces based on the operating budget less debt. When determining the 95/5 component of the formula, the original committee used the rationale that approximately 10% of the operating budget is driven by non-programmatic costs, e.g., things that have to be paid for whether we have 100 students or 1,000 students in the building. They also felt that approximately 90% of the budget is driven by the number of students being served (programmatic costs). Research done in 2015 determined that a 90/10 split was the way to go.

The recommendation was that this 10% part of the operating budget should be apportioned based on an equal division of ADM and EV, which gives us the 5% EV on the operating budget. The committee felt that 90% of that, because it is all about the students in the building, should be apportioned based on ADM.

We end up with an operating budget being apportioned based on a ratio that is 95% based on ADM and 5% on EV. The change to the formula is that a dollar would be added on the Hollis tax effort.

Fifty one percent (51%) of the ADM is from Hollis and 49% from Brookline. In terms of EV, Hollis holds 69% and Brookline 31%. When we apportion, per town, before State aid, Hollis is paying 53% and Brookline 47%. When we apportion after State aid, we're at 55%/45%.

Chairman Deurloo Babcock commented it is, and has always been, a compromise.

A copy of the Warrant Article was displayed. Chairman Deurloo Babcock noted, although it is Warrant Article 1 on the Warrant, the language is a proposed amendment to Article 5 of the Articles of Agreement. It reads:

**Article 1**

*To see if the school district will vote to amend the Articles of Agreement of the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District as follows:*

**Article 5:**

*The operating expenses, excluding principal and interest payments on bonds, of the Hollis-Brookline Cooperative School District, payable in each fiscal year, shall be apportioned based on Average Daily Membership (ADM) and Equalized Valuation (EV) according to the table below:*

<b><u>ADM Weight</u></b>	<b><u>EV Weight</u></b>
95%	5%

*The expenses related to principal and interest of bonds (current and future), of the Hollis-Brookline Cooperative School District, payable in each fiscal year, shall be apportioned based on Average Daily Membership (ADM) and Equalized Valuation (EV) according to the table below:*

<b><u>ADM Weight</u></b>	<b><u>EV Weight</u></b>
0%	100%

*After the calculations are made as set forth above, an additional amount of \$1 will assessed to Hollis prior to apportionment.”*

Chairman Deurloo Babcock spoke of the Special District meeting on the apportionment Warrant Article scheduled for January 29<sup>th</sup> beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the High School gymnasium. Snow date is January 30<sup>th</sup>.

***Chairman Deurloo Babcock opened the public comment period at 6:44 p.m.***

Pete D’Agostino, 9 Louis Drive, Brookline

Five years ago this issue divided our community, tested our friendships, and significantly impacted our families. As it was his first time dealing with the subject of apportionment, he listened and learned. Every point and counterpoint seemed reasonable. Even then he struggled to find what he believed would be a fair proposal. As apportionment came back up this time he watched the meetings and listened to the discussion. He again struggled to find a fair solution. He tried to understand the numbers and impacts to figure what fair really meant. He spoke with people and asked questions. Every time he thought he had a new idea that might be fair, there was a reasonable counterpoint. Then he realized it is not the answer that is the problem, it is the question being asked.

All discussions seem to center around what is fair from the perspective of the towns. Towns don’t send children to schools, families do. The reason we haven’t been able to reach a fair solution is, in his opinion, because we had the wrong perspective and were asking the wrong question. This was never about what was fair for the towns or the COOP. The variables are too many and the priorities are nearly impossible to line up. The question he started to ask himself was how to make it fair for families.

To that end, he came up with an idea; adjust the formula in such a way that the median homes for each town incur the same tax burden; taking everything into consideration, to include aid, and actually level the tax burden at the median home value. He is uncertain it is even mechanically possible although on its face, it appears so. After many conversations and some good feedback, he believes it worth exploring. He requested the School Board and Budget Committee assist in doing a calculation that levels the tax burden at the median home value for each town. Once determining what it would take to do it, we can then assess whether or not it is a valid approach.

He requested he be placed on the next agenda of the Board to present his findings. He has done the math. It moves the number very little for each town, but does level the median home tax burden, which he believes will help the district be able to make good decisions for the students based on a similar impact at a similar financial level.

Chairman Deurloo Babcock requested he submit the information via email. She noted the Special District Meeting is scheduled. Whatever is suggested at a Board meeting will not change what will be presented at the special meeting.

Mr. D’Agostino stated understanding, and the desire to present the option to the Board for consideration, if valid. He has initiated contact with the Budget Committee as he will need to work with them to get the finalized calculations. If valid and reasonable, he would ask the Board to consider proposing an amendment at the special meeting. Chairman Deurloo Babcock noted it is within the purview of voters to propose amendments as well.

Thomas Gehan, 104 Broad Street, Hollis

Urged the Board and voters to adopt the formula that existed up until 5 years ago, which was allocating all costs based 100% on ADM. The change that was shown in the presentation was not a small tweak. That sent \$1,599,674 from Brookline to Hollis over the past 5 years. It is important, in terms of context, to think about how the towns have changed over the life of the COOP. Brookline has had the second highest growth rate among 234 municipalities. A lot of young affluent families have moved here to take advantage of the COOP, and in particular they have moved to Brookline. That has driven these costs higher. He believes it reasonable for each town to pay their share. That is fraught with difficulty because everyone has a different interpretation. Brookline has 36% more children per household than Hollis.

He has used census data, data posted on the SAU website, information from the State DRA and DOE and modeled what the impacts are on the town. In FY21, Hollis will pay \$3.55 million more in taxes than Brookline. That works out to \$4,000 more property tax per student. A significant driver of that difference is State aid. Brookline will receive 44% more aid than Hollis (\$1.65 million or \$3,100 per student).

Mr. Gehan reiterated his recommendation to return to 100% ADM.

***The Public Hearing was declared closed at 6:52 p.m.***

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_