

**HOLLIS BROOKLINE COOPERATIVE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BUDGET COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 11, 2021  
MEETING MINUTES**

A meeting of the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District (COOP) Budget Committee was conducted on Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 6:31 p.m.

Chairman, Darlene Mann, presided:

Members of the Budget Cmte. Present:     Raul Blanche, Vice Chair  
  Matthew Maguire, Secretary  
  Tom Enright  
  Brian Rater  
  Lorin Rydstrom  
  Cindy VanCoughnett, School Bd. Rep.

Members of the Budget Cmte. Absent:     David Blinn

Also in Attendance:                         Kelly Seeley, Business Administrator

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Due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis, and in accordance with Governor Sununu's [Emergency Order #12](#) pursuant to [Executive Order 2020-04](#), this Board is authorized to meet electronically.

As stated on the agenda, the meeting was aired live via Zoom; Meeting ID: 940 7043 3933 / Passcode c0UbpA.

Each member participating electronically was asked to state, for the record, where they were, why their attendance in person was not reasonably practical, who, if anyone, was with them, and whether or not they were able to hear the proceedings.

Tom Enright

Stated he was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, he was alone, and could hear the proceedings.

Brian Rater

Stated he was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, he was alone in the room he was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Cindy VanCoughnett

Stated she was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, she was alone in the room he was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Matthew Maguire

Stated he was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, he was alone in the room he was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Raul Blanche

Stated he was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, he was alone in the room he was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Lorin Rydstrom

Stated he was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, he was alone, and could hear the proceedings.

Darlene Mann

Stated she was participating electronically from home, attendance in person was not reasonably practical due to COVID-19, she was alone in the room he was in, and could hear the proceedings.

Member Blinn was excused.

Chairman Mann stated the meeting, while not on the normally scheduled 4<sup>th</sup> week of the month, will represent the Board's February meeting. The meeting date was moved up primarily due to the deadline for submission of the MS27 (with recommendations of the Committee and School Board). The School Board completed its recommendations the prior evening.

While the Budget Committee is required to take positions on any article that appropriates funding, it is not precluded by law from taking positions on other articles. Some of the petition articles have been put forward previously, the Committee has taken positions on them before, and she personally feels they have some financial ramifications. While an appropriation isn't specifically stated by the article itself, there are ramifications and things that the Committee would be impacted by.

*The Board was reminded that all votes would be taken by Roll Call.*

**AGENDA ADJUSTMENTS** - None

**APPOINTMENT OF PROCESS OBSERVER**

Chairman Mann appointed Brian Rater to serve as Process Observer.

**PUBLIC INPUT** - None

**GENERAL BUSINESS**

- Budget Committee Recommendations on Warrant (Petitions)

At the February 2, 2021 joint meeting with the Hollis School Board, the Committee took positions on the appropriating warrant article. Overlooked was a vote on Article 5. Articles 5 and 6 are related; article 5 would discontinue the Athletic Expendable Trust Fund and Article 6 would establish an Athletics Revolving Fund. She requested the Committee take a position on Article 5.

**Article 5 - Discontinue Athletic Expendable Trust**

Shall the school district vote to discontinue the Athletic Expendable Trust fund? Said funds and accumulated interest to date of withdrawal, are to be transferred to the school district's general fund. (Majority vote required).

**MOTION BY MEMBER VANCOUGHNETT TO RECOMMEND ARTICLE 5, AS WRITTEN  
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER BLANCHE**

*A Viva Voce Roll Call was taken, which resulted as follows:*

Yea: Raul Blanche, Tom Enright, Matthew Maguire, Lorin Rydstrom, Cindy VanCoughnett, Brian Rater,  
Darlene Mann

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Nay:

0

**MOTION CARRIED**

Member VanCoughnett commented during the prior evening’s meeting the question was asked of what would occur if Article 5 passed and Article 6 did not. The belief was the monies would go into the general fund, and a public hearing would be required to expend. Chairman Mann stated that to be correct.

Chairman Mann stated the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School Board conducted the first of two public hearings on the Petition Warrant Articles. The public hearing itself lasted close to 3 hours listening to input provided on all four of the articles. After the completion of the hearing, the School Board took positions on all articles in the warrant. All of the School Board articles were recommended. Article 11, which was heard at the 2-2-21 meeting, and was to include the tax impact on each warrant, was not recommended by the School Board.

**Article 12 – Petition Warrant Article**

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 4%.

*The School Board does not recommend (vote of 0-7-0 to recommend)*

**MOTION BY MEMBER RYDSTROM TO RECOMMEND ARTICLE 12, AS WRITTEN  
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER ENRIGHT**

**ON THE QUESTION**

Chairman Mann commented she has spoken against recommending a tax cap when it has come forward previously. She does not believe it to be a solution for this district. The process that we have allows the Budget Committee to work on the budget over an extended period of time and carefully evaluate all of the input to the process. What this tax cap does, in her opinion, is limit the Budget Committee’s ability to do that work. It would, in some ways, change the process and reverse it. The way we work now is to provide guidance and understand the components and things that develop and evolve into the budget. The tax impact is a byproduct and driven, in several cases, by things that are not related to the budget itself. For that and many other reasons, she believes it to be too limiting for our community.

The Budget Committee in general has done an excellent job at managing through guidance and evaluation of the budget, truly managing the budget increases and being able to explain to the communities the impacts; why the tax rates are what they are, how they got there, and what is driving them. The current process enables and allows the Committee to do that. The information is shared at the Public Hearing and at the Annual Meeting.

**Member Rater**

Commented from the perspective of the Brookline Finance Committee. Brookline has a tax cap in place, and it is causing a problem this year. Last year the State Legislature provided a significant increase in support for

education, which significantly lowered the tax rates in Brookline. This year we don't know whether or not the current Legislature is going to continue with that. Because the revenue side of the ledger impacts the tax rate, we are now having to make cuts in the budget under the anticipation that the current Legislature may not be as supportive of funding public education as the previous one did. That is an effect of the tax cap. It really doesn't make any sense. We are consistent with the budget itself.

Chairman Mann noted what the Statute actually says is the Budget Committee has to recommend a budget that doesn't result in a tax effort greater than 4% of the prior year that is adjusted for the unreserved fund balance. It does not mean the budget can't be amended. The upwards limitation on a budget is still the 10% rule. Members of the School Board, because they are citizens and members of the Legislative Body, could come forward and recommend that the budget be higher and stipulate the reasoning. Members of the community/Legislative Body can do that as well. It is really just a limitation on what the Budget Committee can put forward.

We have never had a year where we saw one community in the COOP, Brookline specifically, losing in total \$1.3 million of State Aid, \$750,000 of it on the COOP side, combined with the money that got returned to the taxpayers last year of over a million dollars just from the COOP, because of savings related to the school closure in the spring. Those two things combined that are not happening are having the largest effect on the tax rate (as we put forward the estimates). The Brookline School District, because of their tax cap, has had to make some operational changes and adjustments to their budget. Perhaps not by the time they vote in March, but by the time the COOP holds an Annual Meeting in April or May, the Legislature may have had a resolution to this. There is legislation out there that would restore funding for the next 2 years not less than the current level. That would significantly shift what the estimates are for the tax rate.

Vice Chairman Blanche commented it seems there are more and more line items in the budget that are outside of the control of the district. Having a tax cap would create a lot of problems.

*A Viva Voce Roll Call was taken, which resulted as follows:*

Yea: 0

Nay: Raul Blanche, Tom Enright, Matthew Maguire, Lorin Rydstrom, Cindy VanCoughnett, Brian Rater, Darlene Mann

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**MOTION FAILED**

**Article 13 – Petition Warrant Article**

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?

*The School Board does not recommend (vote of 1-6-0 to recommend)*

Chairman Mann described the process that would be followed were the article to pass.

**MOTION BY MEMBER RYDSTROM TO RECOMMEND ARTICLE 13**

**MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER ENRIGHT**

*A Viva Voce Roll Call was taken, which resulted as follows:*

Yea: 0

Nay: Raul Blanche, Tom Enright, Matthew Maguire, Lorin Rydstrom, Cindy VanCoughnett, Brian Rater,  
Darlene Mann

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## **MOTION FAILED**

### **Article 14 - Petition Warrant Article**

To see if the Hollis Brookline Cooperative District will vote to amend the Articles of Agreement of the Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District by deleting Article 3 as currently written and substituting a new Article 3 as follows:

Article 3: The Hollis Brookline Cooperative School District shall be responsible for grades nine (9) through twelve (12).

*The School Board does not recommend (vote of 0-7-0 to recommend)*

Member VanCoughnett noted the School Board has requested a legal opinion on this article.

### **MOTION BY MEMBER VANCOUGHNETT TO RECOMMEND ARTICLE 14 MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER ENRIGHT**

#### **ON THE QUESTION**

Chairman Mann noted were the article to pass, a study committee would be formed to evaluate the operational, educational, and financial aspects of a move like this.

Vice Chairman Blanche remarked this is the slippery slope toward dissolving the COOP, which he does not believe to be a good idea.

Member Rater commented splitting up the COOP in this way would have significant financial impacts on both towns, negatively in his opinion. He believes it appropriate for the Budget Committee to take a position on. He is strongly opposed to it.

Member Maguire stated his opposition. Splitting the grades and bringing those two grades back to Brookline would result in having to construct new buildings, and would very quickly become expensive. Additionally, with the loss of economies of scale, course offerings would be reduced. If sports were split at the middle school level there would not be a sufficient number of students to field teams and other extra-curricular activities.

Chairman Mann remarked one of the things included in the presentation was the low financing rates for bonds, and that it would be a good time to finance something. Also included was information on legislation in Concord addressing building aid that would increase the annual amount to \$15 million. There is no district in the State that is guaranteed any amount of building aid no matter what level it is funded at. It is a very competitive process where the approved plans of the districts for renovations, new construction, etc., are rated, ranked, evaluated, and a walk-thru of current facilities conducted. Saying building aid will be available; it may well be available and may well be funded at a higher level, but it is a pool of money that every district in the State is going to look toward. There is no guarantee that just because there is money there that you will get any amount of it.

Chairman Mann stated she believes it would be detrimental for all the reasons noted. Enrollment trends was a significant part of the discussion that occurred the prior evening. While the COOP is seeing some reduced enrollment, based on the most recent NESDEC projections (over next 5 years), the K-6 districts are seeing increased enrollment.

It was used as a reason for saying we could keep those K-8 students in district because maybe in the case of Hollis they will not have room in their building and would then need to move kids to the middle school building, etc. The Hollis School District is in fact anticipating increases in its K-6 population going forward, after the next five years it still remains at a projection of 84 students below the highest rate of its enrollment, which was back in 2000. There remains substantial room in the school to be able to manage the increases that are coming.

As was pointed out, each community does have a limited availability before becoming built out. In Hollis, they are seeing a lot of new homes being built, but it is spread out over single family homes, 55+ housing, workforce housing, etc. She supports keeping the COOP as a 7-12 district.

Member VanCoughnett noted an individual that spoke at the hearing commented it is an article to remove grades 7 and 8 this year; will it be 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> next year.

Chairman Mann commented there is ample opportunity to address the School Board and/or the Budget Committee on a monthly basis, and if it is something that is important, it could be evaluated by the Board and Committee before we get to a month before the Annual Meeting. It is thrown out as a petition with 25 signatures across both communities and is something that could have a very significant impact on both.

While through the Articles of Agreement there is a process that starts a committee, etc., in something as big as this, she would almost prefer to see some assessment and evaluation beforehand on whether you would even bring it forward.

Member Enright stated bringing the towns together in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade works very well socially, and would not work well in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He is opposed to this article.

Member Rydstrom stated agreement.

*A Viva Voce Roll Call was taken, which resulted as follows:*

Yea: 0

Nay: Raul Blanche, Tom Enright, Matthew Maguire, Lorin Rydstrom, Cindy VanCoughnett, Brian Rater, Darlene Mann

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**MOTION FAILED**

**Article 15 – Petition Warrant Article**

Shall SAU 41 and the Hollis Brookline Cooperative Schools hereby affirm our general support for each student’s growth and enrichment, in support thereof, We, the Legislative Body, hereby state the following as a matter of general policy:

- (a) The family unit is ideally at the core of each individual’s social, educational, intellectual, and emotional well being,
- (b) Our schools are a critical element that shall foster an environment where our goal is that all students are enabled to thrive and positively achieve their potential and develop the content of their character accordingly,

- (c) It shall be the primary goal of all teachers and administrators to support these efforts,
- (d) Any divisive policy that fosters prejudicial discrimination, segregation, stereotyping, intimidation, censorship, harassment or retribution based on race or sex is, by its nature, a threat to our social fabric, morally wrong and generally unlawful,
- (e) Further, educational techniques that hinder or prevent: fairness, impartiality, equality of opportunity OR, conversely, support outcomes of “equity redesign”, “equity based outcomes”, “redistribution”, “retribution”, “unlearning” or “Critical Race Theory” are, by their nature, detrimentally counterproductive to healthy education and the unifying ideals of our greater American Society,
- (f) Any parties so wronged may seek court relief under applicable federal and state laws, through and with RSA 354-A (Anti-Discrimination), RSA 91-A, (The Right to Know), et al., noting the enforcement and penalty provisions provided therein.

Therefore,

WE, the Legislative Body of SAU 41 and the Hollis Brookline Cooperative Schools, with our vote, hereby affirm that this Article be published and made an integral policy of our School Administrative Unit and Cooperative School District.”

***The School Board does not recommend (vote of 0-7-0 to recommend)***

Chairman Mann questioned the will of the Committee with regard to providing a recommendation on the article.

Members Rydstrom, Enright, and Maguire stated the belief this is outside of the Committee’s purview.

Member Rater stated he is enormously offended by this article. There is a lot in here that is really personally very offensive. However, this being a Budget Committee, he agrees this is outside of the Committee’s purview.

Vice Chairman Blanche remarked this is outside of the purview of the Committee as is the work of the DEI Advisory Committee. The Budget Committee should either have an opinion on both or neither.

***The decision of the Committee was not to take a position on the article.***

Chairman Mann noted the DEI Advisory Committee was established by the Superintendent. Member VanCoughnett stated the Superintendent put together the advisory committee in response to citizen requests for action. The committee is working to try to get the three individual boards in agreement on a resolution(s).

She noted legal counsel has stated the article would be advisory in nature and not binding in any way. The same is true of the DEI Advisory Committee work.

This petition warrant, although not crafted well, she believes was in response to something that all of a sudden started being talked about, and was not on an agenda. People reacted emotionally.

Member Enright questioned the impetus for this work; is there a problem in the district that he is unaware of. Member VanCoughnett responded the original thought was to have it looked at; hire a consultant to come in and tell us if we were following diversity, equality, and inclusion initiatives. That is how this all started. A group of about 10-15 citizens attended an SAU41 Governing Board meeting and brought this forward. From the Board’s perspective it is a difficult time for our Administration to be doing this work, but the Superintendent feels he needs to listen because the community has come forward and asked to be heard. There is nothing in writing that has proven to anyone that this is an issue, but it is a hot topic.

- Annual Meeting Information

Member VanCoughnett stated the School Board changed the date of the Annual Meeting to Saturday, April 10, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. with a backup date of Saturday, April 17, 2021. The Moderator was asked about the timeline should it be necessary to postpone further, and indicated he could postpone a meeting up to two hours before the start of the meeting.

The plan is for a meeting similar to what was done in the Town of Hollis last year; outdoor meeting with an opportunity for the public to go to the microphone. The hope is that this meeting will resemble a typical meeting as much as possible, e.g., presentations.

Kelly Seeley, Business Administrator, noted because of the change in meeting dates for the school district as well as the Town, there is additional time afforded to when the warrant has to be posted. The issues that require resolution will be addressed by Wednesday. She will likely send out the forms (through DocuSign) that need to be signed by the School Board and Budget Committee by next Friday.

Chairman Mann stated the desire to discuss at the March meeting (18<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup>) if information will be able to be presented. If unable, she is hopeful she will have guidance on some of the legislation and be able to re-evaluate some of the tax impacts that were discussed at the public hearing. The Committee can decide if the information will be put together in a different way, e.g., posted to the website, etc.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS** - None

**PROCESS OBSERVER READOUT**

Member Rater stated the agenda indicated adjournment at 7:15 p.m., and it is 7:16 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION BY MEMBER VANCOUGHNETT TO ADJOURN  
MOTION SECONDED BY MEMBER RYDSTROM**

*A Viva Voce Roll Call was taken, which resulted as follows:*

Yea: Raul Blanche, Tom Enright, Matthew Maguire, Lorin Rydstrom, Cindy VanCoughnett, Brian Rater,  
Darlene Mann

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Nay: 0

**MOTION CARRIED**

The January 28, 2021 meeting of the COOP Budget Committee adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

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

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