

BILLERICA FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES
September 29, 2022

A Public Meeting of the Billerica Finance Committee was held on Thursday September 29, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. in Room 210 of the Town Hall

Present: David Gagliardi, Chairman; Mary McBride, Secretary; Douglas Fogerty, Member; Doug Meagher, Member; Philip Newfell, Member; Larry Norman, Member; Darlene Torre, Member; Kelley Sardina, 1st Associate; Brian Dorrington, 2nd Associate; Town Accountant Paul Watson, Ex-Officio; and Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk.

Excused: John Mulloy, Vice Chairman; Donald Damon, Member; Patrick Logue, Member; and Sharon Healey, Member.

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Dave Gagliardi called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. This meeting was audio recorded.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Brandon Gonzales of 7 Patricia Road is 100% behind pay raises for the teachers but against lengthening the school day. He has lots of concerns regarding the extended hours for teachers and students.

Christina O'Shea of 5 Columbus Rd wants to know if the school days are going to be longer? Looking for clarity on the extended hours, are they for the teachers and students or just teachers? Asking the committee not to vote on article 6 until all their (concerned parents) questions are answered.

Carol Reardon of 18 Pinedale, a self-advocate for kids in town for many years. She believes this has been done without parity, clarity and without transparency and stated it is clear the intent is to lengthen the school day. Parents are uncomfortable not being a part of that conversation. Asking the committee to vote no on article 6. Mrs. Reardon also notified the Chair that she'll be video-recording the meeting.

WARRANT ARTICLES:

Article 6 Teachers Contract – Tim Piowar

Doug Meagher has recused himself; he has a family member that is a teacher.

Mr. Piowar handed out a copy of his presentation for Articles 6 and 7 to the committee. He went over a little of the ground rules of active negotiations. They are prohibited to talk about what is going on during active negotiations. He went over the state average lengths of elementary, middle and high school days each school year. He also explained how salary increases would work over the next three fiscal years of the contracts (teachers and paraprofessionals). The contracts make teachers' salaries more competitive, especially for first year teachers. There was an explanation for the budget challenges of the step raises.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. He did state that the Finance Committee's focus is the financial portion, the dollars and cents of these articles. The rest is handled by other committees and boards. The teachers' days are being extended even if the students are not, at least at this point. The teachers' contract still stands even if the students' day is not extended. Teacher retirement is a percentage of their salary. While the COLA (Cost of Living Allowance) increases the steps will flatten out. Can you guarantee that extending the school day hours for teachers will not extend it for the students? No. The extension of the day is coming from the School Committee as a bargaining chip not from the union. That is correct. Nurses and counselors are part of the teachers' contract. The financial terms were broken out to differentiate COLA vs compensation for additional time. In the contract, Elementary teachers prep time is extended from 45 minutes a day to 50 minutes a day. How many teachers have left to go to other communities for better pay? They do not have accurate numbers, but they had twenty-two resignations that he broke down by month. They had 10 in August of this year and just about all of them were staff going to other districts. The teachers' day extended day begins January 27, 2023, regardless, and any change in the students' days would not happen until September of 2023. There could be up to 74 hours extra a year. There are a total of 503 teachers and 195 paras.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend Article 6 in the amount of \$1,533,008 to fund the first-year cost items associated with the collective bargaining between the School Committee and the BFT. The remaining two years would be in the budgets for those years.

It was voted:

6 – In favor
2 – Opposed – Sardina,
Dorrington

Article 7 Paraprofessionals Contract – Tim Piwowar

Doug Fogerty has recused himself; he has a family member that is a paraprofessional.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Could you not have crafted a contract that would have made it contingent to have the salary structure include the existing hours vs the salary structure with the contingent hours? Based on conversation with legal counsel that was not really a viable solution.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend Article 7 in the amount of \$397,284 to fund the first-year cost items associated with the collective bargaining between the School Committee and the BFT.

It was voted:

7 – In favor
1 – Opposed – Sardina

Article 16 Fund Town Capital Budget – Tim Piwowar and Robin Hulsoor

To see if the Town will vote to transfer and appropriate from available funds the sum of \$4,990,000 to fund the Town and School Capital Budgets. See Warrant for list and more information.

At the last meeting Mr. Curran and Mr. Russell went over the capital funding for Town departments. Tonight, Mr. Piwowar and Ms. Hulsoor are going over the school side of this article. The Superintendent went over his PowerPoint presentation with the committee. The school projects include Culvert repair at the Dutile for \$180,000; Boiler replacement at the Hallenborg for \$150,000; playground upgrades at the elementary schools for \$200,000; sprinkler repairs and upgrade at the Ditson for \$20,000; and HVAC controls hardware upgrades at the Ditson for \$120,000. Some of the schools are old, the Dutile was built in 1965, the rink was built in 1972 and the “new” Ditson was built in 2002. Mr. Piwowar wants to make sure they are taking care of the buildings. Ms. Hulsoor went into detail of the repairs and upgrades that need to be completed.

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. What is the total amount of the school side of this article? \$670,000 and the total for both sides is \$4,990,000. Are these projects in a prioritized order? Not really, we have not numbered them, but they are all a priority. Is the rink run by a revolving fund? Yes. Is there no money in the revolving to take care of the boiler? Not for all the capital work that needs to be done. They are taking one project at a time. There are funds in the revolving fund, but it is used for maintenance and when the chillers go down. Eventually the chillers need to be brought up to date. This is a high priority; one boiler is dead and the other on its last leg. If it goes down, they cannot use the rink. Will there be any significant operating increases with these projects? No, there should not be. There will probably be staff efficiency and time savings. A Committee member asked for a copy of a report. Mr. Piwowar will send a link for it to the chair. How long has the boiler not been working? Over this past year. Why are the town and school capital in one article? Did you ask to be put in with the town’s articles? It was a mutual consideration agreement. What is the balance in the revolving account? There is about \$160,000. It fluctuates with receipts and expenses. Why the combined article? Since Covid we have been trying to streamline for more efficiency so we can get through Town Meeting quicker, to help to keep people from getting Covid.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend Article 16 in the amount of \$4,990,000 as written in the Final Warrant to Town Meeting.

It was voted:

7 – In favor
1 – Opposed – Torre
1 – Abstained - Sardina

Article 25 Free Cash to Debt Stabilization – Dave Gagliardi

Chairman Gagliardi explained this article is the same as article 24 and is not needed.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to withdraw Article 25.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 26 Free Cash to Stabilization – Dave Gagliardi

Chairman Gagliardi stated they have not been doing this because they move it to the Debt Stabilization fund. Within the Stabilization Fund there are sub accounts, the Debt Stabilization, and the Land Bank. It is all Stabilization money.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to withdraw Article 26.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 27 Free Cash to Land Bank – Dave Gagliardi

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to withdraw Article 27.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 28 Free Cash to Tax Levy – Dave Gagliardi

There is a similar article, but they will vote on it. Back in the early 90s the Finance Committee asked themselves why they were putting this forth when there was already a similar article. Since they never recommended it, they thought they would drop the article. When they got to Town Meeting someone got up and asked why the article was not there.

Mr. Curran is concerned with this vote be open ended, it was voted on with out a dollar amount. The committee discussed their options.

Larry Norman, seconded by Doug Meagher made a motion to reserve recommendation for Town Meeting Article 28 rather than recommending action.

Prior to the vote, the committee continued their discussion on the negative or positive implications for a better understanding. Mr. Norman withdrew his motion.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to withdraw Article 28.

It was voted:

9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Article 18 Revisit as Borrowing Article – Dave Gagliardi

Mary McBride went over why the article was being revisited. The original article had a list of the possible ways it was to be funded. The committee voted to support it pending the funding. Mr. Logue asked if they could revisit the article if it ended being a "borrowing". Mr. Curran went over the article and explained how this project would be funded. It would be a borrowing of \$1.7 million to pay the cost of water main replacement.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to reconsider Article 18

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Chairman Gagliardi opened the floor to the committee for questions and concerns. Was the borrowing already known prior to the first vote? Mr. Curran did explain to the committee the last time they discussed this article that a borrowing was the most likely scenario, which is why Mr. Logue asked if they could revisit if it ended up being a borrowing. Why are we borrowing now for a project that will not even start until 2030? We have to start with funding, then design, then the project can start. They would like to be ready for when the Glad Valley project starts, so to ensure that, they have to start now. Why is this not part of article 16? We would not want to put a borrowing in with a capital expense article. Also, if it were included in 16, the entire article would require a two third vote. What was the previous article vote? It was 7 – 0.

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman made a motion to recommend Article 18 in the amount of \$1,700,000 as written in the Final Warrant to Town Meeting

It was voted: 8 – In favor
0 – Opposed
1 – Abstained - Sardina

MISCELLANEOUS CORRESPONDENCE – not subject to discussion

There is no misc. correspondence.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mary McBride, seconded by Larry Norman, made a motion to adjourn.

It was voted: 9 – In favor
0 – Opposed

Chairman Dave Gagliardi adjourned the meeting at 9:30 pm.

Joyce MacMillan, Recording Clerk