



## Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen

Date of Meeting: Monday, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Time: 6:00 PM – 7:29 PM  
Members Present: Boylston Board of Selectmen, Boylston Finance Committee, Berlin Finance Committee, Director of Finance, Superintendent Carol Costello and the Berlin Boylston Regional School Committee. On Zoom, two other Finance Committee members from Boylston, one from Berlin, and all three Selectboard members from Berlin

The meeting commenced at 6:00 PM.

Financial Warrants were signed in agreement.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **FinCom, School Committee, and Selectmen joint FY24 budget meeting:**

Boylston Finance Committee Chair Eric Brose stated that the idea of this meeting was to get everyone together to talk about where we are knowing that there are a lot of needs for the schools, and we need to find a way to do what we can for the schools.

Superintendent Costello said that the school has tried to maintain a level service budget for years and it's become a disservice to the children. They feel they have pushed off so much that they are at a critical juncture and need everyone's support more than ever before. They provided an above level service budget and a level service budget for review. They have recently been hit with unexpected costs around special education and healthcare costs have increased as well. A level service budget will compromise them for what they want to accomplish and will most likely have to make cuts to teachers and programs. They are looking for support tonight for the level service budget with an opportunity to add a few immediate needs. The School Committee is voting on the budget tomorrow night, so they are looking to understand the next steps as we get closer to the Town Meeting.

They presented the budget in two ways: level service budget which is everything they have right now, nothing new, no new positions with nothing being eliminated, and then one that looked at percentages that they believed the towns are looking to stay at for increases and figured out how much we will have to cut to stay at those percentages.

Presentations are On File in the Board of Selectmens Office. Items that they feel need to be addressed in the schools were laid out to everyone.

- Special Education has gone up \$1.3 million

- Main driver for this is out of district tuition
  - Boylston went up by 11% for FY24 and Berlin went up by 14%
- Total Health Care came in at 10.5% increase.

*Reimbursement on Special Education:*

We get reimbursed through Circuit Breaker. The way that works is that you can claim anything over a certain threshold. For FY23, the threshold is 57,000; four times the foundation rate. You get reimbursed a certain percentage per pupil of anything over \$57,000. For the last five years its been 75%, and the Governor sent out a memo stating it could possibly come out to be 90% next year. What they do, is they will increase your threshold to 75,000 but give you 90% so you never really get ahead of the game because they manipulate it. This goes for out of district tuitions and services within the school, but you have to reach that amount, and if you don't reach that amount, you don't get reimbursed.

Review of the level service budget; basic minimum required spending to keep basic educational services flat from 2023.

- Health Insurance Increase
- School Choice allocation increase by \$70,000
- Circuit Breaker Increase by \$25,000 (Split evenly between schools)
- Audit District costs increase

Berlin level service budget – increase by 11.8%

Boylston level service budget – increase by 12.9%

Berlin Capital Increase - \$1,100,000

Boylston Capital Increase - \$ 1,900,000

Review of the below level service budget; lose everything from the above level service, plus a reduction in force.

- 11 positions across the district including teachers and support staff
  - Support services for general education and special education
  - Additional programs in courses will be eliminated
  - Class sizes will increase across the elementary school

Berlin below level service budget – increase by 6.1%

Boylston level service budget – increase by 6.9%

Berlin Capital Increase - \$400,000

Boylston Capital Increase - \$ 680,000

The Boylston and Berlin Finance Committees both had questions regarding revenue projections, circuit breaker and how those were calculated/determined. How is the district calculating revenue flows; they need to get hard numbers so they can understand and come together to converge the numbers. The Director of Finance stated she will dig into the numbers deeper.

*What can we do to get more revenue for the schools? Considering the following options.*

The school committee is considering and thinking about adding fees.

- Fee for school bus transportation
  - Right now, they transport children within 2 miles of the school district and they don't have to. This could eliminate a bus and save money.
- Charge for transcripts
- Increase fees for athletics parking
- Increase fees for before and after preschool rates

The Berlin Finance Committee Chair congratulated Carol Costello and everyone involved in the school district. The school district comes in at 57 out of 357 districts; The kids are not suffering in their education; they're getting an education and a good one. We are made up of smaller towns and we have different problems than other districts like Worcester or Boston. The budget information that was handed out is hard to navigate and they asked for it to be presented more straightforwardly; all sources organized together on the same page.

School Committee member Meghan Grille stated one thing they would like to get a sense of where the Finance Committees stand, are they looking at level funding, or less than level funding. BBRSD Chair Michael Totman stated that the School Committee will vote on a budget whether they do that tomorrow, or agree on it tonight to postpone that, that budget will go to town meeting. If Finance Committees and Selectboards do not agree on that budget, they will propose their own budget and the town will vote on the finance committee and selectboard budget or vote to amend that budget to match the school committee budget or vote for the school committee budget. If it gets approved, it gets approved. If it gets approved by one town but does not get approved by the other, the town that did not approve it starts the process with the school over again. They are here tonight to try and figure that out. Berlin Finance Committee stated they are looking at a 5% increase for both Tahanto and BMS which would be below the below level service budget that the school presented; \$558,000 house in Berlin would have around a \$400 tax increase. The Boylston Finance Committee has not looked over their overall budget yet so could not provide specific information at this time. The goal is to figure out how these two towns can fund all the requests.

The Boylston Board of Selectmen left the meeting at 7:29 PM. Boylston Finance Committee continued on with their scheduled meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Mack, Assistant to the Board of Selectmen

### **Meeting Materials**

Agenda  
School Committee Budget Presentation

On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office  
On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office