



**Town of Concord  
Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**

March 15, 2023 | 6:00 PM

Public Hearing Room, 22 Monument Square, and via Zoom | YouTube link [here](#)

**Call of Roll**

- Parashar Patel, acting as Chair, called roll as noted:
  - Members in attendance: Ray Andrews (remote), Peggy Briggs (remote), Kathy Cuocolo (remote), Eric Dahlberg, John Garofalo, Greg Guarriello, Amrith Kumar (remote), Don Kupka, Lyndsey Lis, Dee Ortner, Parashar Patel, Christine Reynolds, Brian Taylor, Lois Wasoff (remote)
  - Members not in attendance: Suresh Bhatia

**Call to Order**

- Following call of roll, the Chair called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM and appointed Eric Dahlberg as scribe.

**Public Comment**

- The Chair noted that the Finance Committee has received 40-50 emails in support of the CPS budget warrant article. Peggy Briggs observed that all emails were in favor of the CPS budget. The Chair then invited members of the public to share comments.
- Erica Josselyn, 94 Dover Street, offered her perspective on why she supports the CPS budget.
- Jeff Suarez, 45 Oxbow Road, stated that he has participated in several meetings on the topic of the CPS budget and has observed that the community supports it overwhelmingly, noting that the budget is fair and represents “level service.”
- Casey Atkins, 477 Laws Brook Road, stated that she is wearing two hats in speaking in support of the CPS budget tonight, one as President of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council and another as a parent. She shared her perspective on why she supports the CPS budget, stressing the importance of providing for the mental health needs of Concord’s students. She acknowledged the risk that higher taxes pose to residents who may be priced out. She also thanked the members of the Finance Committee for their service.
- John Peachey, 44 Bedford Court, stated that he is speaking as a Concord resident, a CPS teacher, and a parent. He stated that he supports the CPS budget, noting that it contains “no fat” and stressing that there are people behind the numbers represented in the various budget spreadsheets who would be directly impacted by the cuts that would be required if the CPS budget is not approved.
- Daniel Isaacs, 6 Abbott Lane, stated that he moved to Concord in 2020 because of the school system, and he supports the CPS budget. He asked the Finance Committee to consider the externalities of not recommending approval.
- Margaret Wargelin, 97 Hillside Avenue, stated that she no longer has children in the Concord schools but supports the CPS budget, stressing that she feels the process has been transparent and that the increase being requested is less than inflation.

- Natalia Sternberger, 788 Strawberry Hill Road, stated that two of her children attend public school in Concord and that she recently moved to town specifically because of the quality of the school system. She supports the CPS budget.

**Review and vote: recommendations on 2023 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

- The Chair observed that there are three articles pending a vote by Finance Committee ahead of the public hearing: Article 7: Use of Free Cash; Article 25: Appropriation for 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration; and Article 26: Community Preservation Committee Appropriation Recommendations. The Chair elected to take up discussion on Articles 25 and 26 first.

Article 25: Appropriation for 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

- Rick Loughlin, 83 Chestnut Street, Finance Chair for the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee, highlighted that the committee has prepared a detailed budget and shared it with the Finance Committee. He stated that the committee would like to secure \$600,000 in funds for this year in anticipation of pursuing additional funding the year after.
- Henry Dane, Chair of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Committee, flagged that this is a very substantial project that requires significant planning and that the town has only two fiscal years remaining in order to appropriate funds.
- Town Manager Kerry Lafleur provided information on how ARPA funds may be used for a portion of the funding and clarified that, if the funding source is indeed ARPA, there is no action needed at Town Meeting.
- MOTION: Don Kupka moved that the Finance Committee vote to support the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and to support the appropriation of \$1 million in free cash to fund the celebration this year. The motion was not seconded. After brief discussion, Don Kupka elected to withdraw his motion and instead requested that the Finance Committee proceed with a discussion on funding options.
- Peggy Briggs observed that this project represents a significant financial commitment by the town: \$2 million total, with \$600,000 in the current fiscal year.
- Matt Johnson, Chair of the Select Board speaking on his own behalf, clarified that the Select Board has not discussed the idea of utilizing ARPA funds for this project. He also clarified that this does not represent the Town Manager's proposal. He noted that it is the Select Board's intent to make the spending of ARPA funds as public a process as possible. He also stated that he thinks it is the Finance Committee's responsibility to assess this funding request.
- Brian Taylor asked how much ARPA funding is being sought. The Town Manager responded that Concord received \$5.6 million in total ARPA funding, a significant portion of which remains available. Rick Loughlin responded that the committee likely won't spend all of the funding allocated in the current fiscal year and that they don't yet know the full scale of the project. He added that the current budget is just an estimate at this time.
- Diane Proctor, 57 Sudbury Road and member of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Steering Committee, stated that funding will come back to the town in the form of tax revenue as a result of all of the spending related to an event like this.

### **Temporary Adjournment for Purposes of Opening Public Hearing**

- The Chair observed that it is 7:00 PM and that the Finance Committee meeting must now temporarily adjourn in order to proceed to the public hearing posted for this time. The regular meeting of the Finance Committee was temporarily adjourned from 7:00 PM to 9:04 PM for purposes of conducting the public hearing (see separate meeting minutes for the public hearing).

### **Resumption of Regular Meeting – Call of Roll**

- Parashar Patel, acting as Chair, called roll as noted:
  - Members in attendance: Ray Andrews (remote), Peggy Briggs (remote), Kathy Cuocolo (remote), Eric Dahlberg (remote), John Garofalo, Greg Guarriello, Amrith Kumar (remote), Don Kupka, Lyndsey Lis, Dee Ortner, Parashar Patel, Christine Reynolds, Brian Taylor, Lois Wasoff (remote)
  - Members not in attendance: Suresh Bhatia

### **Call to Order**

- Following call of roll, the Chair called the meeting to order at 9:06 PM and confirmed that Eric Dahlberg will continue to serve as scribe.

### **Review and vote: recommendations on 2023 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

- The Chair observed that there remain five articles for which the Finance Committee may take a vote:
  - Article 7: Use of Free Cash
  - Article 17: Concord Public Schools Budget
  - Article 18: Concord Public Schools Capital Projects
  - Article 25: Appropriation for 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration
  - Article 26: Community Preservation Committee Appropriation Recommendations

#### Article 7: Use of Free Cash

- The Chair posed the question as to whether Finance Committee members are ready to proceed to a vote on Article 7 given that it does not appear free cash will not be used for other purposes given the updates shared earlier in the meeting. Dee Ortner wondered what the implications of not using \$1 million in free cash for property tax relief and shared some points of data she had collected with the Finance Director.
- MOTION: Christine Reynolds moved to recommend affirmative action on Article 7. Greg Guarriello seconded. Ray Andrews expressed interest in voting on the CPS budget article before this article to gauge what the impacts of that article may be and to consider free cash as a potential source of funding. Brian Taylor stated that he agreed with this approach. Kathy Cuocolo stated that either funding source would represent a tax increase. After further discussion, Christine Reynolds withdrew her motion.
- The Chair posed the question to Town Moderator Carmin Reiss as to what the implications of utilizing free cash to fund a portion of the CPS budget would be. The Moderator responded that a portion of the CPS budget could be funded by free cash and that this could be accomplished via the wording of the motion for approval of the CPS budget article, Article 17, at Town Meeting. Amrith Kumar flagged that the language of Article 17 appears to restrict the source of funds to appropriation. Upon further view, the Town Moderator concurred.

- The Town Manager clarified that free cash may be used as a funding source for the CPS budget, but noted that free cash is a one-time source of funding, and it would be contrary to the town’s financial policies to use free cash to fund operating expenses.
- Ray Andrews stated that he recognizes that using free cash to fund the CPS budget may not appropriate and is prepared to vote on Article 7.
- MOTION: Amrith Kumar moved to recommend affirmative action on Article 7. Seconded by Greg Guarriello. The Chair called roll:
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ John Garofalo: yes</li> <li>○ Greg Guarriello: yes</li> <li>○ Dee Ortner: yes</li> <li>○ Don Kupka: yes</li> <li>○ Brian Taylor: yes</li> <li>○ Parashar Patel: yes</li> <li>○ Christine Reynolds: yes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lyndsey Lis: yes</li> <li>○ Ray Andrews: yes</li> <li>○ Amrith Kumar: yes</li> <li>○ Peggy Briggs: yes</li> <li>○ Kathy Cuocolo: yes</li> <li>○ Eric Dahlberg: yes</li> <li>○ Lois Wasoff: yes</li> </ul>
--	--

Motion carries by a vote of 14-0.

Article 26: Community Preservation Committee Appropriation Recommendations

- Dee Ortner noted that the Warner’s Pond Restoration Project item, Item E, remains pending, so she proposes removing Item E from consideration until it is resolved.
- Diane Proctor, Chair of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), stated that it is her understanding that the CPC will make a decision on this at their March 21<sup>st</sup> meeting.
- MOTION: Dee Ortner moves to recommend affirmative action on Article 26, Items A, B, C, D, F, G, H, I, and J (excluding Item E). Seconded by Brian Taylor. The Chair called roll:
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ John Garofalo: yes</li> <li>○ Greg Guarriello: yes</li> <li>○ Dee Ortner: yes</li> <li>○ Don Kupka: yes</li> <li>○ Brian Taylor: yes</li> <li>○ Parashar Patel: yes</li> <li>○ Christine Reynolds: yes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lyndsey Lis: yes</li> <li>○ Ray Andrews: yes</li> <li>○ Amrith Kumar: yes</li> <li>○ Peggy Briggs: yes</li> <li>○ Kathy Cuocolo: yes</li> <li>○ Eric Dahlberg: yes</li> <li>○ Lois Wasoff: yes</li> </ul>
--	--

Motion carries by a vote of 14-0.

Article 18: Concord Public Schools Capital Projects

- Don Kupka stated that before the school buildings were replaced, the town had adopted a policy of dedicating \$900,000 annually to school capital needs, but that may no longer be prudent. He added that debt service is the fastest growing category of town spending.
- Dee Ortner concurred and stated it is her hope that the School Department will assess their capital needs annually.
- Christine Reynolds asked if Don Kupka’s previously raised questions about school capital projects have been answered. The Chair noted that he expects answers to be received before the next Finance Committee meeting, which is scheduled for March 23<sup>rd</sup>. The group reached consensus to defer a vote on Article 18 accordingly.
- MOTION: Amrith Kumar moves to table Article 18 for a future meeting. Seconded by Kathy Cuocolo. The Chair called roll:

- John Garofalo: yes
- Greg Guarriello: yes
- Dee Ortner: yes
- Don Kupka: yes
- Brian Taylor: yes
- Parashar Patel: yes
- Christine Reynolds: yes
- Lyndsey Lis: yes
- Ray Andrews: yes
- Amrith Kumar: yes
- Peggy Briggs: yes
- Kathy Cuocolo: yes
- Eric Dahlberg: yes
- Lois Wasoff: yes

Motion carries by a vote of 14-0.

#### Article 25: Appropriation for 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration

- The Chair summarized earlier discussion on this article and asked for a sense of committee members’ perspectives on readiness for a vote.
- Christine Reynolds stated that she feels more discussion is needed given uncertainty over funding sources.
- Kathy Cuocolo stated that she does not feel comfortable about this article, given other pressing needs in the budget this year.
- Lois Wasoff stated that she agrees with sentiments of others that discussion should be deferred given the uncertainty.
- The Chair shared his concern regarding the funding figures and observed that there is consensus to defer further discussion of this article until the next meeting.

#### Article 17: Concord Public Schools Budget

- The Chair provided a recap of the Finance Committee’s guidelines setting process for fiscal year 2024 and opened the floor for comments and discussion.
- Dee Ortner noted that several residents who reached out to support the CPS budget pointed to a disparity in the guideline figures for the town and for the schools, but there are services included in the town’s budget, such as overhead and benefits costs, public safety and public works, that benefit the schools.
- The Chair noted that several residents noted that 85% of the CPS budget is “legally required,” but that is not quite accurate because CPS can adjust the number of employees.
- Don Kupka stated that he reviewed spending over the last 20 years, and he observed that spending on schools as a percentage of total spending has remained fairly consistent (roughly two thirds of the total). He would like revenue to be part of the discussion as well.
- Lois Wasoff stated that should like to echo Don’s sentiments. She added that she has been hearing a conflation in some of the statements of support for the CPS budget that the more money we spend, the better the product we get – but she feels that those two things don’t necessarily relate.
- John Garofalo stated, in response to an earlier statement, that he doesn’t think we should consider prorating the budgets of departments to indicate what portion of their services go to the schools. He asked what portion of CPS spending is tied to mandatory items such as COLA or step increases. Alexa Anderson, Chair of the School Committee, stated that CPS must honor previously-agreed-upon year-over-year compensation increases. The Chair reiterated his previous comment that it is incorrect to state that 85% of the CPS budget is fixed or “legally required.”

- After further discussion, Peggy Briggs, noting that she is unable to make a motion herself as Chair, proposed that a motion be made to recommend affirmative action on Article 17 at a reduced total of \$45,000,000 as a compromise approach.
- Amrith Kumar asked for clarification on what exactly the total amount in the warrant article is. The Chair clarified that, as printed in the warrant, the total is \$45,197,176, but CPS previously communicated that they intend to reduce that by \$150,000, to \$45,047,176. He added, in response to Peggy Briggs' previous statement, that nothing in Robert's Rules prohibits the Chair from making a motion.
- Lois Wasoff stated that, as a procedural matter, if a motion is made as Peggy proposes, it is her understanding that the Finance Committee is effectively proposing an amendment to the article at Town Meeting. She also asked what the implications of Town Meeting approval of a CPS budget above the guideline amount would be in terms of the tax burden. The Chair responded that it would be an increase in taxes.
- MOTION: Peggy Briggs moved to recommend affirmative action on Article 17 as printed in the warrant. After discussion, Peggy Briggs re-worded her motion and instead moved to recommend affirmative action on Article 17 to reflect the reduced total that CPS has communicated, or \$45,047,176. Seconded by John Garofalo. The Chair invited discussion.
- Christine Reynolds stated that she appreciates the support that the CPS budget has received, but this would contribute to an increase of almost 8% in the median property tax bill, which she feels is too high and is one of several warning signs she is seeing from a fiscal perspective.
- Amrith Kumar posed the question as to whether any of the items in the CPS budget are one-time expenses. Alexa Anderson, School Committee Chair, responded that there are a few specific positions added to the budget to support students in the context of recovering from the pandemic and addressing mental health needs. She also pointed to specialized programs at the elementary level related to specific learning and language needs.
- Kathy Cuocolo stated that she agrees with the points raised by Christine Reynolds.
- Don Kupka asked that the School Committee look at tuition at the Ripley School from a revenue perspective – he acknowledged that this may be a difficult exercise but believes it is important under the circumstances. He also challenged the School Committee to look at how other districts are able to deliver services for less.
- Ray Andrews stated that the Finance Committee's responsibility is to look at these things from a financial perspective, and he feels members are doing their job.
- Eric Dahlberg stated that he feels public input is an important part of this process, and he has been impressed by the number of taxpayers who have expressed support for the CPS budget, flagging that it has been nearly unanimous.
- Amrith Kumar asked to re-confirm the figure in Peggy Briggs' motion. After discussion, Peggy Briggs clarified that her motion is to recommend approval of Article 17 with a total CPS budget of \$45,047,176. She subsequently added that she has been impressed by the statements in support of the CPS budget.
- The Chair thanked CPS leadership and the School Committee and noted that the process has been transparent throughout. He added that he would like to see ways to measure outcomes as to how effectively this funding is being spent.
- The Chair, hearing no further questions or points of discussion, called roll on the motion on the table:

- John Garofalo: yes
- Greg Guarriello: yes
- Dee Ortner: no
- Don Kupka: yes
- Brian Taylor: yes
- Parashar Patel: no
- Christine Reynolds: no
- Lyndsey Lis: yes
- Amrith Kumar: no
- Peggy Briggs: yes
- Eric Dahlberg: yes
- Ray Andrews: no
- Kathy Cuocolo: no
- Lois Wasoff: no

Motion fails by a vote of 7-7.

- MOTION: Amrith Kumar moves to recommend affirmative action of Article 17 with a revised total budget equal to the Finance Committee’s guideline figure of \$44,429,832. Seconded by Ray Andrews.
- Brian Taylor asked for confirmation that this total is lower than the total in the previous motion, which failed. Amrith Kumar confirmed and added that his perspective is that the role of the Finance Committee is to make recommendations that are fiscally responsible. Brian Taylor wondered whether it doesn’t make more sense to vote no action tonight and let the decision go to Town Meeting. Lois Wasoff said she feels the Finance Committee should take a position one way or the other. Dee Ortner questioned why there is a need to align on a recommendation tonight. The Town Moderator offered her perspective that the Finance Committee did not technically recommend no action with the previous vote.
- The Chair, hearing no further questions or points of discussion, called roll on the motion on the table:
  - John Garofalo: no
  - Greg Guarriello: no
  - Dee Ortner: no
  - Don Kupka: yes
  - Brian Taylor: no
  - Parashar Patel: yes
  - Christine Reynolds: yes
  - Lyndsey Lis: no
  - Amrith Kumar: yes
  - Peggy Briggs: yes
  - Eric Dahlberg: no
  - Ray Andrews: yes
  - Kathy Cuocolo: yes
  - Lois Wasoff: yes

Motion carries by a vote of 8-6.

- The Chair thanked the members of the Finance Committee and the public for their participation.

**Adjournment**

- MOTION: Amrith Kumar moved to adjourn. Seconded by Eric Dahlberg. The Chair observed that the motion passed unanimously and declared the meeting adjourned at 11:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Eric Dahlberg