

FINANCIAL TOWN MEETING June 6, 2022

Call to Order

Moderator John Murphy calls the Annual Financial Town Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Lawn Avenue Gymnasium, 55 Lawn Avenue, Jamestown and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Town Council members present:

Nancy A. Beye, President
Mary E. Meagher, Vice President
Erik G. Brine
Michael G. White

Town Council Members absent:

Randy White

Also in attendance:

John A. Murphy, Town Moderator
Jamie A. Hainsworth, Town Administrator
Christina D. Collins, Finance Director
Lisa W. Bryer, Town Planner
Edward A. Mello, Police Chief
Fred F. Pease, Town Sergeant
James R. Bryer, Fire Chief
Ray DelFalco, Parks and Recreation Director
Molly Conlon, Senior Services Director
Peter D. Ruggiero, Town Solicitor
Roberta J. Fagan, Town Clerk

School Committee members present:

Keith J. Roberts, Chair
Sally F. Schott, Vice Chair
Andrew C. Allsopp
Kristine A. Lapierre
Agnes C. Filkins

Also in attendance:

Kenneth Duva, Superintendent
Jane Littlefield, Director of Finance
Peter Anderson, Director of Buildings and Grounds

Budget Process, Meeting Procedures and Voting Overview

Town Moderator Murphy reviewed the meeting procedures and voting overview. There were 121 voters present at the 7:10 p.m. (125 were recorded at the adjournment of the meeting.)

Town Council President Nancy A. Beye

Moderator Murphy introduced President Beye, who thanked Moderator Murphy and addressed the assembled voters.

A moment of silence was observed for the victims and families in Uvalde, Texas.

Welcome everyone and thank you for joining us this evening in a much more traditional Financial Town Meeting. The fact that we can meet in our usual location speaks to the progress we have made in the past year to combat Covid-19. In last year's speech, I started out by saying that our community had come together in true Jamestown fashion when it came to dealing with the Covid crisis. Tonight, I want to applaud Jamestown's residents once again for coming together to create a budget that we feel will be in the best interest of everyone. It had its customary challenges and then some.

Creating the budget this year was done in the same manner as it is done each year. The Administration meets with all department heads to discuss their budgets, the council and school committee hold joint public meetings and workshops to discuss the school departments budget and then the town administrator and finance director present the budget to the town council for their vote to send it to the financial town meeting for the voter's approval.

Sounds simple right? That couldn't be any further from the truth! The people who are involved in the making of the budget work long hours, days, and months leading up to tonight's financial town meeting. It is for that reason that I on behalf of the council, would like to thank Jamie Hainsworth and Tina Collins, Dr. Ken Duva and Jane Littlefield, the Jamestown School Committee, Keith Roberts, Sally Schott, Drew Alsop, Agnes Filkins, and Kristine Lapierre. I would also like to thank the residents and parents who came to the meetings and shared their input with us.

At a special town council meeting held on April 4, 2022, the Council unanimously voted to approve the total budget of \$28,285,275 of which \$15,975,057 is for the school budget and the balance of \$12,310,218 is for the town budget.

On behalf of the town council, I respectfully request your support for the fiscal year 2022-2023 budget as it is presented. Thank you.

School Committee Chair Keith J. Roberts

Moderator Murphy introduced Chairman Roberts, who thanked Moderator Murphy and addressed the assembled voters:

Thank you all for coming to the Financial Town Meeting.

First, let's get into the highlights of the school year 2021- 2022:

- Developed a new Chorus Select for Lawn students that occur before school. At Melrose, a chorus group was established for students in 3rd and 4th grade.
- Instituted composting and improved recycling in Lawn Café through a partnership with Clean Ocean Access, and continued this partnership at Melrose.
- Full implementation of Anchored 4 Life, a peer-peer leadership program that focuses on positive connections between students at both schools.
- Advisory program reinstated at Lawn, and many new activities were added this year. For the past two years, Advisory was on hold due to COVID
- Partnership with Roger Williams University to offer a virtual math tutoring program at the middle school.

- Improvements in the cafeteria include new seating, mural, and space was created to offer safe distancing as well as circle table seating to encourage student discourse.
- Asbestos abatement, new security upgrades with a vestibule at Lawn, and new windows were all completed for this school year. *
- We are at the beginning of the implementation stage to install the solar carport canopy in the Melrose parking lot and install solar panels on the roof of the lawn school. This will generate 100% of the electricity at Melrose and up to 70% at Lawn. *
- Island Treasures was run pre-Covid style, and it was a spectacular success.
- Winter Food Drive for the Jamestown Community Food Pantry - we contributed 924 pounds of food. Our best contribution yet.
- After school chess club was created
- Partnership with Naval Academy Prep School cadets as mentors to our students in both schools. They visited during lunch and recess in the fall/winter.
- Replaced failing fiber connection to Lawn with a dedicated connection for that school, and improved coverage of the wireless network
- Procured Emergency Connectivity Grant Funding of \$24,000 to replace aging Chromebooks. *
- Cybersecurity work is ongoing and includes the updating of several cybersecurity policies and the completion of a third-party audit.
- A new school website was introduced in the fall.
- In conjunction with Michelle Steever a podcasting studio was set up in the Melrose library.
- Digging into Equity Newsletter distributed 4 times this year which supports our Strategic Planning goal for increasing cultural awareness in our district.
- After attending a conference to align Portrait of the Graduate to current learning our Instructional Coach and Middle School Principal applied for a STEM grant through RIDE to develop a course for 7th and 8th-grade students focusing on the competencies of our Portrait of a Graduate for the 22-23 SY. Lawn School was awarded this grant! *
- In May, both Melrose and Lawn schools were recognized by the RI Department of Education for making high achievements in the state testing during the pandemic.
- I believe the most meaningful thing that happened for our students this year was the return to traditional school opportunities with concerts, sports, dances, after-school clubs, and field trips.

Thank you to all the Teachers, Administration, and Support Teams that make it all happen. I appreciate the energy and passion you bring into the schools every day and the commitment to the students of Jamestown.

The reason why we are all here tonight is to vote on the budget that has been approved by the Town Council. I would like to take a few minutes to share some of my perspectives on this year's budget that I'm hopeful will receive unanimous support.

At last year's meeting, I spoke about the development of our new 5-year Strategic Plan. We were already delayed one year due to Covid, but the Strategic Plan was finally approved early last fall. It's too much to try to cover tonight, but for those of you that are interested, it's available from the School's website. For me, the essence of the plan is that there is a vision for the Jamestown 8th grade graduate that goes beyond standardized testing scores. There was a very diverse group of community members, teachers, administrators, school committee members, and students that were part of developing the Portrait of the Graduate. We want to send our students to high school as creative problem solvers that are aware of the diverse world we are part of.

The School Committee had initially unanimously approved a budget that included an increase that was 7.43%.

It was more than a \$1,000,000 increase over the previous year's budget. Again, not the final budget that we are voting on tonight.

The vast majority of that increase was related to costs that are completely out of our control.

- Salary and benefits. Contractual obligation
- Special education. Legal obligation.
- High School Tuition. Legal obligation.
- Contingencies related to contract negotiations.
- Total of required increases represents roughly 6.5% of the total budget

Based on the adoption of the School's Strategic Plan there were also additional resources included in the budget. They were as follows:

- Teaching resources to support grades 7/8
- Resources to support technology needs
- Professional/Consulting hours to support Administration in developing and managing the plan
- Total additional increases to support the Strategic Plan were roughly 1% of the total budget.

During the budget process, there was an editorial published by the Jamestown Press that suggested that the School Committee had lofty goals trying to fund a strategic plan that isn't really necessary or required. I also heard echoes of that sentiment from those opposed to budget increases. It was unfortunate that the editor didn't reach out to verify his understanding, but I want to make sure everyone here understands that there is legislation and requirements from RIDE that we not only have a strategic plan but that the strategic plan is aligned with a framework provided by RIDE. As a School Committee, it is one of our primary responsibilities that this plan exists, and is a priority. The Superintendent is responsible for proposing the plan and delivering the outcomes. The Strategic Plan is not a 'nice to have' or a choice. It only seemed reasonable that in order to make changes to reach the strategic goals the Administration would need additional resources.

The result of our request was that the town's budget would exceed the 4% increase in property taxes. We went through a collaborative process with the Town Council to understand the process of requesting a waiver. It became clear that there wasn't overwhelming support from the Town Council to proceed with the waiver, and as a result the School Committee unanimously approved a School Budget limited to the absolute requirements and avoiding the need for a waiver. I want to thank the other town departments that also had to make concessions in order to get the overall budget under the cap.

This will be my last year as a member of the School Committee. I've had the pleasure of being involved for the past 4 years in the capacity of Chairman, and have really enjoyed working with the Committee and Administration. We have a passionate School Committee that has always had a strong relationship with the Town Council, Administration, and Teachers. I like to think that we have the support of the parents, students, and community at large. One of the consistent challenges that cut across every community in America is funding education. I don't intend to be melodramatic, but the future couldn't be more uncertain. I believe there will be significant financial pressures as the COVID-related grants expire in 2024. Along with that, RIDE will begin to require a minimum spend on annual building maintenance. Combine that with all the unexpected things that happen in a district that has 20 – 25% of the school population change every year, and a tax cap. Lots of external factors contribute to the overall budget with very little flexibility. I think it's fair to say there is uncertainty on the horizon.

I wanted to quickly share a couple of observations:

First, Zero-based budgeting is a fantastic tool for budget planning. The premise is that you start the budget at \$0 each year, and build the budget based on the needs. However, that method also assumes that in the years where the budget needs to flex to meet the changing needs the funding will be available – or at least somewhat more available. Zero-based budgeting doesn't mean zero change. Zero-based budgeting is not a replacement for multi-year financial planning or forecasting. In the last two budget cycles, the schools had very small increases. Roughly .5% 2 years ago, and just over 1% last year. While this year's increase was larger than most years, the rolling 3-year averages are fairly consistent. There is nothing in the data that suggests anything other than most years the cost to deliver the standard of education we expect increases somewhere around 2.5%. If it's lower than that for 1 – 2 years it will be higher in years 3 and/or 4. Second, any multi-year plan that requires funding should be approved by both the Town Council and the Town Department. It should be assumed that plans require investment, and there should be a clear understanding between the Town Department and the Town Council. Unfortunately, I don't have any easy remedies to recommend, but I hope future elected officials and town employees make financial planning, modeling, and forecasting a priority. If for nothing else to understand the spectrum of scenarios, and to start to collaborate on mitigation strategies that will inevitably take more than a budget cycle to define, design, and implement.

The School Department is requesting a total of \$14,331,419. This represents an increase of \$890,081 over last year, which represents an increase of 6.62%. The town appropriation is \$13,326,701 Which is an increase of \$689,593 over last year, which represents an increase of 5.46%.

I'm respectfully encouraging you to approve the budget as proposed. We have excellent schools that are comprised of some of the best administrators and teachers in the world. I ask that you allow them to continue their mission, maintain forward progress, and continue to provide our students with the education they deserve.

Voting on the Budget

Moderator Murphy stated in a moment I will call for motions on the two budgets, the general budget, and the school committee budget. He reviewed stating "yes" to cast your vote.

At this time, I call for a motion on the general budget.

A motion was made by Councilor M. White with a second by Vice President Meagher to approve the entire Town Budget for \$12,310,218.00.

Donald Richardson made a motion to go to a paper ballot.

Valerie Southern of 43 Clinton Avenue inquired how much her taxes would go up. Town Administrator stated that it is based on each assessment. The tax rate would be \$6.74 to \$6.79 per \$1000 which would be a decrease from the current rate of \$8.28 per \$1,000.

Motion to go to a paper ballot does not carry.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)
Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor of the motion by saying yes.
Moderator Murphy called for all those opposed by saying no.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

A motion was made by School Committee Vice-Chair Member Sally F. Schott with second by School Committee member Kristine A. Lapierre to approve the school budget in the amount of \$15,975,057.00

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor of the motion that was made and seconded to pass and adopt the school committee budget please signify by saying yes.

Moderator Murphy called for all those opposed to the motion that was made and seconded to pass and adopt the school committee budget please signify by saying no.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Voting on the Resolutions

Moderator Murphy stated there are three housekeeping Resolutions:

A motion was made by Vice President Meagher to waive the reading of Resolutions 1, 2, and 3 with a second by Councilor M. White.

- **Resolution Number 1 – Sewer Linde Frontage Tax Rate**
- **Resolution Number 2 – Borrowing in Anticipation of Taxes**
- **Resolution Number 3 – Disposition of Collected Back Taxes**

Moderator Murphy asks if there is a motion to approve those Resolutions.

A motion was made by Councilor M. White with second by Vice President Meagher to approve Resolutions 1, 2, and 3.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor of the motion to signify by saying yes.

Moderator Murphy called for all those opposed by saying no.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Resolution Number 4 – Setting the Tax Rate

Moderator Murphy announced we will now set the tax rate.

A motion was made by Councilor E. Brine with second by Vice President Meagher to set the Tax Rate and hereby order the assessment and collection of a tax rate on rateable real estate and tangible personal property in the sum of not less than \$6.74 nor more than \$6.79 per \$1,000.00 of assessed valuation.

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion. (No discussion)

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by saying yes.

Moderator Murphy called for all those opposed please signify by saying no.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

Resolution Number 5 –Appropriation Not To Exceed \$400,000 For Purchase Of Development Rights To Farmland At Corner Of Eldred Avenue And East Shore Road With Funding Therefor From The Undesignated Fund Balance Of The General Fund Of The Town Of Jamestown Or Alternatively Borrowing Through Issuance Of Bonds Or Any Combination Thereof

A motion was made by President Beye with second by Councilor M. White to approve Resolution Number 5 –Appropriation Not To Exceed \$400,000 For Purchase Of Development Rights To Farmland At Corner Of Eldred Avenue And East Shore Road With Funding Therefor From The Undesignated Fund Balance Of The General Fund Of The Town Of Jamestown Or Alternatively Borrowing Through Issuance Of Bonds Or Any Combination Thereof

Moderator Murphy asked if there is any discussion.

Mr. Robert (Bob) Sutton gave a brief overview of the Jamestown Community Farm’s history and mission. In addition, Mr. Sutton described the plan to purchase the property, the grant, and the fundraising campaign; and if successful the Jamestown Community Farm would own the land, and the Town of Jamestown would own the development rights to the property.

Moderator Murphy called for all those in favor please signify by saying yes.
Moderator Murphy called for all those opposed please signify by saying no.

Motion passes by a majority vote in the affirmative.

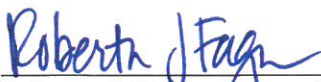
Board of Canvasser member Kenneth Newman addressed the assembly. Mr. Newman requested permission to acknowledge the passing of the fellow Board of Canvasser Melissa “Missy” Warner Barrows and dearly missed. Mr. Newman also asked the assembly to welcome the newly appointed Board of Canvasser Linda Jamison.

Moderator Murphy stated this concludes our business and called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion was made by Vice President Meagher and seconded by Councilor Brine to adjourn. Motion passes unanimously.

The Financial Town Meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Attest:



Roberta J. Fagan, Town Clerk