

Jonathan Anderson, Chair person  
David Hall, Vice Chair  
Jesse Limanek, Clerk  
Jeffrey Bannon  
Normand Champigny



Sutton Town Hall  
4 Uxbridge Road  
Sutton, MA 01590  
Telephone (508)865-8727  
Fax :( 508)865-8721

James A. Smith, Town Manager

Town of Sutton  
Select Board

Meeting Minutes  
Minutes Accepted and filed with the Town Clerk 04/23/2024 with a roll call vote of 5-0

6:00 p.m. – April 9, 2024

Roll Call vote taken:

Members in Attendance in person:

Chairperson Jonathan Anderson, Vice Chair David Hall, Clerk Jesse Limanek, Select members Jeffrey Bannon & Normand Champigny all present in person.

Also attending in person: Town Manager James Smith, Town Accountant Tim Harrison & Deb Jacques, secretary

Public Forum –

Bailey Bradley 26 years old-went in to the military at 19years old- unknown address. Bailey reviewed the budget & capital plan- he voices concerns of the 2.5% tax increase puts burden on tax payers. Why are we funding the Drag Show recently at the High School? Bailey reviewed the budget and questions use of \$25,000. For asbestos redial services on a building from 1999, \$40,000. On a door at the school. He feels he will be unable to live the American dream-his home is being destroyed.

Nate Jerome 47 Dodge Hill Road- Nate says there is a lot of misinformation regarding budget/financial- he wants truthful information to be out there. The town and the school did not pay for a Drag queen. There were no funds from town/school used to pay for this/no tax payer funds. The key note speaker was funded by a grant not part of tax dollars. He appreciates all sides of the issue- Nate goes on to say he fully supports the Superintendent and Principals. We can get thru in an amenable way with leadership in place right now.

Jocelyn Young 466 Boston Road- she has received harassment after speaking at the School Committee meeting. She also has an issue with alot of misinformation. She forwarded emails to officials to educate them on the event. In support of school administration- the amount of money our town gives our school per student is not reflective of many towns around us. They are lean down there- they have mandates- she likes our town being conservative and liberal. She would like to see our Selectmen and town officials put out the right basic information and bring us together.

Vice Chair Hall motions to accept as presented the March 26, 2024 Select Board meeting minutes Select Person Bannon seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote

Vice Chair Hall motions to accept as presented the Executive Session March 26, 2024 Select Board meeting minutes Select Person Bannon seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote

Eagle Scout Philip Ostrowski recognition read into record

Appointment of Associate member to the Board of Health Amy Valetta- Town Manager Smith states Amy was recommended to this seat by the Board of Health. Amy introduces herself to the Board- she previously served on Finance Committee and is looking to be connected to the town again. Amy is an attorney as well as an RN. Vice Chair Hall welcomes Amy- they served together on Finance Committee years ago. Dave says Amy will do great and thanks Amy for volunteering. Select person Limanek says Amy's expertise will serve the community well. Select person Bannon thanks Amy and says he is always amazed at the talent and professionalism of our volunteers. Select person Champigny says thank you- volunteering is a noble act. Select person Limanek motions to appoint Amy Valetta as an Associate Member to the Board of Health Vice Chair Hall seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote.

Intention to Alter Layout of Depot Street- present is Jen Hager- Community Development Director for Sutton. Jen states this is for the replacement of the Depot St bridge. This will involve small land takings- the town has to pay an appraised value. The work will include widening and beefing up the Depot St bridge. Vice Chair Hall asks about the areas looking to be widened- this will require easements- Jen replies yes. Select person Limanek asks about an area on the map that shows a sewer easement- Jen states that is still there- it is a pump station. Jesse asks the start date- Jen replies if this passes at Town Meeting- the job will go out to bid the end of

June. Jen will provide updates as the time gets closer but Highway, Police and Fire will be heavily involved as well as the business owners in the area. The bridge will be closed so the turnaround should be approx. one year. Select person Bannon motions that the Select Board vote its intention to alter the layout of a portion of Depot Street as a public way, to include within said layout the parcels of land shown as "Parcel-E-1", "Parcel S-E-2", "Parcel S-E-3", and "Parcel S-E-4" on a plan entitled "Layout Alteration Plan Depot Street Sutton, Massachusetts," dated April 5, 2024, and prepared by Green International Affiliates, Inc., and that we the Select Board forward the layout alteration plan to the Planning Board for its comments and recommendations pursuant to G.L. c. 41, §§ 81G and 81I. Select person Limanek seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote

Review DRAFT May Town Meeting Warrant- Town Manager Smith and Accountant Timothy Harrison present the draft warrant- the 1<sup>st</sup> 13 articles are financial followed by the Depot St bridge layout, an article for full time fire fighters to buy back time from n call hours, there are 2 citizens petitions on the warrant- they are to amend the zoning bylaw to allow large ground mounted solar photovoltaic installations (over 250k W)- Planning Board voted last night to not recommend. This will still go before Town Meeting for a vote. There is also an article sponsored by the Select Board to adopt MGL c149§ regarding leave of absence for municipal employees donating an organ and funds to purchase a skater system for the Sewer Dept.

FY25 Final Budget presentation- (PowerPoint attached to final minutes) Town Manager Smith states the budget is balanced, the proposed tax levy is \$925,373. (2.5%) plus new growth of \$200,000. The school dept. has balanced their budget with no layoffs. BVT is requesting a 10 million\$ debt to pay for roof reconstruction & replacement of roof top HVAC units. They will first go to the MSBA for funding then the 13 communities will pay over 20 years the remainder. Reviewed with no changes- ARPA funding uses. Health care will increase 9.95%. Enterprise funds are healthy and Capital Plan is funded at \$1,090,500. After a brief discussion the board thanks Jim and Tim for another balanced budget. Select person Champigny at this time reads into record his assessment on the budget and process involved. This will be attached to final minutes when submitted to the Town Clerks office.

#### Town Manager Update:

- Manchaug Boat Ramp season pass- We will write to the Commonwealth of MA Dept. of Fish & Game- office of fishing & boating access to inform them the season pass cost will be increased from \$20.00 to \$40.00. We reached out to them in regards to changing the daily price- they requested documents to show the cost associated with the boat ramp.
- Reserve Fund Transfer for Police Chief assessment process- we will go to FinCom to request a reserve fund transfer of \$5790.00 to pay Hanrahan Consulting LLC for the Police Chief Selection process.
- Correspondence from Unified Global Packaging Group (UGPG) on Thursday April 4<sup>th</sup> we received correspondence from Art Mahassel regarding requirements for the TIF dated 12/6/2022- they are required to submit to the town information identifying the tenant for lot 1. UGPG may be the tenant- they are willing to come before the Board to discuss.
- Fin Com final public hearing is Wed. April 10<sup>th</sup> at 6:30.

#### Announcement's / Round Table:

Vice Chair Hall participated in the Town wide cleanup held over the weekend.

Select person Limanek reads the items needed at the Sutton Food Pantry. Jesse attended an event at the Sr. Center last Wed. run by the President of the Worc. Public Library in regards to books on audio that are no charge to seniors. The Dudley Gendron thru Fish and Chip sales have brought the fund raiser for a Lukis Machine to half way (total \$40,000.). Jesse informs the residents that the sutton site on Face book is not a town govt. run site- at this time Jesse reads from a prepared lengthy statement regarding the recent Connections Event held at the school and all of the social media around this. A copy is attached to the final minutes.

Select person Bannon says there are boundaries between the Select Board and the School Committee as Jesse pointed out. Jeff does appreciate Nate Jerome coming before the board at Public Forum- he reaffirmed the commitment of transparency and communication. The Sutton site is not a govt. facebook page- there is no responsibility for the Select board to address on that site. Jeff would like to hear more from the Superintendent and the Principal about that particular issue.

Select person Champigny also participated in the Earth Day clean up. Normand goes on to say many people reached out to him with concern of recent events at the school- this is not a good reflection of the town. He feels there should be full accountability from all years this took place. If there was any profit where did it go- this will not be swept under the rug. There has been an increase in those interested in home school- people have started looking for other options. These children are not wards of the state- they should not be subjected to political ideology of a teacher- the teacher should not be driving an agenda. Our children need to be educated in Math, English, History. We do pay high taxes- a good portion go to the school – Our children are not wards of the state- children should be taught critical thinking, the constitution- they need to be competitive in the world market place- be productive adults. Elections have consequences. Normand again says the residents do not want this swept under the rug.

Chair person Anderson says from his perspective- when a group keeps pushing to the edge what society is not ready for you eventually hit a point where people say enough- the signs have been there for a long time- people are busy- but now they see they have to pay attention. This can be repaired in a productive transparent civil way. But none of this exists at this time.

There is lack of transparency and misinformation from both sides. If we want a community that educates our kids in a way that works we need transparency as well as input to what is being taught. He does not appreciate the Administration stopping off people with concerns. You need to vote at elections, come to meetings- voice your concerns. If people are not being heard vote out the board members whether it is Select board or School Committee. We have mechanisms in place to make change or a dialogue how we want our kids educated. We will not solve as a divided world. The opportunity as a community is to go beyond where we are and get to a place where our kids are being educated in a way back to the basics of what education is. Focus on our kids- that's what matters. Administration, School Committee take the lead and allow discussion to happen where we all feel the kids are getting what they need from the school- right now the return on the investment is not where it should be. Take a look at the State and Federal level influence on our education system- and the unfunded costs from these mandates that affect our budgets. It takes all of us to pay attention.

Select person Limanek motions to adjourn, Select person Bannon seconds- Roll Call vote taken- passes 5-0

Meeting adjourned 8:50pm

Jesse Limanek

I would like to take a few moments to talk about the events of last week.

1<sup>st</sup> This Board under town charter is barred from directly interfering in the day-to-day operation of any agency of the town.

- Select Board has executive authority to ensure that the will of the legislative branch – (re: Town Meeting) – is adhered to and the MGLs are followed.
- We also have the authority to establish policy that outlines how compliance within these areas are best achieved.

Town Manager serves as our administrator

- His job is to ensure that day-to-day operations of the town takes place in a manner that adheres to the policies that are set by this board in a manner consistent with the town charter, our by-laws and MGL.
- But, as stated in Section 4-2(n) of the town charter, while he is allowed to inquire at any time into the conduct and operation of any office or performance of duties of any official or employee, department, board, commission, or other town agency, he is not allowed to do so with the schools.

Therefore, to those residents who are frustrated by the activities of the Connections Conference, the School Committee is the proper venue to voice your concerns.

- It is the sole duty of the SC to provide oversight for the operation of the schools.
- In doing so, they are responsible for hiring, evaluating and firing the superintendent, making sure that a responsible budget is produced in a timely manner, and ensuring that needs of the ALL children are met by establishing policy directives for the schools.
- BUT, Take note: similar to how the Select Board is barred from interfering in the day-to-day operation of the town, the SC is not involved in what is taught within the schools.
- Day-to-day operations are controlled by the superintendent and the school administration.
- Therefore, the buck stops at their desks.

That being said: for the record, I am in full agreement with those who have voiced their concerns about the nature of this Conference.

- Since its inception, the agenda of each Conference clearly has fallen in within the realm of what is now commonly referred to as “woke”.
- Instead of exposing the participants to a diversity of perspectives and opinions, each session has only involved radical progressive speakers and presentations.

- The danger of this lies in a simple truism: one-sided presentations allow the speakers to skew information to fit their own agendas without any counter voices or opinions.
- And , even more troubling, is that such presentations typically devolve into proselytization, which could result in more harm than good – especially to young, impressionable youths.
- True knowledge and understanding, as we all should know, can only be gained by hearing, at a minimum, both sides of an issue.
- Sadly, based on smugness of the responses from the both the superintendent and the principal, is clear that there is no contrition; no embarrassment; no humility for what has taken place.
- Instead, there is only condescension and aloofness, as well as disdain for those who may disagree.

If this were at a private facility, I, and I assume most people, would have no issue. But, it is not.

- Instead, Connections takes place in our high school, and, therefore, it is a reflection of our community.
- I don't believe that majority of taxpayers in town believe that drag shows, queer theory, or critical race theory are beneficial to the holistic wellbeing of our children.
- The fact that both the superintendent and the high school principal as well as the majority of the school committee seemingly brushed off such concerns is, at least to me, the most troubling aspect of what has become a national news story.

Admittedly, I do not have children in Sutton schools. Both of my kids went to BVT due in part to personal concerns that I had with the ideological direction of the high school seemingly was heading in a decade ago. So, I have no standing as a parent.

But, as I taxpayer, I do have questions about the funding for this Conference, which I hope will be raised by our Finance Committee tomorrow night.

- While the superintendent and principal have claimed that it is fully self-funded:
  - o When is this conference planned? Are the principal and staff involved in the conference putting this together on their own personal time out of school? Or, are they doing it during their taxpayer funded prep time?
  - o Are they using taxpayer funded school equipment? Photocopiers, computers, the kitchen, the town's web server, etc,?
  - o Are they using taxpayer funded supplies? Copy paper, bags, pencils, toner, etc?

- Are the custodians that are on duty paid as part of their normal salary? Or do they receive stipends similar to when outside groups come in and use the facilities during the weekend?
- Was cafeteria staff responsible for making the lunches? And, if so, did they do so on the taxpayer's dime? Or, were they paid stipends?
- Are the principal and staff volunteering their time to run the conference? Or are they doing so on the clock?
- I also have a question pertaining to the alleged misappropriation of grant funds to pay for one of the keynote speakers.
  - While the principal has claimed that DESE approved its use, I don't see how.
  - The grant was awarded for specific purpose pertaining to activities for the benefit of students enrolled in Sutton Public Schools.
  - How can a grant that was obtained to pay for a program for our students – Sutton students - be used for an unrelated activity that essentially was part of a private event involving children bused in from other districts?
  - Since the majority of the school committee did not feel that school council should be contacted to inquire about this, I strongly believe that Town Council should take a look at it. To echo Mr. Edwards' concerns, I would hate for Sutton to get a reputation that we misuse grant moneys and lose out on future awards.

Now that we have been able to peer inside that types of activities that occur at Connections and have become Tik Tok famous as a result, I believe is time for Connections to leave Sutton.

- Let another school district host it if that community will have it. Or, if the powers-that-be are unwilling to do so, the organizers should be required to rent out a nearby convention center and host it in a private – not public – setting.

For those who like me have other concerns, do not be afraid to raise questions before the School Committee and make your voices heard.

- Their job is to serve you – the taxpayer.
- BUT, please do so in a respectful manner.
- Remember, all elected officials are volunteers, freely giving their time to serve this community.
- The hostility and animosity that arose on social media from bomb throwers on both sides has no place in efforts to bring about positive change.
- As proof, I would suggest that you watch last night's planning board meeting.

- Strong opinions were shared, but in a meaningful, passionate way – and the Planning Board was receptive. In the end, they made the decision that reflected the will of the voters who were present.
- The same can happen here if you are determined to try.

# Normand Champigny

Mr. Chairman, to our town manager and my fellow select board members – and to the residents of Sutton.

As an elected member of the Select Board, for the Town of Sutton, I put it upon myself, in view this is my 1<sup>st</sup> year in office, responsible to the town residents, to understand the budget processes. I would like to share my observations with the board and town residents. In perspective, I was using our town charter as a guiding principle.

With the cost of managing the town and the economic conditions of rising cost with inflation, it is imperative that our residents receive above fair value, considering taxes are impacting many in town in these economic times. Personally, as with others, it troubles me when some residents are making arrangements to pay their taxes on time.

I took the liberty of meeting with those in supporting departments Such as the Finance Committee, School Committee, Town Manager, and others ad hoc. I want to thank them for their time and consideration.

Like many, and rightfully so, many residents are concerned about the cost of their town taxes. I encourage them to take part of the process to learn the receipts and expenses, and its reporting.

My observation in reviewing the budget for the 2025 fiscal year is transparent and assures the town is being managed efficiently, with a long-term view; with conservative measures in place. We are very fortunate to have those management practices in place. This is reflected with the current Standard & Poor rating for the town at (AA+)



My view with current increases in this budget, examples with salaries increases are justified to retain the talent in town. These salary increases are adjusted to meet local labor market conditions.

To put it into a different perspective, consider the town as a separate entity. It must contend like any other household to manage its income and expenses. It is impacted, like any other, by external market conditions such as inflation, the cost of maintaining and providing services most efficiently. Also in consideration, required regulations (both federal and state) that also impacts the budget.

If you look at the top cost of expenses for town residents, it is the school budget, rightfully so, to prepare our school age children with an education to be competitive in the global marketplace in the future, and to lead productive lives.

Upon review of the current total cost of education for the town is \$21,391,650 - this represents by rough order of magnitude (ROM) of 72% of the *tax levy* received. Meaning, for the average taxpayer, the majority of their taxes go to the school system. Example, if your real estate tax bill is \$5,000. Roughly, \$3,600 goes to the school system.

That, ROM, struck me as: How many tax paying residents know how much of their real estate taxes is applied to the school system? I randomly asked 10-15 residents in town and the majority of those polled guessed at the 50% marker.

Again, and I will reiterate, it is imperative that we prepare our school-age children to be educated and to lead productive lives. In my observation, this line item in the budget is the only item town management has no control with increase costs which some, not all, these rising costs are led by DESE mandates.

requirements affecting long-term expenditures. To add, our stabilization fund is to be *coveted* by other towns and should remain that way.

Again, *these are my observations*.

The concerns I have for the town residents for future budget management are the following:

1) The need for recurring revenue:

Our tax receipts that manage the town expenditures are heavily weighted as one-time payments. I would recommend continuous exploration of the means of creating *recurring revenue sources* that will offset future cost. Keep in mind, this is a challenging endeavor.

2) Elections have consequences:

If town residents are concerned of current economic conditions and relative cost, please keep in perspective that state and federal elections have implications on towns like Sutton, with regulations and mandates that add to budgetary constraints. If our town rejects such mandates, we are coerced with state or federal aid rescinded.

In as much as *local politics is global politics*, we are affected of federal and global political agendas that impact local cities and towns.

I appeal to the residents of Sutton to take command of the political issues that have effects on towns; let it be local, state, or federal. Simply, please vote.

### 3) Inflation

Reminder that inflation is defined as too many dollars chasing too few goods. Current federal monetary policies with increased spending impacts the cost of managing home budgets, businesses, and municipalities. To add, with recent global events such as the formation of BRICS as these countries are returning to the gold standard, this will return US currency back into the federal system. Thus, adding inflationary pressures on the economy and descend to local levels. Again, elections have consequences.

We must be prepared to embrace any future inflationary pressures on our town budget.

### 4) Succession of Town Administration and Management

*This is most critical.* For the past several years, in comparison to other towns and cities, Sutton residents have benefited from conservative budgetary practices. As we are to look at future successions in key management roles, it is imperative that we seek resources with the same mantra and management practices. It will only take one individual to disrupt the past practices and legacy that would place the town and residents in a precarious position.

To conclude, I would like to finish the way I started. I want to thank those that assisted me in understanding the budget processes, requirements, and future obligations to the town. I did so, like my fellow select board members, to meet our elected duties to the Sutton town residents.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my assessment, findings, and recommendation for the 2025 fiscal year budget for the Town of Sutton. Thank you.