

March 13, 2023  
(via Zoom)

A Special Joint meeting of the Town Council of the Town of Newton and the Newton Board of Education was held on the above date at 5:30pm via ZOOM. Present were Mr. Dickson, Mrs. Diglio, Mrs. Le Frois, Deputy Mayor Couce, Mayor Teets, Thomas S. Russo, Jr., Town Manager, and Teresa A. Oswin, Municipal Clerk.

Present for the Newton Board of Education were Ray Morris, Vice-President, Danielle Zito, Meghan Gill, Joan Faye, Mary Zayac, Lisa Qarmout, Stella Dunn, President, and Dr. Picirillo, Superintendent. Mr. Caffrey and Ms. Cooke were excused.

Mayor Teets led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag and the Clerk called the roll. Mr. Russo introduced Danielle Finkle, Recreation and Senior Services Coordinator, Steven VanNieuwland, Police Chief, and Eric M. Bernstein, Town Attorney.

Mayor Teets made the following declaration that "This meeting is being held in accordance with the Revised Annual Notice, which was published in the NJ Herald and posted at Town Hall and on the Town website on March 9, 2023".

Mayor Teets welcomed and thanked everyone in attendance for this Joint meeting between the Newton Board of Education and the Newton Town Council.

Mr. Russo read following statement:

*"Thanks to everyone for attending via Zoom this evening. I congratulate Dr. Piccirillo on his new position and look forward to working with him for many years to come. First, I would like to briefly go over the 2023 Municipal Budget:*

*As introduced – Total budget is \$16,382,301; Water/Sewer is \$4,952,475. We have 63 full-time and 82 part-time, seasonal, and intern employees (145 total).*

*We had our greatest increase in the NVT (Net Valuation Taxable) in over 7 years: \$11,504,596.*

*Additionally, the new average residential property assessment has gone up slightly from the 2022 level of \$185,293 to the new 2023 level of \$185,638. Therefore, factoring in the budget and tax levy as proposed, the municipal taxes on an average residential property are estimated to go from \$2,838 in 2022 to \$2,899 in 2023 – an increase of only \$5 a month.*

**CIF Projects of Note:**

- ❖ *Community Development Utility Vehicle for Events, \$10,000*
- ❖ *Fire Tools, Thermal Camera, Vent Fans, \$45,000*
- ❖ *Plan Endorsement Renewal, \$20,000*
- ❖ *Recreation, Accessible Playground Equipment, Pine Street Park, \$100,000 (\$75,000 grant application)*

**Capital Projects of Note:**

- ❖ *DPW Replacement for Truck 7 4500 Dump Truck, \$150,000*
- ❖ *DPW Replacement for Truck 2 Tandem Dump Truck, \$270,000*
- ❖ *DPW/Engineering – Clinton, West Nelson, Division, \$249,330*
- ❖ *Engineering – Swartwood Road Sidewalks, \$515,000 (\$400,000 grant application)*
- ❖ *Fire – Firehouse No. 1 Renovations \$2,000,000 Over 3 Years (\$835,000, \$635,000, and \$530,000)*

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- ❖ Municipal Building Fencing, \$75,000
- ❖ Parks and Recreation, Roller Hockey Rink Improvements, \$140,000
- ❖ Parks and Recreation, Kiddie Pool Renovations, \$76,000
- ❖ Parks and Recreation, Boardwalk Connector for Rail Trail and Memory Park \$825,000 (\$750,000 grant application)
- ❖ Police Dispatch Center Upgrades, \$375,000 (Grant Received is \$300,000)
- ❖ Police 4 SUV's, \$260,000
- ❖ Tax Reassessment, \$265,000 over 5 years

**Some other interesting projects we are working on:**

- ❖ EV Charging Station (2 Fast Chargers) in Central Plaza, Lot #4, \$275,000 - \$50,000 from JCP&L Rebate Program, \$75,000 from NJDEP, and \$150,000 from BPU Tourism Grant
- ❖ Spring Newsletter in Spanish
- ❖ NPP Mural on Spring Street
- ❖ Adding New Panic Buttons and Cameras at Town Hall
- ❖ Pop's Bagel Shop on Route 206
- ❖ Cannabis Retailer (Skylands Herbal) approved for Route 206
- ❖ Supporting Thorlabs building #4 at EJ Brooks
- ❖ Food Composting Program (\$169,977 Grant Received over 2 years)
- ❖ Dog Park Success
- ❖ Going out to Bid for the Mill Street 519 Sidewalk Project, Done with County of Sussex
- ❖ New Hampshire Street (W/S upgrades and milling, paving)

**Water/Sewer Projects of Note:**

- ❖ Chemical Room Upgrades Sewer Plant \$375,000 (PSS)
- ❖ Clear Well/High Street Cleaning (W) \$150,000 (PCI)
- ❖ Main Plant PLC Upgrade/Water Plant (W) \$260,000 (w/PSS)
- ❖ Morris Lake Chemical Room (W) \$100,000
- ❖ PLC High Street Pump Station (W) \$120,000 (PSS)
- ❖ Sewer Line Repairs \$1,000,000 (w/PSS)
- ❖ Sewer Plant Fence \$55,000
- ❖ WWTP ABW Sand Filter Rehab \$650,000 (PSS)
- ❖ Consolidation Pump Stations \$1,300,000 (w/PSS) – 2023 Engineering \$300,000/2024 Construction \$1,000,000
- ❖ Sludge Transfer Main Mechanical Valve \$140,000
- ❖ Sparta Avenue Pump Station \$4,113,300
- ❖ Digester Conversion \$1,962,585

**Some answers to recent inquiries:**

1. No additional Pilots being proposed or discussed/reviewed at this time
2. For the Water Street Lofts Project:
  - These are market rate units, not COAH affordable units
  - Average monthly rent shall be around \$2,400 (53 one-bedroom, 47 two-bedroom)
  - As we previously discussed the current PILOT meets all statutory requirements under the advice, guidance, and counsel of our redevelopment attorney and financial advisor.
  - Estimated school population is 7 students (using the reputable Rutgers Study of School Aged Children Report)
  - At such time as the Certificates of Occupancy are received for all three (3) apartment buildings, and actual data can be provided to the Town about actual school enrollment from these buildings, the Town previously expressed its willingness to have conversations with the School District about any modifications to the PILOT as it currently exists, recognizing that data will be required to discuss the actual impact on enrollment and existing school facilities.

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*-If a determination is made to adjust the PILOT, the Town can enter into a local intra-agency agreement.*

*-Our Redevelopment Counsel and Town Attorney are familiar with all such arrangements and stands by when the time is appropriate.*

**Adam Vough, DPW, Bullet Points for Council/BOE Meeting**

- ❖ *DPW employees salt the school parking lots at the end of snow storms after they have been plowed.*
- ❖ *Provide schools with salt for their buildings/sidewalks.*
- ❖ *Fields are maintained at Memory Park for sporting events including soccer/baseball/softball. (This year baseball will not be at the park allowing more time to correct the field issues with Town project this year involving Suburban Engineering)*
- ❖ *The school helps in providing chalk for lining the fields and infield drying agents to help with game preparation.*
- ❖ *Recently did a joint purchase of a seeder for use on the fields to help maintain the football field so it can be dual purposed for soccer.*
- ❖ *The school allows the DPW to use their mechanical lift for projects when needed.*
- ❖ *School vehicles purchase fuel from us and use our pumps whenever needed. Each vehicle has their own fuel key with driver codes.*
- ❖ *Anything that arises we have always been happy to help and they school has always been just as happy to assist.*
- ❖ *Last year we dug up the varsity softball field around home plate and installed more stone and a French drain to help with the standing water. Hopefully, that continues to help and it will be monitored to see if anything else might be needed.*
- ❖ *The drainage project in the park with Suburban Engineering will be adding a new drainage pipe around the field to the stream. This should greatly decrease the standing water issues we have had over a majority of the varsity baseball field. Next year another project will commence to dredge the stream going out to the big springs which should also decrease the amount of water stuck in the park.*

*Joining me this evening on Zoom is Police Chief Steven VanNieuwland who will give us an overview of the excellent, collaborative relationship the Town has with the School District. Chief?"*

Chief VanNieuwland started by giving an overview of the staffing in his department. He said the department currently consists of 22 officers, 3 specials, 4 full-time and 8 part-time dispatchers, and 15 crossing guards. This past year has been one of transition with 2 retirements, 4 new hires, and 2 promotions. They are updating the 9-1-1 center to the Next Gen system. This is a digital system with voice, photo, and digital text message capability. He is proud of the good relationship the department has with the Board of Education and the schools. It has always been good, but this year he feels it has grown. They implemented monthly meetings where they discuss traffic, parking, and security issues. They also do a post-incident review to see what worked and didn't and how they can improve things. Det. Torres handles juvenile matters, teaching the Law Enforcement Against Drug program. Each week she brings a different officer to the class so the kids get to know them. He has talked with Dr. Piccirillo about bringing back having a School Resources Officer. They do random walk throughs the school which has been well received by the staff. It provides a police presence and enhances security. He is looking forward to continuing to work with Dr. Piccirillo and his staff.

Mr. Russo introduced Mrs. Danielle Finkle, so she could briefly go over the services and programs we offer.

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Mrs. Finkle started by saying we plan on opening the kiddie pool this summer, we also plan on making improvements to the hockey rink. They have a basketball camp scheduled for the Spring break. We have an upcoming Senior luncheon and attendees will be attending the musical. The Town will also be hosting an Easter Egg hunt. Students from the school will be volunteering at both these events.

Mr. Russo advised the Mayor, that concluded his report.

Mayor Teets thanked Mr. Russo and asked Dr. Piccirillo for his comments.

Dr. Piccirillo started by saying he has had great conversations with many on this Zoom. He has great communications with the Police Chief and Det. Torres and enjoyed a great conversation with Tom over coffee. He is looking forward to meeting with the Mayor. His went on to say it is amazing to see graduates of Newton schools come back to work here... for decades. He wants to promote that. On the three-year anniversary of COVID their level is now green, which is the lowest level. He feels we are turning the page. He said Community School model works. Last week they had a meeting which brought together all the community partners solidifying their partnership. The goal is for the safety of every student both socially and emotionally. Unfortunately, some of their grant funding is running out, but he wants to keep moving forward. There is a sense of pride about Newton. He feels we need to be our best cheerleaders and not afraid to brag about ourselves. They are working on Apps and promo videos re-engaging all stakeholders. The College, School, and Town all working together. He is excited about all the good stuff.

Mayor Teets thanked Dr. Piccirillo and then opened the meeting up for discussion and asked if the Council had any questions or comments.

Mr. Russo had a question for Dr. Piccirillo. He asked how the mental health of the students were coming out of the pandemic.

Dr. Piccirillo stated COVID shined a light on mental health issues. Schools are struggling across the country. The school has added a social worker at the middle school. They are looking at opportunities to do the same at the high school. He went on to say if a student feels safe at school they are more receptive to learn.

Mayor Teets next asked Deputy Mayor Couce if he has any questions or comments. He said he had nothing to comment at this time.

Next, Mrs. Le Frois said she is glad to see everyone bragging about the good things happening in Town. We can all come together with a sense of pride in Newton. She went on to say grant funds make projects possible and wants to do better job getting the word out about that. It is difficult being the County Seat with one third of our properties tax exempt as Trenton continues to issue unfunded mandates. She is proud of Mayor Dickson's initiative naming Newton as a *Stigma Free Town*, reminding people we are a

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safe community. We need to share each other's events on our social media platforms. She enjoys this meeting, and it is important to continue to keep communicating. Thank you.

Mrs. Diglio asked how the School's budget will impact the average taxpayer.

Dr. Piccirillo stated they did not get the numbers for the State until late last week so he had to push his preliminary budget meeting until tomorrow, so he does not think it would be prudent to discuss it at this time since the whole Board hasn't had a chance to discuss it. Mrs. Diglio asked as liaison to the Board, was she allowed to attend the meeting tomorrow? Dr. Piccirillo responded yes, it is a public meeting, all are welcome.

Mr. Dickson stated Governor Murphy announced his budget and his funding and he was wondering where that put us as far as the track for Newton to become fully funded.

Dr. Piccirillo responded by saying he could give a few data points and history. Thanks to the great work by many at this meeting it has led us to be the recipient of better funding. Our increases in funding are projected to happen over the next several years until we are "fully funded". We are expected to receive \$2.2 million "extra" in aid, which is back pay we should have received over the years. Putting that in context he shared a couple of data points on unexpected expenditures they have taken on. 1. Increase in tuition for charter schools and out of district placement is \$820,000 more. 2. Benefits and insurance increase of \$482,000. 3. Transportation cost increase of \$474,000. 4. Less tuition from Green and Andover in the amount of \$240,000. He stated yes, we are getting some funding we did not receive prior, but unfortunately, it is being offset by some additional expenditures. There is still some work they have to do, like deferring maintenance and deferring facilities. As the money comes in, they will have to build up their reserves to work on long term projects, so they don't have to go to a referendum at some point for maintenance related costs.

Mr. Russo asked each Board member if had any questions or comments.

President Dunn said Dr. Piccirillo stated we are working on the students mental health, but she wanted to remind everyone part of the goal of being a Community School is that those services mentioned have been offered for a very long time. They are just enhancing things we have done in the past. For example, the High School has a green room and we have had social workers on staff before. These things are part of our

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Community Schools model. If you are not familiar with it, she strongly suggests taking a look at it. Supporting the whole child has been on-going not just since COVID.

Mr. Morris said all his questions have been answered.

Ms. Qarmout had no comments.

Ms. Zito thanked the Town for making their meetings accessible via zoom and also for posting them on the Town's website.

Meghan Gill thanked everyone for coming and stated is it great to hear about the Town and the great projects coming up. She feels it is really beneficial to have these meetings.

Ms. Faye said she looks forward to these meetings and how we collaborate together.

Ms. Zayac said it was unfortunate we couldn't have met in person.

Mayor Teets read the following statement: *"At this point in the meeting, the Town Council welcomes comments from any member of the public on any topic. To help facilitate an orderly meeting and to permit the opportunity for anyone who wishes to be heard, speakers are asked to take one turn at the microphone and please limit their comments to 3 minutes. The Municipal Clerk will keep time. If reading from a prepared statement, please provide a copy and email a copy to the Clerk's Office after making your comments so it may be properly reflected in the minutes. Council may choose to comment after the entire public portion has concluded. Please state your name and address for the record."*

President Dunn read the following statement: *"This public session is designed for members of the public to speak on agenda items only. By law, the Board of Education is under no obligation to respond to public comment. If the Board of Education chooses to respond, it does not waive its right thereafter not to respond. Each statement made by a participant shall be limited to three (3) minutes in duration as timed by the Board Secretary. No participant may speak more than once during the public session. Please identify yourself and spell your last name."*

With no-one wishing to be heard, Mayor Teets closed the meeting to the public.

Upon motion of Mrs. Le Frois, seconded by Mr. Dickson and carried, the Council adjourned at 6:20 pm.

Dr. Piccirillo commented the Governor just called a State of Emergency due to the

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weather. This has caught him off guard because all the forecasts he has looked at have called for only rain for tomorrow.

Mr. Russo stated the State of Emergency starts at 8:00pm for Bergen County, Passaic County, Morris County, Sussex County, and Warren County. Six to Twelve inches expected in Sussex County.

Upon motion by Mr. Morris, seconded by Ms. Faye and carried, the Board adjourned at 6:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Teresa A. Oswin, R.M.C.  
Municipal Clerk