

## **MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

October 30, 2023

Rowley Town Hall, 139 Main Street, Rowley, MA

6:15 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Larry White; Vice Chairman Sharon Emery; Dennis Roy, and Chip Sheerin

**ABSENT:** Pam Bowen, Peter Censullo

**ATTENDEES:** Catie McClenaghan, Amy Lydon, Karen Summit, Dennis Roy, Larry White, Sharon Emery, Chip Sheerin, David Irving, Donna Irving, Walter Pomerleau, Chris Harlow, Tia Gerber, Karen O'Reilly, Paul Moskiwz, Alicia Caritano, Kristy Lyons, Kristine Morrison, Katrina Jensen, Kelly Fay, Doug Roberts, Jay Foxer, Joan Petersen, Rick Currier, C. Trotta, Bernie Cullen

### **CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

Chairman Pierce called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**6:05 P.M. JOINT MEETING BOARD OF SELECTMEN** to discuss the Whittier Regional Vocational High School Building Project

### **BOARD OF SELECTMEN VOTE TO OPEN THE JOINT MEETING**

Chairman Cliff Pierce called for a motion and a second from the Board of Selectmen to open the Joint Meeting with the Finance Committee. Robert Snow made a motion to open the Joint Meeting with the Finance Committee, Deana Ziev, seconded, all those in favor, roll call vote, Christine Kneeland, aye; Cliff Pierce, aye; Deana Ziev, aye; Robert Snow, aye; Sheri David, aye.

Chairman Pierce said now Finance Committee Chairman Larry White will call for a motion and a second from the FinCom to call the meeting of the Finance Committee to order and to open the Joint Meeting with the Board of Selectmen by a roll call vote.

### **FINANCE COMMITTEE VOTE TO OPEN THE JOINT MEETING**

Finance Committee Chairman Larry White called for a motion and a second from the Finance Committee to call the Finance Committee meeting to order and to open the Joint Meeting with the Board of Selectmen. Dennis Roy made the motion to call the Finance Committee meeting to order and to open the Joint Meeting with the Board of Selectmen, Sharon Emery, seconded it, all those in favor, roll call vote, Chip Sheerin, aye; Sharon Emery, aye; Larry White, aye; Dennis Roy, aye.

The Joint Meeting between the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee opens at 6:05 p.m.

Chairman Cliff Pierce said the Joint Meeting is now open. He said that the discussion on the Whittier School Building Project will be as follows:

- 1) Presentation by the Whittier School Superintendent and Whittier School Committee representative
- 2) Questions from the Board of Selectmen
- 3) Questions from the Finance Committee
- 4) Questions from attendees – questions must be made at the microphone. Persons need to clearly state their name and address.
- 5) The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee will discuss the project and the planned districtwide January 23, 2024 special election

### **Whittier School Project Presentation**

Whittier Superintendent Maureen Lynch came to the podium. She said thank you for having us here tonight. She asked how many of you have been to Whittier Tech. She said that they are having an open house this weekend from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. to see our programs and walk through the building and to meet with students and staff. Lynch introduced the following members of the project team:

- School Committee member David Irving
- David Saindon, OPM from Leftfield
- Douglas Roberts, Architect, JCJ
- Alicia Caritano, Architect, JCJ; and
- Kristy Lyons, Consigli Construction

She said that Whittier was built in 1973 and that the vocational programs have really evolved a lot since then. She said that were no ADA and IDEA compliance initiatives, so we really have tried to make sure that our kids are taken care of. She said on a really positive note, our students were nationally recognized as a distinguished school for kids with special populations.

She went through her prepared presentation, which was provided in printed form and shown on a monitor that was being broadcast on Rowley Community Media.

She said we have two options – we have a full code compliancy upgrade option or a new school option. She that the previous slides that she had sent to the Town showed the new school cost at \$301 million, and that the cost has now come down to \$264 million. She said that she was pleased to say that the MSBA has come through with more funding.

She said our charter is to provide a workforce for our region and we have 23 vocational and technical programs. She said we have about 1,280 day students and 400 night students. She said our parking lot is always full. She reviewed the list of programs. She said we are a very busy school. She said that we also have summer CTI programs, which are funded through the State for underemployed and unemployed individuals. She said that there were many students in this program and we had 8 programs running all summer. She said we have about 150 seniors out on co-op, which is a program whereby seniors can go out and work in their field.

She compared the programs from 1973 to now. She said there is a real trend now going back to the trades, such as plumbing and electrical. She said that she had to move her electrical program to another area because it had become so large. She said that is one of the issues. She said that we have been able to make sure that our building has been taken care of over the past many years and that we have never come to ask for a renovation from this Board or any other board because we have been able to take care of it on our own for 50 years, but it is time that we do something because we have been told by Haverhill Inspection Services that we cannot do another renovation in our building until we put a sprinkler system in. She said we are at a full-stop.

She said we just added marine technology over the past couple of years because of the need for marine mechanics and we have been able to fund the program through grants. She said computer aided design and drafting is another program where it has gone from using pencils and rulers to online. She said they had a major water leak in the computer aided design lab last week.

She said that in 2014, the former superintendent hired a company to take a walk around the building and do a study about where the needs of the building are or were. In 2016, we started submitting a statement of interest and also came to every Select Board and City Council to open up a Stabilization Account to start preparing for a school building project. She said this has been going on since 2016. She said on June 23, 2021, we were invited into the MSBA eligibility stage for a feasibility study.

Robert Hardy came to the podium to talk about existing conditions. He said that he is the feasibility manager at Whittier Tech. He reviewed the presentation slides. He said that the electrical in the upper auditorium needs to be re-done and it is not ADA compliant. He said there is no ramp to the third floor entrance into the auditorium. He said there is an aluminum ramp, but someone needs to pull it up. He said that the classroom ceilings have staining. He said there is wired glass in a classroom that has to be removed. He said that there is settling in the culinary shop and there are cracks in the drywall. He said there is a mop sink in the culinary shop that has an electrical box near it and it is not safe. He said the circulator pump is about 30 years old and is due for a replacement. He said the controls are about 50 years old and are difficult to work on and extremely hard to find parts for. He said the wastewater ground tank is in need of replacement. He said it is original to the school and is 50 years old. He said there is a bathroom in the ground floor with a sink that is original to the school. He said the generator house needs re-building, but that the generator itself is not large enough to

handle all the emergency lighting needs of the school. He said that there are electrical panels in the hallways of the school, with a subpanel off it because he could not find parts to replace the breakers in the panels. He said the west terrace floods out and water leaks into the ground floor equipment room and they can't store any equipment. He said that the welding and HVAC shop floods constantly. He said the doors for that area are four to six feet below grade level. He said there is a drain there, but it can't handle the rainwater and it floods the shop every time with no drains in the shop. He said when the compressors break down, they have to shut off all the heat. He said the doors at the Poets Inn are completely rotted. He said the wastewater treatment tank is completely rotted out and all the tanks need to be replaced. He said the elevator needs to be replaced. He said the elevator in the main area does not go down to the ground floor. He said persons in wheelchairs have to use ramps that are not ADA compliant and use another elevator that can barely fit a wheelchair in it. He said duct work needs to be re-wrapped.

Lynch said the decision to build a new school, when working with the MSBA, is to look at three options: code upgrade, renovation/addition, or build a new school. She said through a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis of multiple options, the Building Committee determined that constructing a new facility would be the optimal and most cost-effective solution. She said that the MSBA provides reimbursement for a new school. She said that it will take approximately three years to complete the new school with minimum impact on student learning, which is huge because we know what COVID has done to our students and how difficult it was for them. She said that the significant code upgrade needed and required by law would be more expensive and there would not be any reimbursement from the State. She said that the code upgrade would not change the overall layout of the building and would take approximately 10 years to complete and it would have a large impact on student learning, and a large potential increase in costs.

Lynch reviewed slides of the proposed design of the new school, showing the aerial view, main entry view, lower entry view, customer entry view, Whittier Way, Maker Space, Marine Tech, Health Assisting, Neighborhood Breakout, and a Typical Classroom.

Lynch said that if we did build it, it would take three years to build, starting in 2025 and would hopefully be in a new building in the 2028-2029 school year. Lynch said the project would cost \$444 million, but with an MSBA anticipated grant of \$165.1 and anticipated Federal Incentive & State Rebates of \$15.4, the anticipated District Share, again down from \$301 million would be \$264.1 million. She said for Rowley that would mean for an average home of an assessed value of \$620,000 it would be \$230 a year. She said we are anticipating a districtwide vote. She said what if that fails and what are the next steps? She said that Mass. General Laws Chapter 71, Section 16 (n) allows for district elections for regional and vocational schools. She said we can have an election from four hours to eight hours. She said we met with the city and town clerks and that the date that was chosen was January 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and the results are based on the aggregate total throughout the Whittier Tech District. She

said what if the vote fails. She said what are the next steps. She said these are things that need to be done immediately. She said we need a wastewater treatment plant. She said this wasn't originally on our radar, but that once we started the feasibility study we realized that we are in desperate need of a new wastewater treatment plant. She said that we are at a hard stop from doing any other renovations to the building until there is a sprinkler suppression system installed. She said again, we have been taking care of this building for 50 years and have never come to you or to any other Board for a bond to do anything in our building. She said that we only have one road in and one road out, which fire and police have an issue with, and they are requesting that we have an access road. She said this work would trigger the 30% threshold of cost that would trigger a full ADA code and compliance upgrade required by law. Lynch reviewed other examples of code upgrades, full ADA accessibility, code compliant elevator, and electrical replacement. She said that MSBA has said the we have taken really good care of the building. She said that the District share of the cost of code compliance upgrades is \$364 million. She said that the District share of a new building would be \$264 million. She said that last spring, Business Manager Kara Kosmes and she were at a couple of meetings and I said that no one is talking about the Whittier project, so we started the Whittier Wildcat Wire Newsletters. She asked the Board members if they have been receiving them. The Board members said yes. She said that they have had 28 School Building meetings, community forums, advisory board meetings, social media posts, and press releases issued through John Guilfoil. She said that she is holding "Road Shows" in each community in the district, at least once, if not twice. Lynch then turned the podium over to Tia Gerber for the Student Spotlight presentation. She said she is the very proud director of community partnerships at Whittier Tech. She said that she is also a very proud graduate of Whittier Tech. She said that she graduated in 2011 from our health occupations area and I can tell you firsthand that trades and vocational education are incredibly deep-rooted to me personally. She said her dad, her grandfather, all of her uncles and her brother are all plumbers. She said she is married to a welder and that she truly believes in what happens at Whittier and what happens to students, whether they are high school students or adults when they come in contact with high-quality vocational training. She directed the Board members to a presentation slide, where they have highlighted a student from Rowley, who is loving the experience at Whittier Tech. She said that this student, Adrian, is a member of the Class of 2026 in the metal fabrication vocational area. She said that she has the privilege of working at Whittier during the daytime and during the summer. She said that as Maureen had mentioned, that if you go to Whittier now, the parking lot is packed. She said there are personal enrichment evening programs, such as cooking, sewing class, or a digital photography class, and career training such as plumbing or cosmetology, or nursing assistance. She said this coming summer, we are holding a summer training program. She said we have 100 spots for Massachusetts residents who are 18 years or older who are underemployed or unemployed who are really looking to launch their career and to start out in the trades. She said that on Mondays through Thursdays for seven weeks they offer a free 200-hour career training program where they can pick one of 9 different vocational areas to jump start careers. She said they also offer the CTI program for high school seniors in the district so that they can look at the various trades and decide which one they want to go into. She said we are always open to connecting with

individuals in Rowley as to the Whittier offerings. Lynch said that we have a website on the school building project, which has a video that tells a lot about what is happening at Whittier. She thanked the Board members. Pierce thanked her.

### **Board of Selectmen Questions**

Chairman Cliff Pierce said that he has questions. He said that most of his questions relate to the process by which you are proposing to get this project approved, rather to the merit of your project. Pierce said that first of all the Town of Rowley has been pretty aggressive in recent years in addressing our capital needs. We built a fire station, a police station, and we recently completely renovated our elementary school, the Pine Grove School and now it is a fabulous facility. He said that Rowley is not a community that is unwilling to address its capital needs. He said in fact, I don't know if we have ever denied an override request in this Town. He said that no one should assume that is going to happen. If you are willing to show up at Town Meeting and defend your proposal, and it is a well-thought out proposal, you may just get it approved. He said that you are proposing to have this process decided through a districtwide vote. Lynch said that the decision is ultimately up to the School Committee. Pierce said that there is another option available to Whittier, and that is a town-by-town vote. He said that the question is decided by the town meetings and the city councils. He said that is available to you. She said we could. He said that there is an important provision in that process, that if a community fails to act on your request by 60 days, it is deemed to be approved. He said it is not available under the districtwide vote and that he is surprised that you would just give that up. He said that the town-by-town process could be made contingent upon a Proposition 2 ½ ballot debt exclusion vote, right? She said it could, yes. Pierce said that is very important to towns for the simple reason that it ensures that if the project is approved, the Town is going to have the funding and revenue to pay for the project. He said because without that override vote, we don't have the funds. He said if the project vote fails the project will not move forward, which is appropriate under Prop. 2 ½. He said I think that most public building projects are approved by the Proposition 2 ½ overrides method vote. Lynch said that in most large regional school districts that is not how they are approved. Pierce said you have just said that the voting method has not yet been decided. Lynch said that it is anticipated. Pierce said that there will be a vote in December by the School Committee on whether there will be a town-by-town or a districtwide vote. Pierce said in contrast to the town-by-town vote, a districtwide vote will not be contingent upon a debt exclusion override vote. Lynch said correct. He said that your districtwide vote is going to establish our liability to pay for this project but not give us any means to fund it or any additional revenue to pay for the project. He asked if that is correct. Lynch said we have been talking about this since 2016. Pierce is not disputing that at all. Pierce asked her that if she got this project approved through a districtwide vote, that vote could establish our liability to pay for it, but not give us any funding to pay for the project. Lynch said that would be up to the city or town, yes. Pierce said the funding will have to come from our operations. He said that the debt service for this project could be as high as \$700,000 per year. Lynch said that is not the statistic that I have. Pierce said that it may have come down, but it may be around \$600,000. Pierce said we don't have that kind of money lying around. Pierce

said that it is inevitable that if you get this project approved through a districtwide vote, and we have to pay for it, we are going to have to cut services to pay it because we don't have additional funding under Prop 2 ½. Pierce asked her what alternative do we have? Lynch said that the other alternative is to do a code compliancy, but that it cost everyone more money. Lynch said that the new building project will get \$100 million from the State through the MSBA. Pierce said that he understands that. Lynch said this isn't a pie in the sky idea. Pierce said that you could do a town-by-town vote. Pierce said that it is too early to say what services will be cut. Lynch said there is a debt you are asking for 11 communities to approve it individually, and 11 more debt overrides for a total of 22 votes. Pierce said that you should not assume that it won't get unanimous approval. Pierce said we will have to cut services. Lynch said that there is time to plan and work together. Pierce said when voters go to the ballot box will the voters understand that a yes vote will not provide funding? He asked if this information was going to be on the ballot. Lynch said that would it not be on the ballot, but like we are telling you today, it will be \$260 for a Rowley family. He said but you are not going to tell voters that if they vote yes, they are voting to approve a project that has not been funded. Pierce said there are problems with a districtwide vote in mid-January. He said the obvious problem is when you want to hold it because there could be a winter storm which could effectively close polling places and greatly reduce voter turnout. Pierce asked Lynch if she thought about that. Lynch said that we did think about it. Lynch said that we worked with the city clerks and they also have an election in March and that this was a decision that was made with the clerks about the date and time. Pierce said that I don't think that the city clerks chose the date of this election. Lynch said that I can tell you I didn't, sir. Pierce asked Town Clerk Catie McClenaghan if the clerks decided to hold the election in mid-January. McClenaghan said we did not. She said we were told what the date was, and as the group of clerks, we did decide on the hours. Pierce said this is our Town Clerk Catie McClenaghan. Lynch said that she remembers it differently. Lynch said that she remembers us discussing it and coming up with a date that we thought would work with everybody because they also have an election in March. Christine Kneeland asked if there are minutes from that meeting. Lynch said no, I don't think so, it was a discussion. Pierce said you were supposed to meet with the Selectmen to discuss your election, but you haven't done that. He said the Selectmen in Rowley haven't discussed this. He said that Selectmen have made no decision about this. Lynch said that the School Committee makes the decision about the vote and that is why I am here today sir. Pierce said that there will be limited polling hours from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., and assuming the weather is good, it excludes people who are used to voting in the morning or people who work in the evenings or have other responsibilities. Lynch said that the same could be said for the town meeting. Pierce said we are very good at gathering large crowds for issues that matter to people. Lynch said that she has been to the town meetings, almost every one. Pierce said we don't hold Town Meetings in January. Lynch said that the Senior Center is coming tomorrow and I plan to let them know what is going on. She said she is doing as much outreach as we possibly can to make sure that people are informed. Pierce said that my point is that you are excluding people by the very limited nature of this election. Lynch said that this is the law and that the hours can be from 4 hours up to 8 hours, and that we have obviously gone with the largest amount of hours. She said that she reached out to the Legislature to see if we

could change it to make it longer, but that they said no. Pierce asked if early voting was going to be allowed. Lynch said early voting is not allowed, but absentee ballot voting is allowed. Pierce discussed a document that he obtained from Whittier prepared by Leftfield and that says that early voting is allowed. Lynch said she will look into this but that she understands that absentee voting is allowed. Lynch asked McClenaghan if she remembers if it is just absentee voting. McClenaghan said that is what she recalled. Pierce asked McClenaghan if she had information on this. McClenaghan said that she had the presentation. Pierce asked if there is a voter turnout requirement. He said the turnout could be as small as 5%, and you are not going to throw it out. Lynch said that this is not my law. Pierce said that there is another option available to you. Deana Ziev asked why the School Committee is waiting for December to decide. Lynch said that the MSBA will approve the schematic design on December 13 and that is when the School Committee is going to vote. She said that once we have MSBA approval we will have 120 days to get the project approved. Ziev said you could have waited to submit the schematics to after December and then extended your 120 days. Lynch said that it is a very prescribed formula that you have to follow with the MSBA process. Pierce said that on the MSBA website, they will consider a delay for that requirement and that you just have to ask them and they will consider that. Christine Kneeland said that on page six you said that you had come to every Select Board and City Council meeting since 2016. She said that I have only been on this Board for a year and a half and I don't recall you coming here. Lynch asked what page? Kneeland said that on page six you said that you have been coming to every Select Board meeting and City Council meeting. Lynch said in 2016, when we had our stabilization account set up, we went to every city and town, and every city and town approved that stabilization account for the purposes of this building project. Ziev said that she is confused about why you are very proud about not reaching out to the cities and towns over 50 years to support renovations to the buildings. Ziev said I think it would have been better to reach out over the course of time to update us on Whittier over that time period. Ziev said that it is sad to me that you are proud that you haven't gone to the communities for support. Ziev said that Whittier is important and that she has a child who is disabled and that nothing matters more to her than having ADA compliant places. Ziev said it would have been a better idea to reach out even before 2016 to say that we need to update this building and to rally support, than to come to us now. Lynch said that it comes to no good deed goes unpunished. Lynch said we thought about this because of the burdens you are facing with Triton and the Pine Grove School and that if we could make sure that we take care of Whittier we wouldn't be an extra burden on our communities. Ziev said that it sad that it comes to this. Ziev said that it is unreasonable to have an election in January in Massachusetts and a districtwide election is unreasonable. She said the conditions are deplorable and it is an exorbitant amount of money. She said that trades are important and that both of her parents worked in the trades industries. Ziev said that Triton is also in grave need of upgrades and that doesn't take precedence of over this, but that the amount of kids that go to Triton versus the amount of students from our Town that go to Whittier. Lynch said that you need to look at Whittier differently because many students work in your community. Lynch said once we were invited into the eligibility stage, we didn't want to put good money after bad into the building until we got to this point. Sheri David asked when the pictures were taken. David asked how long the ceiling in the locker room has



been like that. Robert Hardy said it has been ongoing. He said they have replaced the lockers and the showers are horrible and they don't drain well and that it all needs to get re-done. Lynch said that there is no air ventilation in there. Robert Snow said I hear your plight, but the problem in Rowley is how do we pay for this. He said that the process you are talking about doesn't work for the Town. Snow said we do everything through Town Meeting. Snow said that when he was the chairman a few years ago, we had to cut the budget by 2 1/2%. He said that he can't imagine what this is going to do without have a debt exclusion override. He said this will cripple us. Lynch said I think no matter, we have to do something at Whittier Tech. Snow said I have no problem with that, but it is the process. Lynch asked if we can play this out and if we went to every town, and Rowley said no, that would make sure that the project doesn't go forward. She said we are still at the point that we will need to bring the building up to code. Pierce said that you have to make the case to the Town Meeting. He said that we have to deal with Proposition 2 1/2. Ziev said that she feels that the districtwide vote is unreasonable. Snow said that if you go forward with this, there be chaos in a number of towns, especially here and you won't be making friends. Lynch said there have been four other vocational technical schools that have been approved through this process. Snow said he has no problem with the project, it is with the process. Lynch said that we have 1,280 kids. Snow said that he does not doubt that. He said that he comes from a blue collar background. He said that it needs to go before the Town. Ziev said that if you were at the meetings for the police and fire station and the Pine Grove School renovation, why weren't you leading to that process. Lynch said that we have 11 cities and towns and that what you are asking is that I would need 11 cities and towns approve the project, and then 11 cities and towns approve a debt exclusion vote and that is 22 votes that we would need. Ziev said that you don't think that is fair to have each town approve it individually? Lynch said that it is a hill that is very hard to climb, but that it is not my decision. Pierce said that the Whittier Agreement requires all towns to approve any changes to the Agreement and that there are problems with the Agreement. Snow said that it is much better for you to come before each Town and present the project. David said that we have 8 full-time firefighters and no overnight coverage and that she would never support cutting our Council on Aging and that maybe the Library will have to go. David asked what would your Board suggest we cut and would you be an advocate for a town-by-town vote? Lynch said that you have very clearly given your opinion and she had received the letter. David said regarding the equipment that you are purchasing for the new school, are you going to be purchasing new equipment. Lynch said that we will be bringing the equipment we have and we have grants for new equipment. David said as far as the maintenance, it is a clear breakdown of the maintenance department. David said going forward, what kind maintenance will the new building need, will it require more maintenance workers. David asked if there is an existing maintenance plan. Lynch said there is a maintenance plan and that the MSBA reviewed the building and the school got extra points for taking care of the building. Lynch said that we have worked night and day to take care of the building. Lynch said we are dealing with HVAC issues and the classrooms got hot and it killed all the plants in one of the classrooms. She said it got so hot that they had to send kids home, but the school provides free meals to the kids while they are in school. David asked what did you know and when did you know it as far as the maintenance, such as the sprinkler system. Lynch said over

the last two years, when we worked with our inspection services. She asked Hardy to speak on these questions. Hardy said it is monitored and that he has good relationships with the Inspection Department, Police Department, Fire Department and Health Department. He said 4 or 5 years ago he was told that he needed the sprinkler system. Hardy said we have a great Maintenance Department and that sometimes they need specialists to come in for work with high voltage, but that he does most of the work. Hardy said that he has two little kids that he hardly sees because he is always at the school fixing things. Hardy said that he is there day and night. David said that she agrees with her colleagues but wants to know why didn't anyone come to us to discuss these needed repairs. Hardy said we have been fixing it in house to the best that we can. David said that it wasn't fixed in house or we wouldn't be in the mess that we are in. David said that something like the continuous flooding issues, don't go away. David said they become bigger problems. David said why have we never heard of these issues and now all of a sudden it is to the point where it can't be repaired. Lynch said that since 2016, we have been raising flags and look in your budget books. Lynch said that she has to do some thinking about why people weren't listening and that some towns know very well about what is going on at Whittier. Snow said that you had a new roof put on a few years ago. Lynch said it was about 12 years ago. Snow said he remembers going over to Whittier about the roof project with Dave Irving and that we had breakfast at the school. He said that since 2016, he doesn't remember hearing about anything else, other than how many students we have at Whittier. Lynch said that she has had meetings with the town managers and that the budget book has had information. Lynch said that she is more than willing to be partners on this. Snow said the Town folks are listening to this and it won't fly.

David Irving of 288 Wethersfield Street. Irving said he is the Town's representative to the Whittier School Committee. Irving said that our instructors are licensed and credentialed and are very well trained and highly skilled. Irving said they were able to take care of the building up to about five years ago when the State stopped it, so there is more flooding. Irving said did as much as we could when we could do it. Irving said that as far as information, he read from the cover sheet of the FY 24 budget. Irving said that someone on the FinCom and or the administrator did not read that paragraph, and that there was knowledge that we were going forward with the project. Irving said that it was in the FY 20 budget cover sheet. Irving said that there was knowledge ahead of time that we were going forward with this project. Irving said that in 1640, the Great and General Court required Rowley to provide an elementary education to the pupils and families in Rowley. Irving said he is a 50-year homeowner and taxpayer in Rowley. Irving said that this is a tough situation. Irving said that Joan Petersen was the moderator in the Town for many years and that he wanted her to speak. Christine Kneeland said that our FinCom is supposed to speak next before the public. Irving said that there may be a way for this to go to the Town Meeting, as Pierce suggested, and that we need to go for an override. David asked Irving if he was on the School Committee and if he would be taking part in the vote to determine how this vote goes forward. David asked would you and Ms. Lynch go on record in supporting a town-by-town vote or stick with a districtwide vote? Irving said that he wants to see how this all plays out. He said he wears two hats –that he represents the people of Rowley and the

students, and that he has been in education for close to 60 years and that he is not going to forget the education part of his two hats and that he will do what is right for Rowley and for the school.

### **Finance Committee Questions**

Chairman Larry White said he has concerns. White said in the presentation it was mentioned that there is an inefficiency in the library because the walls are too high causing heat loss. He said that on page 17 of the presentation, it shows Whittier Way, which is a significant open space area with about 30 to 40 foot high ceilings. White said this is inefficient according to you. White said on page 20 of the presentation, the classroom ceilings are about 12 feet high and are inefficient. White asked is the school has football, track and baseball teams. White said is looking for information because it shows a stadium but he doesn't see bleachers. Lynch said that they have all those teams and lacrosse, like other schools and that the proposed stadium will have bleachers. White said on page 24 of the presentation on the code compliancy section, there is no cost breakdown. White said where did those numbers come from? Lynch said the first few items on the code compliancy were on the page prior, the wastewater treatment plant, sprinkler suppression system, and the access road, but that we can certainly work on that so that you can understand what a ten-year plan would be. White asked about the tax impact analysis on page 22 for \$260 per year for 27 years, which makes it an additional \$7,500+ per household. Lynch said we did the average of the 30 years. White said that the total for the life of the project is \$7,500 in addition to any other overrides or any other cost increases and that is the burden that the taxpayer has to bear. Lynch asked Business Manager Kara Kosmes to come to the podium. White said it is not a question, and that he is saying that the total impact to the taxpayer for this project is \$7,500 per household. Kosmes said it could be less because it is based on interest rates. She said that we won't know what the interest rate will be in 2028 and that we hope that it will go down. Chip Sheerin asked if that is based on a house valued at \$620,000. Kosmes said if your house were assessed less your payment would be less. Kosmes said if the Town could put any money towards this it could be less. Kosmes said every Town has a different tax rate and assessments and some towns have money to put towards this project. Pierce said we don't have any money to put towards this project. Kosmes said the larger amount doesn't come in until 2028, so there is a propensity to plan and budget for that. Pierce said that every year we are scraping together to pay for Triton and Whittier. Kosmes said that a districtwide vote does not preclude you from going for a debt exclusion vote. Pierce said it is not going to pass especially because you have poisoned the relationship by this districtwide vote. Lynch questioned the word poison and said that this is a legal way for a district with 11 cities and towns to vote on the project. Lynch said my colleagues in three or four other school districts did it this way. Pierce said that you are not going to persuade our town meeting to pass our override. Lynch said that you are asking for 22 unanimous votes. Lynch we have a school building that is failing. Lynch said that if it fails then I am going to bring forward the repairs.

Dennis Roy said he was very disappointed with the presentation. Roy said in my view this is the first time the residents are hearing about this project and how far along it is down the road. Roy said it is on the ten-yard line and we are still sitting on the bench and trying to get into the play here. Roy said that I think the presentation was done in a “blink of an eye” with each screen and the conversation was short. Roy said this is a half a billion-dollar project that is being sold to this Town in a matter of 15 minutes. Roy said that is why we are so upset. Roy said that he understands that schools have different rules than the towns and have more power take the routes that are easiest for them. Roy said we can understand that. Roy said by circumventing this Board, our committee, and the townspeople by not bringing this to light publicly is a disaster. Roy said that Mr. Irving spoke about \$436,600 leftover in the FY 24 capital budget. Roy said that they used \$264,000 and there was a remainder of the \$436,000. Roy said my question is why wasn't this put towards the improvements to the building that need to be done, because they put it towards this project before us tonight. Roy said he is disappointed about that. He asked if someone could tell him how much money, in addition to the \$400,000, is set aside for this project. Lynch said that she is sorry that the presentation was not comprehensive enough and that she is more than willing to meet with Dennis Roy. Roy said the slides were like a “blink of an eye” and it not so bad for us because we have the paperwork but more for the people at home. Lynch apologized for the technical difficulties with the presentation that was being shown on the monitor in the Auditorium because the slides were flashing. Lynch said that it was not her computer set up. Lynch said as far as putting that money into the school building, we have invested \$1.5 million into the feasibility study to get to this point. Lynch said to put that money into the building, where don't know if that building is going to be there in three or four years, would seem like a waste of taxpayer money. Lynch said that we really try to be good stewards of taxpayer money. Roy asked about the flooding that is going on in the school and said that it is a health hazard. Roy said whether it is a patch or not, it is a health issue, even though you may be building a new building. Lynch said we are definitely patching the building and making it safe for students to learn and for teachers to teach. Lynch said Bob Hardy and his crew do an amazing job, but that as these building get older it becomes harder to do. She said that they are fortunate because parts become unavailable due to the age of the building and the technician in the machine shop can make the parts. Roy said that he can understand that because he was a public works director in Lynnfield and he was in charge of the maintenance of the schools. Roy said that he wants everyone to know that he doesn't think that the Board of Selectmen or the Finance Committee are against the improvements to Whittier or the need for Whittier. Roy said he thinks Whittier is a super school. Roy said it has a good rating and that we certainly want our kids to take advantage of it, with the best building we can afford. Roy said it is a question of how the process went and that he thinks that it really hurt a lot of us and that he is sure that the taxpayers, in not only in Rowley, are concerned about the way that this is being transpired. Lynch asked for clarification. Lynch said that from her standpoint we have been talking about this since 2016. Lynch said that every year in her budget book we talk about the feasibility study and that she has meetings with town managers and mayors talking about the building project and about our concerns about the building project. Roy said that you haven't done it publicly. Roy said that this is first time that

people are watching it on TV. Roy said we have to go to Town Meeting and we have to explain anything that we propose for the next fiscal year. Roy said that people might have heard that Whittier is going to build a new school and we know that Triton is going renovate their school, but until you see the presentation, we now know that we are at the end of the road. He said we are not trying to tell you what to do. Lynch said that she is more than willing to come here to meet and discuss the project. Lynch said that she was hoping that once the Whittier Wire was sent out that people would start showing some interest because it feels like we have been talking about it but nobody has been really hearing us. Roy said that nobody saw anything until tonight. Roy asked for the costs for the athletic field, the road, and the exterior parts of the project. Roy said that he knows that you have to tear down the existing school to put the athletic field in, and asked how much of that is in addition to the building itself that you are proposing. Lynch said that she doesn't have the number for that, but that we are not trying to develop a sports complex, and that we are just trying to take care of the needs of our students and meet Title 9 requirements for males and females in sports program. Roy asked about the project costs. Roy asked Lynch if she has anticipated cost adjustments or is it fixed at the \$450 million. Lynch said adjustments have been made. Roy said this is a serious number. Roy said that you have an OPM, but we had an OPM for the Pine Grove School project and we stayed on budget. He said with today's market with inflation that number could change three years out. Lynch said that have had two separate companies look at the price and that they agreed that this is the price we should be at. Roy asked about the costs for the code compliance. He asked why it would take 10 years to do the code compliance, which is longer than building the new school building. Lynch said that because we would have to do the code compliance work with children in the building and that we have asbestos and would have to move one whole side of the building to a tent space. She said some of the vocational programs have lifts and other big equipment that we would have to move during the renovation. Roy asked if the cost estimate is in paper form that someone could review. Roy said that the \$364 million is a steep number and asked if it is broken out. Roy said that it is important to have this breakout and that he thinks that the renovation costs look really high. Roy asked about the election costs. He asked if we have to pay for the election upfront and get reimbursed. Lynch said we are working with the clerks. Sharon Emery said that we have to come up with the money first and that we are going to have to take money out of our Reserve Fund to give to the Town Clerk to put in her budget. Roy said that the reimbursement funds will go into the General Fund at some point, when the check comes in from the school. Emery said that the reimbursement funds won't go into the Reserve Fund.

Karen Summit asked how much of the \$264 million of the project cost has been deemed non-reimbursable by the MSBA and what is that made up of? David Saindon said that the MSBA doesn't reimburse for all costs and that some costs are categorically ineligible. Saindon said that the total cost of the project is \$445 million and that there is \$181 million that is going to be made up of MSBA reimbursement grants or a Federal direct payment for green initiatives, as well as about \$5 million from Mass Save for green initiatives, so that the delta of that is \$264 million. Summit asked of the \$445 million, how much of that has been deemed off the table for reimbursement and what

areas are those. Saindon said site work costs and certain building costs and that once it hits a cap it is in eligible. Summit asked what is driving the ineligible costs, because it seems quite high. Saindon said we have a limit. Summit asked if the MSBA will pay for the cost to tear down the building. Saindon said MSBA will pay for abatement, they will pay for tearing it down, but they won't pay for abatement for flooring material and ceiling material, as an example. Summit asked about the playing fields. Saindon said they won't be eligible because we will be over the cap, but that the MSBA will pay a portion. Summit asked what is the total amount of the fields that is ineligible. He said that he would have to get that number to her because he didn't have it with him. Summit said if the vote fails and the repairs need to be made, would the repairs be made based on the enrollment of students. Lynch said that it would follow the capital assessment formula. Summit said that it would be paid then the same way as the project.

Chip Sheerin said he had a question on the numbers. Sheerin said that last week he looked and it was about \$750K for Rowley to pay per year and now it is closer to \$600K. Sheerin said that the numbers have changed just in a week. Sheerin asked how are you going to ensure over the three-year life of the build, plus the year and half leading up to the build, that these numbers stay consistent, and that what you are telling us now is what we are actually going to be paying every year. Lynch said that MSBA had a meeting last Wednesday where they increased their cap so that is where the \$38 million came from. She said we feel really confident with these numbers but that until MSBA reviews and completes the schematic design, things could change, but this is really our best estimate. Sheerin said he is not familiar with these types of projects, but asked if these types of projects go out for three bids. Saindon said, no, the project is still in design. He said we have submitted a schematic design, but eventually, if the project passes, then yes, it is going to be competitively bid. Sheerin asked if you allocated a high enough number to cover the bids. Saindon said yes, we have built in escalation and contingencies. Roy asked about the School Building Committee and said they obviously support this project. He said the School Building Committee may have heard rumblings from the communities because of their concerned about this project. He asked if they would consider pulling this project back based on the concerns from the communities. Lynch said she does not know. She said that she does know that MSBA keeps abreast of news with each of the communities that have projects. She said that when you are finally invited in for eligibility it is like winning the lottery. She said it is awesome. She said we could not do this on our own. She said the MSBA funds are getting smaller and that they are able to fund less projects because of the number of building projects. She said the MSBA used to have a building repair program for roofs and windows and for the last couple of years they haven't had that program. She said that a lot of school buildings were built at the same time in the early 1970s and they are all starting to fail at the same time.

Sheri David asked if there are any projected operating costs for the new building given that it will be bigger than what is existing. David asked if there will need to be additional maintenance staff, teachers, and cafeteria workers. David asked what are the project heating and cooling costs. Lynch said we are the same size on the building and we are not adding anymore staff or teaching staff or maintenance staff. Lynch said she doesn't

have any hard numbers on this. Lynch said that when we looked at the building project the State allowed us to build a school up to 1,400, but the Committee thought it would be really hard for our cities and towns. Lynch said the School Building Committee has been very thoughtful about the process. David said that she wants the residents to know that the expenses are going to go up because there are going to be new systems in the building. Roy asked what is the square footage is for the current building and the new building. Roy asked if it is increasing. Lynch said we just did those numbers. A member of the Whittier project team said that the existing building is 357,000 square feet and that the proposed building is 381,000 square feet. Roy said with increased space you have increased costs for heating, etc. so that it is important to know that.

Christine Kneeland asked where the students will be during the project. Lynch said that while the building is being built they will stay in the current building. If we do a renovation they will have to stay in the building.

### **Questions from attendees**

Joan Petersen from Newbury Road. Petersen stated as a disclaimer that she has two children and that one is a principal and one is a teacher and that her grandson is a student at Whittier and that he is a senior, and that he will not benefit from this project. Petersen said that she had served 23 years on the Triton School Committee and have been through projects with Triton and the Pine Grove School, when that school was falling apart. Petersen said she has served ten times as moderator. Petersen said that you are going to need an override one way or the other. Petersen said that in her history of working with Pine Grove School and Triton, the Library might be the only project that didn't fail at the ballot question to get the money. Petersen said the police and fire station is an example that started out at \$5 million and ended up costing \$12million because the taxpayers said no. Petersen said that you have to look at the whole picture, and if they get dropped off the MSBA list because it doesn't go through, Whittier is going to fall to the bottom of the list. Petersen said that there are more things that are taking place here than the money and how you are going to pay for it. She said that Town Meeting, 99% of the time, passes the override, but the vote at the ballot after the Town Meeting for the projects have failed.

Bernie Cullen 383 Wethersfield Street. Cullen said that his main concern is with the Whittier Agreement. Cullen said he has concerns about the size of the project and the process. Cullen said in 2016, Minuteman Technical School District was facing the same types of problems and they have 16 towns. Cullen said their regional agreement was problematic because it forced the smaller towns, who were sending fewer students to Minuteman, a larger percentage of the capital costs because their formula is the same as our formula. Cullen said back in 2016, after various efforts, they changed the agreement and the 7 communities left the 16 communities. Cullen said the 7 communities left because they were being unfairly charged for their share of the capital costs. Cullen asked that why didn't anyone know that this formula is unfair to Rowley, West Newbury, Newbury, Ipswich and Newburyport, by a significant margin? Cullen said that we are going to be paying twice the amount that we should be paying based on our student enrollment. Cullen said Newburyport is going to be paying five times the

amount it should be paying based on their student enrollment. Cullen said the formula is wrong and may have made sense back in 1967. Cullen said if you look at the enrollment numbers, it peaked in 1980 and went down to 5 students in 2005. Cullen said that the formula is such that if we sent one student to Whittier we would still be paying 4% of the project. Cullen said it is unreasonable. Cullen said why wasn't this formula on top of everyone's mind in 2016. Cullen said if you go back and look at the budgets, our costs were driven by the number of students we were sending to Whittier. Cullen said the capital allotments were in the low \$30s, if that. Cullen said in recent years the feasibility study came in as a capital budget item, but it wasn't presented that way to the Town. Cullen said it was \$1.8 and would have triggered a closer look at the Whittier Agreement and our 4% was broken down over 4 years, so it went unnoticed. Cullen asked why the \$1.8 million in 2021 was not asked for when you became eligible with the MSBA? Cullen said that the \$1.8 million should have been put on the table so that everyone would know what is going on. Cullen said that the \$1.8 million would have gotten the people's attention and would have given us time to work on changing the Whittier Agreement, which is basically a non-functioning agreement. Cullen said it is penalizing towns that like Newburyport, Ipswich, Rowley, West Newbury and Newbury and others to a lesser degree. Cullen said that we know that this agreement can be changed because Minuteman changed it and allowed the seven communities that felt that they were unfairly penalized to leave. Cullen said we don't have any option but to pursue leaving Whittier because we only have 20 students going there. Cullen said they are important and it is not a question of whether Whittier is doing a good job or bad job. Cullen said that it is a question of Rowley being unfairly penalized. Cullen said we need a commitment from the superintendent and our representative that a full faith effort will be made to change this regional agreement so that each of the communities is treated fairly. Cullen said it is completely unfair that Haverhill, which sends 70% of their students, is being charged with only 42% of these capital costs. Cullen said it makes no sense and once that message gets out to our voters there is no way they will support this. Lynch said it is a mistake to look at the regional agreement and tie it into student enrollment at Whittier. Lynch said that if you look at all the cities and towns in Whittier, they are all paying basically the same per household. Lynch said if for instance, Haverhill had to pay say 70%, their costs would go up to over \$550, where other towns would be really less. Lynch said the point of what Whittier does is to provide a workforce for the region and that is my belief as to why the Agreement was set up the way that it is. Lynch said regarding the \$1.8 million, that goes under the no good deed goes unpunished. Lynch said we were dealing with COVID and that is why we set up a stabilization account, so that we could work with our communities. She said to come to communities asking for \$1.8 million when we were all dealing with the horror of COVID didn't seem like the right thing to do. She said we did it with the best of intentions.

Craig Copland, Dodge Road, Rowley. Copland said a lot of what has been said here just now was about what someone said was three-quarters of a billion dollars and the creation of a fairness index. Copland said all these numbers and percentages are based off that and I do not believe that it is true. Copland said we need to look at solutions. Copland said go to the Whittier Tech website and all the information is there. Copland said you can go through the minutes and the plans. Copland said, A, if it gets voted for,



we have to pay not for three-quarters of a billion dollars, but \$264 million over 30 years. Copland said there is going to be a vote of yes or no. Copland said if the voters vote no, then we have to pay \$364 million over ten years. Copland asked what are we going to do? Copland said if we say no, we are not going to pay you. Copland said what are the ramifications of that. Copland said we can pull out and what does that do to Rowley and we say good-by. Copland said this was talked about in February and it is on RCM. Copland said we have to find solutions and not keep saying no every time. Christine Kneeland asked him if he had suggestions for solutions. Copland said he came with solutions – one was A, what other education are the same, and B how do we get out of this contract and working with that, and C, as a solution, rather than us shooting all the horses of education that we have to ride on, let's find one that we are going to ride on and plan actually how we are going to do it.

Bernie Cullen said he was making a clarification about the costs. Cullen said that when he mentioned at the last meeting that the overall project was going to come close to three-quarters of a billion dollars, that it included the finance cost. Cullen said that it is more than \$445 million of the base cost, because the interest rate is projected to be 5%. Cullen said I take offense that something like this is being made to be a personal attack. Cliff Pierce said he agrees.

Craig Copland, 265 Dodge Road. Copland said it is not a personal attack. Copland said it is straight up that we have to start using real numbers. Copland said it is not even close to being three-quarters of a billion dollars. Copland said \$600,000 is nowhere near three-quarters of a billion dollars and he said it himself.

Cliff Pierce asked if there were any further questions.

Lynch said thank you so much for having me here today. Lynch said she appreciated the opportunity to speak to you and that if anything comes up, to please contact her. Lynch said that we have an amazing open house next Sunday. Pierce told her that he hopes that she re-considers the preliminary decision to have a districtwide vote.

#### **BOARD OF SELECTMEN VOTE TO CLOSE THE JOINT MEETING**

Deana Ziev made a motion to close the Joint Meeting with the Finance Committee, Sheri David, seconded, all in favor, roll call vote, Christine Kneeland, aye; Cliff Pierce, aye; Deana Ziev, aye; Robert Snow, aye; Sheri David, aye.

#### **FINANCE COMMITTEE VOTE TO CLOSE THE JOINT MEETING & TO ADJOURN**

Chairman Larry White called for a motion and a second to close the Joint Meeting with the Board of Selectmen and to adjourn, by a roll call vote. Dennis Roy made a motion to close the Joint Meeting with the Board of Selectmen and to adjourn, Sharon Emery, seconded, all in favor, roll call, Chip Sheerin, aye; Sharon Emery, aye; Larry White, aye; Dennis Roy, aye.

The Joint Meeting closes at 8:05 p.m. The Finance Committee meeting adjourns at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Deborah Eagan  
Town Administrator

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Joint Meeting Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee Meeting memo
2. Whittier Tech presentation