



Joint Workshop Meeting of the Town Council and School Committee

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: Wednesday, June 11, 2025 at 7:07 p.m.

This is an in-person meeting. The Public is invited to attend this meeting in person at the Washington Room, Randolph Town Hall, 41 South Main Street, Randolph, MA 02368.

Call to Order: Council President Alexopoulos called the meeting to order.

Roll Call – Council Members Present: Chris Alexopoulos, Richard Brewer, James F. Burgess, Jr., Jesse Gordon, Katrina Huff-Larmond, Kevin O’Connell.

Roll Call - School Committee Members Present: Jaime Ackles, Beverly Coles-Roby, Kirby Christian, Ida Gordon, Lisa Millwood and Kevin O’Connell.

Kevin O’Connell is a member of both the Town Council and the School Committee.

Town Attorney Christine Griffin listed the ground rules: 1. The Town Council President will act as the Chair of the joint body, and each Chair will manage matters that affect only their individual boards. 2. Each person can speak for three minutes at a time on a topic, and back and forth engagement is discouraged. 3. The Council Clerk will keep the three minute timer for each speaker and will take minutes. It was noted that the Clerk to the School Committee is also taking minutes.

The Town Council and School Committee agreed to the ground rules set forth.

New Business:

I. Discussion of Town and School Financial Policies and Procedures

1. Chairwoman Millwood - Over the past year, the relationship between the School Finance Department and Town Finance Department has been extremely strained. We are very thankful for this meeting today and the opportunity to come before the Town Council and talk about some of the concerns we have. What we would like to do and propose is improvement on communication on policies and procedures. We have a list of items we are hoping to discuss tonight.
 - a. The first item is regarding MySchoolBucks. The district has to collect thousands of dollars in cash for student fees and the district has been asking for years to establish MySchoolBucks. The time is running out for us to establish this system, train staff and set up families before the start of the next school year. At this time, we understand that another system has been proposed and it's not operationally feasible for our finance department. We are asking the Town Council to set up MySchoolBucks as soon as possible.
 - i. Council President Alexopoulos: Tell us more about MySchoolBucks.

Chairwoman Millwood: MySchoolBucks is an app that allows families to pay whatever fees they have to pay for in the school department. Students are registered for the app through our Family Resource Center. It is seamless, and works seamlessly with power school. We have thousands of families and students that we need to work with so to have apps that integrate together is essential. We can also adjust settings based on grade. It is all seamless and unburdensome. Our families are already acquainted with the system for lunch. It will reduce schools' need to have to sit there and collect cash

- ii. Councillor Brewer: I looked into the app a little bit and see you can use it for paying sports fees, so you can use it for a lot.

Chairwoman Millwood: You can use it for anything. Most school districts in Massachusetts are using MySchoolBucks.

- iii. Councillor Huff-Larmond: I appreciate you talking about what it will reduce and having a more reliable system to allow for more accurate and instant reporting.

- iv. Councillor Gordon: Why does the Town Council have any authority over this and why isn't this decision up to the School Department?

Town Attorney Christine Griffin: Typically, the Town Finance Director sets the financial policies town-wide. Anything that affects any financial activities on the Town side applies to all the departments, including the Schools. The School Department has independent authority over anything within their individual budget but they still have to comply with town-wide policies. In order for the Schools to implement MySchoolBucks, it requires a tremendous amount of work by the financial officers on the Town side. The Town Treasurer is the only person who can open a bank account. The money would have to be reconciled with all the town books on our side of the house. My understanding is that there are different opinions about whether or not this should be implemented. Ultimately, the Town Council directs those of us who are on the Town side.

Councillor Gordon: Under what authority is the School Department using MySchoolBucks for lunch? How has the school department been utilizing the app for lunch fees?

Chairwoman Millwood: That decision was made years ago.

Councillor Gordon: So, under which jurisdiction do you feel this falls: Town or School jurisdiction?

Chairwoman Millwood: This is part of the reason why we are here- to figure out what authority we have.

Superintendent Thea Stovell: We need a bank account setup. We can't open a bank account without the Town's authority.

- v. Councillor Burgess: On the Treasurer side, what account do we have to set up?

Town Attorney Griffin: Unless there is a specific statute stating otherwise, every Town bank account has to be set up by the Town's Treasurer/Collector.

Councillor Burgess: If MySchoolBucks can actually do reporting. Some reports aren't available.

Superintendent Stovell: MySchoolBucks has reporting capabilities. Our families already have to deal with one app so to deal with another app now seems burdensome for our families.

Councillor Burgess: I don't think there is an ability for municipalities to refuse cash.

Chairwoman Millwood: If there is a burden on a family to use MySchoolBucks then we would figure out a solution so that other types of payments can be made.

vi. Councillor O'Connell: So, no checks?

Superintendent Stovell: We can accept money orders or cash.

Councillor O'Connell: My wife is a school teacher and she brought up a good point. You struggle to get teachers who are willing to deal with cash, versus just relying on the app. I know when my child goes to school I'll want the ability to do things electronically. I think we should support these systems across the board in Town.

Motion: Motion to approve the ability for the Schools to use MySchoolBucks and get it in service by July 1st, made by Councillor O'Connell, seconded by Councillor Gordon.

Town Manager Howard: I'm concerned about the July 1st date. The end of the school year is a very busy time for both the Finance Director and Treasurer/Collector so I'm not sure if the deadline is feasible.

There may be many accounts or sub accounts to set up. The district sets up sub bank accounts under the main account so it's easier to track the yearbook money for example.

Chairwoman Millwood: What we're looking to do is to request that the Town, through its Town Council, set up appropriate bank accounts to set up MySchoolBucks.

Council President Alexopoulos: Because it's already in use, it's just expanding on that use.

Town Manager Howard: Correct. How money is tracked, matters.

Council President Alexopoulos: Is there an easier way to clean that verbiage up?

Town Attorney Griffin: I believe that there are two options. I would suggest that the Council choose to either express their support for the implementation of MySchoolBucks generally, or that the Council request or direct Town staff, that is supervised by the Town Council, to do something.

Town Manager Howard: I have no preference. It's not a question of the software per se but the ability of setting up bank accounts and how many are needed. We don't know how many bank accounts are needed right now.

Motion: Motion for the Town Council to direct the Town Manager and Town Accountant/Finance Director to implement "MySchoolBucks," with a target implementation date of July 1, 2025, subject to appropriation and to all requirements of law, made by Councillor O'Connell, seconded by Councillor Gordon.

Roll Call Vote of the Town Council: 6-0-0 (Absent: Clerger, Egan and Thompson)

Motion passes.

b. Chairwoman Lisa Millwood: At this time, the Town Finance Department is still requiring mailed paper invoices unless they receive confirmation from the vendor that they only issue electronic invoices. The requirement creates an undue burden on vendors. There are over 200 outstanding invoices and more than \$1,000,000 in bills that have not been paid. I do want to acknowledge there is no public comments option on the agenda at this meeting because we have vendors here wanting to express their concern. The School Department is showing a \$28,000 surplus so there is no reason these invoices are not being paid. What I want to make clear is the delay or denial of paying bills is causing the Schools to be denied services: water delivery service is suspended and our teachers do not have boxes to pack up their classrooms. This approach has become burdensome on our vendors and reflects poorly on how Randolph conducts its business. We are requesting an end to requiring paper invoices effective immediately.

i. Town Manager Howard: I appreciate the spin. A live versus non-live bill has nothing to do with the reason bills are not being paid.

Chairwoman Lisa Millwood: Invoices being rejected are 60 days past due.

Town Manager Howard: You're telling vendors that there is a policy you don't like and that is why they're not being paid. Giving vendors the narrative that we are not paying their bills for that reason is not proper and not right.

Chairwoman Lisa Millwood: It has created a massive burden on the School Department.

Town Manager Howard: I had a conversation with you and Carlos Colley and the Superintendent and you couldn't even tell me what the deficit is.

Chairwoman Lisa Millwood: The School Department received a notice on May 28, 2025 that the School Department is in a deficit and all invoices are going to stop being paid effective immediately. Right now, the School Department and School Committee is requesting there is an antiquated practice required by the Town's Accounting Department that needs to end.

- ii. Councillor Burgess: It's not an accurate statement, which is sad, because we should be paying for our special needs students that need to be transported.

Chairwoman Millwood asked Carlos Colley, Acting Director of the School's Finance Department, for clarification.

Mr. Colley: I don't know who sent what email about electronic invoices. We have received statements from vendors stating they don't mail invoices, they only provide invoices electronically, and we have provided that email to the Town's Accounting Department, and those vendors still will not receive payment.

- iii. Chairwoman Millwood: We have two requests on the table right now. 1. A more streamlined process for processing invoices, and 2. coming up with an overall streamlined process to pay bills and get our end-of-year transfers done. The Town Council had a recent meeting where they were able to make necessary financial transfers for Town Departments and we want a similar, simplified, streamlined process to move funds from grants to the Schools' general fund. We've submitted multiple requests to the Town Accounting Department to do this, which have not been processed, and we want to reduce the amount of paperwork that needs to be submitted. There was a recent Paper Elimination Act, so there is a way for us to do this electronically.

Council President Alexopoulos: The real question here is modernizing. How we do things and reduce the amount of paper being used.

Councillor O'Connell: I'm in agreement with what Lisa said. We need to fix this.

Motion: Councillor Gordon made a motion which states:

Whereas, a payment policy exists requiring vendors to submit paper invoices; and whereas some vendors only use electronic invoicing; now, therefore, the Randolph Town Council instructs the Town Accountant/Finance Director to remove the requirement for paper invoices, and to allow electronic or paper invoices, at the preference of each vendor and contractor, subject to all requirements of law.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Huff-Larmond.

Roll Call Vote of the Town Council: 6-0-0 (Absent: Clerger, Egan, and Thompson)

Motion passes.

- c. Chairwoman Millwood: The current process for moving expenses from the Schools' general fund to grant accounts requires submission of grant paper work, signature pages and invoices. What should take us hours to complete is taking us weeks. The Town Accountant is stating that the Schools are in a \$4.3 million deficit and we are reporting a \$28,000 surplus in our records. We need a more streamlined process. We are telling you that we need help. We hired Carlos Colley to do this, who was the finance director previously, and he states it was an easier process when he was here before. It is more complicated now. We need to work as a more cohesive unit to get vendors paid. Based on our reporting, we believe there will be a surplus this year.

Chairwoman Millwood handed out a printed excel sheet with budget reporting information.

Chairwoman Millwood: We just finished gathering this information today. We were left to figure it out on our own.

Town Manager Howard: I'm disappointed I'm getting this document now, at this meeting. The votes the Council took on Monday are not the same. The votes the Council took were simply transfers to move funds from one set of salary accounts to other salary accounts. The state law allows that. Grants are different. Grants have a specific purpose. With grants, the transfer process needs to show that the expenses are qualified to be paid by that grant.

Councillor Huff-Larmond: If the School Department had the same privileges regarding transfers, then we would be in a better state.

Council President Alexopoulos: It's reasonable to be cautious and we are not disputing that at all. The only reasonable thing to do is to compare and contrast the information.

Councillor Gordon: There are a lot of tentacles here. I respectfully acknowledge that all people need to discuss this further at a future meeting. The core of what you're asking for is asking for electronic versus paper.

Councillor Burgess: The Town is being asked to change their year-end policies on how they close out their books.

Chairwoman Millwood: We do have several other items we'd like to bring to the Council's attention. We'd like to request a future Joint Town Council and School Committee meeting and do them quarterly, with the next one in September. Maybe I can draft some of these other concerns and send them to the Council so you can review them ahead of time? We are looking for ways on how we can be productive together.

Councillor O'Connell: Can we make an agreement to have a meeting every three months? It's good that we keep this bridge because communication is important.

Council President Alexopoulos: The more we meet the better it is for everyone.

Adjournment:

Motion to adjourn the School Committee portion of the meeting made by Chairwoman Lisa Millwood, seconded by Jamie Ackles.

All School Committee members present voted in favor to adjourn.

The Joint Workshop of the Town Council and School Committee portion of the meeting is adjourned at 8:20 PM.

The Town Council Meeting session continued.

Executive Session

The Town Council or the School Committee or the Town Council and the School Committee Jointly may vote to go into executive session pursuant to M.G.L. ch. 30A, section 21(a)(3) relative to potential litigation strategy concerning anticipated litigation. M.G.L. ch. 30A, section 21(a)(3) permits a public body to go into executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares.

The Chair so declared.

The Town Council members present voted unanimously in favor to enter executive session for this purpose.

The Council President announced that the Council would enter the Executive Session and would not be returning to public session after the Executive Session.