

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.. Present were Mr. Couce, Mrs. Diglio, Mrs. Teets, Deputy Mayor Dickson, Mayor Le Frois, Thomas S. Russo, Jr., Town Manager, and Teresa A. Oswin, Municipal Clerk.

Present for the Newton Board of Education were Joan Faye, Vice-President, Julie Fahy, Lisa Qarmout, Ray Morris, Marybeth Zayac, Danielle Zito, Ed Caffrey, President, James Sekelsky, Business Administrator, and Dr. Picirillo, Superintendent. Mr. Porter and Ms. Cooke were excused.

Also in attendance were Public Works Supervisor, Kenneth Jaekel, Assistant Public Works Supervisor, Adam Vough, School Resource Officer, Justin Bellis, and Police Chief, Joseph D'Annibale.

Mayor Le Frois led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag and the Clerk called the roll.

Mayor Le Frois made the following declaration that *“In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, notice of this special joint meeting with the Newton Board of Education was given to the two (2) newspapers of record and posted on the official bulletin board on March 7, 2025”*

Mayor Le Frois welcomed and thanked everyone in attendance at this Joint meeting between the Newton Board of Education and the Newton Town Council. The Mayor then asked each member of the Council and Board to introduce themselves.

Mr. Russo read following statement:

*“Thank you to everyone for attending this joint meeting this evening. First I would like to go over the 2025 municipal budget.*

*Newton's 2025 Municipal Budget and Capital Improvement Program totals **\$16,087,577**. The municipal government is a service-based organization. Approximately 65% of the municipal budget provides funding for the salaries and benefits of 66 full-time and 92 part-time/seasonal/intern employees (158 total). The chart below presents a summary of how appropriations are divided within the budget and, in turn, impact local taxes.*

	<b>2024</b>		<b>2025</b>	
Salaries	\$5,919,700	37.2%	\$5,903,653	36.70%
Health/Dental/Vision/Work Comp.	\$2,863,546	18.0%	\$2,882,825	17.92%
Pensions	\$1,253,335	7.8%	\$1,255,277	7.80%
FICA/SUI	\$288,000	1.8%	\$302,000	1.88%
Retirement/LOSAP/Accum. Absence	\$108,500	.70%	\$116,000	.72%
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$10,433,081</b>	<b>65.5%</b>	<b>\$10,459,755</b>	<b>65.02%</b>
General Operating Expenses	\$2,510,267	15.8%	\$2,688,516	16.71%

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Debt/Capital/Deferred Charges	\$2,258,702	14.2%	\$2,233,391	13.88%
Reserve for Tax Appeals	\$18,000	.1%	\$30,000	.19%
Reserve for Uncollected Taxes	\$474,673	3.0%	\$501,982	3.12%
Grants	\$223,877	1.4%	\$173,933	1.08%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,918,600</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>\$16,087,577</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*With the uncertainty of State Aid payments and the fluctuating prospects of grant funding, coupled with the reality of a tax base that has 1/3 tax exempt properties, it is an ever-increasing challenge to maintain appropriate service levels and sound fiscal policies while mitigating any significant municipal tax increases.*

*The Net Value Taxable (NVT) in 2024 was \$1,041,882,244. In 2025 it has gone up to \$1,109,165,654.*

*Additionally, the average residential property assessment has gone up from the 2024 level of \$318,976 to the new 2025 level of \$338,127. Therefore, factoring in the budget and tax levy as proposed, the municipal taxes on an average residential property of \$338,127 are estimated to go from \$3,113 in 2024 to \$3,149 in 2025 – an increase of \$3 a month.*

*The Town maintains independent financial records for the Water and Sewer fund. Both functions are supported by customer billings and do not require property tax revenues to meet financial obligations. The Water and Sewer budget is proposed at \$6,182,000 for the 2025 year. The Water and Sewer budget provides service to 2,775 accounts. The current rate structure will be reviewed annually to ensure the Town can properly maintain both current staffing and operations and fulfill its obligations for the health, safety, and welfare of residents with proper long-term capital project implementation.*

**Capital Projects:**

*The Town is looking to do various road improvements including resurfacing, curbing, sidewalks, and appurtenances for Mount View Street, Palmer Street, Trinity Street, Moran Street, Gardner Avenue, Pine Street, Mason Avenue, and Lower Union Place.*

*The Town will continue working on the Memory Park Connector Boardwalk which will bring connectivity to the Sussex County Rail Trail into Memory Park.*

*The Town will go out to bid this year on Phase III of the Firehouse No. 1 renovation project on Mill Street. Said project will focus on the exterior of the building improvements and property enhancements for the parking and stairway public access areas.*

*The snow remover is a new machine to be used for snow removal on sidewalks. With the addition of new sidewalks on Town property, especially along the State highway, we need a safer more efficient option for snow removal. This Ventrac machine includes a closed cab for staying dry and warm. It also includes multiple attachments like a plow, snowblower, and broom to be used depending on the type of precipitation. It will make snow removal much safer for our crew.*

*The current radio tower equipment is beyond its life expectancy and is no longer supported. This equipment is vital for maintaining effective communications with our emergency personnel. By rehabilitating and reconditioning the existing structure left*

vacant by a former service provider we can significantly save on costs and achieve a more modern, reliable communication system.

Currently we have three (3) Chevrolet Tahoe's in our primary fleet. The Chevrolet Tahoe is better equipped for modern day policing due to the size and durability. The two (2) 2021 Ford Explorers in our fleet each have over 65,000 miles on them. One of these vehicles is in our primary fleet with the other as our back-up. The new purchase would move the 2021 vehicles to back-ups or they can be used by our Special Officers, allowing the Town to sell older traffic vehicles.

Our current MDT's are at the end of their life (purchased in 2019) with significant "screen burn" leaving them difficult to use. The NJSP CJIS unit is now requiring added security measures including Multi-Factor Authentication. The License Plate Readers "LPRs" are an add-on to our current "dash camera" system and would greatly increase productivity, notify officers of stolen vehicles, dangerous persons, missing persons, and much more. LPRs would be added to all patrol cars in rotation.

We also have many water and sewer projects underway, and the Town is working closely with Suburban Consulting Engineers on millions of dollars in i-Bank principal forgiveness grant funding in order to properly manage and fund these expenditures.

We are also looking to continue work on replacing the lead service lines in our water system throughout the Town in order to comply with the NJ DEP requirements for the same.

Finally, we appreciate the support of the district and High School students as they assist with technology classes for seniors at Liberty Towers and Newton Town Centre. The students also assist with our luncheons, and this Sunday we have the luncheon at the high school cafeteria at 12:30pm followed by Catch Me If You Can production at 2:00pm

*Other Interesting Projects We Are Working On:*

- *Roller Hockey Improvements*
- *Stormwater Ordinance Updates*
- *Fire Museum Historic Designation and Grant Applications*
- *Redevelopment – Armory & McGuire's*
- *Electronic Signboard Trailer*
- *Recycling Center Upgrades*
- *Electrical Improvements at Memory Park, Town Hall, Central Plaza, Adams Plaza*
- *Dispatch Center Upgrades*
- *Ordinance Regulating Airbnb's*
- *Bronze Level Achievement for Sustainable New Jersey*

*Also joining me for our discussion are the Police Chief Joe D'Annibale, Officer Justin Bellis, W/S Supervisor Ken Jaekel, and Assistant Supervisor Adam Vough.*

*Mayor that concludes my report."*

Mayor Le Frois thanked Mr. Russo and asked the Council if they had any comments.

Mrs. Teets stated she and Danielle Zito have talked about recognizing student accomplishments more often at Council meetings.

Mr. Couce joined the meeting via Zoom at this time. He stated he appreciates the working relationship between the Town and the Schools.

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At this time Mayor Le Frois asked Dr. Piccirillo to speak.

*"Good Evening.*

*Thank you to Mr. Russo, Mayor LeFrois and the Town Council for the opportunity to meet together today. Since I started as superintendent in Newton in 2023, I have felt very fortunate to have built and maintained such a great relationship with many members of the Town's staff. Mr. Russo has been a pleasure to work with and I have enjoyed our meetings over coffee and our out-of-the-box brainstorming sessions; and, I can simply not imagine a better police force than the Newton PD. Working with the entire team, especially Chief D'Annibale, Dan, Judy, and our SRO Justin Bellis has been a pleasure. They are all so cooperative, compassionate, caring, and above all they really do put the safety and well-being of our students first. One of the lines of our District's Mission Statement, which we read at the beginning of each of our BOE meetings is: "We believe in the value of care. Therefore we put trust, respect, and support at the heart of our school culture, and safety, security, and sustainability at the center of our physical environment." I can say with confidence that together the District and Town have made this more of a reality than ever before. Today is just another example of the partnership we've made for the betterment of the community and I am thankful for each of you.*

*While I do not need to share this update with Ms. Teets since she comes to each of our Board meetings, I will give a quick update for the public and Council on the State of our Schools. We currently have about 1,600 students attending our schools. Just over half of our students in Newton receive free and reduced lunch indicative of lowered income. We have also increased our number of students who are classified as MLs or English Language Learners to over 100 students – and growing. So many of our students impress me each day with their talent, work ethic, and accomplishments. Our high school seniors are now beginning to announce where they are going to college and some of them are being accepted into the finest academic institutions in the country. On top of that, many of our students in high school are already earning college credits while in HS, taking credits at Sussex County Community College in welding, culinary, and automotive. Mr. Russo and I are in fact, meeting with Dr. Homer tomorrow and I suspect we will come up with even more ways to give our students the most amount of opportunities.*

*With regard to some of our goals this year, we were focused on strengthening the pride in our schools through increased community communication and partnership, in person events and facilities improvements. Additionally, we had goals to strengthen the education of the whole child by enhancing the arts, athletics, social-emotional learning, and virtue habituation. Lastly, we set a goal of improving academics through MTSS (Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) and curriculum/instruction improvements. I am proud to say we've done a tremendous amount of work in these areas. I won't spoil the surprise for our BOE as I will be giving a full presentation on this at our meeting next week but some highlights from the year include:*

- *new gym floor, partition, wall pads, backboards in the H.S. gym*
- *two new state-of-the-art science labs at the high school*
- *the advent of an ELL Parent Group*
- *continuation of quarterly newsletters to the community*
- *Watch D.O.G.s reboot*
- *Star Student Program at Merriam*
- *In Person Conference, Back 2 School Nights, Parent Nights*
- *The HUDL camera*
- *Increased Social Media Presence and Spanish Language Liaisons*
- *Tri-District Events (e.g. 2nd grader day, Tri-District Field Day, 7th grader day, 8th grader day, HS graduation walk, etc)*
- *Beautification project; branding; and students "seeing themselves" in their school*
- *Faculty Pride – Newton Pride Foundation has returned, Wellness Program,*

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- BRAVE initiatives, Dr. Mather science lab naming idea, contract negotiations*
- *Music Sound Lab - What's Newton Podcast*
  - *Carnegie Hall program - Musical Explorers*
  - *Re Upped our partnership with Big Brothers/Big Sisters*
  - *NJ4S - Mental Health Supports*
  - *PSIS - Behavioral Supports*
  - *District-Wide Security App*
  - *Handle With Care Training for all Security*
  - *County-Wide Reunification Initiative*
  - *Standard Response Protocol*
  - *ERI Classes and ASD Classes expansion*
  - *Partnerships with Harvard*
  - *Working with Magnolia Consulting*
  - *Expansion of G&T*
  - *High Impact Tutoring Grant*
  - *Science and ELL(ML) Think Tanks*
  - *Presentation at Techspo*

*And on top of all this, the accolades from the students continue to come! Our mock trial team was first in the County and competed at States last week, our girls' wrestling team finished 2nd in the State last week, and I went down to Atlantic City yesterday to watch our HS FBLA team dominate at their State competition (where both of our student representatives to the Board had top ten finishes; and Andrew Stone serves as both the State and National FBLA President). This week I am looking forward to seeing how our*

*Robotics team does – I went to see them at their Mt. Olive competition last weekend and they seem poised to qualify for Nationals in Texas; and I am looking forward to Catch Me If You Can opening tomorrow at Newton High School and Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Jr at Halsted in two more weeks.*

*From a budgetary perspective we have been working on the budget since December and have just met with the Finance Committee this week to review our proposals. Overall, we saw an increase in State Aid of \$977,000 which helped to make up for the significant spike in energy costs and insurance costs, but was nearly \$200,000 less than what we were anticipating. We are continuing to propose a 2% steady tax increase. This will allow us to Work-to-Earn-to-Save for long-term projects utilizing reserve accounts without needing to go to a referendum. We are fortunate to have received ROD grants to supplement costs for the Halsted boiler for this year, but other large expenditures are anticipated in the future from these reserve accounts such as the HS Turf Field/Track which will likely be done in the Summer of 2026.*

*In closing, the State of the Schools is bright and we are so glad to be able to count on the support of the Town Council, Town Employees, and Town Residents. It is an honor to teach and care for the students of Newton."*

*Mayor Le Frois asked Chief D'Annibale for some remarks.*

*Chief D'Annibale reviewed some items of note, such as having a School Resource Officer to build a positive relationship between the students and the Police. The SRO is never a disciplinarian. He also reviewed the Rapture Alert App and additional features that they are looking into.*

*Some of the Board members had questions for the Chief regarding the curfew ordinance which he answered.*

Next Mayor Le Frois asked Mr. Vough and Mr. Jaekel to review what is happening in the Public Works Department.

Mr. Vough reviewed the upcoming projects and purchases. He gave an update on the Roller Hockey and Babe Ruth field improvements. He went on to say they are purchasing a machine to safely remove snow from the sidewalks. He also said he is looking forward to working with Brian, he always had a good relationship with the prior school personnel and hopes that continues.

Mr. Jaekel reviewed the major projects, one of key interest would be the lead line replacement program.

Mayor Le Frois asked the Chief to speak a bit about the Drone program and Animal Control.

The Chief explained the Town purchased two drones, and they have been used for various reasons throughout the County assisting other agencies. Whether it was to help locate a missing person or determine a hot spot for a house fire. He went on to explain the Town now provides Animal Control services to eight (8) municipalities including Newton. The Chief also brought up they are always looking for safety improvements and they are evaluating installing strobe lights outside the school to alert students of drills or emergencies going on inside the building. They are also looking into color-coding the hallways in the schools for tactical purposes.

A discussion took place on the use of strobe lights and notifications to parents as well as students.

Mr. Couce asked Mr. Vough on the status of the Babe Ruth Field, and he asked if the School had an alternative if the field is not done in time for the season. Mr. Vough advised the School will use the field at Hillside Park as they did last year.

The Board and Council had a very productive discussion on several matters with each group providing sufficient answers to their counterparts.

Mr. Dickson and Mr. Couce left the meeting at 7:19pm.

Mayor Le Frois 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."*

Mr. Sekelsky 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*

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*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 Le Frois closed the meeting to the public.

Mayor Le Frois noted in closing, this is the fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of COVID and she wanted to acknowledge the hard work behind the scenes done by everyone to make sure education continued in Newton. She thanked all the first responders and emergency personnel for everything they did also.

Upon motion of Mrs. Teets, seconded by Mrs. Diglio and carried, the Council adjourned at 7:35 pm.

Upon motion by Mrs. Zayac, seconded by Ms. Qarmout and carried, the Board adjourned at 7:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



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