

**Stoneham Select Board
Open Meeting - Remote
Friday, May 9, 2025
8:30 a.m.**

Open Session

Members Present: Timothy Waitkevitch – Chair, David Pignone – Vice Chair, Ryan Foreman – Clerk, Heidi Bilbo; Raymie Parker

Also Present: Town Administrator Dennis Sheehan, Town Counsel Robert Galvin

Document List:

Agenda Item 1: Call to Order: Waitkevitch called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with a unanimous roll call vote.

Agenda Item 2: Pledge of Allegiance

Agenda Item 3: Citizens' Comment Steven Ternullo, 20 Cottage Street, stated that the Board's decision to hold an immediate override vote sends a troubling message that resident voices are not being heard. He stated that the Board must make tough decisions and look for efficiencies. He stated that residents are being taxed out of Stoneham.

Christina Gale, 89 Summer Street, stated that making more cuts will cut everything good about Stoneham. She stated that inflation is 8% and there is no future here without an override.

George Georgoutzos, 11 Fieldstone Drive, stated that earlier this week he sent a letter on behalf of Keep Stoneham Affordable for All raising the issue of conflict of interest for one of the Board members who voted for another override vote at the 4/29/25 meeting and requested a new vote on the override at today's meeting.

Jen Cobianco, 21 Beacon Street, stated her concern that if the Town does not have an override it will never recover from the losses.

Ed Rosa stated that it is easy to say keep Stoneham affordable, but it really doesn't make sense. We cannot cut everything. He urged the Board to come up with a reasonable number and let the voters decide.

Jill Blagsvedt, 23 Maple Street, stated that the new override needs to be much less than \$14 million and it needs to be clear where the money will be spent.

Agenda Item 4: Override Ballot Sheehan stated that the School Committee took some time last night to consider what would like to add back in with an override vote. He stated that on the Town side he added an overlay provision to cover tax exemptions, added the Mystic Valley Elder Services position to the Council on Aging's budget line. He said that the School Committee's discussion focused on salary negotiations which resulted in \$8.1 million in total override costs.

Jamie Wallace, Chair of the School Committee, stated that if we pass a one year override, it is unlikely that the Town would be able to come back and ask for more in year two. She stated that the School Committee considered the outyears for contract negotiations.

Foreman stated that while we are contemplating the one year cost of an override, it is important to consider that an override continues forward. He stated that the growth factor for the override is calculated at 8% plus FY26 needs.

Leia Secor, Budget Director, stated that the union raises do not include the growth factor or the five units that are in negotiations. It covers the teacher's union negotiations for three years.

Parker stated that watching the School Committee meeting was very difficult. She continued that no one is disagreeing that we need an override, but she needs time to digest the information that was presented last night and a pause is merited.

Foreman stated that the needs are immediate. He stated that the School Committee voted on option B which is a 5-5-5 salary increase for FY26 or \$977,528. If that is added to the \$5.2 million that was discussed with the growth factor that we land at a \$6 million override. We can also continue to cut from the Town side to get back to the \$5.2 million override figure.

Jessica Killilea, Chair of the Library Trustees, stated that it may make sense to push a ballot to September so other departments can respond to the proposed number.

Waitkevitch stated that we've had this discussion many times and we are roughly 30 days out from the override vote. Parker stated that we need time to consider the numbers. She stated that she is against the override vote on 6/14 – She stated that we have a balanced budget that has already been passed. She continued that she is strongly urging full discussion of all needs so that the override will pass and be done correctly.

Pignone stated that he has had multiple conversations with Town Counsel about any potential conflict of interest he may have because of this position within the School Department. He stated that the numbers being voted on are general numbers and there is no conflict with his voting to

move an override forward. He stated that he would like to see an override, but that the numbers continue to change. He stated that he is concerned that the override will not pass and if it does not pass it will not help us.

Bilbo stated that the frustration is palpable. She stated that if we allowed our professional staff to meet and do their jobs, we would have had this number to begin with. If this vote fails the consequences will be everlasting and overwhelming.

Jeanne Craigie, Town Moderator, stated that as someone with wisdom and longevity she realizes we need an override, but cannot follow the jumping ball right now. She stated that once a number is made public, residents latch onto it. She stated that the process has been confusing and disruptive and the professionals on staff have been twisted in every direction trying to meet the requests placed before them. The teachers deserve a raise, but we have to do this job judiciously and thoughtfully. She stated that the Town needs the money to keep going, but it is not mismanagement – it is proper management that has allowed the Town to make do and never have an override. If we are not asking staff to do their jobs then why are we even sitting here?

Foreman stated that he does not see the downside in asking for what is needed for FY26. He stated that Sheehan has identified the areas of most need and provided the Board with a number. He stated that we can find an additional \$977,000 from the Town side and give it to the school. We need to select a number that the Town will support.

Wallace asked if the Finance and Advisory Board have voted of the changed budget and override number. She stated that the School Committee proposed a number, but did not vote to support the override number that may be moved forward today.

Bilbo stated that Foreman is once again proposing to pull money from the Town side and Town Meeting just voted on a balanced budget. This continues to impact the Town, the staff, and the residents who will think that again we found money. She stated that the back and forth is detrimental to trust and creates confusion.

Parker stated that the Board voted on 4/29 to move the ballot question to 6/14 with no input. She stated that the Board is not the School Committee or the Finance and Advisory Board. This rush does not help the conversation. This has to be done properly. Parker moved to move the override ballot date from 6/14 to a date to be determined in the fall. Bilbo seconded the motion.

Foreman stated that it was not his intention to invade the province of the School Committee in any way. He stated that \$2.1 million plus \$900,000 is very close to the \$3.1 million discussed last night at the School Committee meeting.

Parker stated that this is not an emergency. Clearly we have forced the School Committee to show its hand and we have forced this staff to work tirelessly. Pignone stated that it is not emergent, but it is urgent. Bilbo stated that the confusion is from the timing and the inability to have follow-up conversations. A roll call vote was taken.

Voting in favor:

Timothy Waitkevitch
David Pignone
Heidi Bilbo
Raymie Parker

Voting against:

Ryan Foreman

Motion Passes (4-1)

Pignone stated that there is a lot of work to do before the fall. Sheehan stated that the public information session scheduled for Tuesday will continue and he will work to inform residents through the summer. Waitkevitch stated that he will continue to make sure all of these items are on future agendas so that the conversation does not stop.

Agenda Item 5: Special Town Meeting This item was tabled.

Agenda Item 6: Town Administrator's Report Sheehan did not give a report.

Agenda Item 7: Non-deliberative Announcements Parker thanked the boards and staff for its dedication and continued efforts on the override. Waitkevitch seconded the thanks.

Agenda Item 8: Adjourn: Parker moved to adjourn. Pignone seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken.

Voting in favor:

Timothy Waitkevitch
David Pignone
Ryan Foreman
Heidi Bilbo
Raymie Parker

Motion passes (5-0)

Respectfully submitted,

Dava Kilbride – Office Manager