



Patricia O'Neil <poneil@natickma.org>

On the FY 2020 School Budget, Bus Fees, and the Bus Fee Support Warrant Article

3 messages

Richard Sidney <richsidney@gmail.com>

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To: mmalone@natickma.org, selectmen@natickma.org, anolan@natickps.org, Natick School Committee <schoolcommittee@natickps.org>, Finance Committee <fincom@natickma.org>

To the Town and School Administrators, and to the Board of Selectmen, School and Finance Committees:

Committee Chairs: Please distribute this to all members of your committee and include it in the record of either your next meeting or, preferably, for a meeting where these matters are on the agenda.

It has come to my attention that the School Administration and School Committee are planning to raise the fees paid for busing students.

I am not opposed to raising some fees that haven't been raised since they were instituted.

I am, however, very concerned that raising these fees will not achieve the desired goal -- to help the School District meet their needs.

My understanding, over the many years that I have been on Town Meeting, and through my 10 years on the Finance Committee, is that the agreement between the Schools and the Town work as follows:

1. The Schools make a contract to provide transportation.
2. The Schools pay for this contract.
3. Revenues from bus fees (for those children not receiving free transportation) are applied to pay for this contract, to the extent that the bus services are not required by law. This means that we can only use the "extra" (cost of the contract for those not required to receive it) cost of transportation in this calculation, not the entire contract.
4. The annual warrant article can only be used to supplement the cost of this "extra" transportation, in order to keep fees down. Any unused portion is returned to the Town.

This is a zero-sum situation -- any increase in bus fees will reduce the amount required, and therefore available, from the warrant article, and result in no net change to the money available to be use for other School purposes.

It's also my recollection, that the annual warrant article to support reduced bus fees is worded in such a way that the funds from this article **must** be used in this manner, and I believe, although I am not the Town Moderator, that any other agreement around the use of this money would be out of the scope of the article.

Therefore, I see two solutions to this issue:

1. Don't raise bus fees, and close the revenue/expense gap in other ways.
2. Increase the School budget by the amount of the warrant article, and request no funding in the warrant article.

This practice, of supporting reduced bus fees through a separate appropriation by Town Meeting, has probably run it course. My preference would be to allow the School Administration and School Committee to manage their budget entirely, and eliminate this extra warrant article.

Thank you very much,

Richard Sidney
30 High Street
Town Meeting Member, Precinct 8
508-655-5639

