

**MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF
THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Monday, June 16, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.
Killingworth Town Hall/Remote Access Available**

BOS Members in Attendance: First Selectman Eric Couture, Selectmen Joel D’Angelo (Via Remote) and Eric Nunes

BOS Members Absent: None

Visitors: Killingworth Board of Education Members: Suzanne Sack, Chair, Kathleen Zandi, Jen Voegtli and Lisa Connelly, Eileen Blewett (Via Remote), Eileen Unger-Pleines (Via Remote), Richard Pleines (Via Remote), Bill Kosturko (Via Remote), MLP (Via Remote), Regina Regolo (Director of Finance/Via Remote) and Jamie Sciascia (Via Remote)

Called to Order: First Selectman Couture called this meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance: The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Budget Discussion with Killingworth Board of Education Members:

First Selectman Couture opened the meeting by stating that it would be helpful to outline the Budget plan for the coming weeks. Couture emphasized the importance of reviewing the next steps, especially since it has been some time since they last met with the Board of Education to discuss the Budget. Couture highlighted the upcoming referendum as a key focus and noted that the Budget dates are especially important for election officials, including the Registrars and Town Clerk, all of whom have already been notified.

Board of Education Chair Suzanne Sack explained the statutory process following a failed budget vote, including the requirement for a District meeting with a public hearing and adoption of a revised budget within four weeks. Chair Sack explained that until a new budget is approved (absent specific exceptions), the Board must operate under the prior year’s budget starting July 1, 2025. Chair Sack noted that multiple referendum cycles may be necessary, as seen in past years, which incur additional costs.

Chair Sack provided the Budget Schedule:

- **June 19, 2025:** Board Workshop/Public Meeting (No Public Comment)
- **June 23, 2025:** District Meeting with Public Hearing & Board Meeting to Adopt a New Budget
- **July 7, 2025:** Annual Meeting
- **July 8, 2025:** Referendum (6:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.)

Chair Sack explained that this meeting was scheduled specifically with the Killingworth Board of Education members to promote transparent communication regarding the budget and to clarify information circulating on social media.

Selectman D'Angelo raised concerns about the necessity of an Assistant Superintendent, especially considering the District's small size and declining enrollment. Chair Sack clarified that while only a Superintendent is legally required, the Assistant Superintendent position was recommended by a previous Superintendent to help share the workload and improve District operations.

Chair Sack outlined the Assistant Superintendent's responsibilities, including: 1) Managing Human Resources (e.g., hiring, onboarding, orientation); 2) Systematizing Personnel Processes; 3) Redesigning the Middle School schedule to improve Academic Performance; 4) Leading Contract Negotiations. She also clarified that the Assistant Superintendent position has existed for over a decade, with a brief hiatus during Superintendent Dr. Holly Hageman's tenure when she chose not to refill the position she had previously held.

Selectman Nunes asked for clarity on the Superintendent's daily responsibilities, particularly in light of rising costs and declining enrollment. Chair Sack responded that the Superintendent functions as the CEO of the District, managing a wide range of duties such as: 1) Overseeing K–12 Education, Curriculum, Special Education, and Student Performance; 2) Supervising Principals and Administrators, Visiting Classrooms, and Addressing Discipline; 3) Managing Facilities and Capital Projects (e.g., mold remediation, new water systems); 4) Preparing and Presenting the Budget, including Leading Community Workshops; 5) Representing the District in the Community and responding to inquiries; 6) Ensuring Compliance with State Mandates and Laws; 7) Participating in State-Level Education Discussions.

Chair Sack acknowledged the concerns regarding the Superintendent's salary, explaining that it reflects the scope and complexity of the role. She emphasized the Board of Education's goal, to balance fiscal responsibility with educational excellence.

Providing further insight, Sack gave an overview of the Curriculum Coordinators, distinguishing them from instructional leaders. These Coordinators ensure curriculum coherence across Pre-K–12 and lead key subject areas such as Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies. Their work involves coaching teachers, improving instructional practices, and selecting, piloting, and aligning curriculum with state standards. Chair Sack explained that they spend most of their

time in schools rather than in Central Office. One significant achievement is the development of a State Recognized English Language Arts Curriculum, which secured state funding. Sack highlighted that the two District Curriculum Coordinators, who work hands-on with educators across multiple buildings, operate without any support staff.

Selectman Nunes raised concerns about the District becoming “top heavy,” given its size. While appreciating the role clarifications, he suggested some responsibilities could be handled directly by the Superintendent, recalling earlier times when a single principal was sufficient. Chair Sack responded by emphasizing the critical importance of the Assistant Superintendent for maintaining continuity and managing complex responsibilities, especially during Superintendent turnover and peak summer hiring. Though the next Superintendent may reevaluate the administrative structure, the position is essential for the upcoming year and not currently considered for elimination.

The Board of Selectmen emphasized the need for intentional decision-making in the budgeting process rather than simply cutting fund balances. They stressed the importance of prioritizing needs, evaluating spending, and making effective use of available resources.

Chair Sack reiterated that while residents are not expected to propose line-item cuts, their general desire for reduced spending is a valid input. She acknowledged the effects of inflation and stagnant wages on community members and highlighted the pattern of “budget fatigue,” where periods of smoothly passed budgets are often followed by increased resistance and failed referendums. She further explained that the Board of Education asked the Superintendent to present a categorized list of “tolerable” versus “intolerable” budget cuts to help the public better understand potential trade-offs.

Selectman D’Angelo expressed a desire to “think more globally,” beyond the immediate details of the budget, encouraging consideration of Killingworth’s broader fiscal trajectory, where the town stands today and where it is headed. D’Angelo emphasized his intent to better understand the Board’s longer-term perspective, especially amid a cultural shift in which residents are asking more pointed questions about how public funds are being spent.

Selectman Nunes noted that since moving to town in 2019, the recent two failed school budget referendums reflect a shift toward greater public interest in financial oversight. He acknowledged Chair Sack for understanding this shift and highlighted that most residents aren’t asking for cuts to student services but feel the District may be “top heavy,” especially in Administration. Nunes shared that many community members want to see Administrative restructuring, including possibly eliminating the Assistant Superintendent role and redirecting those funds to teachers and student programs. He emphasized that concerns focus more on how the budget is allocated rather than its overall size.

Board Chair Sack firmly rejected this narrative, calling it unsubstantiated and noted that it's unclear what exactly qualifies as "top heavy." She made clear that the Assistant Superintendent role is off the table for cuts in the current year, citing its critical importance amid leadership transitions and summer hiring. Sack emphasized that while the role could be reassessed by a future Superintendent, it remains essential for the upcoming year.

Sack stressed the urgent need to address the deteriorating condition of the high school, cautioning against continued investment in short-term fixes. She also acknowledged past difficult decisions, such as the closure of Haddam Elementary School, which was emotionally challenging. The transition was ultimately successful, with Burr Elementary earning a "School of Distinction" designation for four consecutive years.

Chair Sack further noted that Board of Education members cannot advocate for or against the budget during the referendum period but may provide factual information. Sack highlighted the District's strong performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, keeping schools open with minimal learning loss, a source of pride that helped improve the District's statewide rankings and affirmed its commitment to students and families.

Acknowledging the wide range of feedback received during the meeting, Chair Sack expressed appreciation for the candid input from both the Community and the Board of Selectmen. She observed a clear shift in public sentiment, particularly around fiscal accountability and the importance of making informed, intentional budget decisions. Sack recognized that concerns about rising costs, administrative structure, and the looming high school renovation project have prompted residents to engage more deeply in the budget process.

She affirmed that the Board of Education has heard the community's call to avoid superficial cuts such as simply reducing fund balances, and instead focus on evaluating spending priorities, weighing trade-offs, and ensuring long-term sustainability. Sack also acknowledged concerns about affordability for residents on fixed incomes and the need to prevent the town from becoming financially inaccessible. She reiterated the Board's commitment to maintaining a strong and effective school system while operating as efficiently and frugally as possible. Chair Sack emphasized that the input received will help inform the Board's ongoing work, and that open communication with the public will remain a priority as they revise and present the next version of the budget.

First Selectman Couture emphasized that budgeting is an ongoing process requiring continual reassessment. He cautioned that making short-term decisions solely to meet a budget target may compromise the District's ability to operate effectively throughout the year. He also stressed that a true budget should reflect thoughtful planning, not reactive cuts, and acknowledged the difficulty and complexity of the decisions involved.

Board of Education member Kathleen Zandi clarified that, per Board policy, Chair Sack serves

as the official spokesperson for the Board of Education during regular operations. This policy ensures consistent communication, which is why the public primarily hears from Chair Sack rather than from the full Board. As the primary liaison to the Superintendent, Chair Sack has more frequent communication, providing her with a broader, day-to-day understanding of District matters. Ms. Zandi emphasized that Chair Sack speaks on behalf of all eleven Board members, not just her own views, and that if she did not represent the group, they would address it.

Chair Sack expressed her gratitude to the Board of Selectmen for inviting the Board of Education to participate in the Budget discussion.

Adjournment: First Selectman Couture adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jamie Sciascia
Clerk