

Correspondence received by the Concord Select Board
Week Ending – November 25, 2024

1. Miguel Echavarri – 255 Commonwealth Avenue
2. Susan Bates – 28 Concord Greene
3. Robert P. Comer – 106 Riverdale Road
4. Miguel Echavarri – 255 Commonwealth Avenue and Paul
Macone – 33 Grove Street

Please Note: The letters posted here reflect the views and opinions of the author as recorded in the body of their email. Neither the Select Board nor Town staff have verified or reviewed the contents. The Select Board and the Town do not necessarily agree, condone, support or advocate the ideas expressed in these letters and have not verified any factual statements made in the letters.

Dear Select Board Members,

Please note that all information mentioned below has been previously provided and is available upon request. For brevity, this email focuses on one example, the Town Manager's Office (TM Office). FTEs refers to Full-Time Employees.

In response to public comments at last week's forum (see link below), the Chair stated that "...blaming the RTE is not really getting to the fundamental problem, which is spending and that's up to town meeting. That's not up to the select board."

<https://youtu.be/Yc4W7-60xMU?si=YISzpUZ8iK66baLU&t=7970>

Respectfully, I disagree because citizens don't control spending, they approve budgets developed and presented by town leadership and the Select Board (SB) at Town Meeting. We trust town leadership to spend within approved budgets and trust our elected SB officials to provide oversight on our behalf. The Chair's recent comment, that the Board has nothing to do with spending, is extremely troubling considering the recent lack of fiscal transparency, questionable off-budget spending and the addition of administrative staff.

For example, this Board and town leadership told FY24 Town Meeting voters that the TM Office would remain steady at five FTEs. However, by overspending its 5111-salary account, the office was able to grow its staff without enduring public scrutiny. And because this Board doesn't believe in overseeing spending (per the Chair's comments) Town Meeting voters didn't know about this FTE expansion.

The additional FTEs should've been reflected in the FY25 Book and that would've sparked a public debate. However, neither a budget book nor the FY25 account data was released, keeping the new FTEs hidden from public view(a). More egregious, the TM Office added another two FTEs bringing its total staffing to ten. If it wasn't for the Personnel Board, the public wouldn't know about the new FTEs or that the TM Office doubled its staffing in just two years(b).

These FTEs will likely cost taxpayers ~\$500K per year and will need to be supported by future budgets, shouldn't taxpayers have a right to debate and approve or reject these FTEs?(c)? Why hasn't a budget book or account data been made available for FY25(a)? Enough excuses, these should've been delivered by now. And finally, who's advising you on these matters because the MMA handbook states that Select Boards should play a major role in formulating financial policies and monitoring town performance(d). This directly contradicts what the Chair publicly stated about spending and the role of the SB.

Respectfully, we need this Board to represent us, the residents and taxpayers of Concord. Every time we express concerns over town management, your kneejerk reaction is to circle the wagons and protect the administration. However, you don't work for town management but rather for the people who fund town operations, fund capital projects and elect members to the Select Board. In short, you work for the people and we need you to step up and start exercising oversight on town leadership and our finances. Start with asking (in a public setting with public comment) about the overspending, the lack of budget data, the lack of fiscal transparency and the FTEs. Please note that the foundation of our local government is trust and right now, that's starting to erode.

Miguel Echavarri

Homeowner – 255 Commonwealth Ave

978-333-0385

Footnotes:

- a. Requests for FY25 account data were made in September but have yet to be released.
- b. Source: 10/13/2024 Personnel Board meeting packet, page two: Chart titled, "Town of Concord, Regular Status Hires and Terminations, YTD 2024 (October 31,2024)". – Shows Town Manager's office added two FTEs YTD in 2024, ten FTEs total in office.
- c. The exact number is unavailable because there's no public information for FY25. Further, we can no longer trust what's represented in the budget because surplus from other accounts may be used to fund additional administrators. The \$500,000/year estimate is based on taking an average salary of \$100,000 X 5 FTEs.
- d. MMA = Massachusetts Municipal Association. Excerpt from Handbook: "As the chief executive officer for the town, the Select Board should play a major role in formulating financial policy. Generally, the Select Board will participate in the town's financial planning and budget process, provide leadership in the development of the capital improvement plan, and monitor the town's financial performance..." MMA Select Board Handbook, Chapter 6, Financial Management. Section Finance Roles and Responsibilities. Massachusetts Select Board Handbook - Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA)

Dear Select Board,

I am writing to fully support the RTE as it currently stands.

You have done due diligence in investigating the tax laws that can be adopted in light of state constraints. There have been many suggestions from the public on what to do, most of which are not possible under current state law. The most feasible option at this time is the RTE.

Thank you for all of your work on behalf of all of us.

Sincerely,

Susan Bates

28 Concord Greene

To: Concord Select Board

Date: November 18, 2024

Subject: Residential Tax Exemption

I urge you to keep the Residential Property Tax Exemption, as-is, in place for FY 2025. It's admittedly not perfect and I'm open to improvements in the future. But it's a step in the right direction and the most practical tool we have available, right now, to help those with less wealth afford to remain in Concord. Thank you for your consideration.

Rober P. Comer
106 Riverdale Rd.
Concord

Select Board Members,

The Select Board is about to begin contract negotiations with the Town Manager. We're asking that you do not sign a three-year contract but instead consider a one-year extension or the appointment of an interim Town Manager. As with the appointment of Ms. Lefleur to interim Town Manager in 2021, there's no need to rush a three-year agreement especially considering the open-ended issues outlined below.

1. **Lack of budget transparency:** Despite being Concord's CFO and treasurer since 2016, The Town Manager was unable to oversee the production of a FY25 Budget Book, leaving FinCom and the public without the necessary information to review and/or vote on the budget. This is the first time in two decades a budget book hasn't been published. It's absence, especially considering the possible (unfunded) hiring of additional administrators, **shouldn't be taken lightly** and has eroded budget transparency and public trust in Town government.
2. **Was the lack of a FY25 Budget Book a self-inflicted wound?** The Town Manager's Office issued a separation agreement to a 20-year town employee who helped deliver previous (award winning) budget books. The employee, along with another staff member, left town service shortly thereafter; without an alternative plan, the Town was unable to produce the book.
3. **FY24 salary accounts overspent, were additional FTEs added off-budget?** According to FY24 account data, the Town Managers Office overspent its personnel account by \$279K, indicating the possible addition of two to three administrators. It should be noted that the FY24 Book showed staffing to remain steady at five full-time employees (FTEs). Forecasting salaried accounts should be easy and it's shocking these were overspent by such a large amount.
4. **Were more FTEs added in FY25?** A recent Personnel Board packet shows the Town Managers Office with ten FTEs. However, the FY24 Book showed staffing at five FTEs. We know that due to FY24 overspending (see #3), the office may have added another two to three FTEs. If the office currently has ten FTEs, then it's likely another two to three people were added in FY25. What's especially troubling is that there is no way to research this since neither the budget book nor account data has been made available for FY25. This **lack of transparency** should be getting more attention. Why isn't it?
5. **Gerow Park – Not taking responsibility & undermining the public trust:** Possibly the worst managed project in Concord's history. There is no excuse for this mismanagement.

6. The entire process of the Warner's Pond dredging project needs to be investigated. This project has been subject to questionable procurement processes, tremendous amounts of money being spent on unnecessary consultants and "facilitators" to subvert the will of Town Meeting and taxpayers in dredging the pond.
7. The extreme growth of personnel in the Town Manager's Office and the continued exorbitant size of the Human Resources Department needs some close scrutiny. Why do we have double the size of Town Hall and Human Resource staff compared to equivalent municipalities? Why do we continually have "Acting or Interim" managers of important Divisions in our Town Government? Why are there different totals of Town staff on different documents?
8. What is the justification for hiring high paid temporary contract employees? Why did the prior Chief Financial Officer for the Town resign and was then immediately rehired as a contract procurement employee? Where is the justification in hiring a resident of Florida, to work remotely from Florida, initially as the "Interim Human Resources Director" and then after the newly hired Assistant Town Manager was hired and placed into the Interim Human Resources Director's role, this Florida resident is continuing on in some sort of another not clearly defined contract employee? Is it good judgement to pay for this Florida resident to come back to Concord for extended periods of time paying \$3,450.00 a month lodging reimbursement on top of their extremely high contract salary (as well as travel expenses and shipping of a car from Florida to Concord?) Is there no-one in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or southern New Hampshire that can't do these common municipal tasks?
9. Paul Macone filed a formal written complaint for interference and improper practices against Chair Mary Hartman some time ago and he hasn't had any contact whatsoever by the Select Board. Why?
10. The Town was recently notified by the Department of Labor that the Engineering and Line Division of the Concord Municipal Light Plant (CMLP) are joining the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (Union). On April 4th, 1898 Town Meeting voted to take control of Concord's electric service. For more than 125 years CMLP existed as a non-union Division of the Town. Why did they feel compelled to unionize after 125 years? The Select Board should inquire and make their investigation public.

Miguel Echavarri Paul Macone