

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING**  
**JOINT MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**November 22, 2022**

A joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee was called to order by Vice Chairman Melia at 6:00 PM, Northbridge High School Media Center, 87 Linwood Avenue, Whitinsville, MA. **Board Members Present:** Ampagoomian, Begin, Melia and Paulhus. School Committee Members **Present:** Donahue, Alden, Richards and Leonard. **Also Present:** Amy McKinstry, School Superintendent and Melissa Walker, Director of Business and Finance.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by those present.

**APPOINTMENTS/INTERVIEWS: School Committee [1 vacancy]:**

**1) Rebecca Jackson.** Candidate, Rebecca Jackson introduced herself and answered questions from both the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen. The following questions were included in her interview.

**Heather Alden: What do you see as the major issues facing our school district and do you see them as unique to Northbridge or public education in general?**

Rebecca Jackson said that she has worked in the community for the past 3 years. She has been all over New England in her career and it seems a lot of the major issues districts are facing are pretty universal. The biggest issue I've seen since COVID is staffing and attracting teachers to each district and retaining staff. I think mentoring young teachers is a challenge in all districts. I think we have mounting challenges in every classroom and I don't think Northbridge is very different. Each classroom is getting more diverse and serving each student's needs is becoming more challenging. I feel grateful for being in Massachusetts because we have some of the best schools in the country.

**Jill Leonard: What are your reasons for seeking a position on the board?**

Rebecca Jackson answered that she's been in education for seven years and has seen a lot of different models for schooling. I think I have a well-rounded idea of what a good education looks like for students and teachers. I recently stepped back from teaching to work for an education technology startup and I wanted a way to get more involved in the Northbridge schools and the School Committee was the top of my list. I'm looking to help with some of the complex issues that are facing our schools.

**Erin Donahue: What do you see as the School Committee's roles and responsibilities?**

Rebecca Jackson answered the School Committee's role is to provide solutions and a diverse set of people who are problem solving around issues that our school district is facing. I think it's crucial that people serving on the board have the same values to make sure students are getting the best education possible, ensuring the district is retaining the best teachers possible, and helping to make the community stronger by empowering who is already there.

**Allan Richards: What do you think is the greatest challenge in the Northbridge School District?**

Rebecca Jackson said it's making sure each student is getting what they need in the classroom. That we're able to identify earlier what students need and implementing it in the classroom.

**Charles Ampagoomian: What is your philosophy on what is being taught in the school systems around the nation on the topic of transgender transformation trying to transgender the young kids into believing that they are something that they're not?**

Rebecca Jackson said that she thinks it falls under the idea of inclusion, awareness and tolerance. I can't speak to asking students to be something they are not. I haven't experienced that personally or as a teacher. I think that public schools are open to everyone, I believe classrooms should have students that are aware of who is there in order to speak tolerance and help those people feel safe. I think it looks different depending

on the age. I believe parents should have a say in what goes on in classrooms. The community should be involved with the classroom agenda when it comes to discussing a student's gender. Teachers should not be doing it on their own.

**Brian Paulhus: The School Committee deals with many things but primarily three main things: policy, superintendent and the budget. The budget in Northbridge is typically handled by Melissa Walker, but there are times things come up and choices have to be made. Can you explain an experience you've had with a budget or having to make tough choices.**

Rebecca Jackson said she had a good idea of budgets or lack thereof from working in other school districts. She helped create a retention program for at risk students in Milford who would have dropped out. The goal was ensure they had opportunities to go into a trade or internship post-graduation to ensure they had a tract to follow. This was in 2019 and 60% of students in the program were helped to graduate. The program was cut the next year and the funds were dispersed to other needs of the district.

**Thomas Begin: What are some of the experiences as a teacher that you bring that will really benefit the School Committee?**

Rebecca Jackson said she understands the many different things that teacher's face they have to balance and also understanding what administrators have to face. She said she worked under some great administrations and some not so great. I saw staff thrive under certain administration and some that didn't work up to their full potential. I would like to see a partnership with parents. She said she sees a lot of parent involvement in the Northbridge schools, something she's really excited about. She would love to see what a school district looks like that is thriving with parent partnership and also has administration that lifts up their teachers. From reading the strategic plan, I know that is the goal of Northbridge.

**Thomas Melia: What is you're feeling about the use of Police Resource officers in the school system?**

Rebecca Jackson said it's becoming more controversial in the media but she thinks that as an educator she was not the best person to protect her students if there was a danger in the school. There was a resource officer at one of the schools I worked in and that brought me great comfort.

## **2) Brandon King**

Candidate Brandon King introduced himself and answered questions from both the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen. The following questions were included in his interview.

**Heather Alden: What do you see as the major issues facing our school district and do you see them as unique to Northbridge or public education in general?**

The number one issue I see with the school is communication. I don't think it's only Northbridge issue, I think it's a statewide issue, some schools are far better than others.

**Jill Leonard: What are your reasons for seeking a position on the board?**

I would like to be able to more directly influence the school system itself with my special education background.

**Erin Donahue: What do you see as the School Committee's roles and responsibilities?**

The School Committee's roles and responsibilities are to hold administration of the schools accountable for their actions or perceived in actions. To help facilitate the decisions that may better the district as a whole and hopefully work together to create a more wholesome environment for the school.

**Allan Richards: What do you see as the two highest education priorities and how would you accomplish them on this committee?**

Number one is everyone getting on the same page. I would accomplish that more directly through a financial aspect as a school committee being that's predominately what the school committee leveraging thing is. Two is keeping and acquiring high quality teachers and admin. I would try and facilitate that by leveraging the school committee position to increase town taxes.

**Charles Ampagoomian: What is your philosophy on what is being taught in the school systems around the nation on the topic of transgender transformation trying to transgender the young kids into believing that they are something that they're not?**

I feel that topic is too narrow, I feel at that age the topic of respect and body autonomy is important. I believe transgenderism is too narrow a topic. We should be teaching children to respect each other regardless of what the other person's deal is in the sense that everyone is different. We live in America. You're free to be whoever you want to be, but with that being said, I don't necessarily think we should be pushing one specific topic like that.

**Brian Paulhus: The information you shared indicates a strong background with IEP and special education, something you're passionate about. Being a member of the school committee encompasses all kids, all learners K-12, do you think you'd be able to continue with your work in that field and have the same devotion and passion towards programs for all learners?**

I would say definitely yes on that, although I have a neurotypical daughter as well. I have two children, two different paths. Although I feel the special education department is wholly underfunded and under supported, I appreciate the ongoing support for general education and neurotypical children. They also need to excel and benefit in all schools.

**Thomas Begin: What unique prospective have you gained from your experience that you believe would strengthen the school committee?**

I describe myself as a fixer. I see a problem, for better or worse I feel compelled to fix the problem. It doesn't always work as well as you think it would, especially when we get into a more political arena. My experience has led me to believe that determination can basically fix everything. That's what I would bring to the school committee.

**Thomas Melia: What is you're feeling about the use of Police Resource officers in the school system?**

I do not support police officers in public schools because police officers are not there to help the individual, their aim is to protect the property and values. Anyone who has dealt with police officers on the negative side know they don't have your best interest at heart. When we teach children you can always trust the police and you can go to them anytime you have a problem, tell that to a child who has been ripped out of their home for saying something to a police officer.

### **3) Talia Berkowitz**

Candidate, Talia Berkowitz introduced herself and answered questions from both the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen. The following questions were included in her interview.

**Heather Alden: What do you see as the major issues facing our school district and do you see them as unique to Northbridge or public education in general?**

Talia said that one of the most prevalent issues is staffing and it is not isolated to Northbridge however the para staffing situation is significant to Northbridge. We have districts around us that are paying a lot more money and they have amazing paraprofessionals that are trained, putting in the work. Northbridge has a problem keeping the quality paraprofessionals we have with us.

**Jill Leonard: What are your reasons for seeking a position on the board?**

Talia said she wants to put her money where her mouth is. The board is doing a great job leading with policy and budget. I want to do it as well. I watch the meetings at home, I'm very vocal sending the board emails and I'm very involved in the school system. I want to be able to help our district move forward. Talia said creating policy and making sure the policy is followed at the school level, overseeing the budget and creating an educationally sound budget and overseeing the superintendent.

**Allan Richards: Can you give us some background why you would be good on the School Committee?**

Talia said she grew up in Northbridge, I was the first graduating class out of the high school building. My heart and soul is in this town. I taught here for 13 years. I'm well versed it what it's like to be an educator

and what it's like to be a parent in this district as well as being a special needs parent.

**Charles Ampagoomian: What is your philosophy on what is being taught in the school systems around the nation on the topic of transgender transformation trying to transgender the young kids into believing that they are something that they're not?**

I think kids come into the classroom telling us what they feel and we can address them how they feel. It matters these kids come into school, we want them in school, it's the best place for them. We need to make them feel comfortable and accepted. I don't feel it's the districts job to teach about transgenderism. I think it's our job to accept kids how they come into our buildings, but I don't think it should be part of the curriculum.

**Brian Paulhus: Would you be able to support a decision that went against your personal beliefs?**

Yes, I would have to that's why there are five members. There are five members of the committee and everyone comes with their own personal beliefs and backgrounds. I think everyone's opinions weigh just as much.

**Thomas Begin: As a parent with children in the district what do you believe should be the main priority of the school committee?**

The main priority is to increase the budget so we can pay our staff to stay.

**Thomas Melia: What is you feeling about the use of Police Resource officers in the school system?**

I completely support having a police resource officer. Officer DeJordy does an amazing job. The way he interacts with the kids is wonderful. I know if my children have an issue they are able to go to him because they feel comfortable with him. Just his presence makes them feel safe. I support having one at every school so kids can feel safe.

**Thomas Melia: Follow up question to Tom's question, where would you find the money?**

I don't know, we need to think outside the box. I would be interested to see what the budget looks like, what the proposal is. We're spending money training these people, then they are taking that training and experience they are getting in Northbridge and they love their job but they are leaving for another district where they'll get paid more. We need to be creative and find a way. It's actually a way to save money so that we're not spending more money training these assistants so that they can leave us.

#### 4) Carl Cowen

Carl Cowen introduced himself and answered questions from both the School Committee and the Board of Selectmen. The following questions were included in his interview.

**Heather Alden: What do you see as the major issues facing our school district and do you see them as unique to Northbridge or public education in general?**

I don't see anything that is necessarily unique. I think communication is a struggle. I hear that from other parents. I think it's a continuing challenge.

**Jill Leonard: What are your reasons for seeking a position on the board?**

Service. I'm at a stage where I'm not working. I feel there are things I can offer, I've done administration, budget planning and operations management. I think I can offer some assistance.

**Erin Donahue: What do you see as the School Committee's roles and responsibilities?**

It is a body that has oversight over the entire district so things don't get to far in one direction. It is a checks and balance on the administration.

**Allan Richards: Can you give us some background why you would be good on the School Committee?**

I reside in the community, I care about it, and my daughter goes to school here. I'm invested in the community. In the Army I did resource management, planned logistics.

**Charles Ampagoomian: What is your philosophy on what is being taught in the school systems**

**around the nation on the topic of transgender transformation trying to transgender the young kids into believing that they are something that they're not?**

I don't think it should be taught in the Northbridge School system. Maybe in the higher years you can have discussions related to an ELA course discussing a novel with some issues that might have to be discussed. I absolutely disagree that it should be introduced in younger grades. I think it should be discussed at home.

**Bryan Paulhus: Explain your background with budgeting and your work with Junior ROTC. Explain what you think the benefits for your students in Northbridge would be if that type of program was in the school.** Carl said he worked extensively with budgets during his time in the military. Junior ROTC is a program often seen in inner city schools, Indian reservations out west and in some of the US territories. The program deals with students that are disadvantaged. It would be valuable to Northbridge or any school. The schools must maintain a minimum enrollment of 100 students. The school district has to see value in the program for it to begin and to maintain it. The school district and the Army each pay half of the ROTC program for the students.

**Thomas Begin: As a parent with a child in the district what do you believe should be the priority of the school committee in the near term?**

Carl said he doesn't think he can pick one issue as the main priority. There is nothing that sticks out to me as the main issue. He doesn't know of any extreme issues that need immediate addressing.

**Thomas Melia: What is you feeling about the use of Police Resource officers in the school system?**

I'm not sure I support it, but I think it's fantastic to periodically have people see a police officer cycle through the campus. I rather see a community environment where we the people do not see that as a necessary thing, we know they are right down the road and can be at the school within minutes. We have a building full of adults and have procedures to lock down doors.

Erin Donahue opened it up for nominations upon completion of Carl Cowen's interview.

School Committee

A motion was made by Tom Melia to nominate Rebecca Jackson to become a member of School Committee. The motion was seconded by Heather Alden.

Erin Donahue	Yes
Heather Alden	Yes
Allan Richards	Yes
Jill Leonard	Yes
4	members having voted in the affirmative
0	members having voted in the negative

Board of Selectmen

Charles Ampagoomian, Jr.	No
Brian Paulhus	Yes
Thomas Melia	Yes
Thomas Begin	Yes
3	members having voted in the affirmative
1	members having voted in the negative

Linda Zywiec swore Becky Jackson in as a School Committee member.

Adjournment

School Committee

A motion was made by Erin Donahue to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Heather Alden

Erin Donahue	Yes
Kathryn Atchue	Yes
Allan Richards	
Jill Leonard	Yes

3 members having voted in the affirmative  
0 members having voted in the negative

Board of Selectmen

Charles Ampagoomian, Jr.	Yes
Brian Paulhus	Yes
Thomas Melia	Yes
Thomas Begin	Yes

4 members having voted in the affirmative  
0 members having voted in the negative

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Brian Paulhus, Clerk**

/mjc

**LIST OF DOCUMENTATION**

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING - OPEN SESSION**

**November 22, 2022**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**I. APPOINTMENTS/INTERVIEWS: School Committee [1 vacancy]**

- 1) Rebecca Jackson**
  - Copy of letter of intent
  - Copy of Talent Bank Form for Rebecca Jackson
  - Copy of Rebecca Jackson's resume
  
- 2) Brandon King**
  - Copy of letter of intent
  - Copy of Talent Bank Form for Brandon King
  
- 3) Talia Berkowitz**
  - Copy of letter of intent
  - Copy of Talent Bank Form for Talia Berkowitz
  
- 4) Carl Cowen**
  - Copy of letter of intent
  - Copy of Carl Cowen resume
  - Copy of Talent Bank Form for Carl Cowen