

Soaring costs push Norwich school budget into the red

By **CLAIRE BESSETTE**
Day Staff Writer

Norwich — Facing a projected \$1.87 million budget deficit this year, school administrators have instituted a spending freeze on supplies, technology, equipment and other items for the rest of the current school year.

School Business Administrator Robert Sirpenski told the Board of Education on Tuesday that special education

costs have skyrocketed leaving an expected \$2.9 million deficit at the end of the year. Unanticipated costs include 12 new placements of students in specialized programs, transportation costs and the \$425 per hour cost of contracting for a hearing instructor. Sirpenski called special education costs “financial roulette.”

State reimbursement for special education excess costs will cover an estimated

\$868,000, leaving the special education deficit at a projected \$2.1 million by June 30, Sirpenski said. Other areas of the budget also are in the hole, including a combined \$564,000 in all salary categories. The district has realized savings in some areas, including winter heating and snow removal costs, but not enough to cover the entire deficit.

With just eight weeks to go in the school year, the freeze

on equipment and supply purchases should have minimal impact in the classroom, Sirpenski said, and the heating season is mostly over.

Unlike in past years, the school district has a safety net for budget deficits. The school board this year will use funds in its non-lapsing account to cover the deficit. The City Council agreed to create the fund in 2021 and has allowed the board to keep portions of

pandemic-era budget surpluses over the past two years to cover unanticipated expenses and emergencies. The fund now has \$3.3 million, Sirpenski said.

This year’s budget deficit comes as members of the school board and the City Council get set to meet to discuss the proposed 2023-24 school budget. The Board of Education approved a proposed \$92.8 million for next

year, with a 6.98% increase over this year. City Manager John Salomone proposed a total of \$88.9 million, a \$2.1 million increase over this year.

The Board of Education-City Council Ad Hoc Budget Committee will meet at 6 p.m. Wednesday at City Hall to begin discussions on the school budget before the City Council makes its final budget decisions in early June.

c.bessette@theday.com

DAILY BRIEFING

POLICE LOGS

Norwich

Emnet Miskiewicz, 21, of 164 Canterbury Turnpike was charged Tuesday with third-degree burglary and disorderly conduct.

Robert A. Goss Sr., 64, of 120 Cliff St., No. 1, was charged Monday with second-degree failure to appear in court.

David Preston, 24, of 17 Atlanta Court, Groton, was charged Tuesday with three counts of second-degree failure to appear in court and two counts of second-degree failure to appear in court.

Waterford

Justin Webb, 26, of 4 Starlight Lane, Stonington, was charged Tuesday with criminal violation of a restraining order.

Leila Morel, 19, of 51 Myrock Ave., was charged Tuesday with third-degree assault and disorderly conduct.

Victor Ocasio-Algarin, 22, of 12 James Ave., Quaker Hill, was charged Tuesday with criminal violation of a protective order and disorderly conduct.

Police logs reflect arrests, not convictions. For outcomes of criminal and motor vehicle arrests, visit bit.ly/ctcourts.

POLICE/FIRE REPORTS

NEW LONDON MAN CHARGED IN ‘PISTOL WHIPPING’ CASE

New London — Police on Wednesday arrested a New London man on charges he “pistol whipped” a woman earlier this month, striking her in the head multiple times with a handgun.

Maaseiyah Williams Jr., 27, whose last known address was 51 Wood Drive, is one of two suspects in an April 10 assault in the area of Eastern Avenue and Adelaide Road.

Williams is charged with first-degree assault, criminal possession of a firearm and unlawful discharge of a firearm.

Police said the handgun was fired during the assault but the shot did not hit the victim.

The victim claimed that in addition to the attack by Williams, another man kicked and punched her while she was on the ground. Police said the victim was treated for multiple abrasions and lacerations to her head and face and needed 16 staples.

Williams appeared in New London Superior Court on Wednesday where he was ordered held on a \$300,000 bond and under house arrest if he posts bond. He is due back in court on May 5. Police said the investigation is continuing.

NEWS IN BRIEF

PLAYWRIGHTS HAVE THEIR DAY AT NL PUBLIC LIBRARY THIS SATURDAY

At 1 p.m. Saturday, April 22, short scripts deemed “One-Character-Wonders” from the Exploratory Playwriting Program taught at the Thames Club facility by local writer Nicholas Checker will be performed in the Community Room of the Public Library of New London, 63 Huntington St., New London.

The program is run in coordination with Flock MakerSpace and the Garde Arts Center. Each script to be performed presents a single character caught up in a state of angst that finally resolves for better or worse. Free admission and free refreshments are the rule, though donations for the Public Library of New London are welcome. For further information, call Checker at (860) 444-8711.

Court hearing delayed for airman accused in documents leak

By **ALANNA DURKIN RICHER** and **ERIC TUCKER**
Associated Press

Boston — A hearing to decide whether a Massachusetts Air National Guardsman charged with leaking highly classified military documents should remain jailed while awaiting trial has been delayed to give the defense more time to prepare.

Jack Teixeira, 21, was supposed to appear in Boston federal court on Wednesday for a detention hearing after he was charged last week, under the Espionage Act, with unauthorized retention and transmission of classified national defense information.

But the judge canceled the hearing after Teixeira’s lawyer filed a motion requesting that it be delayed for about two weeks. The defense said it “requires more time to address the issues presented by the government’s request for detention.” A new date has not yet been set.

During his first court appearance last Friday, a magistrate judge ordered him to remain in custody until his detention hearing.

He has not yet entered a plea. His federal public defender didn’t respond to an email last week from The Associated Press and didn’t

speak to reporters at the courthouse after his initial appearance.

Teixeira is accused of sharing highly classified military documents about Russia’s war in Ukraine and other top national security issues in a chat room on Discord, a social media platform that started as a hangout for gamers. The stunning breach exposing closely held intelligence has sparked international uproar and raised fresh questions about America’s ability to safeguard its secrets.

Air Force leaders said Tuesday that they were investigating how a lone airman could access and distribute possibly hundreds of highly classified documents. The Air Force has also taken away the intelligence mission from the Air National Guard 102nd Intelligence Wing based in Cape Cod, where Teixeira served, pending further review.

Court records unsealed last week revealed how billing records the FBI obtained from Discord and interviews with social media comrades led authorities to Teixeira.

Investigators believe he was the leader of an online private chat group on Discord called Thug Shaker Central.

Collins: War over access to Napatree Point revs up

FROM B1

corruption anyway. His shouts of “thirty thousand dollars” drifted through the council chambers as he yelled while leaving the building.

Morrone did agree at Monday’s council meeting to ask “in the morning” for an opinion about a potential conflict from the Rhode Island Ethics Commission. By the time I caught up with him Tuesday afternoon he said he hadn’t had time to do that yet.

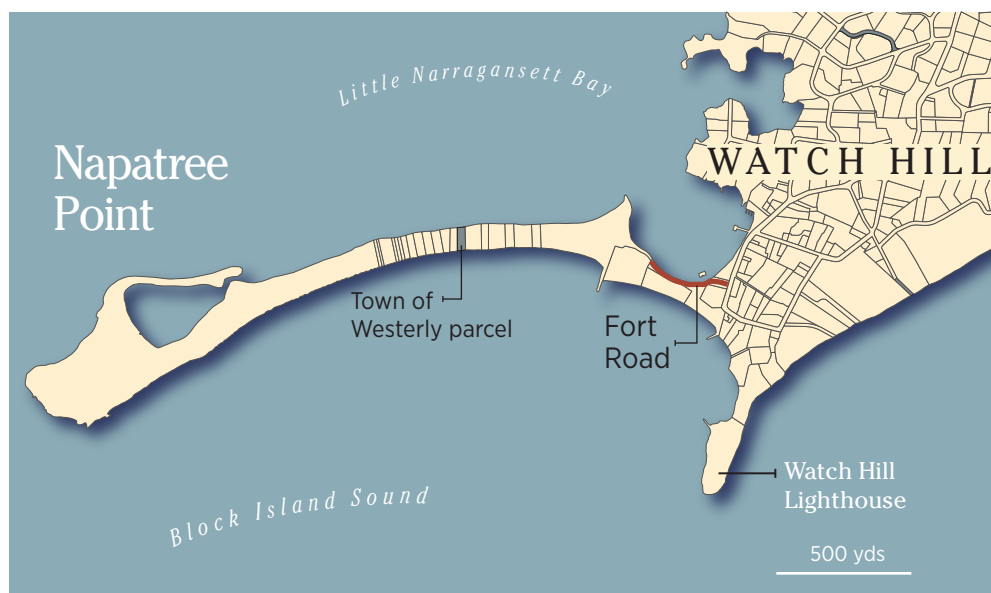
Morrone referred me to the town attorney — who has said there is no conflict — when he refused to comment on suggestions that a previous ruling from the Ethics Commission would not apply to him. That ruling was in regards to a Planning Board member from the Weekapaug Fire District who was told not to vote on access issues there because he owns property nearby.

“They are mirror circumstances,” said Councilor Cordio, who noted that Morrone owns property in Watch Hill.

Morrone and Councilor Philip Overton both voted against a motion made Monday by Cordio to commission a survey of the right of way to Napatree based on the tax maps used to justify the 2008 resolution creating access in perpetuity. The Monday motion passed 4-2.

The 2008 resolution notes that the town owns a lot on Napatree Point, which was wiped clean of houses in the Hurricane of 1938, and that a tax map in use at the time shows the original Fort Road, which led from Bay Street out Napatree Point, still exists.

That road gives the owners of lots there, like the people of Westerly, access to their



MAP: SCOTT RITTER/THE DAY | DATA: TOWN OF WESTERLY; RHODE ISLAND GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM

Access to the pristine 1.5-mile-long Napatree Point is heating up in the historic Watch Hill section of Westerly.

property, the 2008 resolution says.

Overton said he respects the 2008 resolution but would have preferred a more elaborate survey ordered by the council than one focused on the maps used for the creation of the right of way.

Overton also said the town could ultimately use eminent domain to assure access, a suggestion that might send a chill through the Watch Hill cocktail party circuit this summer.

Morrone told me he wants a “deep dive” into the legal issues involving Fort Road and he would be fine if a survey showed the fire district has control of Fort Road. He said he believes public access would be assured either way.

On the contrary, I would agree with the access advocates who say that the public needs legal assurance of a

right of way and should not depend on the munificence of the fire district to let the public use Napatree Point.

Indeed, the fire district notes there is a conservation easement allowing public access over much of its land on Napatree, but that permission specifically notes it depends on environmental issues.

It could be withdrawn at any time.

The easement allowing public access also does not include the district-owned downtown parking lot in Watch Hill, the route to Napatree, and without the legal justification provided by the use of the old Fort Road right of way there, the public is in no way guaranteed the right to get to its own property on Napatree.

I give Morrone credit for taking my calls and answering all my questions, even though I didn’t agree with all his

responses.

I did not hear back from messages left for both attorney Petros and Fire District Moderator Joan Beth Brown, who wrote to the Town Council March 30, asking that council members not “cause more divisiveness, unnecessary legal and other expenses” in asserting the claims of its 2008 law.

Like many of the beach access advocates, I have found a new hero in Councilor Cordio.

“We are going to protect it,” she said at Monday’s council meeting, about the town’s 2008 declaration of a right of way in perpetuity, which is now under attack by the well-paid attorneys of the fire district.

The gallery lit up in applause.

This is the opinion of David Collins.

Shooting suspect was recently released from prison

By **PATRICK WHITTLE** and **DAVID SHARP**
Associated Press

Bowdoin, Maine — A man who police say killed four people in a home in rural Maine and then shot three others randomly on a busy interstate highway had been released four days earlier from prison, a state official said Wednesday.

Joseph Eaton, 34, was released Friday from the Maine Correctional Center in Windham, where he had been sentenced in March 2021, originally on a probation violation related to a previous crime, said Anna Black, director of governmental affairs for the Maine Department of Corrections.

Eaton had a criminal history with offenses serious enough to have prevented him from legally possessing a gun in Maine, according to state records.

The shootings in Maine began in the small town of Bowdoin, where four people were killed Tuesday. Then a chaotic scene developed in which shots were fired at vehicles on an interstate highway over 20 miles away in the community of Yarmouth, police said. Three people were shot there, and one remained in critical condition Wednesday.

“This is an active investigation with a lot of moving parts,” Shannon Moss, state police spokesperson, said Wednesday.

The day before the shootings, an anguished man believed to be Eaton posted a roughly two-minute live video on Facebook criticizing people who he said are Christian and don’t give people a second chance. “What good does it do to hate somebody?” he said, choking back tears on the video. “You know, it destroys you.”

On the day he was released from prison, the man believed to be Eaton posted on Facebook that he was feeling thankful. “It’s finally over. There are so many people I can’t wait to see.”

Moss confirmed that state police were aware of the video, and that it’s part of their investigation.

Eaton, who was living in Bowdoin, was charged with four counts of murder but was not immediately charged in the highway shootings, she said. He was jailed while awaiting a court appearance. It was unclear if he had an attorney to speak on his behalf, a jail official said Wednesday.

The names of the victims were not released, and state police didn’t discuss any possible motive. The four bodies were taken to the state medical examiner’s office in Augusta for positive identification and autopsies.

The seven people shot Tuesday were the latest victims of mass shootings in the U.S.,

whose targets included a Christian elementary school in Nashville, Tenn.; a bank in Louisville, Ky., and a Sweet Sixteen party in a small city in Alabama.

Ian Halsey, of Bowdoinham, said that two cousins were shot and that his uncle suffered shrapnel injuries in a single car. One of his cousins is in critical condition, and none of the family knew the shooter, he said.

“They were just passersby in the wrong place at the wrong time,” he said of his family. “It’s horrible what happened.”

In Bowdoin, Denise Pride, 58, a neighbor who lives in a farmhouse down the street from the location of the four deaths, said members of the rural community were shaken by the tragedy.

The house where the killings took place is in a wooded

area of rolling hills and farms, and houses range from mobile homes to large estates.

Pride said one of the victims was famous for delivering baked goods to neighbors on holidays. “They were very kind people,” Pride said. “The neighbors were texting, shocked that it happened, and to them.”

Eaton was charged over the past decade with more than a half-dozen crimes and served an eight-month sentence last year for assault, according to state records. Past convictions included aggravated assault, a felony that would prevent him from legally having a firearm.

The origins and ownership of the firearms used in Tuesday’s shootings were unclear. State police declined to comment on the weapon that was used.

Spring Season video highlights, player profiles and special features are now available on **theday.com/gameday**

New features produced weekly so check back often!

PRESENTED BY

SPONSORED BY

THE Wander OF IT ALL

SPRING SEASON GAMEDAY

@gamedayct