

Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of October 4, 2023

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chair Louise Miller at approximately 7:00 pm in the Great Plain Room at Needham Town Hall, also available via Zoom teleconference.

Present from the Finance Committee:

Louise Miller, Chair; Carol Fachetti, Vice Chair

Members: Karen Calton, Barry Coffman, John Connelly, Carli Hairston, James Healy, Joshua Levy (remote), Paul O'Connor

Others present:

David Davison, Deputy Town Manager/Finance Director

Timothy Muir McDonald, Director of Health & Human Services

Sara Shine, Director of Youth & Family Services

Tiffany Benoit, Assistant Director of Public Health

Massiel Gallardo, Youth Commission

Approval of Minutes of Prior Meetings

MOVED: By Mr. Connelly that the minutes of the meeting of September 27, 2023, be approved as distributed, subject to technical corrections. Mr. Healy seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 9-0.

October Special Town Meeting warrant

Article 2 – Appropriate for Youth Health Initiatives (Children's Hospital Community Benefit Payment)

Ms. Shine stated that there is a mental health crisis and that the Youth and Family Services division plans to address the small gaps in need within the program. The plan for the use of the opioid settlement funds is outlined in her memo. The Health Department plans to hire two additional community outreach clinicians. Ms. Shine met with other departments to identify gaps in mental health support. They found that other departments, such as the Library, and Park and Recreation, as well as a few other organizations such as the YMCA, have some need to make community mental health referrals. They are also seeking to add a community training coordinator who can provide information and support to other departments that is needed to address the mental health crisis. The coordinator would be able to train Town department staff as needed and to train families as well as to support Youth and Family Services in providing mental health first aid. They will also train community members how to provide mental health first aid. There is also a new program to train 10th graders how to recognize and help people in need of mental health support. The goal is to have the whole school trained within 4 years by training all 10th graders every year.

Mr. Connelly asked if the \$200K from Children's Hospital would be recurring funds. Mr. Davison stated that there were two initial \$200K one-time payments to be made as milestones in the construction project under the host agreement, but there is a requirement for \$200K to be paid to the Town annually in perpetuity. Mr. Connelly asked if there would therefore be money

to continue to fund these positions. Mr. McDonald stated that the funding is a set amount, \$200K, and not indexed to inflation, so it can be expected that at some point the salaries will outgrow the funding amount. At that point, some service cuts may be needed. Mr. Davison stated that the Town is required under the host community agreement to use the funds to promote adolescent mental health, but the community decides the specific way to do that. Mr. Coffman stated it would be helpful to clarify how long the funding will be provided, although Mr. Connelly did not feel an answer was needed before he would vote on this article to appropriate the funds per the warrant article. Mr. Connelly asked why the article states that the funds are from Overlay surplus. Mr. Davison stated that the Town's free cash from FY2023 has not yet been certified so this is the best place to capture the cash at this time. This article will put the funds aside where they can stay until they are used, rather than going to free cash. Ms. Miller stated that if the Town does not appropriate the money now, the Town will have the same funding source issue again next year, just a greater amount. In response to a question, Mr. Davison stated that if the funds are appropriated for this use and the warrant article is rescinded, the money will need to be given back since it cannot be used for other purposes. He noted that this is the only year that there will be \$400K. Each year going forward, there will be \$200K from Children's Hospital to appropriate. Mr. Healy asked what the Town gave up in consideration of these funds. Mr. Davison stated that the Town created a zoning amendment to allow the pediatric hospital facility.

Mr. Connelly asked if the positions being proposed with this funding are planned to become part of the annual operating budget eventually. Mr. McDonald stated that the positions would be funded separately from the operating budget for the foreseeable future, at least five years. He cannot say that he would never ask that they be funded in the operating budget, but he can say that it would be difficult to add staff simply based on the available space. Mr. Healy asked if there will be a chance to deliberate over the issue before the funds are spent. Ms. Miller stated that there will be an annual request to appropriate the \$200K, and the Town will need to report on funds spent so far. Mr. Davison noted that it is important to appropriate these funds before the tax rate is set. The Town needs to have a source to appropriate the funds from and then make sure that the funds are spent as required. Mr. McDonald stated that they will spend from the oldest appropriations first. He stated that they must spend the funds on adolescent health needs, but they have flexibility within that requirement. They are hopeful that they will be able to attract and hire for the proposed positions but could use contracted services if not.

Mr. Connelly asked whether the community outreach is needed in places like the Library and Park and Recreation departments full time when adolescents are mainly in school at those times. Ms. Shine stated that they would also be doing in-home visits. Those two departments are where the positions might be stationed to be able to provide assistance when needed. Mr. Connelly asked if there would be interplay with the Schools. Ms. Shine stated that the current Youth and Family Services staff spends significant time in the schools and this person would be filling other gaps in need that are not currently being addressed. Mr. Connelly asked if there would be reporting requirements to be able to track the needs and activity. Ms. Shine stated that she does expect to track that data though she has not yet figured out exactly how they will do it.

Ms. Miller asked if the Committee wanted more information on whether the annual funding is guaranteed prior to voting the Warrant Article. Mr. Healy stated that he is prepared to vote this funding, though he has concerns about the out years.

MOVED: By Mr. Connelly that the Finance Committee recommend adoption of Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 2 – Appropriate for Youth Health Initiatives (Children's Hospital Community Benefit Payment) in the amount of \$400,000. Ms. Calton seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 9-0.

Article 4 - Appropriate for Community Opioid Settlement Fund Planning

Mr. McDonald stated that Ms. Benoit will discuss the substance of the proposal. He stated that he had handled the competitive procurement process. Ms. Benoit stated that the article is seeking \$145K from the opioid settlement stabilization fund for three proposed initiatives. First, \$90K is requested to hire two consultants for work leading to a 5-year strategic plan for use of the funds. One consultant will meet with stakeholders and with community groups to help determine where the unmet needs are, and another consultant will then develop a plan based on those meetings. Second, \$3K is requested to install SAM boxes (overdose emergency treatment kits) at the 10 locations where there are AEDs throughout town. Third, \$52K is requested to train a peer recovery coach, who is someone experienced in substance use that can help residents plan recovery. The goal is to make the best use of funds through both harm reduction measures and connection to treatment and services.

Mr. Coffman asked why the proposal includes separate contractors for the community engagement part and for the actual preparation of the strategic plan. Mr. McDonald stated that the Finance Committee had previously stated that it was looking for broader engagement before developing a plan for these funds, so the community engagement contractor would engage people throughout Town so the ideas would not be coming strictly from the Public Health Department. He stated that there were 4 bids received for the community engagement and strategic planning services. They chose the lowest qualified bidder at \$49K. That bidder does not, however, have subject matter expertise in substance abuse. He stated that there was only one bidder on the strategic plan request. Ms. Miller stated that they are doing the exact same thing in Framingham, and the cost is \$15K for two people to do all of the work including a survey, focus groups and meetings with staff, plus developing a plan. She stated that they are also culling the information on local opioid use and needs that is already available through various data collection agencies, Town and City-wide. She stated that these proposed costs seem high. She asked why they wanted the strategic plan contractor in place right away. Mr. McDonald stated that they wanted that contractor to be present at and observe the meetings with stakeholders and staff. He described some of the bids that were not accepted.

Mr. Connelly stated that he is in favor of the community engagement and the strategic plan but has an issue with the SAM boxes. He feels that they are jumping the gun and should wait to see if the plan recommends this step before adding them throughout Town. He stated that typically there is some engagement before someone can be provided with Narcan, but this would put Narcan in boxes in public places available to anyone without any kind of engagement first. Ms. Benoit stated that the hospital gave the Town a grant to buy the Narcan. Mr. McDonald stated that he has had multiple discussions with the Board of Health about the SAM boxes, and they have supported this initiative. He stated that if Narcan is given to someone who is asleep or passed out, but has not overdosed, there are no negative repercussions. The Narcan can help but it does not hurt. He stated that the Police and Fire Departments administer Narcan about 24 times each year. Mr. Connelly stated that he is concerned that with the SAM boxes, it will be abused. Mr. Coffman noted that there has never been a discussion of having Epi-pens available

publicly. Ms. Benoit stated that the law treats them differently, and that a license is needed to have and administer an Epi-pen in an emergency, but no license is needed for Narcan. Ms. Benoit stated that there is some training information in the SAM box for administering the Narcan. Mr. Levy stated that he does not see a financial implication, and he feels that the initiative is within the designated use of these funds.

Ms. Miller stated that she would like to see the results of the study and know where the gaps are before hiring anybody or starting other initiatives. She stated that she can accept what seems to be a high cost for the study since it could be a sudden high demand for these types of services by communities throughout the State. Mr. McDonald stated that the Public Health department has received other grants with substance use prevention but none of those funds are available for harm reduction for use or access to treatment, so they have done no work in that area and there is a need. The peer recovery coach would help to address some problems without having to seek out a social worker. Ms. Fachetti asked if the \$52K for the peer recovery coach is full time or part time. Ms. Benoit stated that it is for a part-time person, though they will assess whether that will be sufficient. She described the training involved in becoming a peer recovery coach.

MOVED: By Mr. Coffman that the Finance Committee recommend adoption of Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 4 - Appropriate for Community Opioid Settlement Fund Planning in the amount of \$145,000. Mr. Levy seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 7-2, with Mr. Connelly and Ms. Hairston dissenting.

Article 15 – Amend General By-Law - Specialized Energy Code

Ms. Miller stated that the Committee has received information in response to questions. Mr. Connelly stated that he was unclear on the effective timing of the code. Ms. Miller confirmed that a fall vote would mean that the revised code would take effect on July 1, 2024, and a later vote would mean a later effective date. Mr. Connelly stated that he read the materials and still does not have a good understanding of the effect on costs for residents or for the Town with respect to Town buildings. He feels that there has been a lack of communication with the broader community regarding the changes. He stated that he is not against the proposal, but feels it is premature to make a decision. Mr. Coffman stated that he was interested in the net cost of the changes. The information provided to the Committee included unit costs, but he would like more specific information about the additional costs. He stated that he also questioned why this needs to be addressed now. Ms. Fachetti stated that she would like a better understanding of not only construction costs but also of changes in operating costs. Mr. O'Connor stated that this should be seriously considered in the future but was concerned about the rushed nature and felt that there should be more experience-based data. He noted that he is not inclined to be an early adopter. Mr. Levy stated that there is always a desire for more information, but he felt that adopting the revised code is completely reversible if the Town finds it is not working. He feels that the potential benefit outweighs the cost, and he would vote to recommend adoption.

Mr. Healy stated that he feels that there is a rush to judgment. We do not know what the public thinks, and it is not clear what the repercussions may be. He feels that he may agree at some point, but not today. Mr. Healy also expressed concern about the Town using the fall Special Town Meeting to vote on things that could be addressed at the Annual Town Meeting. He does not currently support the article. Ms. Miller stated that she does not have time to research the issue, but she did some superficial research and found a study by MIT and Wentworth Institute

of Technology on the affordability of opt-in specialized code. She stated that the Town needs to figure out the effects. There are more global discussions to have regarding green energy. She also stated that she needs more information on redundancy and what the Town would do if the one energy provider failed.

MOVED: By Mr. Connelly that the Finance Committee recommend that Town Meeting not adopt Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 15 – Amend General By-Law - Specialized Energy Code. Ms. Fachetti seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 8-1, with Mr. Levy dissenting.

Article 16 - Foster Property Open Space Zoning Non-Binding Resolution

Mr. Healy stated that he read the letter that a resident sent to the Select Board and felt it was fabulous. He also did not understand why the Town was not following the usual zoning process. He feels that there is scant information on why the resolution is needed. He stated that he read through the records provided in response to the Finance Committee's request and took issue with the Town's position that it expected that the 5% level of affordable housing would be acceptable to DHCD to allow the project to proceed without the zoning change. He pointed out instances when the Town acknowledged or was told that 25% affordable housing was required by DHCD to qualify for a LIP (Local Initiative Program). He pointed out an email from the DHCD to the Town which stated that the two other projects working under this initiative in Needham met the standard 25% affordability threshold, and that since the early 1990s, 400 projects had been approved by DHCD with minimum affordability of 25%. He stated that he cannot support this article. Mr. Coffman stated that the 25% affordability minimum would not need to be met if the zoning is changed. Within the current zoning, the developer would need to agree to make 25% of the units affordable. Ms. Fachetti commented that the developer has said that would not be economically feasible.

Mr. Connelly stated that he agrees with Mr. Healy and is opposed to this resolution and is also disappointed by the relationship between Northland and the Town Counsel evidenced in an email from the developer in which the developer asked to avoid being specific with information being made available to the public. Mr. Connelly also stated that the article is confusing and vague. The title refers to Open Space, but it is not indicated in the resolution. He stated that the resolution seems to be asking the Town to support a concept without specifics. The terms in the resolution are not defined. He noted that there is no Purchase and Sale agreement, nor a Development Agreement, in place. There is almost nothing definitive, and yet the Town is being asked to use it as a reason to go against the normal process for creating zoning. He does not support it.

Mr. Levy stated that he would want to know the financial implications of the anticipated zoning article, and that information has not been provided. He suggested referring the article to the Planning Board for further review. Mr. Coffman stated that the financial implications are likely net positive since the property will generate taxes compared the current or alternate uses under the present zoning, but there has been insufficient due diligence. He felt that the Select Board wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to purchase the land but the process has been flawed, as highlighted by the emails provided. He cannot support the resolution, even with a net positive financial benefit. Mr. Healy stated the \$2.5 million has already been voted in support of the purchase. However, this should be considered in conjunction with other financial needs in the Town such as the remediation work at Claxton Field which are expected to cost \$3-\$4

million and will likely be enjoyed by more people. The Finance Committee's job is to look at all of the projects. Mr. Connelly added that the School building projects are now known to cost \$100 million more than expected, and meanwhile the \$2.5 million in funds for the property purchase have been set aside for a year unused.

Ms. Miller stated that though there is a potential net tax benefit to the project, there will be additional costs for schools, infrastructure, etc. She stated that there are also likely to be legal hurdles with the proposed zoning that the Town has likely not yet had a chance to consider. She feels that voting on this resolution with so little information may set unrealistic expectations. Many questions still need to be worked through.

MOVED: By Mr. Levy that the Finance Committee recommend the Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 16 - Foster Property Open Space Zoning Non-Binding Resolution be referred to the Planning Board for further consideration.

Discussion: Mr. Connelly stated that the Finance Committee needs to take a position whether to recommend the article or not. If such a motion is made at Town Meeting, the Committee should discuss it at that time. Ms. Miller stated that the motion was not seconded and did not call for a vote.

MOVED: By Mr. Healy that the Finance Committee recommend that Town Meeting not adopt Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 16 - Foster Property Open Space Zoning Non-Binding Resolution. Mr. Connelly seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 9-0.

Committee Updates

Mr. Connelly stated that he attended the meeting at the Pollard School with the MSBA in response to the Statement of Interest filed by the Town. He stated that the MSBA representatives were very professional and asked good questions. They said that the Town would be notified on December 10 whether they will proceed with the application. It will depend on the available funding and the number of applications. Last year 7 of 17 projects were selected from this stage. The questions seemed to indicate that enrollment and building conditions were the major issues. If the project is not accepted, then the Town will need to resubmit an application.

Ms. Miller stated that she plans to make budget liaison assignments shortly. She also plans to hold an orientation session for Town Meeting Members on October 18 to address the budget process and role of the Finance Committee.

Adjournment

MOVED: By Mr. Connelly that the Finance Committee meeting be adjourned, there being no further business. Mr. Healy seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a roll call vote of 9-0 at approximately 8:41 p.m.

Documents: October 30, 2023 Special Town Meeting Warrant (9-26-23 draft); Memo to Finance Committee from Sara Shine, Director, Youth & Family Services, October 4, 2023, re: Children's Hospital Funds; RFQ and Quote for project: Public Engagement and Facilitation of Community Discussions around use of Opioid Settlement Funding, August, 2023; Memo to Finance

Committee from Tiffany Zike, Assistant Director of Public Health, September 20, 2023, re: Opioid Settlement Stabilization Fund Plan; RFQ: Opioid Program Evaluation and Planning; Proposal: Town of Needham Opioid Program Evaluation and Planning, 6/20/2023 by Education Development Center;); CAPC Informational Slide: Won't the electric grid be overwhelmed by building electrification?; DOER Compiled Residential Case Studies on Cost of Specialized Energy Code; Slides regarding Update to Plan titled "Massachusetts is Ready for Net Zero"; Foster Property Records Request Responses; Letter from Resident to Select Board regarding Foster Property Resolution.

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Mizgerd
Staff Analyst