

**Needham Finance Committee  
Minutes of Meeting of December 14, 2016**

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by the Chair, Rick Zimbone, at approximately 7:00 pm in the Selectmen's Chambers at the Town Hall.

Present from the Finance Committee:

Rick Zimbone, Chair

Members: Barry Coffman, John Connelly, Tom Jacob, Ken Lavery, Rick Lunetta, Carol Smith-Fachetti (arrived 7:20 pm)

Others present:

David Davison, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

Jeanie Martin, Co-chairperson, Commission on Disabilities

Tatiana Swanson, Finance and Procurement Coordinator and Liaison to the Commission on Disabilities

Rick Hardy, Chair, Historical Commission

David Roche, Building Commissioner

Lee Newman, Planning Director

Matthew Varrell, Director of Conservation

Ted Owens, Chair, Planning Board

Paul Alpert, Planning Board

**Citizen Requests**

There were no requests to address the Committee.

**Approval of Minutes of Prior Meetings**

MOVED: By Mr. Connelly that the minutes of September 21, 2016 and October 5, 2016 be approved as distributed, subject to technical corrections. Mr. Jacob seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was approved by a vote of 6-0. (Ms. Fachetti had not yet arrived.)

**FY2018 Departmental Budget Requests:**

**Commission on Disabilities**

Ms. Swanson stated that the budget request was level-funded with \$550 expenses and a \$1500 stipend for the liaison. The expenses cover training, mileage and supplies. Ms. Martin stated that the Commission is concerned that there have been no requests for grants, so they need to get the word out. Grants are funded by handicap parking violation fees, and have paid for educational programs or accommodations such as disability awareness programs in schools and for materials and equipment such as large print books at the library or a Braille machine for the Community Center. The parking fund has over \$7000 in it. The annual revenue has been decreasing. Mr. Zimbone asked the School liaisons to ask why schools are not seeking grants.

## **Historical Commission**

Mr. Hardy stated that the Commission is examining the demolition delay by-law as the Town considers extending the time frame to one year. They have held meetings with owners of homes currently in the historical housing inventory, and those proposed to be added. While the Commission has the right to unilaterally add houses to the registry and make them subject to demolition delay, in practice they have always sought permission. The Board of Selectmen held a public hearing. He stated that some homeowners agreed to add their homes to the registry in the 1970s before the demolition delay by-law was enacted in the 1980s, and they are unsure if the owners were informed. They want to make sure that, with the proposed change, people are informed. He stated that the information is currently difficult to find on the Town website, and they want to make it more easily available. He stated that Dan Matthews suggested that the restrictions be registered at the Registry of Deeds so that they are known. He stated that the reason for increasing the demolition delay is to further discourage demolition. With low interest rates and permitting time, developers often just wait it out. He stated that 12 houses have been lost to demolition in recent years.

## **Town Counsel**

Mr. Connelly presented the budget and stated that there are two components: salary for Town Counsel of \$75,442 and expenses of \$254K. He stated that in FY16, this department was \$60K under budget, all due to lower expenses. The current FY17 budget is the same as the FY18 request. He discussed the current legal matters which are being managed by the Town Counsel.

## **Building Department**

Mr. Roche described the main functions of the department, and stated that he expects very high fee revenue in the current year because there are 5-6 large projects being permitted at the same time. He stated that there are approximately 1600-1700 building permits issued per year, and a 5000 permits issued in total. He stated that two new part-time inspectors were funded last year, though he has only been able to fill one position. He stated that the Town pays \$26 per hour when private work earns \$100 per hour. He stated that he only wants to hire inspectors with sufficient experience to deal with the issues that come up. He stated that a plumbing inspector needs to be a master plumber, and that an apprentice cannot do the work. He stated that next year will be very challenging with the new commercial projects while keeping up with the usual residential inspections. He stated that finding the part time help is difficult because there are a limited number of people doing this for different towns, and no new people coming into the labor pool.

Mr. Zimbone asked about the Fire Protection Consultant funding. Mr. Roche stated that this funding had been part of the Fire Department budget but was moved to this budget recently. It is the same person doing the same work, but for accounting and regulatory reasons, it was moved to this budget. He stated that there is fee revenue to offset this cost. Mr. Coffman asked how the Town's building fees compare to peer communities. Mr. Roche stated that they are lower, even after a recent fee increase. He stated that he thinks the fees are reasonable. The fees are supposed to cover only costs, so they cannot be raised too much.

## **Planning and Community Development**

Ms. Newman introduced the budget and stated that it is level-funded for the most part. There are increases in the salary line due to step and cost-of-living increases, and the elimination of the wetlands grant funding. There are increases in expenses for legal advertisements, mileage reimbursement and professional services. She stated that CPA funds have been designated to provide half of the salary of the Community Housing Specialist for three years, through FY19, while the remaining half is covered by the operating budget. This arrangement will be discussed at the end of the term.

Mr. Zimbone asked if there are particular areas of focus for the department. Ms. Newman stated that the Large House study was completed, and they are working to review and implement the recommendations. She stated that the Planning Board is concurrently reviewing the recommendations. She stated that the ideas of the proponent of the recent citizen's petition were considered and some adopted by the Large House Study Committee, and that he is somewhat satisfied. Ms. Newman stated that two big projects have been approved in Needham Crossing and are ready for building permits. Mr. Owens stated that the Planning Board feels that the lower Chestnut Street area where Roche Bros. is located is underutilized and that changes should be considered.

## **Draft Capital Improvement Plan**

Mr. Davison stated that the Town reviewed the proposed capital projects that will be moving forward in FY18 and prepared a draft capital improvement plan as the first step in the process. The second step is the review of the draft. The preliminary plan includes the Rosemary pool complex construction and the High School project. If the High School expansion is approved, then the plan is to combine it with the Gym A improvements and the boiler and chiller installations. Mr. Zimbone was concerned that combining the projects would mean adding scope to the architect and engineering work that might not be needed and lead to higher fees than necessary. He stated that if the boiler and chiller projects were handled independently, they might not call for an architect. Mr. Connelly noted that if the chiller replacement were a standalone project, it would likely be handled by Public Facilities instead of the PPBC. Mr. Davison stated that there is an allowance for the feasibility work in the estimates.

Mr. Davison stated that the plan also includes large projects that still need vetting including RTS storage and Police/Fire Station, Fire Station 2. He stated that the Rosemary Pool project is still in the plan for \$15.8 million.

## **Finance Committee Updates**

Mr. Lunetta stated that he, Ms. Miller and Mr. Reilly attended the Selectmen's meeting with the PPBC, Planning Board and Design Review Board regarding the new Police and Fire Station project. He stated that there is not yet a consensus on the design. He stated that some contemporary designs may be more useful and less expensive but fit in less well to the area. He

stated that the Fire Station 2 project is facing some complexity due to constraints of the lot. He stated that the Finance Committee should be involved in the process right away given the complexity. He stated that when the Committee is not involved until late in the process, any resistance can appear to be obstructionist. Mr. Lunetta expressed concern that there has not been thought of innovation such as outsourcing services or changing location. He stated that he is not aware of any discussion of how the second ambulance will be used at Station 2. Mr. Coleman stated that one cost saving option being discussed is to build the Fire Station part first so that the Fire Station can be moved right into the new space, avoiding any need for Fire Department swing space which is very expensive.

Mr. Zimbone stated that Mr. Reilly said that the locations have already been decided. Mr. Connelly asked if there was consideration whether the properties would be better used as commercial sites since it is valuable property. Mr. Lunetta stated that a proposal was raised to stop the project and study whether the Police/Fire Station property is the best location, but it was tabled abruptly because that discussion had happened and because the Selectmen have purchased abutting properties in preparation for this project. Mr. Davison stated that there have been staffing and location studies in the 80s, 90s and early 2000s to determine the best location. This location avoids the need to add a third fire station at the end of Greendale Ave.

Mr. Connelly stated that the School Superintendent submitted his budget recommendation, and it is well considered. He stated that the liaisons are looking at the requested increase in FTEs and the projected changes in enrollment, as well as the issue of level service increases vs. additional needs. Mr. Zimbone stated that it is important to look at which requested positions will be new, and which are already filled but were not yet included in the budget.

### **Adjournment**

MOVED: By Mr. Lavery that the Finance Committee meeting be adjourned, as there was no further business. Mr. Lunetta seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion was approved by a vote of 7-0, at approximately 8:29 p.m.

Documents: Department Spending Requests FY2018

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Mizgerd  
Staff Analyst