

Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of April 21, 2021

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chair Carol Fachetti at approximately 7:00 pm via Zoom Video conference:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88997598432?pwd=bndhV1ZxVFZOZC95ajhGckExZHU3Zz09>

Present from the Finance Committee:

Carol Fachetti, Chair ; Joshua Levy, Vice Chair

Members: Barry Coffman, John Connelly, James Healy, Tom Jacob, Richard Lunetta, Richard Reilly

Others:

David Davison, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

Citizen Requests to Address the Finance Committee

No requests to speak.

Warrant Articles

May Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 1 - Collective Bargaining: Independent Town Workers Association

Mr. Davison stated that the union voted on April 20 to accept the agreement, which is consistent with the terms discussed in the executive session. The Select Board has not yet voted, and is planning to vote on April 27. Mr. Healy stated that the Finance Committee should wait until the Board has voted since they are the proponents. Mr. Connelly was frustrated that the Committee was presented with this agreement after the deadline for posting presentations on articles which is requiring the Committee to extend its schedule and hold an additional meeting. The Committee agreed to meet on April 28 to vote.

May Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 24 - CPA - Emery Grover Renovation Design

Ms. Fachetti stated that there was a Chairs/Vice Chairs meeting late week. The Select Board would like to convene a working group with members of the School Committee, Select Board, and Finance Committee to consider a financing plan for Emery Grover as part of a town-wide comprehensive financing plan. Earlier this week, Dr. Gutekanst asked the CPC to defer the funding application for Emery Grover renovations. It is anticipated that the Select Board will withdraw this article.

May Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 35 - General Fund Cash Capital

Ms. Fachetti stated that the Finance Committee voted to recommend funding the items in the article except for two items: the Ridge Hill demolition and the Pollard feasibility study. The Town Manager has asked to create a task force to consider the demolition of the Ridge Hill buildings, and what should be done on that site. Mr. Reilly offered to join the task force. Mr. Lunetta stated that he would like to join as well. Mr. Davison stated that it is his understanding that the Select Board voted in favor of the article, but they plan to present an amendment to

Town Meeting consistent with the Finance Committee's recommendation. The Committee agreed to review and vote on the amendment at the April 28 meeting.

May Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 37 - Public Safety Buildings Construction

Mr. Connelly stated that at the Chairs' meeting last week, there was further discussion about the amount of this Public Safety construction appropriation. He stated that he continued to support reducing it to \$1 million, as opposed to the \$1.4 million amount proposed by the PPBC, in light of the progress of the project and the remaining work. He stated that he spoke with Stuart Chandler, Chair of the PPBC, who felt that \$1.4 million is the correct amount despite the Finance Committee's lower recommendation. Mr. Connelly stated that he has decided that he will not stand in the way of the appropriation. He has been assured that the Town will not spend any money that it does not have to, and that appropriating this amount will eliminate the possibility of having to ask for more funds later. He therefore feels that the Committee should support the article at \$1.4 million, despite his strong feelings on the issue.

MOVED: By Mr. Healy that the Finance Committee reconsider its vote on May 2021 Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 37 - Appropriate for Public Safety Buildings Construction. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 8-0.

MOVED: By Mr. Healy that the Finance Committee recommend adoption of May 2021 Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 37 - Appropriate for Public Safety Buildings Construction, as amended to \$1.4 million. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 8-0.

May Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 13 - Public Health Consulting Assistance

Ms. Fachetti stated that the Finance Committee had a tie vote on this article last week, which means that if nothing is changed, the Committee will not be able to take a position at Town Meeting. Mr. Lunetta stated that the Committee voted against the Planning consulting funds when the Planning Board had some idea of what they would use the funds for since the identified need should be requested through the operating budget. In this case, the Board of Health does not know what they will be using the funds for, or when, but they need to have discretionary funds available to bring in additional expertise. Mr. Connelly stated that he felt that if an identified need is not contemporaneous with the development of the budget, as the Planning Board described, then the Reserve Fund provides a mechanism to provide funding. In this case, however, he feels that he cannot vote for something unspecified. He would support a funding request if there were a specified need. Mr. Lunetta stated that the Finance Committee does not have the expertise to assess whether or not a health related need is appropriate, so the Committee should not require the BOH to ask the Committee for the funds. He trusts that if they have access to the funds, the BOH will spend them wisely.

Mr. Healy stated that he debated this point with Mr. Reilly last week, and does not agree with Mr. Lunetta. The Committee regularly is confronted with issues outside of its expertise and relies on the expertise of others to make recommendations, which our Committee would accept unless we had reasonable fact-based reasons not to do so. However, Mr. Healy stated he does not recommend giving departments an unqualified ability to spend funds without having first provided a clear description of the need and requested amount. Mr. Reilly stated that the

argument is internally inconsistent. If the funds were in the operating budget, the Committee would not pass judgment on whether a specific use is appropriate. Instead, they have asked for funds to be available to draw down as needed. It is inconsistent to allow them such authority with funds in the operating budget but not with funds from a warrant article. Mr. Healy posited that if the requested funds were included in the Operating Budget, the Committee would look at the request and consider whether it is an appropriate expenditure to recommend to Town Meeting. Our Committee's review process in each circumstance is the same – whether we analyze the request in the Operating Budget or in a request for Reserve Fund transfer, we look at the appropriateness of the request and whether we should recommend it be funded. He asked what the harm is in requiring these boards to come request a Reserve Fund transfer when a future issue arises to explain the need and the amount of funds requested. Mr. Reilly stated that implicit in the fact that the Finance Committee is requiring these boards to come to the Finance Committee to request a Reserve Fund is the notion that the Finance Committee has veto power over the expenditure. He pointed out that the Committee has never questioned the Legal Department budget which provides funds for the Town Counsel to hire outside counsel, despite the fact that there is much legal expertise on the Finance Committee.

Mr. Levy stated that he voted differently on the Planning Board and BOH requests. He voted against the Planning consulting funds because they expended the last funds differently than they indicated in their request. Mr. Coffman stated that the issue is what level of scrutiny is given to the discretionary use of funds. He stated that he is willing to give the BOH the benefit of the doubt to spend the money as described, and does not think that there needs to be an emergency issue to use the funds when they need expert opinions.

MOVED: By Mr. Reilly that the Finance Committee reconsider its vote on May 2021 Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 13 - Appropriate to Public Health Consulting Assistance. Mr. Coffman seconded the motion. The motion was approved, due to a by a vote of 5-3, with Mr. Lunetta, Mr. Reilly, Mr. Coffman, Mr. Jacob and Ms. Fachetti in favor and Mr. Healy, Mr. Levy and Mr. Connelly voting against the motion.

Mr. Healy and Mr. Levy indicated that they did not support voting this article again without every member who has voted the first time being present.

MOVED: By Mr. Reilly that the Finance Committee recommend adoption of May 2021 Special Town Meeting Warrant Article 13 - Appropriate to Public Health Consulting Assistance in the amount of \$50,000. Mr. Lunetta seconded the motion. The motion was approved, due to a by a vote of 5-3, with Mr. Lunetta, Mr. Reilly, Mr. Coffman, Mr. Jacob and Mr. Levy in favor, and Mr. Healy, Ms. Fachetti and Mr. Connelly voting against the motion.

Updates:

The Committee will hold a brief meeting on April 28 to discuss the ITWA union article and to consider the Select Board's anticipated amendment to the Cash Capital article.

Adjournment

MOVED: By Mr. Reilly that the Finance Committee meeting be adjourned, there being no further business. Mr. Coffman seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote of 8-0 at approximately 7:47 p.m.

Documents: Town of Needham 2021 Annual Town Meeting Warrant; Town of Needham May 2021 Special Town Meeting Warrant; NIPEA Memorandum of Agreement, Fiscal Year 2022; Police Union Memorandum of Agreement, Fiscal Year 2021; Police Superior Officers Association Memorandum of Agreement, Fiscal Year 2021.

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Mizgerd
Staff Analyst

Approved April 28, 2021