

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of March 18, 2009**

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by the Chair, David Escalante, at 7:05 pm in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at Town Hall.

Present from the	David Escalante, Chair	Richard Reilly
Finance Committee:	Lisa Zappala, Vice Chair	Steven Rosenstock
	Scott Brightman	Michael Taggart
	Richard Creem	

Also Present: David Davison, Assistant Town Manager / Finance Director

There were no public comments.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 50 - Appropriate for Athletic Facility Maintenance: Present for the discussion were Mr. Healy, chair of the Board of Selectmen, Mr. Nadler, vice-chair of the Park and Recreation Commission, and Ms. Carey, Park and Recreation Department Director. The request is for funding for work at the Asa Small field, which is a Little League field at the DeFazio Park. The irrigation system has been cut off as a result of the fields work at DeFazio. The irrigation system needed upgrading even before it had been cut off. The fences at Asa Small date to 1959. The funding for this article will be from funds remaining from appropriations under Article 33 of the May 2005 Annual Town Meeting, Article 36 of the May 2004 Annual Town Meeting and Article 4 of the March 3, 2008 Special Town Meeting. The Asa Small field is the top priority of the field improvement plan developed by the Parks and Forestry Division of the Department of Public Works. Mr. Healy stated that repairs to fields are generally not made. This year, there is an opportunity to do the needed work at the Asa Small field because there are unused funds from prior appropriations. It is good policy to promote efficiency from a department and use any unspent funds to fund additional work for that department. Asa Small is heavily used for Little League in the spring, for summer baseball, and for fall baseball. The Asa Small field work would allow the DeFazio Park fields to be complete. The only remaining work at DeFazio would be the parking lot. The use of aluminum bats creates a safety issue that requires a fence around the field. The other reason for the fence is that the Small field is a Little League majors field which requires a boundary for home runs. The only other majors field is Mills. The player benches will be made of resin and anchored to the ground. Little League contributed \$50,000 to \$75,000 to DeFazio. No further contributions for the work at the Asa Small field were sought from Little League. The work would take approximately three weeks. It could be done in the fall and displace only the fall baseball season games.

The Capital Improvement Plan has included work at Asa Small for two years. The Asa Small work was prioritized but unfunded in the May 2008 Annual Town Meeting Cash Capital appropriation.

Mr. Escalante stated that he is concerned about the \$1,000,000 shortfall in Cash Capital. Mr. Healy stated that there must be a mix of capital projects that are funded otherwise some projects will never get done.

Mr. Brightman moved that the Finance Committee recommend adoption of Annual Town Meeting Warrant Article 50, entitled "Appropriate for Athletic Facility Maintenance", amended to reflect that \$83,200 be transferred from Article 4 of the March 3, 2008 Special Town Meeting. Mr. Creem seconded the motion. Discussion: Mr. Reilly stated that he would like to see what the other capital items are that are not being funded this year before voting. Mr. Taggart stated that he is inclined to support this Article but sees no harm in looking at the other capital items. Ms. Zappala stated that she is in favor of this Article whether the Article is voted now or later. Mr. Rosenstock stated that he would vote in favor of this Article. Generally the Town does not cut services when revenue is down. Instead the Town tends to defer maintenance on infrastructure. The field work is infrastructure maintenance for the Town. Mr. Brightman stated that he supports this Article. He has stated that Little League fields need to be renovated. The work at Asa Small needs to be done. Mr. Escalante stated that he would vote against this Article. Mr. Creem stated that some of the funds for this Article are derived from the extraordinary Free Cash amount in FY 2008. An argument could be made that the funds should be appropriated to one of the Reserve Funds. Mr. Creem stated that, after hearing the presentation on the Article, is convinced that the funds should be spent on the Asa Small field, whether the Article is voted today or at a later time.

Mr. Taggart moved that the vote on Mr. Brightman's motion be postponed to a time certain, namely at the conclusion of the vote of the Finance Committee's recommendation on Article 45 of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant, entitled "Appropriate to Cash Capital." Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Discussion: none. Mr. Taggart's motion was approved by a vote of 4-3 (Mr. Reilly, Mr. Taggart, Mr. Escalante, and Ms. Zappala voted in favor of the motion. Mr. Creem, Mr., Brightman, and Mr. Rosenstock voted against the motion).

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 21: Citizens' Petition – Natural Resources Committee: Ms. Abbott represented the Citizens. Ms. Abbott stated that one purpose of the Petition is to determine whether it would be beneficial for the Town to have a Natural Resources Board or Committee. The mission of the Conservation Commission does not include what the mission of a Natural Resources Board or Committee would be. Ms. Abbott stated that one goal would be to inventory the Town's natural resources and determine how to protect them. There was a discussion of how to explore the need for a Natural Resources Committee and whether Ms. Abbott should be speaking first with the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen. There was a discussion whether a governmental committee is needed or whether a private citizens' committee would be appropriate. There was a discussion of the source of funding for the exploration of a Natural Resources Committee. There was a discussion of how other towns handle their Conservation Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, and a Natural Resources Committee.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 16: Changes to Wetlands Protection By-Law: Present for the discussion was Dr. Standley, Chair of the Conservation Commission. Dr. Standley stated that the Warrant Article seeks to make minor rewording amendments to the Wetlands Protection By-Law. Typographical errors are being corrected. The abutter notification is being changed. The Commission is being given latitude to waive or reduce certain fees. The amount for fines for violations of the regulations is being increased to up to \$300 per day per offense. Fines are General Fund revenue. The waiver of

fees may result in a small reduction of revenue collected by the Town, but the amount for fines is being increased.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 37- Appropriate for CPA/Design Funds for All-Person's Trail Around Needham Reservoir: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Community Preservation Committee member, Ms. Bernardo, CPC member, Ms. Howard, CPC vice-chair, Mr. Siegenthaler, CPC chair, and Dr. Standley. Dr. Standley stated that the request for an all-person's trail around the Needham Reservoir comes from the Town's Trails Master Plan. The existing trail is largely in the wetlands around the Reservoir and is damaging the wetlands. Dr. Standley stated that she sees the damage to the wetlands increasing with the addition of the Public Service Administration Building (PSAB). She expects employees working at the PSAB may use the trail. The proponents of the Article are the Town Manager, Park and Recreation Commission, and Conservation Commission. The \$55,000 being requested would cover the design and permitting for the ½ mile trail. The permitting is very complex as is the design to meet ADA requirements. There was a discussion whether there are any other all-person's trails in other communities that have been paid with public funds. No one could name any such trail. There was a discussion about the repairs that were funded in a previous year for the Ridge Hill trail. The work has not been done. There were no bids for the project. The proposal is being refined in the hopes that there will be a bidder. There was a discussion of whether there is a demand for an all-person's trail. Dr. Standley stated that there is a demand for trails that are easier to walk. There was a discussion about the maintenance of the proposed trail and whether the maintenance could be funded in the future with CPA funds. Currently pending legislation would clarify whether future maintenance can be funded, although members of the CPC believed that it could be funded.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 38 - Appropriate for CPA/Additional Easement Research to Complement Master Plan for Trails: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Ms. Bernardo, Ms. Howard, Mr. Siegenthaler, and Dr. Standley. The trails in Town do not connect. It is not uncommon for trails to connect through an easement on private property. This Article would provide funding to hire someone to do research into existing easements and recommend funding for future easements. It was not clear how \$25,000 was determined to be the amount of the funding. Nor was it clear how many easements there are that need to be researched.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 41 - Appropriate for CPA/Transfer of Funds to Conservation Fund for Future Open Space Purchases: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Ms. Bernardo, Ms. Howard, Mr. Siegenthaler, and Dr. Standley. The request is a second year of funding request to the Conservation Fund for future purchases of open space. The balance of the Fund was stated to be \$144,000 at the 2008 May Town Meeting. The addition would bring it to \$250,000. Mr. Davison will get information about the balance of the Fund.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 42 - Appropriate for CPA/Preservation of Open Space Purchase of Land: This Article is being withdrawn.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 36 - Appropriate for CPA/Affordable Housing Consulting Assistance: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Ms. Bernardo, Ms. Howard, Mr. Siegenthaler, and Ms. Fitzpatrick, Town Manager. The request would provide the Town Manager and the Zoning Board with the ability to obtain technical expertise from a housing consultant. The Town Manager and Zoning Board hired a housing consultant to assist with the Cabot, Cabot & Forbes 40B project. It was not clear whether this request would be a one-year request or a recurring request. There was a discussion whether a consultant could be hired out of CPA administrative funds. Mr. Siegenthaler stated that it may be preferable to fund this request from the affordable housing funds. Unused administrative funds are placed in the CPA general fund.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 39 - Appropriate for CPA/Windows/Energy Improvements for Six 40B Housing Units: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Ms. Bernardo, Ms. Howard, and Mr. Siegenthaler. The Charles River Center owns a 6-unit house. The requested amount is based on bids received from various contractors. The group home is owned by a non-profit corporation. The replacement of the windows upgrades existing affordable housing to ensure that the housing is comfortable. There was a discussion of whether CPA funds should be used for maintenance of existing affordable housing or whether it should be used to add to the affordable housing stock. There was a discussion whether CPA funds should be used to maintain property owned by non-profit corporations or other entities rather than Town-owned or State-owned affordable housing. There was a discussion of whether an articulated policy should be implemented.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 40 - Appropriate for CPA/High Rock Homes: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Ms. Bernardo, Ms. Howard, and Mr. Siegenthaler. This request is to pay down three units and a fourth unit if outside funding of \$50,000 is obtained. The pay down would make the units affordable to people with 80% of the area medium income (AMI) instead of the planned 110% of AMI. Any reduced price unit will be able to be counted toward the Town's 40B housing stock. If this Article is approved, there will still be over \$200,000 in the affordable housing funds, including the expected contribution of \$182,000 at the May Town Meeting.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 35: Appropriate for CPA/Town Hall Historic Preservation: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Ms. Bernardo, Ms. Howard, and Mr. Siegenthaler. Funding the Town Hall construction will zero out the CPA historic reserve and the entire historic reserve funds to be allocated in May at Town Meeting. The remainder of the cash will be from the General Reserve. 65% of the CPA surcharge will be used for the debt service on Town Hall. Each year that the CPA continues to be in effect, each of the three CPA reserves will be allocated 10% as required by law. In addition, 5% will be allocable each year to administrative costs. There was a discussion of bond counsel's letter concerning the architect's estimate of CPA eligibility of the Town Hall project. The CPC is comfortable with the estimate of eligibility provided by the architect. There was a discussion how the CPA eligibility would be reassessed if there are costs savings. Any cost savings would be in material costs rather than labor costs, which have not changed much. If the budget is tight, then the Furniture, Fixtures, and Equipment budget for the project would probably be tightened.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 43: Appropriate to Community Preservation Fund: Present for the discussion were Mr. Gluesing, Ms. Bernardo, Ms. Howard, and Mr. Siegenthaler. Mr. Creem requested that the CPC provide alternative scenarios for funding based on whether CPA articles are funded at Town Meeting. Mr. Siegenthaler stated that, this year, there will be known allocations to the open space and affordable housing reserves. There will be no allocation to the historic reserve fund. The administrative allocation will be 5%.

Finance Committee Updates: The appropriation for the design of the Newman School repairs will be on the May Special Town Meeting Warrant. There may be a special election and Special Town Meeting in early December. The School Department will be asked to clarify why surplus funds in the cafeteria revolving fund can be used to fund a new kitchen at High Rock but not to fund renovations of an existing kitchen at Newman.

Mr. Rosenstock moved to adjourn the meeting at approximately 10:45 pm, seconded by Ms. Zappala. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote: 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Miller
Executive Secretary