

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of February 4, 2009**

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by the Chair, David Escalante, at 7:00 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
	Richard Creem	Michael Taggart
		Richard Zimbone

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

There were no public comments.

Zoning Board of Appeals Budget Review: Ms. Zappala presented the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) Budget. The cost for personnel is down because the total number of full-time employee equivalents (FTEs) is down. Communication expenses are requested to be budgeted at \$3,500 rather than \$3,000 to cover the cost of legal ads for the posting of ZBA hearings. The professional and technical expenses are for conferences and training in Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B regulations.

Minuteman Regional High School Budget Review: Mr. Taggart stated that there is an increase in enrollment of one student for Needham. The overall enrollment at the Minuteman Regional High School is down. Mr. Rosenstock stated that Needham pays more per student for tuition than towns that are not part of the Minuteman Regional School. The final Minuteman assessment generally is provided to Needham before the March 15 deadline for the Finance Committee to submit its budget recommendation for inclusion in the Annual Town Meeting Warrant.

Memorial Park Trustees Budget Review: Present for the discussion were Mr. DiCicco, Memorial Park Trustee, and Ms. Carey, Park and Recreation Department Director. The Memorial Park Trustees' budget is \$750. They have submitted a DSR-4 for \$3,000 to replace the appliances in their concession stand. They do not charge for use of the concession stand. There is a revolving fund for the concession stand. They receive donations. There are not sufficient donations to cover the cost of the appliances. Mr. DiCicco also stated that there are other needs for items for Memorial Park, such as netting in the parking lot. There was a discussion of the energy costs for Memorial Park being budgeted in the Department of Public Works Parks and Forestry budget. There was a discussion of the maintenance of the field house and the concession stand. The Memorial Park Trustees do not have a budget for maintenance. There was a discussion of the condition of the field house. There was a discussion of the gate receipts for sports events. The gate receipts for High School games go to the School Department. Concession receipts go to the concession users.

There was a discussion of the capital needs of the Memorial Park Trustees: perimeter fencing, crowd control fencing, bleachers, player benches, netting to the parking lot. For the field house, the capital needs are for carpeting, exterior doors and garage doors.

Mr. DiCicco stated that the Memorial Park is used. It recently hosted the Vietnam Wall for Veterans. Mr. Rosenstock commented on the maintenance needs and the need for the Town to address items before they become catastrophes.

Department of Public Works – Parks and Forestry Budget Review: Present for the discussion was Mr. Remsen, Manager of the Parks and Forestry Division of the Department of Public Works (DPW). Mr. Remsen stated that there is a need for fencing at the top of the hill for the Memorial Park fields. The main concern from Mr. Remsen's perspective is protection of the fields. There are construction barrels and rope in lieu of fencing from the flagpole to the walkway at the top of the hill. The guard rail on Admiral Gracey Way is deteriorating. The parking lot fencing was taken down and not replaced.

The two main increases to the Parks and Forestry budget are for vehicle supplies (fuel) and grounds keeping supplies (the price of fertilizers is up 40 to 50%). Mr. Remsen has some concerns with the maintenance needs of the two major field facilities coming on line. Mr. Remsen discussed briefly the maintenance of the artificial turf fields. Mr. Remsen stated that different field complexes require different maintenance. Any comparisons in terms of cost that were provided between natural and artificial turf were determined based on acreage. The bottom line for Mr. Remsen's budget request is that no additional money is being sought for maintenance and there is no reduction to the budget. There was a discussion of the mowing needs of the two field facilities. Mr. Remsen stated that mowing is only one component of the maintenance. There is more trimming work required for the new facilities. The new natural turf fields will also require more fertilizer applications, from 3 annual applications to 5 annual applications. There was a discussion that there will not be hard covers purchased for the artificial turf field at Memorial Park to accommodate the High School graduation. Mr. Remsen believes that additional intensive grooming of the field will be sufficient to maintain it. There was a discussion of the adjustment in the High Rock override to the Department of Public Works budget. Mr. Davison stated that the funds allocated to the DPW were reduced because the amount of work that will be needed at High Rock is less than originally anticipated.

There was a discussion of the DSR-4 request for the organic fertilizer program for the new fields. Mr. Remsen stated that the program would be the same program that was done at Cricket. Mr. Remsen stated that he has a maintenance database where he is tracking the maintenance work at Cricket and the maintenance work that will be done at the new fields. There was a discussion that the natural turf fields at DeFazio will not be ready for use until the spring of 2010. Mr. Remsen described the process of seeding and fertilizing. There was a discussion whether fertilizer prices would adjust downward with the downward adjustment of fuel prices. There was a discussion of the fencing request at Memorial. Mr. Remsen stated that his primary concern is the security of the facility. He stated that there only need to be adequate openings in the fencing for people to walk in. The fencing in the parking lot is to separate the field from the parking lot.

Discussion of Board of Health Budget Request: Present for the discussion were Ms. Berns, Manager of the Health Department, Dr. Connolly, Chair of the Board of Health, and Drs. Cosgrove and Epstein, members of the Board of Health. The Board of Health has made a request for \$3,600 for the testing of artificial turf fields. Dr. Connolly stated that there are no known problems with artificial turf fields. The testing is to monitor the degradation of the infill over time. The testing would be a once per year prophylactic testing. There was a discussion of what happens to the rubber infill when it is heated. Dr. Connolly stated that there is literature on health concerns of plastic bottles. There is no literature on crumb rubber. Dr. Connolly stated that there is no evidence that crumb rubber is bad, but it would still be prudent to test it once per year. There was a discussion of whether other towns that have put down artificial turf fields are testing and whether efforts could somehow be combined. There was a discussion of acceptable lead levels and acceptable levels of other compounds. Dr. Epstein stated that children are tested at a very young age for lead. Older children and adults are not tested. Dr. Connolly stated that there is no clarity on the acceptable standards for various compounds or the acceptable standards for sports fields. Dr. Cosgrove stated that the Board of Health had a citizen group raise serious concerns. The Board of Health did a literature search and contacted the Department of Public Health (DPH). The DPH stated that there is no real reliable data. The Board of Health did not give its blessing to the artificial turf fields. The Board of Health could have shut down the fields. Instead, it stated that it would want to see testing of the fields as the infill degraded. There was a discussion of which compounds should be tested. There was a discussion of what actions the Board of Health may take if the request for testing were not funded. Dr. Connolly stated that year 1 testing is to provide a baseline for various compounds. Annual testing thereafter will be requested.

Draft Operating Budget Review: Present for the discussion was Ms. Fitzpatrick, Town Manager. Mr. Escalante provided an overview of the Draft Operating Budget. There are no staff cuts, except those proposed by the School Department. The Draft Operating Budget is a level service budget. It is not feasible to add any positions based on the projected revenue. Mr. Escalante would like a list of additional items to be funded should additional revenue become available. The 5.3% increase in the budget includes the High Rock operating override. Mr. Escalante reviewed the lines of the draft Operating Budget. Mr. Escalante highlighted the \$25,000 request for the computer replacement cycle by the Information Technology Department, within the Finance Department budget. Mr. Escalante stated that the Minuteman Regional High School assessment estimate seems low. The Municipal Lighting budget assumes certain savings in energy costs from the replacement of fixtures with more energy efficient fixtures. Mr. Escalante stated that there are some items that would be nice to fund such as additional funds in the Workmen's Compensation Fund, additional funds for grounds keeping, additional funding for the Library.

There was a discussion whether the Finance Committee is trying to achieve a level service budget or whether more funds should be spent on maintenance. Mr. Rosenstock stated that the Finance Committee should be doing more to push for capital planning. He stated that three years ago he addressed Town Meeting regarding a capital needs assessment. He still believes that the Town is not addressing the long-term maintenance planning of its buildings. One possibility would be to reduce some of the operating budget

to work on building maintenance needs. Mr. Escalante stated that the Finance Committee has been talking about maintenance needs for some time. One problem is that many of the requests in the Operating Budget are not for the long-term maintenance needs of the buildings. Mr. Zimbone suggested that the Public Facilities Department budget could be reduced based on expected energy savings. Cutting the budget may incentivize energy cost savings measures. Mr. Rosenstock stated that the budget could be reduced by 1% across the board and those funds put toward maintenance. There was a discussion whether a 1% cut across the board could be effectuated without affecting the level of services provided. Mr. Zimbone stated that there are some items of maintenance that the Finance Committee is not recommending for funding, such as the physical plant director at the High School. Mr. Escalante stated that putting together the operating budget is a balancing act. Mr. Reilly stated that one issue is a lack of an articulated maintenance standard. There needs to be a meaningful number attached to maintenance needs. Ms. Zappala stated that the trade-off between a 1% cut to the budget and the increase in maintenance would need to be articulated. Ms. Zappala stated that the Town Management should be given the chance to develop a maintenance plan. What needs to be funded is money for a consultant to help develop the maintenance plan. Mr. Zimbone stated that he is not sure about sacrificing the operating budget for maintenance. Mr. Zimbone stated that Mr. Laffey is trying to develop a maintenance plan, and has developed a maintenance work order program. Any energy consumption savings should be put into a maintenance budget. Mr. Creem stated that the Finance Committee should balance present and future needs of the Town. The Finance Committee should not shortchange present needs but should look for opportunities to augment the maintenance budget in the future. Mr. Taggart stated that he is intrigued by Mr. Rosenstock's proposal and that it may make sense to do an in-depth analysis of what would happen if the proposal were implemented. Mr. Davison stated that the Town is moving in the direction that Mr. Rosenstock is suggesting by increasing maintenance funding. Mr. Davison cautioned that cutting the operating budget too deeply would result in a Town with well-maintained buildings but inadequate services. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that maintenance plans will be developed for new buildings as they get done. The maintenance plans will then be used as a model for older buildings.

There was a discussion of revenue assumptions. The only amount of revenue that the Finance Committee can assume is the estimate from Mr. Davison.

There was a discussion of the field testing for \$3,600. There was a discussion that the testing should not be just for the sake of testing. There was a discussion of what it means to have a baseline for the fields. Mr. Zimbone stated that he would like to discuss further the .5 FTE teacher cut in the School Department budget.

There was a discussion of the doubling of the Town's maintenance budget in the capital plan. Mr. Rosenstock stated that the increased amount will in part serve to do maintenance work that was not done because the maintenance funds were used for work at the Newman School.

There was a brief discussion regarding the amount of Free Cash that is allocated to the Operating Budget. The Finance Committee looks to allocating no more Free Cash to the Operating Budget than approximately 2% of the Operating Budget.

Updates: Mr. Zimbone reported that the School Department is preparing an estimate of year-end savings based on the second quarter report.

Mr. Rosenstock moved to adjourn the meeting at approximately 11:00 pm, seconded by Mr. Zimbone. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote: 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Miller
Executive Secretary