

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of April 7, 2021**

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Executive Session of the Finance Committee was called to order by the Carol Fachetti at approximately 7:10 pm via Zoom Video Webinar after a unanimous roll call vote by the Committee during an open meeting to enter Executive Session under Exception 3. This was a combined meeting with the Select Board also convened in executive session.

Present from the Finance Committee:

Carol Fachetti, Chair ; Joshua Levy, Vice Chair

Members: Barry Coffman, John Connelly, James Healy, Richard Lunetta, Louise Miller, Richard Reilly

Others:

Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager

David Davison, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

Dan Matthews, Select Board

Collective Bargaining

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that she wanted to update the Committee on where the union negotiations stand. She stated that there are tentative agreements with the Police Union, and Police Superior Officers Union, the Independent Town Workers' Association (ITWA), and the Needham Independent Public Employees Association (NIPEA), which is the DPW union. She stated that they are still bargaining with the Fire Union, so she expects that there will be no agreement in time for Town Meeting.

She stated that the Police and Police Superior Officers have agreed to a 1-year extension through FY21 that will give them a 3% wage increase, as well as an increase in the detail rate. In exchange, they have agreed to work with the Town in good faith to negotiate an alternative to Civil Service which is not working well for the Town because there is less control over hires. They understand that the next agreement needs to be a multi-year agreement with the way to the alternative system. She stated that it has been difficult this year to bargain during the pandemic over zoom. She stated that the Police have been out on the street all year through very difficult times.

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that the Town is seeking to enter into a 3-year agreement with ITWA. In FY22, the will implement the new Classification and Compensation study recommendations, which will be comparable to an increase of approximately 2% across all departments across the budget. So there would be no other increase or COLA. There is a proposed 1% wage increase in FY23 and 2.5% in FY24.

Ms. Fitzpatrick stated NIPEA has agreed to a one-year extension of its agreement, and implementation of the Classification and Compensation recommendations. It has been difficult to negotiate with this bargaining unit since people are not working in the office. She stated that she is hopeful to present these terms to the Select Board next week.

Mr. Lunetta asked how much the Police detail rate is increasing. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that last year, there was a survey of detail rates in other communities, and they set a goal of increasing to \$55 per hour. Last year, they increased to get half way there, and this is the second half. The increase is approximately \$3.50 per hour.

Mr. Lunetta asked about the amount of the salary increase for the Needham Independent Public Employees Association. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that the Town is seeking to implement the new recommendations in the classification and compensation study. She stated they are looking to enter into an agreement with the Fire Union next year. Mr. Matthews stated that the Select Board is expecting some pushback on the Police agreement, but that it has been a high stress year. Mr. Healy agreed that is very difficult and stressful to be a police officer at the present time, and that is borne out by the number of officers who have recently resigned or retired. Mr. Matthews stated that it is in the best interests of the Town to get out of the Civil Service system, and that needs to be done through collective bargaining. He stated that the Town wants to diversify the public safety departments but that can't be done under Civil Service. He stated that the Town needs to exit Civil Service to have accountability. The unions are concerned with job security. He stated that the agreement being recommended does not get out of Civil Service, but the union has committed to bargaining the issue in good faith. The Police have worked hard throughout the pandemic, and some officers got COVID-19. There has been much direct and indirect stress. There is not sufficient time to fully negotiate, but the Town wants to move forward to this extent. They feel this COLA is the right answer to the unions' commitment to negotiate. Ms. Miller stated that it does make sense to examine the issues of Civil Service and needed reforms, but she does not think getting out of Civil Service would answer all of the questions raised, and may not be as important to Police reform as stated. Mr. Matthews stated that Civil Service would be replaced by different collective bargaining regulations and state law, and he feels that it is the right course, and that the Town would be better off. Mr. Healy stated that he would caution the Town not to make dramatic changes in the Police Department based on certain events in 2020, and that it might be better to look at this Department over a longer period of analysis. Mr. Matthews stated that this has been a priority of the Select Board since before the pandemic and the events in Minneapolis that have led to national movement pushing for police reform.

Mr. Coffman asked how getting out of the Civil Service system will provide more flexibility to the Town. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated that Civil Service relies on a statewide test every other year and creates an order based on test results, and it then advantages veterans and children of deceased officers. The system tends to create a white male dominated list. Being out of Civil Service will give the Town more control over hiring. She noted that the Police Reform law includes a commission to study Civil Service. Mr. Levy stated that the Police may want a significant financial increase in exchange for the change, and the Town may not be interested. Mr. Matthews stated that there is still significant negotiating to be done, which cannot be finished before Town Meeting.

Return to Open Session

MOVED: By Mr. Healy that the Finance Committee exit the Executive Session and return to Open Session. Mr. Lunetta seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote of 9-0 at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Mizgerd
Staff Analyst

Documents: Town of Needham Classification and Compensation Study, Final Report, March 2021.