

**Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for Tuesday, November 26, 2024
Select Board Chambers and
Via ZOOM
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89068374046>**

6:00 p.m. Call to Order:

A meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair Kevin Keane. Those present were Vice Chair Heidi Frail, Marianne Cooley, Joshua Levy, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick. David Davison, Deputy Town Manager/Director of Finance, Katie King, Deputy Town Manager, and Susan Metropol, Recording Secretary, were also in attendance.

6:01 p.m. Public Comment Period:

Julie Tracey, 33 Beech Street, commented on the proposed off-leash dog park at Mills Field. Mills Field is used in many ways, with tennis courts, pickleball courts, high school tennis matches, a tot lot, batting cages, a baseball field, and a basketball court. The pre-school nearby also uses the tot lot every day during the summer. There are more than 30 trees in the open space, which makes the creation of a meandering trail unrealistic. She encouraged Select Board members to spend time at Mills Field when there are people and activities to see how busy it can be. Ms. Tracey also clarified that Mills Field is not currently being used as an off-leash dog park; it is being used occasionally in this way by nearby residents but not for more than one or two dogs at a time. She also noted that an off-leash dog park would not result in a negligible amount of noise as was suggested at the prior Select Board meeting. Finally, she noted that this area often floods, which would require an engineer to evaluate the space in order to maintain a clean outdoor space.

Gary Ajamian, 47 Meetinghouse Circle, shared his thoughts on the upcoming MBTA special election coming up on January 14, 2025. As a newer Town Meeting Member, he canvassed as many residents as he was able to and found that many of them support the state mandate and they believe that we should go no further than the state mandate. The intent is to comply with the law responsibly while preserving the character of our Town, respecting current and hopeful future residents. He argued that this intent to go further than the state mandate does not actually encourage home ownership and lacks the controls that the Town could have to designate open spaces or protect housing for seniors. He cited 100 West Street as an example. He commented that rezoning will work more in favor of urbanizing our suburban town, and it deserves input from all citizens.

Nathan Levin, 39 Lantern Lane, commented that the Finance Committee voted in favor of Articles 8 and 9 but against Articles 10 and 11. According to the Finance Committee, the Neighborhood Plan should be viewed by what is allowed, not by what is likely. He commented that there are no guardrails in the event that the likely

scenario is surpassed in terms of construction in a quicker timeframe than has been anticipated. Additionally, there is no data to show how well the models used to make projections have worked in the past. The schools are full, and infrastructure is burdened. Although the Neighborhood Plan was supported by 118 Town Meeting members, 90 members voted against, and 40 members chose not to vote.

Barbara McDonald, 147 Pickering Street, expressed her opinion against about the Neighborhood Plan. She commented that the street she lives is on already very busy, and she cannot envision what it would look like having a 4.5 story residential building next to her home. She cited her concerns about traffic and parking.

Jane Volden, 133 Brookside Road, suggested that the Town Manager request a 3-month extension to the deadline and cited the city of Newton as an example of a municipality being granted an extension. Ms. Volden expressed her concern that non-compliance is being used as a tool to divide our Town and influence our voters who should only be focused on the choice at hand.

6:15 p.m. Public Hearing: Grant of Location – Tolman Street:
Presenter: Alex Marrero, Verizon Representative

Verizon New England requested permission to install 1 JO Pole, P.3 on the westerly side of Tolman Street, approximately 75 feet southwesterly from existing JO Pole, P.2. The reason for this work is to provide service to 29 Tolman Street.

The Department of Public Works has approved this petition, based on Verizon New England and Eversource Energy's commitment to adhere to the Town's regulation that all conduit installed must be 3" schedule 40 minimum; and, that when buried, that conduit must be placed at 24" below grade to the top of the conduit.

David Rush, 21 Rosemary Street, commented that he believes overground service is unsightly and presented the policy of the Town of Wellesley, where new poles are not permitted. He asked why underground service was not considered or pursued in this case. Mr. Marrero responded that currently there are no existing underground services on either Tolman Street or High Rock Street, therefore if the homeowner at 29 Tolman Street wanted it then they would have to pay for this. Neither Verizon nor Eversource would install an underground service at their expense. Ms. Fitzpatrick noted that the Town of Wellesley runs a municipal light plant and can control the funding for underground service.

Eric Shaff, 23 Tolman Street, the abutting property, noted that the pole is to be placed in front of his home. He asked why the pole cannot be placed at the site of the new construction. Discussion ensued regarding the proposed location of the pole and the planned driveway of the new home. Ms. Fitzpatrick noted anyone who is an abutter is advised to arrange a meeting directly with Verizon via Mr. Marrero.

Danen Cunoosamy, 5 Brackett Street, suggested that the new pole be in the middle of the two new properties, 35 and 29 Tolman Street.

Mr. Marrero clarified that 35 Tolman Street residents will be serviced from High Rock Street, but this pole cannot service 29 Tolman Street as it would trespass on 35 Tolman Street. After discussion, Select Board members determined the preferred course of action is to arrange a meeting to clarify. Ms. Fitzpatrick noted that the parties should contact the Town, and they will help the parties connect.

Motion by Mr. Levy that the Board vote to continue this hearing on December 3 at 6 p.m.

Second: Ms. Frail. Unanimously approved 4-0.

6:29 p.m.

WestMetro HOME Consortium Update:

Presenter: Alison Steinfeld, Community Housing Specialist

Alison Steinfeld, Community Housing Specialist, provided an overview of the WestMetro HOME Consortium, which administers federal funds to create affordable housing for low-income households. The City of Newton administers the Consortium on behalf of 13 member communities including Needham. The funding is allocated by formula to the Consortium which then distributes funding to its members. This update is part of the process to update the HOME Consortium's Consolidated Plan for FY26-30. There are three categories of funding:

- HOME Administrative Costs: approximately \$3,000 per fiscal year. Reimburses the Town for a significant portion of the salary of the Community Housing Specialist for HOME-related work.
- Project/Program Costs: approximately \$30,000 per fiscal year. Typically, members relinquish these funds to the Competitive Pool.
- Competitive Pool: awards funds for selected major projects that fall within the HOME guidelines. The Consortium just released an RFP for \$303,383, which was forwarded to the Needham Housing Association (NHA). Although NHA received a \$500,000 HOME grant under the American Rescue Plan, neither NHA nor the Town has received any regular HOME funds since 2013 when HOME awarded 1285 South Street/Charles River Center a \$280,000 grant.

In exchange for access to HOME funding, Needham has certain responsibilities, including executing a sub-recipient grant agreement with the City of Newton, ensuring that all HOME-funded projects comply with HUG regulations, participating in periodic monitoring of programs and activities, attending quarterly HOME Consortium meetings, and providing input into the Consortium's five-year Consolidated Plan. Ms. Steinfeld thanked the NHA for funding and arranging the inspection of the Charles River Center in order to remain in compliance with federal regulations.

Ms. Steinfeld emphasized that a persistent theme in the Housing Plan and the Consolidated Plan is the lack of affordable housing. Based on 2020 federal census estimates, 21% of all homeowners in Needham are spending more than 30% of their income on housing. The disparities are more pronounced amongst renters, with approximately 47% of all renters spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Ms. Steinfeld acknowledged that Needham is committed to addressing the lack of affordable housing, as evidenced by recent zoning amendments.

Select Board members asked questions about how competitive it is to receive funding, what kinds of projects the Consortiums fund, and how each piece of funding is used to leverage other investments. Funding for this year is expected soon.

6:40 p.m.

Mobility Planning & Coordination Committee Update:

Presenters: Tim Bulger, Mobility Planning & Coordination Committee Chair, Carys Lustig, Director of Public Works, Tyler Gabrielski, Director of Streets & Transportation

The Mobility Planning & Coordination Committee (MPCC), established in 2023, provided an update on the Committee's ongoing work and priorities. These include developing a Street Design Guide, updating the Town's bicycle network plan, and continuing to collaborate with the Department of Public Works during their roadway design and construction processes.

Mr. Bulger, MPCC Chair, presented an overview of the Committee's activities, working towards the Complete Streets Policy adopted by the Town in 2017 and a draft list of priorities including sidewalks, bike lanes, speed, traffic calming, School and Safety Zone standardization, and the Downtown redesign.

Mr. Bulger highlighted that one of the principal tasks of the MPCC has been developing a Street Design Guide for the Town, collaborating with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to draft a Scope to produce a document that will be a basis for the Town's transportation policy. This guide will serve to shift current Town policy to a proactive outlook that is protective of all users. The guide will also include a classification of roads, shape a more equitable transportation network with an emphasis on access and safety for vulnerable users, note areas of historical underinvestment of infrastructure, and reduce health impacts of noise and vehicle pollution. The goal of the MPCC is to develop a written document, website, and an online map to ensure effective communication with constituents. The plan is to utilize Chapter 90 funds to engage a consultant. The anticipated timeline for the publication of the RFP is January/February and for the work to be completed in 8 to 9 months, towards the end of 2025.

The second major task of the MPCC is to develop a Town Bike Map Plan. This involves creating a list of possible areas where the Town could potentially add bike infrastructure and integrate these streets into DPW's annual planning. This would

include working with Geographic Information System (GIS), a computer system, to create a visualization plan of the streets. In its initial draft, the Bike Map Plan includes approximately 10 miles of bike lanes. Mr. Gabrielski highlighted that many of the streets are already connected within the Town; this ensures that they are connected via bike lanes, thereby creating a bike network. This Bike Map Plan is an element of Neighborways, which is a proactive response to speed mitigation and a way to create a bicycle network without adding a lot of additional infrastructure.

Another task of the MPCC is the Sidewalk Renovation Program, which involves addressing the removal of sidewalks on residential streets with low pedestrian volume and simultaneously addressing inconsistencies and creating continuous sidewalk to improve access. Ms. Lustig added that the focus is currently on the Downtown business area and school walking routes. Discussion also included whether sidewalks can be redone when a new home is built, and the need for community engagement when prioritizing sidewalks to be addressed.

Mr. Bulger added that the MPCC deemed the creation of a Mountain Bike Trail to be outside of the Charge of the Committee. Discussion also included the issue of bicycles on sidewalks and the potential extension of the Orange Line to West Roxbury, which is currently not being pursued given the potential loss of mobility for Needham residents. An additional ongoing item is communication with the Dedham Active Transportation Working Group regarding the potential to add bicycle infrastructure to connect Needham Street in Dedham and Great Plain Avenue in Needham.

Select Board members expressed their appreciation to the MPCC for their efforts. Questions included concerns about children on motorized scooters and bikes, the source of the grant for the Street Design Guide, and the status of jurisdiction over state-owned versus municipal roads.

7:12 p.m. Appointment Calendar and Consent Agenda:
Motion by Ms. Cooley that the Board vote to approve the Appointment Calendar and Consent Agenda.
Second: Ms. Frail. Unanimously approved 4-0.

APPOINTMENT CALENDAR

1.	Tatiana Swanson	Needham Contributory Retirement Board (Term Expires 12/18/2027)
2.	Liz Lee	Town Manager Screening Committee – School Committee Chair (Term Expires 6/30/2025)
3.	Carol Fachetti	Town Manager Screening Committee – Finance Committee Chair (Term Expires 6/30/2025)
4.	Rita Vogel	Town Manager Screening Committee – Human Resources Advisory Committee Chair (Term Expires 6/30/2025)

CONSENT AGENDA

1.	Accept the following donations made to the Needham Community Revitalization Trust Fund: • \$1295 from Carol De Lemos • \$1295 from Louise Condon Realty, Inc • \$ 400 from Needham Council for Arts & Culture
2.	Accept the following donation made to the Needham Youth & Family Services Crisis Donation Fund: • \$500 from the Needham Clergy Association
3.	Accept the following donation made to the Needham Free Public Library: • \$70 from Lois & Bill Bacon, in honor of Gail Hedges

7:12 p.m. Director of Public Works:
Presenter: Carys Lustig, Director of Public Works

Eversource Winter Gas Work

DPW Director, Carys Lustig, provided a request on behalf of Eversource Gas to perform winter gas main upgrades within the Town in the upcoming winter season. This is outside of the Town's regular street opening process. These upgrades are part of the work Eversource is mandated to complete to upgrade older infrastructure and improve safety. The work being completed off-cycle will benefit the community by decompressing the busy summer construction season and expediting this gas main replacement work in Needham. Additional requirements will be placed on Eversource to ensure safe work conditions in anticipation of a snow season, and greater restoration requirements where Eversource will be responsible to restore the road with a full overlay. There would be three crews in Town for approximately one month, and two crews for the remainder of the time.

Discussion ensued about the reason for these upgrades, whether Eversource leaves abandoned pipes in place underground, and how residents can ask questions about work occurring near their homes. Ms. Lustig responded that DPW will address the communication gap and identify where residents can call for more information.

Traffic Regulation Amendment – Zero Emission Vehicle Parking

Ms. Lustig requested that the Town of Needham Traffic Rules and Regulations Article V, "STOPPING, STANDING, PARKING" be amended by adding SECTION 5-11: "Zero Emission Vehicles." This would provide an enforcement mechanism to ticket individuals who are parked in Electrical Vehicle charging spaces when not charging their vehicles.

Motion by Ms. Cooley that the Board vote to approve and sign the Notice of Traffic Regulation Permit #24-11-26 amending the Town of Needham Traffic Rules and Regulations by adding to Article V, "STOPPING, STANDING, PARKING"; SECTION 5-11: "Zero-Emission Vehicles."

Second: Ms. Frail. Unanimously approved 4-0.

7:25 p.m. Needham Police Department Update:
Presenter: John Schlittler, Chief of Police

Chief Schlittler updated the Board on the Department's accreditation process, and on recent experience hiring and promoting employees since the Department left the Civil Service System.

Accreditation Process

Chief Schlittler provided an overview of the accreditation process that the Needham Police Department is undergoing, highlighting that it is a self-initiated process by which police agencies voluntarily strive to meet and maintain standards that have been established for the law enforcement profession, by the law enforcement profession. The program establishes standards of best practice for police agencies to adopt. Agencies then establish written directives for their personnel to implement, focusing on topical areas that require policies and procedures. Over the last two years, the Needham Police Department's policies were rewritten with the focus of becoming accredited. They also wrote an additional 50 policies, bringing the current total to 135 policies. The Department fulfilled the 274 mandatory standards and received credit for 72 optional standards.

Chief Schlittler added that the Department is committed to meeting professional standards and is willing to be assessed on a regular basis by a Commission-appointed assessor to ensure compliance. The reaccreditation process occurs every three years with annual check-ins.

Select Board members congratulated Chief Schlittler on this accomplishment. Questions included what the reaccreditation process may look like in the future, the administrative demands of the accreditation, and what the benefits of accreditation are.

Hiring and Promoting Employees

Chief Schlittler also provided an update on new hiring and promoting processes and results since the Department left the Civil Service System. He reported that 93 candidates applied, with 30 candidates receiving invitations to attend orientation based on rank scoring of the written examination. There were 14 candidates who participated in the orientation, which included a fitness evaluation.

Board members asked about the geography of the applicants and how the application process compares to that of the Civil Service System. Chief Schlittler noted that there has been a significant increase in applicants after this change.

Finally, Chief Schlittler addressed promotions within the Department, which have occurred significantly faster following testing.

Ms. Cooley asked Chief Schlittler about policing with the incoming President. Chief Schlittler responded that Needham Police Department does not have authority to enforce federal law. He added that Needham Police may be present with Federal authorities to ensure that there is a local representative to provide resources or assist an individual.

7:45 p.m. Town Counsel Update:
Presenter: Chris Heep, Town Counsel

Town Counsel Chris Heep provided the Board with an update of activities over the past year and answered questions from the Board about the Town's legal services. Mr. Heep highlighted his firm's work on MBTA zoning, affordable housing zoning district, solar zoning bylaws, the creation of a local historic district, and organization of the Technology Advisory Board. Other categories of legal services include:

- General Legal Services
- Town Meetings and By-Law Review
- Open Meeting Law
- Public Records Law
- State Ethics Law
- Contract Review and Procurement
- Permitting of Town Projects
- Litigation Matters
- Legal Training and Outreach

Mr. Heep emphasized that his goal is to be accessible, responsive, and to provide legal advice that is accurate, clear, and can be put to use. Discussion ensued regarding other important items to include FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests and the preparation process for Town Meeting with regard to the MBTA Communities Act.

8:10 p.m. Town Manager:

Preliminary FY2026 – FY2030 Capital Improvement Plan

The Board discussed the FY 2026 – FY2030 project submissions with Ms. Fitzpatrick, Mr. Davison, Ms. King, and Cecilia Simchak, Assistant Director of Finance. They will present recommendations on December 3 and will seek final approval of the Capital Improvement Plan on December 17.

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that these are the submittals from all departments, including the School Department, of their estimates of capital expenditures for this five-year period. The current estimate for Free Cash available to fund typical cash capital items is \$8-9 million. The estimate of submissions for use of the Free Cash are over \$15 million. Ms. Fitzpatrick noted that this is not an unusual gap, because departments are encouraged to submit every item they would like, and they think the community needs. If an item is new to the plan and does not have a direct impact

on health or safety, it is moved to Tier 2. She identified that the unknown for this year is the impact of the Pollard project.

Town Manager Report

The Town received a report for Transportation Network Fees with 207,573 rides in 2023.

8:40 p.m. Board Discussion:

Town Manager Search Process

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that three Search Committee members have been appointed: Liz Lee, School Committee Chair, Carol Fachetti, Finance Committee Chair, and Rita Vogel, Human Resources Advisory Committee Chair. The Town has released the request for quotes, which are due on December 2, and the request for a solicitation for a Town Meeting Member has been sent to the Town Clerk.

Committee Reports

Ms. Frail reported that the Tree Preservation Committee is in the process of scheduling interviews.

Mr. Keane reported that the Branding & Town Seal Committee is currently working with an illustrator with more progress to come on the seal. Mr. Keane also noted that he attended the Trans Day of Remembrance Vigil. He and Ms. Cooley also attended a neighborhood meeting with residents on Bennington Street to understand the challenges of road repairs this past summer.

Ms. Frail attended the Needham Diversity Summit, which featured many talented musicians and a thought-provoking panel.

Mr. Keane also attended the Emery Grover Dedication Ceremony.

8:29 p.m. Adjourn:

Motion by Ms. Frail that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board meeting of Tuesday, November 26, 2024.

Second: Ms. Cooley. Unanimously approved 4-0.

A list of all documents used at this Select Board meeting is available at:

<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID>

The next Select Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, December 3, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

A video recording of the November 26, 2024 Select Board meeting can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmIW5rNJ2hs&ab_channel=TownofNeedhamMA at <https://www.needhamchannel.org/select-board-archive-page/>