

**Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for Tuesday, January 28, 2025
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, Cathy Dowd, Joshua Levy, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick. David Davison, Deputy Town Manager/Director of Finance and Katie King, Deputy Town Manager were also in attendance.
- 6:01 p.m. Public Comment Period:

Margaret Abruzese, 30 Bridle Trail Road, commented on the Special Election and urged the Select Board to consider the effects of the Special Election on the Town's residents and their relationship with Town Officials. She added that there were individuals advocating for compliance without exceeding the State law's requirements well before the petition took place. She encouraged the Board to examine how policy is made in Needham and whether there is a need to change how committees are formed.
- 6:05 p.m. Public Hearing: Application for a New All-Alcoholic Beverages License – North Hill Needham, Inc. d/b/a North Hill

Motion by Ms. Frail that the Board vote to continue the Public Hearing relative to the application for a new All-Alcoholic Beverages License for North Hill Needham, Inc. d/b/a North Hill to Tuesday, February 11, 2025 at 6:20 p.m. Second: Ms. Dowd. Unanimously approved 5-0.
- 6:06 p.m. MWRA Metropolitan Water Tunnel Program Update:
Presenters: Kathy Murtagh, MWRA Director of Tunnel Redundancy, Paul Savard, MWRA Director of Design and Construction, Tunnel Redundancy

Project leaders Kathy Murtagh and Paul Savard discussed the design progress and site preparation steps taken to date, as well as the future plans for the Tunnel Redundancy Program. Since their last presentation to the Select Board in 2022, they have completed the environmental review process and the preliminary design for the program. Ms. Murtagh provided an overview of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) and the tunnel system that is the main distribution channel that bring water into the Metro Boston area. She emphasized the urgency of the tunnel project given the lack of redundancy for these tunnels and outlined the potential negative effects for rate payers. The goal of the Metropolitan Water Tunnel Program is to provide full redundancy for the Metropolitan Tunnel System.

Ms. Murtagh then provided an overview of the project itself, which will include approximately 15 miles of water tunnels and 13 shaft sites. Tunnels will begin in Weston at the intersection of I-90 and I-95 at the end of the current redundancy, from which there will be a North Tunnel and a South Tunnel. Tunnel construction is anticipated to occur between 2028 and 2040. About 1.7 miles of the South Tunnel system and 3 shaft sites will be in Needham. Mr. Savard then provided a background of the construction sequence. Throughout the presentation, Board members asked questions about the logistics of tunnel construction and how Needham residents may be impacted.

Mr. Savard outlined the early concepts, preliminary design, and environmental impact report that the MWRA has conducted. Ongoing work includes geotechnical investigation, including various locations in Needham, as well as outreach with communities in the study area. Outreach has included establishing working groups with representatives from each community, numerous meetings with Town Management, Public Works, Public Safety/Fire, Conservation Commissions in each of the seven communities in which the tunnel will be constructed, meetings with key stakeholders, permit agencies, businesses, private property owners, and community interest groups, establishing a website and email address for questions, creating multiple factsheets, and holding public information sessions that are upcoming. Mr. Savard also showed the connection shaft sites in Needham where work will occur. Discussion ensued regarding communication with residents and the points at which residents may be impacted, including noise and pollution effects.

Work will also occur in collaboration with Eversource in order to bring new power infrastructure to the launching shaft sites, as there is currently not sufficient power supply in the Highland Avenue area to support tunnel boring machine operations. This new power infrastructure will remain after the Tunnel Program is complete. Ms. Murtagh emphasized the role of Emergency Response Coordination and the work that the MWRA is conducting with local Emergency Responders to determine what resources will be needed. Residents can learn more about the project on the Tunnel Program website: <https://www.mwra.com/mwtp.html> and <https://www.mwra.com/mwtp/resources.html#resources> for information specific to Needham. The program email address is tunnels.info@mwra.com and the Community Relations Coordinator, Carmine DeMaria, can be reached at carmine.demaria@mwra.com.

Discussion ensued with questions from Board members including debris being transported away from the construction sites, communication with residents, concerns about potential effects of earthquake tremors, and other redundancy projects in cities like New York.

6:56 p.m.

Appointment Calendar and Consent Agenda:

Motion by Ms. Frail that the Board vote to approve the Appointment Calendar and Consent Agenda.

Second: Ms. Dowd. Unanimously approved 5-0.

APPOINTMENT CALENDAR

1.	Marie Shapiro	Human Rights Committee Term Exp: 6/30/2027
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CONSENT AGENDA

1.	Approve Open Session Minutes of January 7, 2025
2.	Approve the following donation to the Needham Public Health Division: • \$10,000 from Needham Community Council for Needham's Gift of Warmth
3.	Amend Final ARPA Budget by reallocating \$86.76 from the Epidemiologist Line to the Public Health Nurse Line and \$255.75 from the Epidemiologist Line to the Mental and Behavioral Health Line.
4.	Approve a request from the Exchange Club of Needham to sponsor 4th of July fireworks and festivities on Thursday, July 3, 2025, as well as a flag raising and parade on Friday, July 4, 2025. Coordination of all activities will be made with appropriate Town Departments. (Updated list of approved events)
5.	Authorize the placement of "Go Fourth" lawn signs at the Town Hall and Public Services Administration Building from June 20, 2025 through July 4, 2025.
6.	Approve a request from John Hrones, Race Director of Needham Track Club, to hold the road event "Great Bear Run" in Needham. The event is scheduled for Sunday, May 18, 2025, starting at 10:00 a.m. The event and route have been approved by the following departments: Fire, Police, and Public Works

6:57 p.m. Director of Public Works: Sign Notice of Needham Traffic Regulation Amendment – Parking Meter Location and Regulations Amendment:
Presenter: Carys Lustig, Director of Public Works

Ms. Lustig requested that the Select Board approve an amendment to the Town of Needham Traffic Rules and Regulations, Article V, "Stopping, Standing, Parking," specifically by amending Section 5-7, "Parking Meter Locations and Regulations."

Motion by Ms. Frail that the Board vote to approve and sign the Notice of Traffic Regulation Permit #P25-01-28 amending the Town of Needham Traffic Rules and Regulations by amending Article V, "Stopping, Standing, Parking," Section 5-7 "Parking Meter Locations and Regulations."

Second: Ms. Cooley. Unanimously approved 5-0.

6:59 p.m. Proposed Dedication of Benches:
Presenter: Paul Good, Needham Community Revitalization Trust Fund Chair

Paul Good, Chair of the Needham Community Revitalization Trust Fund, proposed to the Select Board the acceptance of two dedicated celebration benches:

- A bench dedicated to Betty Soderholm to be placed in Avery Square. This bench would replace a current, undedicated bench in the same location and be of the same design. The value of this bench is \$3,150. Mr. Good notes that this bench will be added to the newly refurbished common area in Avery Square.
- A bench dedicated to John E. Goodfellow to be placed along Amity Path. This would be a new bench and be of the same design as the wood benches already along the path. The value of this bench is \$3,100.

Board members thanked Mr. Good for the Committee's efforts and asked questions about the process for dedicating a bench, including the research process and the contributions of the various stakeholders in Town who are involved in the decisions about these functional art pieces.

7:14 p.m.

Town Manager:

Accept and Refer Zoning

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported that the Planning Board, at its meeting of January 21, 2025, voted to place the following articles on the warrant for May 2025 Annual Town Meeting:

- (1) Article 1: Amend Zoning By-Law – Multi-family Overlay District (Base Compliance Plan)
- (2) Article 2: Amend Zoning By-Law – Map Change for Multi-family Overlay District (Base Compliance Plan)

Under State law, the Select Board has 14 days to accept the proposed amendments and refer them to the Planning Board for its review, hearing, and report. The Board's action in this matter is not discretionary.

Motion by Mr. Levy that the Board vote to accept the proposed zoning articles:

- (1) Article 1: Amend Zoning By-Law – Multi-family Overlay District (Base Compliance Plan)**
- (2) Article 2: Amend Zoning By-Law – Map Change for Multi-family Overlay District (Base Compliance Plan)**

For referral to the Planning Board for its review, hearing, and report.

Second: Ms. Frail. Unanimously approved 5-0.

FY2026 Budget Presentation

Ms. Fitzpatrick presented the proposed annual balanced budget for fiscal year 2026, emphasizing the budget priorities and the goal to align these with the Select Board Goals for Needham to be healthy and socially thriving, economically vital, and livable. She noted that Town Management has focused on maintaining adequate contingency funds, as well as investing in the maintenance of facilities and equipment. Additionally, she emphasized how the Town has set up the budget to withstand regular shocks that happen in local and regional markets.

Ms. Fitzpatrick then presented the Budget Overview for FY2024, FY2025, and FY2026 (as proposed). The largest categories of revenue for the Town are property taxes, free cash, state aid, and local receipts. The current estimate for free cash recertified for appropriation in FY2026 is \$19 million. The main budget driver this year is employee benefits, especially health insurance. Ms. Fitzpatrick then outlined the changes to budgets submitted by Town Departments. Ms. Fitzpatrick noted that while school enrollment itself is mostly steady since before the COVID-19 pandemic, student needs have increased. The School Department is reducing a net of 11.7 FTEs to meet the amount of revenue available in the FY2026 budget. Ms. Fitzpatrick reviewed funds and other transfers, as well as the following financial warrant articles:

- Classification & Compensation Study
- Property Tax Assistance Program
- Facilities Maintenance Program
- Forestry Maintenance Program
- Climate Action Planning
- Financial Applications

Finally, Ms. Fitzpatrick presented the changes to Submitted Capital and the estimated revenue and reserve balances for the Community Preservation Fund. Select Board members asked about predictions regarding future financial trends, such as health insurance costs, interest rates, and new financial growth. Ms. Fitzpatrick and Mr. Davison also answered questions regarding billing systems, Town and School IT, and estimates of public sector retirements.

Motion by Ms. Cooley that the Board vote to recommend approval of the Town Manager's Proposed Annual Budget for FY2026.

Second: Ms. Dowd. Unanimously approved 5-0.

Town Manager Report

- The Needham Power Choice information session had excellent turnout with many individuals attending and asking questions.
- Eversource is also holding various information sessions.
- Envision Needham Center is holding walking tours and self-tours for resident feedback.

8:08 p.m. Board Discussion:

Town Manager Search Process

The Screening Committee is meeting on February 24, 2025 and interviews will be scheduled.

Committee Reports

Ms. Dowd reported that the General Bylaw Committee met and plans to review each section of the Bylaws and look for any inconsistent or unclear areas. The goal is to bring any suggestions to May 2026 Town Meeting.

Ms. Frail reported that several Select Board members and Town Administrators attended the Massachusetts Municipal Association meeting with presentations by both Ms. Fitzpatrick and Carys Lustig. Ms. Frail also reported that she attended the Needham Area Immigration Justice Task Force in cooperation with the Needham Human Rights Committee and League of Women Voters Needham on the recent and rapid changes occurring with regard to immigration.

Mr. Keane reported that he attended a Board of Assessors meeting and thanked the Board and David Davison for their efforts. He noted that there were 75 abatement applications as of yesterday.

Mr. Keane also congratulated the Needham Police Department for their recent accreditation.

8:15 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Ms. Frail that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board Special Meeting of Tuesday, January 28, 2025.

Second: Ms. Dowd. Unanimously approved 5-0.

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, February 11, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

A video recording of the January 28, 2025 Select Board meeting can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAJgDQPOz6A&ab_channel=TownofNeedhamMA or at <https://www.needhamchannel.org/2025/01/needham-select-board-1-28-25/>.