

**Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for Tuesday, February 25, 2025
Select Board Chambers and
Via ZOOM
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89068374046>**

- 6:01 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.
- 6:02 p.m. Statement from Chair Keane

Chair Keane noted that there have been concerns within the community regarding racial equity. He restated Article 48 from May 2021 Town Meeting, emphasizing that Needham will be a community free of racism, racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination.
- 6:04 p.m. Public Comment Period

Ross Donald, 25H Chambers Street, commented as President of the Linden Chambers Residents Association that the Association has spent two years reestablishing the group. Mr. Donald noted that without a Local Tenant Organization (LTO), the Housing Authority is the only entity contacting every resident. Therefore, a LTO can act as an intermediary for resident involvement. Mr. Donald clarified who and what the LTA is in relation to the Town. Mr. Donald asked on behalf of the Linden Chambers Residents Association that it be recognized as a party in standing.
- 6:07 p.m. Close Public Hearing: Verizon Cable License Ascertainment
Presenter: Myles Tucker, Support Services Manager

Mr. Tucker reported that there were no public comments heard in person, by email, or by phone. He recommended the Board close the public hearing. The Board can expect to see a memo in the coming days describing the rest of the licensing process.

Motion by Ms. Dowd that the Board close the public hearing relative to the ascertainment process for the potential renewal of the Verizon New England Inc cable license.
Second: Ms. Frail. Unanimously approved 5-0.
- 6:09 p.m. Appointment Calendar and Consent Agenda
Motion by Ms. Cooley that the Board vote to approve the Appointment Calendar and Consent Agenda.

Mr. Levy noted that he was not present for two of the meetings for which minutes were included.

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

APPOINTMENT CALENDAR

1.	Michael Orscheln	Golf Course Advisory Committee Term Exp: 6/30/2025
2.	Hannah Corrigan	Rail Trail Advisory Committee Term Exp: 6/30/2027
3.	William Mahoney	Council of Economic Advisors Term Exp: 6/30/2026

CONSENT AGENDA

1.	Approve Open Session Minutes of August 3, 2023; August 4, 2023; and January 28, 2025
2.	Accept the following donations made to the Needham Free Public Library: • \$50 from Randa Khuri • \$30 from Daniel Callahan
3.	Accept the following donations made to the Needham Public Health Division: • \$1,500 from the County of Norfolk for Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham • \$100 from Constance Royden for Needham's Gift of Warmth program • \$100 from Temple Aliyah, Inc. for Needham's Gift of Warmth program • \$500 from Avenue Church for Needham's Gift of Warmth program • \$1,135.50 from First Parish Church for Needham's Gift of Warmth program
4.	Accept the following donations made to the Needham Community Revitalization Trust Fund: • \$3,100 from Thomas Leary • \$3,150 from Elin Soderholm Trust
5.	Approve revision of Benefits Administration Policy #510: Travel Expense Reimbursement Policy

NOTICE OF APPROVED ONE-DAY SPECIAL ALCOHOL LICENSES

Hosting Organization	Event Title	Location	Event Date
Needham History Center & Museum	Music and Merriment at the Schoolhouse Pub	Needham History Center & Museum 1147 Central Avenue	3/01/2025
Plugged In Band Program	Dirty Water Music Festival	Powers Hall 1471 Highland Avenue	4/05/2025

6:10 p.m. WestMetro HOME Consortium Annual Action Plan – Needham

Presenter: Alison Steinfeld, Affordable Housing Specialist

Alison Steinfeld, Affordable Housing Specialist, provided a summary of the Town's responses to a questionnaire prepared by the WestMetro HOME Consortium for its 13 member communities. The Consortium, which administers federal funds to create affordable housing for low-to-moderate income households in the 13 municipalities, will incorporate these responses into its FY26 Annual Action Plan. Ms. Steinfeld reported that the focus is on the Town's support of the Housing Authority's effort to preserve and redevelopment its properties. Mr. Levy asked about the function of the action plan, which Ms. Steinfeld responded is administrative. Board members agreed that it is of high priority to the Board.

Motion by Ms. Dowd that the Board approve the Town of Needham Template for WestMetro HOME Consortium FY2026 Annual Action Plan.

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

6:12 p.m. 2023 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey Data and Updates from Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham (SPAN) and Youth & Family Services
Presenters: Julie McCarthy, Epidemiologist/Data Analyst, Karen Shannon, Substance Use Prevention Program Coordinator, Sara Shine, Director of Youth and Family Services

Staff from Needham Public Health and Youth & Family Services Divisions presented substance use and mental health data from the 2023 MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey. This survey has been administered biennially since 2006 (with the exception of 2020 due to COVID-19) and monitors trends in the 25 communities in the MetroWest region served by the MetroWest Health Foundation. In 2023, Needham High School had a 94.4% participation rate, and Needham Middle School had a 93.4% participation rate.

Substance Prevention Alliance of Needham (SPAN) Program Coordinator Karen Shannon reviewed the work of SPAN. As a community coalition, the team has fostered a culture of prevention with a broad base of support from twelve sectors represented from the community. This work includes a public health approach to prevention as part of a strategic plan:

- Prevent and reduce underage substance use
- Build community collaboration – a common message
- Change perceptions and norms regarding underage substance use – shift from a rite of passage and perception of inevitability
- Increase protective factors that support healthy choices
- Decrease risk factors that are indicated in underage substance use
- Guided by SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework

All of the elements create a sustainability and culturally competent approach to prevention and reduction of substance use. Ms. McCarthy then presented overall substance use trends in middle and high school grades, highlighting decreases in

use across all substances from 2021 to 2023 for high school grades and seeing decreased use of several substances for middle school grades for the same timeframe. There is also a pattern of increased perception of the negative effects of these substances. Alcohol remains the highest reported substance used.

Ms. Shannon added that Needham High School student alcohol use is 8% higher than the MetroWest average. Ms. Shannon outlined that they have used positive community norms as a strategy for reducing use. SPAN created five messages using a positive community norms strategy to communicate to students and families that most Needham High School students do not use substances. Vinyl banners with these messages were placed around the community. The anticipated effect is that this strategy will correct these misperceptions and contribute to a decrease in youth alcohol use. Ms. McCarthy added that there is a sharp increase in alcohol use from 8th to 9th grade. There are similar increases in electronic vapor use and prescription drug use.

Ms. Shannon then presented on the protective factors that make it less likely that a youth will choose to use substances. School connectedness, peer support, and adult support are key to bolstering substance use prevention. Specific initiatives include SALSA (Student Advocating Life Without Substance Abuse), a student-led organization that provides opportunities for peer-to-peer education. Community partnerships are also essential to preventing student access to substances; these include TIPS trainings, compliance checks, parent education, Drug Take Back Days, and Overdose Awareness Day.

Finally, Ms. McCarthy presented relevant data on mental health among Needham High and Middle School students, including stress, anxiety, depression, and suicide. Ms. Shine noted that Youth & Family Services have been tracking these patterns for some time and aim to make services more accessible. These services include clinical programming, communication with Needham Public Schools, ongoing case and crisis management, and eliminating barriers to the available services.

Discussion ensued regarding phone usage in schools, how the team measures effectiveness of programs, and how information is provided to parents. Other specific questions included the rates of gambling among students and concerns about nicotine pouches.

6:58 p.m.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Consultation

Presenters: Dave Herer, Community Preservation Committee Chair, Maureen Callahan, Community Preservation Committee Vice Chair, Lauren Spinney, Administrative Coordinator, Cecilia Simchak, Assistant Director of Finance

The CPC held its annual consultation with the Select Board on the pending project applications for FY2026, as well as the appropriation of CPA monies.

CPC has six applications under consideration, down from an initial cohort of nine applications. A public hearing is scheduled to be held by the CPC on March 12, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. in the Charles River Room, 500 Dedham Avenue, Needham (PSAB) and via Zoom. It will also be televised on the Needham Channel.

The six applications currently under consideration are:

1. Needham History Center & Museum: Application would fund ongoing collections storage upgrades to more effectively preserve historic documents.
2. Needham Conservation Department & Conservation Commission: Application would fund trail signage improvements.
3. Charles River Center: East Militia Heights Development: Application would support the ongoing development of affordable housing at the East Militia Heights.
4. Needham Housing Authority: Preservation of Seabeds Way & Captain Robert Cook Drive: Application would support NHA's long term preservation of Seabeds.
5. Needham Park & Recreation Department: Action Park & Pickleball Courts: Application would support the creation of an action sports complex and pickleball courts, with exact locations to be determined.
6. Needham Park & Recreation Department and Department of Public Works: Eliot School Grounds Renovation: Application would support maintenance and stormwater runoff.

7:45 p.m. Needham Housing Authority Linden Street Redevelopment Project – Release of Restrictions and Agreement Regarding Local Taxes
Presenters: Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, Chris Heep, Town Counsel

Chris Heep discussed the pending actions and documents related to the Needham Housing Authority's soon-to-be submitted EOHLC funding application. The NHA is seeking three documents at this time in connection with its application. Discussion ensued regarding the pending actions including:

1. Release of Restriction: Under Article 41 of the May 2024 Town Meeting, Town Meeting voted to release the restrictions previously made on the Linden Chambers properties that they would only be used for housing for the elderly. Thus, Town Meeting authorized the Select Board to enact the release of restrictions, which is now documented in this document that will be on file with the Registry of Deeds.
2. Agreement Regarding Local Taxes: This document would agree in writing that the Linden Chambers property will not be subject to local property or personal taxes as long as the property is used exclusively for affordable housing and is owned by the Housing Authority. This applies to three other entities as well: the Needham Housing Authority Development Corporation and two entities that are responsible for leasing portions of the property from the Housing Authority as part of the operation of the redevelopment project.
3. Community Preservation Act Grant Agreement: This document is typically signed by the Town Manager and discusses the manner in which payments will

be made from the Town to the Housing Authority and states that these payments will be on a reimbursement basis once the Housing Authority has submitted paid invoices for eligible costs. It requires that there will be an affordable housing restriction recorded against the property before they close on their financing.

Following questions from the Board to Mr. Heep and Katie King regarding the specifics of each document, the following motion was made:

Motion by Ms. Frail that the Board approve and sign the “Release of Restrictions” and the “Agreement Regarding Taxes and Payment in Lieu of Taxes, Linden Street and Chambers Street Properties Needham Housing Authority” to be provided to the Needham Housing Authority in connection with the Linden Street Redevelopment Project.

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

8:07 p.m. Town Manager

Sira Natural Agreement Update

The Select Board voted on January 23, 2024 to enter into an amended Community Benefit Agreement with Sira Naturals, Inc. As now required by Massachusetts law, Sira submitted this amended Community Benefit Agreement to the Cannabis Control Commission (“CCC”) for review and approval. In response, the CCC noted that one term of the amended Community Benefit Agreement—the requirement that Sira not challenge the taxability of its property or seek any exemption from such taxes—was inconsistent with new regulations.

Mr. Heep has worked with Sira’s counsel to prepare an amended agreement that addresses CCC’s comment, without making any further changes to the terms that the Board approved in January 2024.

Motion by Ms. Dowd that the Board vote to approve and sign the amended Community Benefit Agreement between the Town of Needham and Sira Naturals, Inc.

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

Preliminary Discussion of May 12, 2025 Special Town Meeting Articles

Ms. Fitzpatrick updated the Board on the preliminary articles under consideration for the May 12, 2025 Special Town Meeting as follows:

Financial Articles:

- Appropriate for PEG Funding
- Appropriate for Road Improvements (Children’s Hospital)
- Amend General Bylaw – Sustainability Revolving Fund

General Articles:

- Adopt MGL: Veterans Tax Work-Off
- Adopt MGL: Senior Tax Work-Off
- Adopt MGL: Affordable Housing Property Tax Exemptions
- Rescind MGL Saturday Town Hall Hours
- Amend General Bylaw – Skip the Stuff (pending public hearing input)
- Amend General Bylaw – Black Plastics (pending public hearing input)

Reserve Articles:

- Appropriate to the Capital Equipment Fund
- Appropriate to the Athletic Facility Improvement Fund

Zoning Articles:

- Amend Zoning Bylaw – Flood Plain

2025 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Update

The Planning Board held a hearing to discuss the two Zoning Articles before the upcoming Annual Town Meeting regarding zoning to achieve full compliance with the MBTA Communities Law. The Planning Board chose to remove language calling the proposal the “Base Compliance Plan”, as it had been referred to in prior warrants and in popular discourse. Ms. Frail noted her opposition to this change in order to ensure that there was as little confusion as possible, as there were no changes made from the prior identical article and the proposed article. Each Board member followed, voicing similar opinions. Members then discussed the specific nomenclature change made by the Planning Board, asking confirmatory questions to Ms. King regarding any other changes made by the Planning Board, to which Ms. King noted that descriptions related to “workforce housing” were removed, as this term was not used in the “Base Compliance Plan”, but rather the “Neighborhood Housing Plan” that appeared before the October 21, 2024 Special Town Meeting.

Stephen Palmer Development Review Committee

The October 21, 2024 Special Town Meeting appropriate funding for a consultant to evaluate the potential redevelopment of the Stephen Palmer site. The Select Board reviewed a draft committee composition and charge at its meeting on February 11, 2025. Ms. Fitzpatrick recommended that the Board vote to adopt the Stephen Palmer Development Review Committee Composition and Charge. This a seven member committee for a three-year term.

Motion by Mr. Levy that the Board vote to adopt the Stephen Palmer Development Review Committee Composition and Charge.

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

Town Manager Report

- Ms. King reported on the potential for the State Emergency Order to extend flexibility of the Open Meeting Law since the start of the pandemic. There is pending legislation at the State House to potentially provide voluntary options

for remote access for municipal meetings. If the State law is not changed by March 31, 2025, all public bodies must have an in-person option for the public to attend. She also discussed the other implications for Board and Committee member participation in these meetings.

8:37 p.m. Board Discussion

Town Manager Search Process

Ms. Frail reported that the Committee received 13 applications and has had one meeting at which they were discussed. They anticipate a round of interviews in the next couple of weeks.

Committee Reports

Mr. Levy reported on the distribution adjustment charge for gas prices that increased by over 50% on November 1. Residents feel that the charges are unreasonable. Mr. Levy suggested writing a letter to the DPU recommending that they look into these charges again.

Ms. Dowd reported that the General Bylaw Committee met and reported several suggestions. They began with Article 8 on Non-Criminal Dispositions.

Ms. Cooley reported that the Large House Review Committee and will discuss houses on non-conforming lots at their next meeting.

Mr. Levy reported that Stormwater Working Group met and discussed definitions included in the developing bylaw and the circumstances that would trigger a consideration of the bylaw itself, including new construction or an addition such as a tennis court. There will be a public hearing at some point in the future.

8:51 p.m. Adjourn

Motion by Mr. Keane that the Select Board vote to enter into Executive Session pursuant to Exception 3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with the Needham Police Union and to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining with all represented employees, where an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body and the Chair so declares [The Chair so declares] and not to return to Open Session prior to adjournment.

Second: Ms. Cooley. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

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

A video recording of the February 25, 2025 Select Board meeting can be found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPXppBzk10c&ab_channel=TownofNeedhamMA or at <https://www.needhamchannel.org/2025/02/needham-select-board-2-25-25/>.