

Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for Tuesday, November 24, 2020
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83560996922>

5:00 p.m. Executive Session: Exception 6 - Acquisition of Real Property
A meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair Maurice P. Handel. Those present were Matthew D. Borrelli, Marianne B. Cooley, Daniel P. Matthews, John Bulian, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick. Also attending were Dave Davison, ATM/Finance and Katie King ATM/Operations. Recording Secretary Mary Hunt joined the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Motion by Mr. Borrelli that the Select Board vote to enter into Executive Session under Exception 6 - To consider the purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real property if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body.

Second: Mr. Bulian. Unanimously approved 4-0 by roll call vote. (Ms. Cooley joined the meeting after the vote).

5:45 p.m. Informal Meeting with Citizens: No Activity.

6:00 p.m. Call to Order:
The public portion of the Select Board meeting of November 24, 2020, was convened by Chairman Maurice Handel.

Mr. Handel announced this open meeting is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020 due to the current state of emergency from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. He noted all public gatherings have been suspended as advised and directed by the Commonwealth. And, as such, suspending the requirement of the open meeting law to have all meetings in a public, accessible, physical location while encouraging and allowing members of all public bodies to participate remotely. Mr. Handel stated the meeting will not include public comment and the Needham Select Board and all attendees are convening by Zoom, as posted on the Town's website identifying how the public may join. He said all supporting documents used at this meeting are available on the Town's website www.needhamma.gov.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that this meeting be continued to the Select Board's next scheduled meeting on Tuesday, December 8, 2020, if a technical problem develops that makes it impossible for the Select Board to conduct the meeting in this format.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

6:02 p.m. Appointments and Consent Agenda:

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to approve the Appointments and Consent Agenda as presented.

APPOINTMENTS

- 1. Water & Sewer Rate Structure Committee Harold Burger (term expires 6/30/2023)**

CONSENT AGENDA

- 1. Accept a \$100 donation made to the Needham Aging Services Donation Account from Nancy and Jon Schneider, Needham residents.**
- 2. Approve a 20B Exemption for Lulu Tsai who is an employee in the Needham School Department as an Instructor to engage in work with the Aging Services Department as an activity instructor.**
- 3. Water & Sewer Abatement Order #1299.**
- 4. Accept the following donations made to the Needham Health Division's Gift of Warmth Program: \$10,000 from the Needham Community Council; and \$250 from Mary Clare Siegel, a Needham resident.**
- 5. Accept a \$100 donation made to the Needham Aging Services Donation Account from Ruth & Paul Richards, Needham residents.**
- 6. Approve minutes of November 9, 2020 (open session) and November 10, 2020 (executive session).**

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

6:03 p.m.

School Master Plan Presentation:

Dan Gutekanst, Superintendent of Schools, Steve Popper Director of Design & Construction, Hank Haff, Senior Project Manager, Stuart Chandler, Chair, PPBC, Don Walter, Dore & Whittier, Michele Rogers, Dore & Whittier, Jason Boone, Dore & Whittier presented the final School Master Plan Report to the Select Board. Anne Gulati, Assistant Superintendent/Finance and Operations, Andrea Longo-Carter, Chair, School Committee, and Connie Barr, School Committee also participated on the call.

Dr. Gutekanst told the Board two presentations tonight include a facilities master plan and a renovation plan for the Emery Grover Building. He stated the plans, if implemented, total approximately \$280 million in construction for Needham schools and the Town of Needham. He said these projects, discussed for many years, now have numbers, ideas, and timelines to consider. Dr. Gutekanst commented on renovation of the Emery Grover building, Mitchell School, Pollard Middle School, as well as long term goals of the school committee. He recognized this is the first of many conversations in achieving the goal, noting the options voted on by the school committee for the community to consider are efficient and cost effective, even though the dollar amount is extraordinary and is an appropriation request more than the community has ever considered for school building projects.

Don Walter, Dore & Whittier, Michele Rogers, Dore & Whittier, Jason Boone, Dore & Whittier presented the School Master Plan. A PowerPoint presentation titled “Needham School Master Plan Project Update” dated November 24, 2020.

Mr. Walter commented on the history/process including visiting buildings, reviewing enrollment projections and capacity needs, capital needs, and cost estimates.

Ms. Rogers discussed a graph commenting on the existing educational space needs and physical conditions within all Needham schools. She commented on capital improvement cost estimates for both Pollard Middle School (approximately \$40 million) and Mitchell Elementary School (\$25 million). She discussed what would be included and not included for each cost.

Mr. Boone told the Board of seven possible identified solutions. He commented on the three final options that made the “short list” including the status quo grade configuration, discontinuance of High Rock, and High Rock 6th Elementary School. Renderings of each school option were viewed.

Ms. Rogers commented on the master plan sequences with 2020 cost estimates in each of the top three scenarios with four options, noting timelines reflect 2020 costs escalated at 4.5%/year and do not include MSBA participation.

Hank Haff commented on a modified approach should the Town choose or need to delay the implementation of Option D, which is a lower cost first step, but an important first step in achieving the long-term goals.

6:35 p.m.

Emery Grover Presentation:

Dr. Gutekanst suggested discussion continue on the Emery Grover plan prior to taking questions. Joel Bargmann, Architect, Bargmann Hendrie & Archetype, Inc., joined the discussion.

Mr. Bargmann explained the process of exploring ways to provide the school administration with modern facilities began over a year ago. He acknowledged the working group and the PPBC. A PowerPoint presentation titled “Needham School Administration Emery Grover Building Study,” dated November 24, 2020 was viewed.

Mr. Bargmann commented on the historical significance of the Emery Grover building and that it is listed in the Nation Register of Historic Places. He also discussed initial studies, summarized and showed renderings of six preliminary options, summarized the three final options, and analysis and conclusions. He commented the three final options meet the school administration’s program needs and present different opportunities to address parking challenges. Mr. Bargmann commented on cost comparisons backed up by cost estimates, as prepared by an independent cost analysis firm. Mr. Bargmann noted the significant decline of the

building includes a leaking roof, non-functioning systems, non-functional windows, and sagging stairs.

Hank Haff reviewed the project schedule beginning with design and construction funding, leading to project completion in May 2025.

Mr. Bargmann discussed Option 3 and why a rotated addition at the rear of the Emery Grover building is the preferred option. He summarized Option 3 allows the Town to save the Emery Grover building as a gateway to town center, saves one of the oldest buildings in Needham, is the best compromise between preservation, department needs, parking, and allows for the best natural light/window ratio, including natural ventilation opportunities. He reviewed construction costs for each option, saying Option 3 (preferred) is the highest cost option offering the best building. Mr. Bargmann commented on why CPA funds are appropriate for this project.

Dr. Gutekanst acknowledged a lot of information has been presented and asked the Select Board if it had any questions.

Mr. Handel asked the cost for a school administration building on a clean site compared to renovation of Emery Grover?

Joel Bargmann said a new building would be approximately \$25 million, depending on site work.

Andrea Longo-Carter reiterated the totality of the projects is a large sum of money over quite a bit of time, but the option presented will best meet the school needs in a cost-effective manner for the Town. She acknowledged this is the first of many conversations in determining the best path forward.

Mr. Bulian commented on the dollar amount. He asked Mr. Davison about the Town's 10% debt capacity at this time and how much is left on the Sunita Williams school to bond? He commented on bonding the new public safety buildings and Emery Grover building.

Discussion ensued on a financing summary update, anticipated in late winter at the time of formulating the annual Town Meeting warrant, the Williams school, debt service of all projects to date, cost per square foot for renovations vs. new construction.

Mr. Borrelli commented on swing space, off-site parking, demolition costs, and rental cost per sq. ft.

Mr. Matthews said the presentation is a good starting point. He said the key issue for Emery Grover is simply "Does the public value the building as a historic and iconic structure worth investing a premium cost?" He commented if \$27 million

dollars is going to be invested in renovating the building it must be for Town use, acknowledging other challenges and demands on Town resources. Mr. Matthews commented on the functional use of the High Rock School, suggesting school enrollment must be tracked for any decision and that changes in zoning and housing policies may add more students to the system in the next 5-10 years.

Discussion ensued on renovations of Emery Grover, potential use of the building if it is not used by the school administration, reverting the High Rock School to an elementary school, cost projections, and potential increases in taxes.

Ms. Cooley commented on changes in student population over the next decade. She noted the current High Rock School works well, noting the shift in thinking about its function. She said the price tag is challenging. She said she supports recommendations that provide the greatest flexibility, as the state housing situation has the potential to be highly disruptive for Needham.

Dr. Gutekanst commented there may be efficiencies to be gained by bringing the 6th grade into a building where cafeteria, gyms, and auditoriums are shared.

Mr. Handel said everyone is concerned about the magnitude of the plan, noting there are not unlimited resources. He commented that finding a buildable site for school administration may produce a very different building, rather than putting it in a prominent place that reflects the significance of our civic center in the downtown.

Dr. Gutekanst concluded the MSBA must be part of the conversation. He pointed out that decisions must be made sooner rather than later, as the Emery Grover building is no longer sustainable. He advocated for abandoning the building soon, as the School Administration cannot stay in the building much longer. He said Pollard Middle School and Mitchell School have significant needs and cannot languish for years.

7:36 p.m.

Town Manager:

Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager spoke with the Select Board regarding six items:

1. Termination and Release of Easement - Mill Creek

Ms. Fitzpatrick recommended the Select Board approve the Termination and Release of Easement for the Mill Creek (Modera Needham) project on Greendale Avenue.

She commented the developer of Modera Needham received a Comprehensive Permit issued by the Zoning Board of Appeals to allow the development of its project on Greendale Avenue. After the developer relocated the Town's sewer line at its own expense, the Select Board authorized the developer to encroach on the existing sewer easement to construct the facility. The 2019 Annual Town Meeting, under Article 48, authorized the Select Board to extinguish the easement running

from Greendale Avenue to the Route 128 Right-of-Way. The Department of Public Works has confirmed that all necessary work is complete to the satisfaction of the Town.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board approve and authorize the Town Manager to sign the Termination and Release of Easement.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

2. Proposed MBTA Service Cuts

Ms. Fitzpatrick updated the Board on proposed service cuts at the MBTA and recommended that the Board submit a letter during the comment period expressing the Town's concerns. She noted changes could impact Bus 59, Saturday service, the number of trains, service ending at 9:00 p.m., and the elimination of the layover facility in Needham.

Discussion ensued on the value of the MBTA for people who live and work in Needham, particularly once the pandemic is over.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board authorize the Town Manager to send a letter to the MBTA expressing concerns about the proposed reductions in service and potential disruptions in system reliability associated with the current proposal.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

Ms. Cooley suggested the Town Manager use the "notify me" system to encourage citizens who use the commuter rail to craft their own letter and ask large employers for data on how important the bus and train service is to them.

Mr. Matthews said the issue is difficult, noting public transportation is a core service and affects current and future town planning. He noted it would be difficult to bring services back once reduced.

3. Minuteman School Fields Project & CARES Funding Request

Ms. Fitzpatrick reminded the Board the original plan for the Minuteman School Building and Campus project was a fully designed full build out of an Athletic complex located on the Lexington site of the old building, which has been torn down. The Athletic Complex was not eligible for MSBA funding and was held until the building project was complete. The Base project includes: multi-sport synthetic turf stadium field & equipment; asphalt walking track & spectator fencing; synthetic turf softball/ multi-use field, dugouts, bullpens, & batting cage; synthetic turf baseball/ multi-use field, dugouts, bullpens, & batting cage; emergency vehicle access & visitor vehicle drop-off/ pick-up loop; accessible walkways, safety netting, & spectator viewing areas; maintenance equipment; and scoreboards & utilities for each field. The approved alternates include stadium field lighting; softball/ multi-use field lighting; baseball/ multi-use field lighting; competitive running track and track events; non-fixed track equipment; and perimeter fencing.

She said at its meeting this week, the Minuteman School voted to authorize borrowing in the amount of \$1,900,000 for the project. She said now that the Minuteman School Committee has voted to borrow the funds and has notified each District community, the District members have 60 days to call a Special Town Meeting to disapprove Minuteman's borrowing. If there is no such vote, then the borrowing is deemed approved by that community. She said the expected first year assessment for the Town of Needham is \$15,915. Ms. Fitzpatrick also told the Board the Minuteman School has requested funding from the CARES Act ("CvRF") to support expenses related to COVID-19. She noted regional vocational schools were not eligible to receive the pass-through Federal funds. Ms. Fitzpatrick said Minuteman has requested \$12,613.55 to support Needham students. A reserve fund transfer from the Finance Committee would be required for the Town to make this payment before the December 30, 2020 deadline.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Board vote to:

1. Approve the Minuteman School Debt Issuance for the Completion of the field component of the School Building Project; and

2. Approve a request from the Minuteman School for \$12,613.55 from the Town's allocated CvRF Municipal Fund and endorse a Reserve Fund Transfer Request to provide the funding to the Minuteman School in advance of reimbursement from the Commonwealth.

Second: Mr. Borelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Matthews noted the Minuteman School is fully enrolled for the next incoming class and has a waiting list.

Ms. Cooley said the fields project has been fully vetted and is the right project for the school. She said she is delighted knowing the school is fully enrolled, with increasing participation from Needham.

4. Preliminary FY2022 - FY2026 Capital Improvement Plan

Ms. Fitzpatrick discussed with the Board the preliminary FY2022 cash capital and debt financed project submissions. She said the FY 2023 – 2026 projects will be discussed at the Select Board meeting on December 8th and final approval of the Capital Improvement Plan will be sought on December 22nd.

Ms. Fitzpatrick highlighted a few of the funding recommendations including Emery Grover, Mitchell School, and Pollard project, Defibrillator and Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus for the Public Safety department, Pollard School Feasibility Study, Public Works Facilities Improvements, and the Ridge Hill building demolition.

5. Budget Priorities

Ms. Fitzpatrick reviewed proposed budget priorities for the FY2022 Operating and Capital Budget. She referred to “Select Board Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2022,” dated 11/24/2020. She noted the primary goal is maintenance and optimization of existing Town services during a pandemic along with the financial, social, and economic crises. In addition, mindful of the availability of revenue for appropriation, the Board has set the following priorities:

- a. Support for items that contribute to the achievement of Town wide goals and objectives, including recovering from COVID-19 and advancing racial equity in Needham.
- b. Support for the continuation of the Public Information Officer position.
- c. Support for a five to ten-year plan for the renovation, reconstruction and/or preservation of the Town’s capital assets in the most prudent, realistic, and efficient manner, including continued investment in buildings infrastructure, and fleet maintenance.
- d. Support for initiatives that contribute to financial sustainability, including the maintenance of a debt service plan that balances capital needs with the Town’s ability to pay, identification of alternative funding sources for traditional cash capital needs, evaluation of financing alternatives, and alignment of capital and maintenance needs with appropriate funding sources.
- e. Support for initiatives aimed at achieving greater coordination and efficiency among Town departments and providing adequate resources to address identified service delivery and general administrative needs of the Town in a cost-effective manner.
- f. Support for a funding mechanism for mandated water quality (stormwater) expenses.

The Board thanked Ms. Fitzpatrick for the review of proposed budget priorities.

6. Town Manager’s Report

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported the Newton Needham Regional Chamber has put out a list of the 50 most influential business owners of color, noting many people on the list live or work in Needham.

Ms. Fitzpatrick said the Blue Tree will be lit the weekend after Thanksgiving.

8:10 p.m. Board Discussion:

1. Preliminary Discussion FY2021 - FY2022 Goals

Ms. Fitzpatrick said a number of goals are in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and race equity. She referred to “FY2021-FY2022 Select Board Goals Adopted,” highlighting new items including working with utility companies to improve coordination, working to keep businesses open and attract new businesses in light of the pandemic, exploring the option of implementing an organics recycling program for the community, discussing oversight and reports needed for public safety, reviewing the composition, structure and charge of two to three committees, and reviewing the operations and long-term service delivery model at the RTS.

2. Committee Reports

Ms. Cooley reported the downtown economic working group continues to meet. She commented on “pick up” zones for restaurant take out and store merchandise during the winter months, and on outdoor dining in the Chapel Street parking lot. She noted merchants were thrilled to hear sidewalks will now be cleared after a snowstorm due to the recent purchase of additional equipment. She reported some restaurants will continue to provide table service outside, but not during a storm.

Ms. Cooley reported the Needham Unites Against Racism Initiative (NUARI) working group met last Monday focusing on the creation of its vision. She said the group is eager to get to work creating an environment where all citizens can feel successful and welcome. She commented on the group facilitator Lisa Smith McQueenie.

Mr. Borrelli said the issue is complex and the good group of people are not shy about “putting themselves out there.”

Discussion ensued on restaurants using outside heaters and guidelines provided by the Town.

Mr. Matthews said the draft goals document is very good, noting additional responsibilities this year related to the COVID -19 pandemic and race equity.

Ms. Cooley suggested adding a goal of redefining the role of the Needham Human Rights Committee. She said a variety of work from NUARI will fit within the interest of the Human Rights Committee.

Ms. Cooley commented on oversight of public safety, vehicular accident and pedestrian safety, which she said should be looked at regularly.

The Board wished the community a Happy Thanksgiving.

8:25 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board meeting of Tuesday, November 24, 2020.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. 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=>