

West Newbury Capital Improvements Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:30 PM, February 8, 2024 First Floor Hearing Room

Members Present: Judy Mizner, Rick Parker, Elisa Grammer, Paul Niman, Ross Capolupo, and Polly McDowell. Ex officio, Town Manager Angus Jennings; also present Select Board Chair Wendy Reed

Call to order

Minutes

Ms. Mizner moved, Mr. Parker seconded, and the Committee voted 5-0-1 to approve the minutes of March 9, 2023 as amended (Mr. Niman, not present, abstaining). Ms. Mizner moved, Mr. Parker seconded, and the Committee voted 4-0-2 to approve the minutes of April 19, 2023 as amended (Ms. Mizner and Mr. Niman, not present, abstaining).

Committee Reorganization

Ms. McDowell moved, Mr. Niman seconded, and the Committee voted unanimously to retain the current officers:

- *Ms. Mizner, Chair*
- *Ms. McDowell, Vice-Chair*
- *Ms. Grammer, Clerk*

Review and approve draft FY23 CIC Annual Report for Town Report

Ms. Mizner moved, Mr. Parker seconded, and the Committee voted 5-0-1 to approve the Committee report for the FY 2023 Annual Town Report (Mr. Niman, not present in FY23, abstaining)

Updates re: ongoing Town studies related to potential future capital projects

Mr. Jennings said that major Town initiatives have been featured at Town Fairs, which were quite successful. He also recommended to Committee members signing up for Town email announcements, which can be done through the Town website

<https://www.wnewbury.org/subscribe>.

Middle Street Bridge

Mr. Jennings said that replacement of the Middle Street Bridge is a significant topic leading up to town meeting and at town meeting. West Newbury has done extensive work on this. The project is fully permitted in both West Newbury and Newburyport, including bid documents and construction specifications. Thus it is a shovel ready project, ready for funding. Even with grants West Newbury and Newburyport have received, shortfalls in construction funding remain. Since a portion of the bridge is in Newburyport, the city's support is essential for the project to proceed. Mr. Jennings has had discussions with Newburyport, but progress is slow. In addition to speaking with the mayor, Mr. Jennings has also been reaching out to Newburyport's city councilors.

Ms. Grammer asked if we have data, after five and half years of bridge closure, about the adverse impacts (such as ambulances delayed or citizen complaints) experienced from loss of the Middle Street Bridge. Mr. Jennings said that such data has not been collected and he has not heard complaints, but a number of people including Ms. Grammer had written in support of funding for the Middle Street Bridge replacement. Ms. Grammer noted that this contrasts with the Rocks

Village Bridge outage, which inconvenienced many including school buses and generated many ongoing complaints. Mr. Parker said that people have accommodated to the loss of the Middle Street Bridge, found alternative routes, and stopped complaining about it.

Page School conditions

Mr. Jennings reported that the Town-funded study about existing conditions and costs of repairs at Page School is now under review. Once review is completed, the study will be forwarded to the CIC. This will help frame the conversation whether to continue with Page School or pivot to construction of a new school. He stressed that under any scenario, the Town will be using Page School for the next decade or so, so further investment is warranted.

River Road climate change resiliency

Mr. Jennings said that the Town received draft reports about existing conditions of the River Road shoreline and related culverts. He noted that the grant application proposed a 2-year timeframe but the state required that it be done in 10 months, which is making this onerous. Ms. Grammer said that it appears that sea level rise and storm surge is in the model, but flooding from the upstream Merrimack is not. We should be getting a report about vulnerabilities in March and it will be interesting to see whether upstream flooding as well as overland and groundwater issues are addressed.

Rte 113 corridor planning

Mr. Jennings said that this is a proactive effort to address and improve safety on Rt. 113. The state maintains a rolling TIP list that requires level of design completion as a first step. The Page School/Pipestave pedestrian safety project is already at the 25% engineering stage. Work is ongoing regarding conceptual improvements on Main Street running from Newburyport to Groveland. Another area of potential improvement is traffic/pedestrian flow at the town center.

Presentation of updated working draft Capital Improvements Program, including capital articles for Spring 2024 town meeting

Mr. Jennings shared on the projector and described the 63 items now proposed for spring town meeting. An overview, with backup data, is also available on the Town website https://www.wnewbury.org/sites/g/files/vyhlf1436/f/uploads/town_meeting_article_requests_packet_feb_7_2024.pdf. Mr. Jennings encouraged the Committee to review this and urged the members to share this with friends and neighbors.

Litmus test

The Committee discussed the litmus test (<https://www.wnewbury.org/capital-improvements-committee/files/blank-litmus-test-spreadsheet>), which is used to rank capital projects. The members generally questioned whether it was a satisfactory method of evaluation, but so far no better mechanism had been found. Mr. Capolupo suggested that the Committee take some time to review the test to develop improvements. It was suggested that perhaps there could be a weighting mechanism. Mr. Parker questioned the use of the test when in his experience all capital improvement projects proposed had been approved. Ms. Grammer said that some form of

ranking could be helpful if the Town did not have the funds to go forward with all proposed items, and needed to choose among them. Ms. Mizner said that she will need to look at the bylaw, and will circulate the litmus test to Committee members. Mr. Jennings noted that given the relatively large number of capital items, it might be useful to list them by priority.

Designate CIC members to meet with sponsors of proposed capital articles

Ms. Mizner said that typically the Committee divides up articles, so that a Committee member discusses proposed items with the sponsoring department or committee to develop background information to share with the larger group. *After discussion, it was agreed that*

- *Mr. Parker will talk with the Fire Department about the new pumper truck*
- *Mr. Niman will work with the Water Department and with the Department of Public Works (DPW) about their proposed new vehicles*
- *Mr. Capolupo will work with DPW about proposed renovation and construction projects*
- *Ms. Mizner will work with DPW about bridges and culverts*
- *Ms. McDowell will work with the schools and DPW about projects concerning the schools*

Schedule for upcoming CIC meetings

The next meeting will be on February 29 at 7:30 when sponsors of the capital projects will address the Committee.

Other business

Ms. Grammer thanked the Select Board and the Town Manager for the decision at the prior fall town meeting for retaining free cash instead of spending it down to reduce taxes. This year's extensive list of capital improvements shows that was a good decision. She also stated her concern that the Town will certainly face additional capital costs because of climate change and that the state's Department of Local Services has yet to provide guidance about how to prepare and plan for such costs.

Adjournment

9:00 pm

Meeting Documents

Meeting packet provided by Town Manager

Respectfully submitted

Elisa Grammer