



**Town of West Newbury
Select Board and Finance Committee Joint Meeting
February 26, 2024 @ 6:00pm
381 Main Street, Town Office Building
www.wnewbury.org
Meeting Minutes**

Open Session: The session opened at 6:10 for both Board and Committee.

Participation at the Meeting:

- Rick Parker, Wendy Reed - Select Board
- Ross Capolupo, Dan Innes, Dennis LaMalfa, Rob Phillips, Jim Sperelakis- Finance Committee
- Angus Jennings- Town Manager
- Jim Blatchford- Town Clerk
- Christian Kuhn- Town Assessor
- Jenny Walsh- Town Accountant
- Bob Janes- Water Commissioner
- Mark Marlowe- Water Superintendent

Announcements:

- This meeting is being broadcast on local cable TV and recorded for rebroadcast on the local cable channels and on the internet. Meeting also accessible by remote participation; instructions below.
- Nomination papers available for local office- contact the Town Clerk's Office! townclerk@wnewbury.org or call or visit. Final day to obtain nomination papers: March 14, 2024
- Presidential Primary Tuesday, March 5, 2024- Last day to request vote by mail ballot February 27, 2024
- SAGE Center Lunch and Learn: Senior Tax Circuit Breaker Tax Relief- March 6th 11:30am-1pm
- RSV Clinic- March 12, 2024 10am-12pm in the Annex
- Call for volunteers! FY24 positions on Boards/Commissions/Committees. See www.wnewbury.org/volunteer
- Reminder to subscribe for emailed Town agendas/news/announcements at www.wnewbury.org/subscribe

Regular Business:

A. Public Comment. Limited to 2 minutes per resident on any topic. Please note that the Board will not discuss or take action at this meeting.

There was no public comment at this meeting.

B. Consent Agenda

There was no Consent Agenda at this meeting.

C. Town Manager Updates

a. Route 113 corridor planning process; recent working meeting with consultant and staff

See Exhibit C.a., p. 6. The planning process continues, reported Jennings, with a recent meeting on the project taking place. The consultant reported they have taken into account resident and official feedback and sent over a fresh set of plans to the Town Offices with data points on crashes and other dimensions. A set of markups with potential safety improvements (flashers, crosswalks, sidewalks, etc.) is forthcoming, he said, and he added he planned to submit it to MVPC for TIP comments, to get on their radar.

b. Newburyport Council Public Works & Safety Committee, mtg re Middle Street Bridge, Mon., March 4th

See Exhibit Cb, p. 7-20. Jennings said that the Newburyport City Council had referred the matter to its appropriate subcommittee, and that a meeting in Newburyport would be taking place in March. Jennings hoped that the meeting would serve as a gauge of the City's willingness to move ahead with the project.

c. New Task Force regarding Whittier Tech Regional Agreement, upcoming meeting in Newburyport

See Exhibit Cc, p. 21-22. Mayor Sean Reardon is forming a task force to evaluate the Regional Agreement, and West Newbury had been in receipt of a letter explaining his plans and outlining an upcoming meeting in Newburyport he hoped would be attended by two senior representatives from each of the member Towns and Cities. Jennings reported the task force was purely in an exploratory stage at this time.

d. Continuing work on Hazard Mitigation Plan updates

See Exhibit Cd, p. 23-24. Jennings assured the Board that work on the Plan was still ongoing. With staff help, it would be before state and federal authorities by Spring to get West Newbury eligible for related grants.

e. 10 staff members' completion of Leadership Management International professional development course

See Exhibit Ce, p. 25-26. Jennings provided a glowing review of the LMI Professional Development course experience from which 10 staffers had recently graduated.

f. Meeting with MIIA re FY25 health insurance renewal and updated employee benefits

See Exhibit Cf, p. 27-28. Jennings said that the Town had received confirmation on the 2.2% increase in rates, as well as a better explanation of insurance plan benefits for Town workers. He hoped to find a better way publicize these benefits to employees. As for the plans available, Jennings said the mandate to provide the top-tier PPO option remained- despite no one opting for this plan for yet another year. The Town had inquired about swapping it out for something more suitable, perhaps deductible-based, but this was apparently not possible.

g. Status of review of draft River Road resiliency planning consultant reports

See Exhibit Cg, p. 29-30. Reed and Parker received draft reports recently. The work combined public comment, Climate Change Resiliency Committee input, and input from the Projects Manager.

h. Updates on other ongoing/active projects/initiatives

D. Department Updates/Discussion

a. AED grant awarded to Police Dept

See Exhibit Da, p. 31-32. Reed announced the defibrillator grant was received.

b. Pre-Construction meeting for Church and Prospect St water main project held on February 22nd

See Exhibit Db, p. 33. Jennings said he included the Item as a brief update to the Select Board. Mark Marlowe spoke to his experience with the selected vendor when they did a ride-around to analyze the worksite. He reported the vendor felt confident about the size of the project and knew the area well. Marlowe said that the work would be underway in early April.

Item Fc was taken out of order at this time.

E. Board/Commission/Committee Updates/Discussion (and Select Board liaison updates):

a. Board of Water Commissioners' continuing work regarding water rates; rate public hearing in March

See Exhibit Ea, p. 34-37. Jennings told the Board that a large amount of headway had been made on the budgeting process and rate setting. A new rate structure would be referred to hearing March 21st. The rate-payers would be alerted via a mass mailer.

b. Community Preservation Committee actions taken, re proposed warrant articles, at Feb. 22nd meeting

See Exhibit Eb, p. 38. Reed told the room that the cemetery cleanup project, pickleball study, and the affordable housing trust transfer were approved by the Committee. An application for trail design on the Sawmill Brook property was paused for further review by the Board, since it would fall under their purview. The project would include the installation of a small bridge over the brook. The application included specs for various material costs (composite versus lumber) as well as costs for labor type (volunteer versus contracted). She solicited Parker's feedback on the best approach to spanning the stream. After considering the location (and environment) and the bridge options, it was felt a shorter span with composite materials may need more permitting, but it would allow for volunteer labor, and would guarantee a longer life for the footbridge.

c. Cultural Council grant awarded

See Exhibit Ec, p. 39-40. Jennings made the Board aware of the Cultural Council grant that West Newbury received.

F. Action Items

a. Cont'd review, with Finance Committee, of proposed Town Meeting warrant articles; and proposed sections of FY25 operating budget

See Exhibit Fa, p. 41-48. Chair Phillips opened the Finance Committee session at 7:01pm.

Town Moderator's Budget: No comments or changes were made to the Moderator's Budget.

Select Board's Budget: No comments or changes were made to the Select Board's Budget.

Rob Phillips asked that all focus on ways to reduce costs across the Operating Budget

Town Manager's Budget: The Manager's Budget carries "Manager's Newsletter" expenses. Jennings said that one of the variable expenses was posting job ads. Technology expenses are also highly increased and variable (such as Verizon Communications and Verizon Wireless expenses for Town cell phones). The Finance Committee wondered what the leadership seminar expenses were, and Jennings provided an overview of the recently completed LMI course the Town's employees had attended.

Finance Department Budget: The implementation of ClearGov software in the Finance Department caused a big increase. Jennings feels optimistic about the platform and said he would like to utilize it for a full Budget cycle.

Finance Committee Budget: Given that there have not been Reserve Fund Transfers in the last couple years, it was decided to reduce the budget line to \$40K.

Assessing Department's Budget: Jennings said that the Department has seen reductions in its financial needs by taking many things in-house versus contracting out, as previously had been done.

Town Clerk Budget: A increase in expenses for the Registrars is due to the number of elections needing executing and the number of paid workers each requires. Blatchford pointed out that a good deal of money is saved by having tax work-off poll workers. Sperelakis wondered if there was any reimbursement from the state or federal government for early voting or elections generally. Blatchford and Walsh spoke briefly on the small refunds provided to West Newbury to cover some elections-related expenses, but they stressed they did not cover them all.

Insurance and Bonds: The increase in this area was fairly minimal for FY25, and it yielded no questions from the Board or Committee.

Legal Counsel: The Select Board receives categorical breakdowns from Town Counsel on what their

money is going toward. Innes wondered if there was a benchmark for Towns of West Newbury's size that West Newbury could compare itself to see if the expenses were in line.

Health Insurance: The plans carry some contingency for changing insurance needs due to family status or new hiring, reported Jennings, but some money could be taken out of the contingency funds. Parker suggested a reduction from \$60,000 to \$40,000.

Reaching the end of the Operating Budget, the Finance Committee confirmed the reductions that had been decided upon, namely, \$1,100 from Select Board training and travel and \$4,500 from the Town Manager's Budget.

Article 27: Pension Liability Stabilization Fund: To transfer funds to PEB. Based on prior joint Board and Committee discussions, the percentage increased from 10% to 11.5%. **Parker motioned to recommend Article 27. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 27. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Phillips stated he would write the rationale.

Article 11: Transfer of Funds to OPEB. Jennings said that Walsh had pointed him to a past discussion with West Newbury's actuary wherein the Town committed to \$25,000 to put into OPEB. **Parker motioned to revise the recommended number in Article 11 to \$25,000. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperelakis motioned to revise the recommended number in Article 11. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

Article 55: Amendments to Finance Committee Bylaw. The Article would allow for quorums to be set at a majority by those "then serving", allow for a Finance Committee representative on any School District Advisory Committee, provide for a vice chair, [and] to set dates regarding Town Meetings and Annual Budgets to those dates. Looking over the text of the Bylaw, the Finance Committee debated elements of the Bylaw and what they might like to amend. One of the first suggestions, made by Dan Innes, was supporting a reduction to five members and an elimination of the "secretary" position. The second area of debate was whether the Committee should weigh in on all Articles at Town Meeting or just Articles with a financial aspect. Jennings opined that he felt having the Committee responsible for offering a recommendation on Articles unrelated to their immediate duties, especially those with tremendous substance (such as the upcoming Wetlands Bylaw), was a burden to FinComm members. In situations where money is not being spent, it did not make sense for the Committee to make policy critiques, in his view, and could also come across as over-reach. Jennings said that the Finance Committee's involvement in non-financial affairs was a deviation from previous Committees' approaches. Reed asked the Finance Committee members if they felt that restricting recommendations/analysis to Articles where funds were being appropriated would suffice. Parker raised an example of a previous FinComm member who used their platform to advocate for their own benefit/viewpoint, even though the Article in question was unrelated to finance in any way. Phillips felt the same thing could happen with any Board or Committee member. Other Finance Committee members spoke up and said that at prior moments they felt uncomfortable being asked to offer opinions on non-financial matters (such as the non-binding referendum on changing the Commonwealth flag that was brought before a 2020's Town Meeting). The discussion continued. Jennings expressed his worry that the final sentence of the Bylaw made it sound like the FinComm's discretion would set the date that Budget drafts would need to be delivered, which in his prior experience created difficulties. He suggested revision of that sentence.

Article 56: Proposed Amendments to Town Meeting/Elections Bylaw: To provide clear authority to the Moderator to declare a two-thirds majority vote when the record or legislation requires it, without completing a hand-count vote. It was confirmed that the Moderator (KC Swallow) was in favor of the contents of this Article. **Parker motioned to recommend Article 56. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** The Finance Committee took no action on this Article.

Article 59: Dissolve the Opioid Settlement Stabilization Account. Revocation of the dedication of revenues to the Opioid Settlement Stabilization Fund. This would authorize release of the funds for spending by the Town Accountant. **Parker motioned to recommend Article 59. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Innes motioned to recommend Article 59. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Phillips stated he would write the rationale.

Article 60: Establish Capital Stabilization Fund pursuant to MGLCh. 40 Sec 5B. Sperelakis encouraged the narrative to include what exactly "capital" was. **Parker motioned to recommend Article 60. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 60. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperelakis stated he would write the rationale.

Article 61: Reduction of Property Tax Obligation of Veterans in Exchange for Volunteer Services. Veterans would be entitled to reduced property taxes if they donated their time to the Town (similar to the Senior Citizen work-off program now in effect). **Parker motioned to recommend Article 61. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Innes motioned to

recommend Article 61. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). LaMalfa stated he would write the rationale.

With their business concluded, Sperelakis motioned to adjourn the Finance Committee Meeting. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The Finance Committee adjourned at 9:31pm.

- b. Review/ confirm method of funding for Police Cruiser replacements**
See Exhibit Fb, p. 49-76. The Select Board debated if the Warrant should be reopened and the police cruiser acquisition turned into a standalone Article (versus a line in public safety's FY25 Budget). Parker felt that having the squad car included in the Budget was not of any particular advantage, and neither did others who chimed in. After further conversation, Jennings confirmed that a future Agenda Item could be the reopening of the Warrant to add a new Article on the cruiser.
- c. Reconsider ARPA funding award for Church/Prospect water main replacements**
See Exhibit Fc, p. 77-88. Reed opened the discussion by stating that a prior Board's vote should be reconsidered only if the situation changed and in this case it had. She brought the Water Commissioners up to speed on Wile's investigation and subsequent memo into ARPA funding for the water main replacement project. The concern had been raised that the allotment of the ARPA funds was done under the assumption that the \$625,000 would go toward securing materials for the project. The bid the Town went with was significantly lower than anticipated, leading the Select Board to wonder if the \$625,000 awarded should be pared back. Reed opined that any change to the funding should have taken place much earlier out of fairness to the Water Commissioners. She also pointed out that based on cost per foot, piping would come in at about \$600,000 at the end of the day. Parker agreed with Reed, and added the Board should be true to its word on the matter- an agreement had been made with the Board of Water Commissioners/Water Department to allow them to use that money. He wanted to continue to foster a spirit of cooperation between the Select Board and the Water Commissioners that had grown in the recent past.
- d. Authorize submittal of FY25 Community Project Congressional Funding request (Middle Street Bridge)**
See Exhibit Fd, p. 89-114. The Town would need to submit the CPCF grant request to Congressman Seth Moulton's office within two days. Much of the required materials was in hand, reported Jennings, it would just be a matter of assembling and sending the packet to Moulton's office. Permission had been requested from those who submitted support letters in the past to use them in the packet. **Parker motioned to authorize the CPCF request. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**
- e. Decide whether to seek participation in MassCEC Non-Profit Buildings Decarbonization Pilot Program**
See Exhibit Fe, p. 115-118. Parker motioned to apply for the Pilot Program. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**
- f. Review draft framework for potential budgeted step increases for FY25**
See Exhibit Ff, p. 119-126. With personnel evaluations out of sync with the FY25 Budget development process, Reed wanted to make sure that any process decided upon could be replicated year-to-year. The Board felt it should pick an amount that would be paid out for performance based increases rather than decide on a certain number of pay step increases across all Departments. The basis for determining this amount was discussed and it was agreed that a percentage of the labor budget for non union, non contract employees and excluding overtime should be used. Jennings would calculate this number for discussion at the next meeting for further discussion.
- g. Request for Special Event Permit: Essex County Trails Assn. "Tails for the Trails" 5K Cani-cross at Pipestave / Mill Pond, March 30th, 2024 at 8am**
See Exhibit Fg, p. 127-133. Parker motioned to approve the permit. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**
- h. Select Board meeting minutes: February 6, 2024**
See Exhibit Fh, p. 134-136. Parker motioned to approve the Minutes as amended. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

G. General Discussion Items

There were no General Discussion Items at this meeting.

H. Correspondence, including:

- a. Letter from Groveland Select Board member regarding PRSD Regional Agreement**
See Exhibit Ha, p. 137-138. The Board took no action on this letter.
- b. Response from NHESP regarding proposed Ash Street Traffic Management Plan**
See Exhibit Hb, p. 139-142. Jennings noted that he would discuss the response with relevant staff and report back to the Board..
- c. Letter from Assessing Dept. regarding FY24 valuation changes**
See Exhibit Hc, p. 143-144. Parker suggested the information about valuation changes be publicly viewable. Jennings felt some sort of presentation or discussion would be good. Presently, Board of Assessors meetings are very early in the morning, which perhaps prevents residents from attending- but the fear is that such a meeting might become very politicized.
- d. Letters from Mass. Office of Dam Safety**
See Exhibit Hd, p. 145-156. Jennings alerted the Select Board to the eight letters from the officials at Dam Safety.
- e. FEMA letter regarding updated Flood Insurance Rate Maps**
See Exhibit He, p. 157-161. The Board took no action on this letter.

I. Future Agenda Items / Meeting follow-up assignments

Parker hoped that the April 8th Board meeting could be shifted to a Tuesday night instead. The rest of the group seemed agreeable to the idea.

Reed motioned to adjourn the session. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The Session adjourned at 10:09pm.

To access a video recording of the meeting, use the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l85FIpcGtE0>