



Town of West Newbury  
Select Board and Finance Committee Joint Meeting  
March 13, 2024 @ 6:00pm  
381 Main Street, Town Office Building  
www.wnewbury.org  
Meeting Minutes

**Open Session:** Chairwoman Reed opened the session at 6:01pm.

**Participation at the Meeting:**

- Rick Parker, Wendy Reed, Chris Wile- Select Board
- Dan Innes, Dennis LaMalfa, Rob Phillips, Jim Sperelakis- Finance Committee
- Angus Jennings- Town Manager
- Jim Blatchford- Town Clerk
- Jenny Walsh- Town Accountant
- Paul Sevigny- Health Agent
- Tom Fahey, Bob Janes, Blake Seale- Board of Health
- Chief Michael Dwyer- West Newbury Public Safety
- Christine Marshall- CoA Director
- Doug Mead- Park and Recreation Commissioner

**Announcements:**

There were no announcements read at this meeting.

**Regular Business:**

**A. Convene**

The session opened at 6:01pm. Rob Phillips of the Finance Committee walked through the drafting of the Annual Budget and provided context on its creation to date.

**B. Review and Discuss Budgets and Articles for Spring Town Meeting to be Held on April 29, 2024, Including Proposed FY25 Public Safety, Health Dept, and Council on Aging Operating Budgets and Warrant Articles**

This Item opened with Jennings requesting a Reserve Fund Transfer related to Public Safety. With Public Safety staff in attendance for the evening's proceedings, Jennings thought it was a good idea to discuss this matter. \$20,000 was requested to fund the costs of an internal affairs investigation of the West Newbury Police Department by an outside vendor. The Finance Committee would be solely responsible for approving or denying the request. **Sperelakis motioned to the transfer. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

Jennings requested a Reserve Fund Transfer to cover additional expenses for PFAS testing at the shuttered Steele Landfill and on properties nearby. Jennings said that the Town was part of a class-action suit against PFAS manufacturers such as 3M and DuPont, but filing a claim would require updated testing to be done by the end of April, prior to the originally imagined testing dates for May that would have been bankrolled by a Town Meeting appropriation. Paul Sevigny explained the testing process, and how different testing intervals would potentially impact the price, but suggested the amount being asked for not be modified to a lower figure. The Finance Committee would be solely responsible for approving or denying the request. **Sperelakis motioned to approve up to \$15,410 in a transfer for the testing. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

The Committee and Board next took up the Board of Health Operating Budget. Sperelakis wondered about the expenditures in the Waste Collection and Disposal lines and in landfill monitoring/testing which were lagging behind the amounts set for them at prior year's Town Meeting. Phillips pointed out that the increases for FY25 (despite the present trends) were being driven by mandates and contractual obligations. Sevigny said that it would be a good decade before the testing could be wound down, depending on the quantity of chemicals found during testing. With regard to the increased price tag for the waste disposal contract, Seale opined that the only way West Newbury might see a reduction in expenses is if fuel costs dip. Costs for recycling tonnage also had to be factored in, due to the Chinese no longer accepting our recycling products, reported Seale. The present Budget would cover amounts up to \$100/ton. **Wile motioned to recommend the proposed Health Department Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to recommend the proposed Health Department Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperelakis stated he would write the rationale.

The Committee and Board next took up the Historical Commission's request for a Quaker Cemetery cleanup. The Town Manager reported CPC supported the project. Wile wondered why the costs could not be included in the DPW's tree maintenance expenses. Jennings said he had not talked to Butch Hills about this but did not see a reason why it couldn't hypothetically. **Wile motioned to approve the Article on Cemetery cleanup. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to approve the Article on Cemetery cleanup. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperelakis stated he would write the rationale. The sunset date is June 30, 2025.

The Committee and Board next took up the Council on Aging Budget Operating Budget. Jennings lauded the work of Marshall and Vincent at Council on Aging. Reed asked Marshall what the formula grant increase would be (that pays for many programs as well as Jen Vincent's salary as the Nutrition Coordinator). Marshall stated that it was \$14/senior (those 60 and older) based on 2020 Census numbers, bringing the total for 2024 to \$19,000. **Wile motioned to approve the CoA Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to approve the CoA Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

The Committee and Board next took up the Historical Commission Operating Budget. Reed wondered what the Commission's Budget went toward. Jennings explained that some Committees and Commissions received funds, but the monies were rarely used. Jennings said he had gotten them to reduce the asked-for amount (as he had with other bodies). Reed suggested reexamining Budgets for Boards, Committees, and Commissions in the future. Jennings stated that historically BCCs were given their own funds to manage prior to the Town Manager form of government, and Phillips suggested that these funds could be included in the Town Manager's Budget for dispersal as needed. Making changes would be a decent amount of work, Jennings admitted, for a variety of reasons, both for Town administration and the Boards, Committees, and Commissions. The Board and Committee discussed when the best time might be to reevaluate whether these Budgets should be standalone or included in the Town Manager's portion of the FY Budget. **Wile motioned to approve the \$600 Historical Commission Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to approve the \$600 Historical Commission Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

The Committee and Budget next took up the Public Safety Department's Operating Budget. Jennings pointed out some changes to the numbers since the initial Budget reveal. Some salary increases were not yet set in stone, with union negotiations still ongoing, Jennings told the Committee and Board. Other major expenses included unanticipated costs and OT salaries. **Wile motioned to approve the Police Department Budget for \$1,299,568. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to approve the Police Department Budget. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Following a brief clarification on whether the new Office Administrator position would be paid for out of the Police Budget alone (it would), **Wile motioned to approve the Fire Department Budget for \$328,091. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Phillips had further questions about the Budget before the FinComm voted on the Fire Budget. Chief Dwyer said the new numbers were to accommodate getting firefighters on hand during the day with greater ease, since evening shifts were much easier to fill at present. Public Safety would take a per diem approach to daytime wages, versus on-call. **Sperelakis motioned to approve the Fire Department Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Following consideration of the Fire Budget, Jennings indicated that there would be increases in the Dispatchers' Budget. **Wile motioned to approve the Dispatch Budget for \$341,366. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). LaMalfa motioned to approve the Dispatch Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Following consideration of the Dispatch Budget, **Parker motioned to approve the Emergency Management Agency Budget for \$12,601. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to approve the Emergency Management Agency Budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** The Select Board decided to table approving the Animal Control Officer's Budget until the financial picture in Newburyport was clearer. Jennings said that in a call with the City's Finance Director, Newburyport may be adjusting wages for the ACO. This would potentially impact how much West Newbury would need to contribute to retaining the Officer's services.

The Board and Committee next considered Warrant Articles.

Article 21: Replacement of the WNFD Pumper/Tanker Truck. Dwyer explained that the existing pumper truck would be sold off to another Department or simply traded in. In its place, the new pumper would be a stock model, meaning, Dwyer explained, that it was available for purchase from the dealer now at \$560,000 a more affordable price than building it custom (like many of West Newbury's other Fire Dept. vehicles). **Wile motioned to recommend Article 21. The motion was properly seconded.** Prior to the final vote, Reed interjected and asked the Chief why grant money was not given to West Newbury to help with the purchase of the new truck. Dwyer said that West Newbury's finances were excellent, and this had resulted in being denied grants. **The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Jennings discussed options for funding the truck such as financing v. outright purchase. He felt that with interest rates, it may not be worth it. He encouraged Dwyer to look into it. **Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 21. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 21. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Innes stated he would write the rationale. The sunset date is June 30, 2025.

Article 65: Purchase of a new police cruiser. **Wile motioned to recommend Article 65 in the amount of \$57,000. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Parker asked where the Department came down on purchasing a hybrid or non-hybrid vehicle. Chief Dwyer said that there's no available hybrid models (a one-year-plus waiting list at most dealers). Dwyer endorsed the lower wear and tear and fuel costs in hybrid cruisers and wanted to continue to pursue that route. However, he did say that the cruiser's undercarriages were posing issues because of plastic cladding to protect the hybrid components, and that the Ford Explorer Hybrid has not been very reliable. The Department was monitoring their Explorers and those in other Town's fleets to see if these problems persist. He stated that many new gas-powered vehicles were much more efficient, and that they were comparing the two engine types. **Innes motioned to recommend Article 65. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Innes stated he would write the rationale. The sunset date is June 30, 2025.

Article 34: Public Safety Complex repairs. **Wile motioned to recommend Article 34 in the amount of \$23,835. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Innes motioned to recommend Article 34. **The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperelakis stated he would write the rationale. The sunset date is June 30, 2026.

Article 64: Transfer of Opioid Stabilization Fund money. Jennings explained that the original opioid stabilization fund would be closed (per Article 59), and that a second Article (64) would authorize the transfer of those funds. **Wile motioned to recommend Article 64. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to approve Article 64. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Phillips said he would write the rationale. There was no sunset date.

Article 53 and 54: The Finance Committee intended to make no recommendation on these Articles asking for changes to the Hunting and Animal Bylaws, but Jennings said the Finance Committee could choose to do so if they wanted. Reed said that the Select Board was waiting on further input from other Town bodies after getting public feedback at a prior Board meeting. The Finance Committee decided not to make any recommendations either, with Phillips planning to write a rationale for the public to understand why.

The Board and Committee agreed that another joint meeting would be useful, and they agreed upon March 25<sup>th</sup>, a Monday. **At this time, the Finance Committee closed their session, with Sperelakis motioning to adjourn. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The Committee Session adjourned at 8:04pm.**

The Select Board members next took up the still-unresolved matter of step raises, determining that an allotment of 1.25% (\$26,402) would be available to the Town Manager to accommodate pay increases across Town government, based on performance reviews. **Wile motioned to use up to \$26,402 for step raises. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

**Wile motioned to adjourn the Session. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The Session adjourned at 8:22pm.**