



**Town of West Newbury
Select Board Meeting
February 6, 2024 @ 6:00pm
381 Main St., West Newbury, MA 01985
www.wnewbury.org
Meeting Minutes**

Open Session: Chairwoman Reed opened the session at 6:08pm.

Participation at the Meeting:

- Rick Parker, Wendy Reed, Chris Wile- Select Board
- Angus Jennings- Town Manager
- Jim Blatchford- Town Clerk
- Rob Phillips- Finance Committee representative

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.
- Mill Pond Open House – Sat., Feb. 10, 10am-2pm. Roasted marshmallows, hot chocolate, snacks, hiking & more!
- 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.
- 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 on public comments at this meeting.**

No comments were made.

B. Consent Agenda

There were no actions on the Consent Agenda.

C. Town Manager Updates

- a. Updated schedule for presentation of proposed FY25 budget; preliminary updates as known, incl. receipt of proposed FY25 Pentucket budget**

See Exhibit Ca. Jennings shared with the Board that the Pentucket Budget presentation would be taking place at a different time, but that the Town was in receipt of it. He explained that there would be areas of the Town and school budgets that would remain in flux even toward the final presentation of the Budget (2/12) and on the date of its vote at Town Meeting, largely due to CBAs being worked out. The Whittier High School budget, due to the special election, would be delayed until March though Superintendent Lynch had said she did not think there would be capital projects included in their budget the upcoming Fiscal Year. Addition of a new electrical specialist to attend to the school's wiring problems was anticipated, per Jennings, as well as the potential expense of analyzing the building's issues and prioritizing the most critical fixes.

Jennings spoke on the work being done with DPW to wrap up the restructuring of their Department, and also said he urged Park and Recreation to move some of their baseline expenses out of their purview and under the DPW's instead.

Other aspects to be determined were insurance rates and legal expenses.

- b. Addition of new focus area to Rte. 113 corridor planning: Ocean Meadow easement/Way to the River**

See Exhibit Cb. Conservation Agent Greene had been working hard on sorting out this issue of trail access, and the Select Board was warned that the issue may come into the Board's lap depending on how things progressed, particularly with regard to Route 113 crossing points for this trail and affiliated sidewalks. The Manager again underlined the need to address safety along the Corridor as a whole.

- c. Ash Street Traffic Management Plan submitted to NHESP**

See Exhibit Cc. This Item was included to provide information to residents as needed, given the great interest in the issue last Fall.

- d. Executed contract with B2Q for Page School HVAC Repairs**

See Exhibit Cd. Jennings reported that the work was now under contract. Reimbursements for energy efficient utilities would be signed off on when the job was nearly completed. The work, Jennings inform the Board, was being scheduled to take place over April vacation, when the school is closed. The delay had been in response to vetting a potentially lower quote for the job from another vendor. This never came to fruition.

- e. Upcoming interior modifications to Old Town Hall for regulatory compliance**

See Exhibit Ce. Brian Richard of Buildings and Grounds had recently requested the Town Manager's approval to work on an internal wall of the Hall to make the space leased out for child care compliant with applicable DESE regulations. Wile expressed concern that the work was being paid for with the Town's dollars when he felt that the lessee was responsible. Jennings said he would review Richard's proposal relative to the present Lease Agreement and bring it up at a later junction if review was needed.

- f. MMA Annual Conference, updates on information received/lessons learned**

See Exhibit Cf. Jennings provided information from the MMA Annual Conference, and Parker asked if there was anything in particular they all should take from it. One aspect was the handling of solid waste more cost-efficiently, with Jennings raising the idea that perhaps it would be better for the Town to go out to bid on said services when the contract comes up in 2026, relaying that the Finance Committee had already endorsed the idea for some time. The solid waste contract is one of the largest expenses to the Town.

g. Updates on other ongoing/active projects/initiatives

Reed queried Jennings on a state-sponsored change to RFPs, moving the total to apply from 50,000 to 100,000 dollars. These new policies would make a difference to small municipalities like West Newbury.

D. Department Updates/Discussion

a. Merrimack Valley “Vision Zero” Municipal Liaison meeting presentation, and upcoming meeting

See Exhibit Da. Christine Wallace, Butch Hills, and Chief Michael Dwyer have been representing West Newbury in this activity. The MVPC received a grant to improve traffic safety- and an interactive had been unveiled showing danger hotspots across the area. West Newbury’s small size and limited amount of dangerous areas make the Town less competitive to receive improvement funding.

b. Land Management & Planning working group

See Exhibit Db. Jennings used this Item to highlight the enhanced collaboration between land management, conservation, planning, and others in their bi-monthly meetings- which has lead to better cooperation and swifter progress on issues.

c. Town Planner Report

See Exhibit Dc. The Town Manager acknowledged the valuable Report and Sue Brown’s work on it.

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

a. Update re PRSD Agreement working group

See Exhibit Ea. Wile said that at the most recent meeting was agreeable, and that the only main issue of contention was the demand by Merrimac and Groveland to keep language in the Agreement stating that each Town would be required to have their own elementary school. He reported that Groveland’s representatives wanted to add “stabilization” as a fourth component of the budget section, along with “capital”, “operating costs”, and “debt”. Wile relayed that a longer timeline might be necessary to finalize the Agreement (as opposed to getting it before this upcoming Spring Town Meeting) with blessing from MA DESE, Pentucket officials, and the approval of each component community. Reed said she had put a placeholder Article in the Warrant for Town Meeting. She asked Wile why the two other Towns were opposed to consolidating elementary schools, and Phillips chimed in saying that Merrimac and Groveland had never explained it, a sentiment which Wile echoed.

b. Update re Municipal Energy Aggregation – recent call with MassDOER

See Exhibit Eb. Jennings said that West Newbury attended a call with a trio of other Towns to check in. Parker, who also was on the call, indicated progress toward municipal aggregation was ongoing, and aggregation could even take place as soon as a few months from the meeting date. Originally, the timeline had set things back two years.

c. Closeout of Green Communities grant

See Exhibit Ec. Parker said the final report of the Green Communities Grant was submitted on Friday, February 2, 2024. He felt the Town would be meeting the targets for energy conservation that had been set. No follow-up call on the submission was planned, per Parker, but any questions would be brought to the Town’s attention if necessary.

d. Review status of remaining Board/Commission/Committee Questionnaires

During this Item, Reed said that no questionnaire had been sent to the Board of Fire Engineers, and asked Parker (since he was the liaison to the Board) if there were any upcoming meetings, to which he replied he was unsure. She requested they address the questionnaire at a future meeting. The Select Board next turned to the Capital Improvements Committee, which had not met since August 2023, wondering when a questionnaire could be presented to them. It was determined a meeting of the CIC would be taking place in early February, and a questionnaire might be taken up then. Reed followed up about other outstanding entities including the Climate Change Resiliency Committee, the Historic District Commission, and the Cultural Council. It was reported the River Access Committee had not received one, but the body had not met in two years. It was suggested that meeting with Chip O’Connor of the Whittier School Committee would also be valuable, especially given the recent developments regarding the Whittier project vote. Jennings said he had encouraged District administrators to provide the Town with meeting notices and updates, and in light of the failure of the building project vote he hoped that the District would take him up on his recommendations.

As discussion continued it was revealed the Harbor Committee had been invited to come to a Select Board meeting to discuss their questionnaire, but they had not shown up.

F. Action Items

a. Review of proposed/potential warrant articles for Spring Annual and Special Town

Jennings and the Board discussed the process of submitting Articles, improving efficiency in the process of review and analysis, and the timeline for closing the Warrant for Town Meetings. As the discussion turned to the Warrant for Spring 2024 Town Meeting itself, Reed lead discussion by asking which of the tentative Articles, if any, her fellow Board members would object to being included. No objections were raised. Jennings indicated that some Articles did not yet have formal sponsors. Concern was raised about residents objecting to rising property tax rates, and to provide greater context for these increases, it was decided that the Board of Assessors should make a report in advance of Town Meeting.

b. Vote to close Annual and Special Town Meeting Warrants

See Exhibit Fb. Parker motioned to close the Warrants. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).

c. Referral of proposed capital articles to the Capital Improvements Committee

See Exhibit Fc. The group looked at several Articles that may or may not be appropriate to be bankrolled by Stabilization funds. Jennings urged a future look at defining what should be a capital item expense and what shouldn’t. This lead to a broad discussion on the role of the CIC and other Town bodies with regard to optimizing

efficiency and examining proposed financial expenditures. Parker suggested that the \$20,000 threshold currently in place where a project would pull in the CIC was too low. The dollar amounts attached to the Bylaw governing this were originally established in 1977, meaning that inflation has made \$20,000 in 70s dollars equivalent to \$100,000 today. Wile chimed in that he felt even \$50,000 was too small a figure for CIC direct involvement. Jennings pointed out that depending on the interpretation of the Bylaw governing the CIC, it could restrict the Town to having the Committee review every dollar spent- and clearing up this ambiguity was a priority for him and the Select Board agreed. Eventually the Board settled on which Articles to forward to the CIC. **Wile authorized Articles 21-37 (excluding 36) to be brought before the Capital Improvements Committee. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

d. Decide whether to seek participation in Commercial Building Pilot Program

The Select Board opted to delay discussing or taking action on this Item until the next meeting.

e. Vote to sign Presidential Primary Warrant

See Exhibit Fe. Parker motioned to sign the Warrant. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).

f. Request for authorization to submit MIIA Wellness Grant

See Exhibit Ff. Parker motioned to authorize submission and acceptance of the MIIA Wellness Grant. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).

G. General Discussion Items

a. Request for top two State budget priorities for West Newbury, Office of Representative Ramos

See Exhibit Ga. Reed asked if there was a predetermined list of priorities for the Board to examine. In response Jennings recapped prior requests to the state legislature, and Blatchford offered insight on his time on Beacon Hill with regard to the sorts of projects legislators were more likely to champion for the Town (those that were fairly simple such as a public park, etc.). Wile emphasized introducing one major priority to Rep. Ramos and Sen. Tarr. The Board alighted on the Middle Street Bridge Project as the priority.

b. Whittier Regional Technical High School updates

See Exhibit Gb. The Town Manager recapped a recent meeting for Town leadership across the Whittier School District hosted by the school. During the meeting Superintendent Maureen Lynch said that the outcome of the election was not what the District wanted, with their new building project being defeated at the polls by District voters. The assembled City and Town leadership offered united sentiments to Lynch and her colleagues, emphasizing the unfair nature of the 1967 Regional Agreement (and possibly restructuring it), as well as concerns that Whittier was not serving as a trade school but rather generating college-bound students. Overall, Jennings felt the gathering was cordial enough, but could not offer a prediction as to where things would go next. The communities also told the District that decision-making regarding the Regional Agreement should be undertaken by members of the communities as a whole rather than just Whittier School Committee representatives- and that the budgeting process going forward would be under intense scrutiny from the 11 member communities.

H. Correspondence, including:

a. Attorney General approval received for remaining items from fall Special Town Meeting

See Exhibit Ha. Blatchford reported that all approvals and correspondence had been received from the Commonwealth regarding decisions made by West Newbury Town Meeting voters in October 2023.

b. Letter from MassDCR re required dam inspection, Mill Pond Dam

See Exhibit Hb. Jennings said Butch Hills of the Highway Department would be handling the DCR and the dam inspection.

c. EV Stations monthly metrics report, Dec. 2023

See Exhibit Hc. The Board did not discuss this topic.

I. Future Agenda Items / Meeting follow-up assignments

Parker said he would bring up the Commercial Building Pilot Program on February 12th. Reed said she would like to go over the Animal Control, Town Meeting/Elections, and Hunting Bylaws up for potential Town Meeting voting. Additionally, she wanted to reevaluate appointment processes to Board, Committees, and Commissions, and discuss starting Open Session at an earlier hour (and how to promote any time change to the public).

Reed motioned to adjourn the Session. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The Session adjourned at 8:53pm.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbbZl8b1QeM>