

West Newbury Capital Improvements Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting date & place: 7:30 pm, December 9, 2020, Remote Participation via Zoom, Plus In Person at First Floor Conference Room, 381 Main Street, West Newbury.

Members Present: Via remote participation Julie Boria, Rick Parker, Elisa Grammer, Polly McDowell, and Patrick McCoy. Chair Nathan Kelly, Judy Mizner, and DPW Director Wayne Amaral present in Town Offices and participating remotely. Also present in Town Offices and participating remotely, Town Manager Angus Jennings, ex officio.

At the outset, Chair Kelly read the following statement: "Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the West Newbury Capital Improvements Committee will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible."

Call to order

7:33 pm

Approval of Minutes

By roll call vote, Mr. Kelly, Mr. Parker, Ms. Mizner, and Ms. McDowell, who were present at that meeting, approved the revised minutes for January 29, 2020.

By 6-0-1 roll call vote (Mr. Kelly, not present, abstaining), the Committee approved the minutes of September 23, 2020.

By 4-0-3 roll call vote (Ms. Mizner, Mr. McCoy and Ms. McDowell, not present, abstaining), the Committee approved the minutes of October 29, 2020, as revised.

Public Comment

None

Late File Items

Mill Pond Dredging Ms. Grammer said that today as part of a history project she had been reading old Annual Town Reports and saw that in 2000, the Town spent over \$700K (mostly with grant funds) to drain and dredge Mill Pond. She said that this will need to be done again at some point, perhaps sooner than might otherwise occur with the developments planned uphill, but is not on the capital improvements list.

Upcoming January Committee Meeting Mr. Kelly said that the next Committee meeting will be in mid-January, 2021, to vote on priority capital items in advance of Spring Town Meeting. Ms. Mizner noted that the outcome of the January meeting will provide the Committee's

recommendations to the voters. Mr. Jennings said that some requests may need to be whittled down. A large amount is being requested and the Stabilization Fund will also need funding. *The Committee generally agreed that Wednesday is a good day for meeting and that we would aim for January 13th or 20th.* A Doodle poll will be sent out to nail down the date.

Liaison Reports

Department of Public Works (DPW)

Mr. Parker said that many DPW projects are listed, which reflects a comprehensive view of items that will need to be addressed. As we get closer in time, we can identify what must be done at the time, and there may be some flexibility. At this point it is not clear how we would fund all that is on the list. We will have to choose the most important. Also, other funding sources may be available. For instance, any item involved with energy improvements may be eligible for a Green Communities grant.

With the updated capital improvements spreadsheet on the computer screen, Mr. Amaral noted that items in green (phone system replacement, electronic keying, etc.) have been newly added. Ultimately, the \$1.3M amount for DPW in FY22 will not be fully funded.

Mr. Kelly observed that the important thing now is to get a complete perspective. With that in place, we will need to make choices. Mr. Parker added that DPW has the most significant needs of any department because it is responsible for most of the physical plant in the Town. Also, we will need to consider impacts of climate change in these decisions, and storm water needs. We will be working on that over the next months and years.

Police & Fire Departments

Mr. McCoy said that he spoke with Fire Chief Dwyer, Police Chief Durand, and Mr. Amaral. The major items are from the Fire Department: 1) a new tanker truck (\$300-500K) to replace the 1984 truck that cannot make it up the hills, especially when it is icy; 2) new jaws of life (\$30K), and 3) emergency communications upgrades to relocate the Pipestave Hill antenna to the Page School (\$60K). The last communications item is also the Police Department's request.

In response to Mr. Kelly's question about other items, Mr. McCoy noted that a pumper truck is on the list. It may be possible to get a combined pumper/tanker truck, which would cost more but possibly result in net savings. That is being researched.

Mr. Parker said that the climate change Municipal Vulnerability Working Group identified improving communications as among the most important action items. The cell buildout in Town is quite inadequate and improved cell service could complement the issue of improved communication with the Pipestave antenna. He suggested that this committee should be aware of this need as concerns cell service and work to support a better build out. Also, new cell towers

should be located on Town land, so that the Town gets the revenue.

Water Department

Ms. Grammer said that the Water Department is under significant stress. Currently it is short staffed and has very large looming capital improvement needs. The item sure to be raised at Spring Town Meeting is \$160K for cleaning and painting the Pipestave water tank. Another serious need is the chemical building, which is in bad shape. About 2/3ds of the Town is on the public water system; it is not clear that water ratepayers alone can bear all these costs. It seems that in the past there has been some fluidity with taxpayers picking up some water-related costs. Ms. Grammer is still trying to understand some of the rate and financial issues confronting the Water Department.

Mr. Jennings provided compelling statistics about the disproportionately high amount of debt in the water budget. Over the past 4 years, 97.9% of the increase in water rates is attributable to debt. Although the Town overall has a good credit rating and relatively low amounts of debt, the Water Department debt is general obligation debt binding the whole Town.

Parks & Recreation

Ms. Boria spoke with Jack Foley of the Parks and Recreation Commission. He is working on a list of capital needs, most of which don't reach the \$20K level needed for this Committee's involvement. Mr. Foley is working with Mr. Amaral to determine if there are enough capital improvement items to put on the spreadsheet. Some items would be replacing bleachers, parking lot lighting, and irrigation. Two playgrounds are on the list. The one at Page School is being funded with Community Preservation Act monies. Action Cove playground replacement is on the list, but not for FY 2022. Ms. Boria expects to hear more on this before the next meeting and report more at that meeting.

Council on Aging (COA)

Ms. McDowell spoke with COA Director Theresa Woodbury and Mr. Amaral. Most COA needs are relatively small items, such as furniture. The COA van will need to be replaced around 2026. The COA also is feeling space constraints, and would like a larger facility that could accommodate yoga classes.

Mr. Jennings observed that the Town is on track to restore Carr Post and one of the questions is how that building will be used. Perhaps the COA could use it as programming space. Yoga classes on the second floor is one idea, but Mr. Kelly noted that the upstairs is constrained by the slanted ceilings. He also said that Old Town Hall is available for programming use.

Library

Ms. Mizner spoke with Wendy Reed, Chair of the Library Trustees. The Library has no immediate capital needs, but in the longer term the main library rug needs to be replaced, which will require work on the floor underlayment. Also, the HVAC system, whose filters are not rated for COVID, will need evaluation for replacement and/or upgrades. The second floor needs handicap access and could be made into meeting/tutoring space. In the afternoons, tutoring often takes place in the main room, which can be distracting for other patrons.

Page School

Mr. Kelly met with Mr. Amaral, the Page School principal, the school physical plant superintendent, and others. He said that many people do not realize that the \$10M in renovations of Page School done about a decade ago is only a band aid, which barely scratched the surface. Mr. Kelly was shown a 200-page report of major problems with Page School identified over 10 years and still requiring remediation. For instance, the elevators are small and aged, paving needs are far greater than easily seen, and the plumbing and lead issues are highly worrisome—acceptable lead levels in schools are likely to go to zero, which Page School plumbing will not meet.

Collectively, the group Mr. Kelly met with felt that there is a need to 1) do a deep dive into that 200-page report from 10 years ago and 2) conduct a feasibility study of continuing with this building. Whether further capital improvements in Page School is money well spent needs to be studied fully. Ms. Grammer said that while she has not quantified the amount, her review of Town Annual Reports indicates very large amounts already spent on Page School. Mr. Parker raised the question whether Page School is functional from the perspective of what a modern school should be.

A general sentiment was that the feasibility study should be conducted sooner rather than later. Mr. McCoy said that ratios should be evaluated—how does Page School relate to other schools? Mr. Kelly agreed and noted that Page School has relatively high operating costs: the building is poorly insulated, the windows are bad, the ceilings are unusually high, so that with heating costs Page School is spending more than other elementary schools.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:01pm

Meeting Documents

[Updated Capital Improvements Schedule](#)

Respectfully submitted

Elisa Grammer