

West Newbury Finance Committee
Minutes of the meeting
Monday, February 27, 2017

Vice Chairman Winch called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. in the second floor hearing room of the 1910 Building with Ms. Grammer, Mr. DeLena, Mr. Ellis, and Mr. Phillips in attendance. Finance Director Gould was also present.

There being no public comment, the Committee considered its agenda.

Assessor's Office—Ms. Meredith Stone, Chief Assessor

Mr. Rick Baker, a board member, accompanied Ms. Stone.

FY18 Assessor's Office Budget

Ms. Stone reported a 0% increase in expenses for the assessor's office from FY17 to FY18. Many changes have occurred for the Assessor's Office in recent years. Uploading results of the Pictometry Fly Over to the Patriot Properties Real Estate Assessment System is approximately a six-month process. The Patriot System will be an important tool in assessing new properties and the reevaluation of current properties. Additionally, property reevaluations moved from a three to a five-year cycle.

In order for the Assessor's Office to generate the most funds possible for the town, Ms. Stone stressed the importance of educating both the staff and the Board to keep up with the ever-changing state laws and policies. Ms. Stone provided an example. Land dedicated to agricultural use is untaxed. However, if usage of agricultural land moves to private homes, the town is able to collect a five-year rollback in property taxes.

Salary Adjustment for Chief Assessor and Assessor's Assistant

Ms. Stone stated she has completed a three-step process moving from the positions of Assistant Assessor to Assessor and finally as Chief Assessor. She has undergone a full reevaluation cycle and has followed up with a survey of salaries of personnel in the Assessor's Office in nearby towns within Essex County. Ms. Stone proposes an increase in salary for both the Chief Assessor and that of the Assessor's Clerk. *Ms. Grammer requested Ms. Stone forward a PDF of the FY18 Assessor's Budget and a historical of West Newbury Assessor's salary stages. Ms. Stone agreed to forward the information.*

Stipend for the Board of Assessor's

In FY17, the Board of Assessor's stipend was reduced from \$1,000.00 to \$1.00 annually. Ms. Stone proposed a reinstatement of the \$1,000.00 stipend. She stated the Board devotes many hours to supporting the Assessor's Office. Additionally, continuing education is imperative allowing the Board to effectively carry out their elected jobs.

Town Clerk's Office—Mr. Michael McCarron, Town Clerk/Counsel

FinCom requested Mr. McCarron provide updates and information regarding the Cell Tower, Pipestave Apartments, and the proposed Town Manager position.

Cell Tower

Motions have been authored to allow the Board of Selectmen (BOS) to negotiate the rental of land on the Dunn Farm for purposes of maintaining a cell tower. Verizon has requested testing for the possibility of establishing a tower. T-Mobile has also expressed interest in a site at Brake Hill alongside the water tower.

The request for a proposal is a two-step process. An initial background check of the company regarding solvency for payment occurs. A conditional agreement includes installation of Radio and Fire Communications at the tower.

Ms. Grammer inquired if it were possible to have two cell towers. Mr. McCarron replied it was possible for two separate requests for proposals.

The establishment of a cell tower at the Brake Hill site would involve working with the Water Department. Fortunately, the water tank is not at the highest point. Therefore, it would not interfere with the placement of a cell tower. Mr. McCarron stated the new water tower would utilize the current hydraulics, which precludes an increase in elevation. Ms. Grammer asked if there have been any complaints regarding the view. Mr. McCarron replied balloon studies were conducted including photographs. View obstructions were minimal. Ms. Grammer asked if there were a downside to location of the towers. Mr. McCarron stated there were some possibilities of exposure to radiation. Mr. DeLena remarked exposure to radiation decreases exponentially with distance. Mr. McCarron also mentioned residents may complain about aesthetics.

Pipestave Apartments

Mr. McCarron provided a brief history of the apartments. In the early 2000s, the apartments were fixed using grants and CPC funds. Repair of both the septic system and roof took place. At the time, the town owned the property, but the Housing Authority managed the property based on rental receipts. Subsequently, Newburyport Housing Authority took over managing the property, allowing them to add the apartments to their subsidized housing inventory. Funds over operating expenses were deposited in an escrow account. The account funds paid for repairs. Newburyport Housing Authority made repairs, when needed, drawing funds from the account. Residents continued to call the town of West Newbury to complete exterior repairs.

In FY2016, the town approved funding in order to enable repairs to the apartments. The focus of this project changed when the Finance Director moved on. As now proposed, the Newburyport Housing Authority would assume full responsibility to manage the Pipestave Apartments, now proposed in the to be deeded to the West Newbury Housing Authority. This would make treatment of Pipestave Apartments consistent with other subsidized housing in town. The state subsidizes the rent providing funds for capital improvements. The West Newbury Housing Authority, an elected board, sets policies and prioritizes projects. The state provides most of the funding. West Newbury appropriates funds only for special projects.

Town Manager

Ms. Grammer mentioned some of the town's bylaws specifically mention the Finance Director. With the potential legislative approval of the Town Manager, elimination of the position of the Finance Director will occur. Mr. McCarron stated legislation could not change until the Town votes on a Town Manager. A change in bylaws will follow approval. The change involves a two-step process. The first eliminates archaic provisions such as ex officio members on boards. Secondly, removal of any mention of the Finance Director will occur in the bylaws. One article can address both steps.

If the Town approves Town Management government, the Board of Selectmen will petition for legislation. State Representative Leonard Mirra and State Senator Bruce Tarr will present the Bills to the state legislature. Mr. McCarron cited one change. Currently, the BOS signs warrants paying town bills. With the change in government, the Town Manager will sign warrants. In the absence of the Town Manager, the BOS will sign warrants.

New Articles

FinCom members asked Mr. McCarron if any new Articles had been or would be submitted. He answered two requests were submitted. The first was a request from citizens to place the town's sentiment that President Trump's tax returns should be made public. Another involved the Early property title issues. *Mr. McCarron will provide a narrative for FinCom members.*

Planning Board Budget—Mr. Rick Bridges, Chairman

Also, present were board members Ms. Ann Bardeen and Mr. Brian Murphey.

Mr. Bridges began by stating the Board is requesting a change in title of the Planning Administrator to that of Town Planner (remaining a 25-hour position). A salary increase of approximately 5.0% accompanies the request. Members of the board are experienced; however, they are not planners. Members believe the correct person is in place and if the town moves to a town manager, Ms. Zambenardi's background will be especially helpful. It is important to review and improve zoning bylaws in anticipation of new growth. Mr. Bridges added approximately half of the expenses budgeted cover the cost of a meeting note-taker. This allows Ms. Zambenardi to focus on planning.

Sign Bylaw

The bylaw changes reflect a communication from Mr. Clohec, building inspector. The bylaw is similar to a bylaw used in Topsfield and allows the enforcement officer, Mr. Clohec, to address gray areas and create larger allowances for signs. Mr. Bridges remarked the previous chair had taken pictures and dimensions of signs. This work offers a framework for the building inspector to enforce the bylaw.

FinCom Update

Ms. Grammer reported with information she had received this week:

- Salary increases for all Departments and Boards-discussed by the BOS on Monday, March 6, 2017.

- Capital Improvements
 - Fire Breathing Apparatus-paid with Free Cash.
- Pending water well issue may affect funds for renovating Carr Post.
- Action Cove Playground-report suggested playground not worth the renovation
 - Community Preservation Committee will discuss tonight.
- Whittier Regional High School will meet the BOS and FinCom on Monday, March 6, 2017
 - Ms. Grammer requested Mr. Gould to contact the school for any documents regarding their budget.
- Demolition Delay Bylaw-perhaps little progress made to revise the bylaw in the wake of the discussion with BOS and FinCom last year.
- BOS Chair Anderson said that BOS representatives plan to meet with FinCom to discuss budget and other items on March 20.

Minutes

The Committee voted to approve the January 30, 2017 minutes, 4-0-1, Ellis abstaining.

The Committee voted to approve the February 6, 2017 minutes, 3-0-2, DeLena and Winch abstaining.

The Committee voted to approve the February 13, 2017 minutes, 5-0-0.

Future FinCom Meetings

Monday, March 6, 2017

- Whittier Vocational School

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elisa Grammer
Secretary

Meeting Material

Revised budget

Assessor

- 1) Assessor budget form
- 2) Latest Omnibus Budget

Town Clerk

- 3) Town Clerk cell tower lease article
- 4) Town Clerk town manager bylaw
- 5) Revolving fund article to comply with new state law
- 6) Pipestave apts article

- 7) Bicentennial funding article

Planning Bd

- 8) Planning Bd budget form
- 9) Sign bylaw article
- 10) Sign bylaw explanation
- 11) Sign bylaw text

Minutes

- 12) Jan 30
- 13) Feb 6
- 14) Feb 13