

WEST NEWBURY FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date & Time: Monday, April 5th, 2021, 6 pm

Location : 1910 Building 1st Floor Hearing Room, West Newbury, MA

Attendees: Gary Roberts, Jessica Knezek, Angus Jennings

Remotely: Nathan Kelly, Jim Sperelakis, Joe Heyman, Stephanie Frontiera, Wendy Reed, Rick Parker, Bert Comins, Jack Foley, Walt Burmeister

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order, 6:02 p.m.
2. Public Comment - none
3. Approval of Minutes - 4/1/21, Approved 5-0
4. Review and discuss budgets and articles from the following departments:

a.) Library

AJ - Main change: supplemental cleaning

Budget Approved, 4-0

b.) Conservation Commission

AJ - trying to bulk up staffing levels. Land Agent role has responsibility for trails. Commission proposes to increase hours for Land Agent, but use the Wetlands Fund one time for this purpose. If the Town becomes accustomed to the service, it may make sense to raise the budget.

NK - curious about relationship between MVP interns Article/Land Agent

Budget Approved, 4-0

STM Article 15 - ID, map, invasive species on WN lands

NK - What is the money really going toward, salary or something else? Often internships are unpaid. Who will the two interns report to or be supervised by?

RP - \$6K is wages, location and mapping of invasive species on Town owned land/roadways; goal is to map plants that do not have a big footprint. Some plants, like bittersweet, are ubiquitous, and do not make sense to map. Likely to be supervised by Carol Decker, Nancy Pau, etc.

WR - sub committee of open space will supervise

JS - once species are identified, will ConCom try to eradicate them?

RP - evolving thought on what to do exactly, depending on how residents embrace this.

Split Vote, 2-2 (Heyman, Sperelakis for, Roberts, Kelly against)

c.) Planning Department
AJ - only change driven by COLA

Budget Approved, 5-0

d.) Inspectional Services
AJ - only change driven by COLA

Budget Approved, 5-0

e.) Board of Appeals
AJ - Level funded budget.

Budget Approved, 5-0

f.) Recreation
AJ - biggest change was due to Port-a-Potties. Vendor went out of business; if a location has a single unit, it has to be ADA accessible, which is more expensive; cleaning went up due to Covid-19; new vendor is more expensive. There is a lot of uncertainty in general. Challenging to project fees we will get as revenue due to Covid.

JS - what is the salary/wage line?

JF - laborer who does work on baseball field and Action Cove playground

JK - when do toilets go out?

JF - should be going out this weekend. Never have them in wintertime.

Budget Approved, 5-0

g.) Council on Aging
AJ - level funded, except COLA

Budget Approved, 5-0

h.) Open Space Committee
AJ - level funded

Budget Approved, 5-0

i.) Town Moderator
AJ - level funded

Budget Approved, 5-0

j.) Cultural Council

AJ - token budget, most of their expenses are grant funded.

Budget Approved, 5-0

k.) Cable Advisory Committee

AJ - does not have a budget, all expenses paid out of their revenues.

l.) Citizen Petition Article regarding Soldiers & Sailors Building

ATM - Article 28

WB - Believes architects have been out to building recently; project looks like a waste of money; want to stop spending on the project until a use for the project is found.

JS - AJ can you give us an update?

AJ - Town went out to bid, took over 6 months to get a contract into place due to Covid. Public hearings upcoming with the Planning Board. Late spring/early summer likely timeline to get bids, and then sign a contract to go forward with project. \$250K available for upfront costs (likely to be under \$150K) with \$1.5 million that can be borrowed.

JH - what did we ask architects to do? Take down walls? Repair? How did we decide on the design?

AJ - upstairs, designed as office space, downstairs as assembly space.

NK - I wrote the FinCom argument against supporting the Fall 2019 STM Article, so I have long been against this project as not having a defined use, and being rushed into, but the Town spoke clearly with 2-1 support. The Town's mentality was that if you build it, they will come. The space now has to be considered like the Annex or Old Town Hall, where groups will use it for occasional space; also, Mr. Bowe is interested in the space, related to the Cable Advisory Committee. Unlikely the Town would support this, and the ship has sailed.

JH - It would be more productive to suggest a particular use. Has consideration been given to a sale of the building?

JS - what is the likely outcome if we voted to delay?

AJ - not sure that there is a legal impact. It was certified at Town Meeting, Town can rely on that vote with regard to presentation to Bond Counsel.

JK - What would that be the next step if we did not move forward? Would it be demolition? That would also have costs.

AJ - if we do not invest in the building, it becomes a liability issue. Demolition cost around \$50K

RP - if we do not move forward with the money approved, costs are only going to go up.

JS - has CPC reviewed this petition?

AJ - it was mentioned to CPC meeting, but no discussion occurred.

NK - if CPC were to change their support of this project, which is unlikely, this committee would probably reconsider the issue as well.

JK - what is the undesignated amount of CPC funds?

SF - \$1,045,663

AJ - \$85,000 approved last year has been taken out of that amount as spoken for.

GR - large majority of FinCom was against, but we respect the will of the Town, public appetite was there to move forward with the project even without a defined use; approved by a majority of residents who attended Town Meeting; it passed legally with 2/3 support, enthusiastically; dangerous precedent that when we have disagreements, that we will not see them through. Even though this building is a mistake, it is what the Town wants.

Article Fails, 0-5

5. Communications - none.

6. Adjournment - 7:13 p.m.