



**Town of West Newbury  
Select Board and Finance Committee Joint Meeting  
February 15, 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
- Ross Capolupo, Dan Innes, Dennis LaMalfa, Rob Phillips, Jim Sperelakis- Finance Committee
- Angus Jennings- Town Manager
- Jim Blatchford- Town Clerk
- Jenny Walsh- Town Accountant

**Announcements:**

- There were no announcements read at this joint meeting.

**Regular Business:**

**A. Public comment**

There was no public comment at this meeting.

**B. Select Board consideration of appointment of Dennis LaMalfa to Finance Committee**

LaMalfa spoke about his background as business manager for several local churches when prompted by Reed. He also talked about his background in finance and operations jobs on the West Coast prior to working more locally. **Parker motioned to appoint LaMalfa to the Finance Committee to a term ending June 30, 2026. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

**The Finance Committee Meeting was called to order at 6:07pm with Rob Phillips, Dan Innes, Jim Sperelakis, Ross Capolupo, and Dennis LaMalfa in attendance.**

**C. Presentation of Proposed FY25 Budget and proposed Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Jennings touched on some key elements/directions of the new Budget. Among these elements and directions were proposed staffing changes, a 2% COLA increase, an effort to limit average single-family tax increases to no more than 2.5%, a continued draw-down of School Stabilization Fund based on a multi-year strategy, and continued transparent, clear budget drafting processes. Jennings additionally stated that other specific areas were being considered in the FY25 Budget:

1. Personnel step increases
2. Expenditure of ARPA funds
3. A revised DPW budget
4. Legal cost offsets
5. Unsettled union contracts
6. Trail maintenance funding resources
7. Estimated regulatory mandates
8. Ongoing evaluation of fee structures
9. Ongoing evaluation of regionalizing certain services
10. The FY25 Capital Improvement Program

The proposed Budget carried with it a proposed increase of \$1.3 million but there are some unknowns still (including the Whittier Tech. High School Budget). Jennings said that the retirement funding increase was the biggest unanticipated expense facing the Town this Fiscal Year (35%). Jennings said that after questioning Essex County Regional Retirement on the lack of an increase in FY24 on multiple occasions, and being told that this was normal, it appears that in fact the numbers were initially calculated by the ECRR incorrectly. Jennings also pointed out increases in the Police for overtime and vehicle costs and the DPW for tree removal and Park and Rec expenses newly rolled into the Department's purview as a result of restructuring. The Town Manager's Budget also reflected an increase because of the Projects Manager position being incorporated into that Office. An additional DPW position is also being added to bring the Department back up to full strength for the first time since 2008. Combining several part time administrative positions into a fulltime administrative position is also being considered.

Jennings explained that Police OT was increasing because the Department was short-handed, especially with officers being at the Police Academy or attaining certifications- this necessitating overtime coverage. During discussion of Public Safety items, Rob Phillips requested the Select Board withdraw the request for a new police car from the Budget and make it a capital item Warrant Article.

Jennings pointed out that the Town had received an updated Budget from Pentucket RSD with a more modest increase than originally given to the Town officials at the beginning of the Budget drafting process.

Examining the cost of dead or dangerous ash tree removal in the DPW section of the Budget, the question was raised about why tree removal was in the proposed Budget as well as a warrant article. After extensive discussion, it was agreed that the budget line item should be increased to \$100,000 and the warrant article would focus on Ash tree removal.

**D. Process to review Budget and Warrant Articles**

The Select Board and Finance Committee arranged for joint meeting dates through the remainder of the drafting period, and it was discussed how best the Committee could work in concert with the Capital Improvements Committee as they made their analysis and recommendations. At this evening's Meeting, Jennings encouraged the group to tackle the simpler Articles first.

**E. Review and discuss Budget and Articles for Spring Town Meeting to be held on April 29, 2024**

Article 6: To see what rules and regulations the Town may wish to impose on the Water Commissioners. Citing great progress being made in the Water Department, the Board felt that no instructions needed to be issued.

Article 8: To create a water pension liability fund. The Town Manager stressed this Article would create said fund (with a 2/3<sup>rd</sup> Town Meeting vote) but nothing would be put in at this time. **Parker motioned to recommend Article 8. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 8. The motion was properly seconded. The motion passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, LaMalfa Abstaining).**

Article 9: To transfer \$10,364 from the Septic Loan Revolving Account to repay debt service. **Wile motioned to recommend Article 9. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to recommend Article 9. The motion was properly seconded. The motion passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, LaMalfa Abstaining).** Jim Sperelakis stated he would write rationale.

Article 10: Vote to appropriate or transfer the sum of \$99,507 for the Pension Liability Stabilization Fund. During discussion, Phillips said that the Finance Department recommended 10% allocation of the following year's Pension Assessment toward the Stabilization Fund (as had been done in the years prior) with a 2% increase for the Fiscal Year. Phillips suggested pushing the allocation to 11.5% in the future, and Parker felt a further review was necessary.

Article 11: To see if the Town will transfer funds to the Other Post-Employment Benefits Stabilization Fund. After brief discussion on the trends of the finances related thereto, **Parker motioned to recommend Article 11. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 11. The motion was properly seconded. The motion passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, LaMalfa Abstaining).** Dan Innes stated he would write the rationale.

Article 13: To set maximum receipts and expenditures from Revolving Funds in FY25. **Wile motioned to recommend Article 13. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to recommend Article 13. The motion was properly seconded. The motion passed. (4 Yes, 0 No, LaMalfa Abstaining).** Dan Innes stated he would write the rationale.

Article 19: To extend sunset date for prior Town Meeting Articles. These Articles included funding for various projects across Town (including the Middle Street Bridge, a telecommunications overhaul in Town buildings, facilities improvements, and funds for the Soldiers and Sailors building). **Wile motioned to recommend Article 19. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 19. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

Article 31: To obtain [TBD] supplemental funds for telecom replacement/upgrades at Town Offices, Public Safety complex, and Library. Jennings explained that the initial \$65,000 expected for the telecom work would not be sufficient to cover re-cabling costs that became clearer during the RFP process. The original sum was based on an older estimate that was no longer relevant in 2024.

Article 36: Coffin Street culvert design, engineering, and permitting. Jennings provided brief background on the culvert replacement project, stating that more engineering and design work was needed prior to approaching a future Town Meeting to obtain funding for the actual replacement. **Wile motioned to recommend Article 36 and that it not exceed total cost of \$50,000. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to recommend Article 36 and that it not exceed total cost of \$50,000. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Capolupo stated he would write the rationale with a sunset date of FY25.

Article 40: To fund PFAS testing. The Board of Health-sponsored Article provided for Mass DEP required testing at the Steele Landfill and residential wells within 500 ft. **Parker motioned to recommend Article 40. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 40. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Innes stated he would write the rationale.

Article 45: The group discussed unpaid bills that 45 provides funding for including a police detail bill and others. The Finance Committee and Board planned to return to this Article when more details were provided.

Article 47: Will be dropped from the Warrant.

Article 50: Will be dropped from the Warrant.

**Phillips motioned to adjourn the Finance Committee session. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

**Parker motioned to adjourn the session. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The Session adjourned at 8:40pm.**