



Town of West Newbury
Select Board and Finance Committee Joint Meeting
February 20, 2024 @ 6:30pm
381 Main Street, Town Office Building
www.wnewbury.org
Meeting Minutes

Open Session: The session opened at 6:01 for both Board and Committee.

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
- Richard “Butch” Hills- Highway Superintendent
- Kaitlyn Barker- DPW Business Manager
- Brian Richard- Building and Grounds Supervisor
- Christine Wallace- Projects Manager
- Jenny Walsh- Town Accountant
- Fred Chanania- Tree Committee representative
- Doug Mead- Park and Recreation Commission representative

Announcements:

- There were no announcements read at this joint meeting.

Regular Business:

A. Convene

B. Review and discuss Budgets and Articles for Spring Town Meeting to be held April 29, 2024, including proposed FY25 DPW Operating Budget and Warrant Articles.

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

Future meeting dates were confirmed, and the group discussed how to best to build these around School District Budget meetings. Town Manager Jennings gave another review of the Budget, with specific focus on the DPW sections.

Discussion began on the tree removal portions of the DPW Budget. Butch Hills spoke on how the funding requests for tree removal were broken out: ash trees received their separate Article, while, for example, red and white oaks were included in the Operating Budget. Fred Chanania said that the Article served as a pilot program to see how much work could be done for \$50,000 (relative to the location and conditions of trees faced by removal crews). The program would allow for a better understanding of the problem, and how it could be rolled into a permanent line item. Chanania provided a brief history of the ash tree funds, saying that the Town was far behind on removal despite previously allocated funding. Capolupo urged the Town to consider reformatting how the Town approached the problem, suggesting a contract with a lump sum tied to a number of trees needing to be removed (versus paying per diem). Hills and Chanania both said that the ash tree marking process was not completely comprehensive since they were only IDed as they stood close to roadways, not further off the shoulder or on other public lands. Spurred by the ongoing discussion, Phillips felt that \$100,000 should be the amount in the line item, with the \$50,000 still separate for the ash trees. Jim Sperelakis brought up the question: what was National Grid’s responsibility for tree management, versus West Newbury’s? Could external pressure be applied to get Grid to assist? It was determined that National Grid’s responsibility fell largely on protecting their poles and wires, and that the company had a backlog of work to do state-wide in that regard, making them not of much help in tree removal. A reduction in the total tree removal line item for FY25 brought the total to \$250,000, with the \$50,000 still allotted in a separate Article for ash tree removal.

Wile motioned to recommend Article 41 (\$50,000 for ash tree disposal). The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperelakis motioned to recommend Article 41. 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.

The next topic of conversation in the DPW FY25 Budget was salaries. Innes of the Finance Committee wondered what benefit the Town gained by having an “experienced operator” position versus simply an “operator”, as they attempted to bring on a fourth DPW staffer. Jennings emphasized that this has been a 15-year vacancy, with a worker laid off during the Great Recession, and the slot never filled in the intervening years. He stated that the “experienced” label was to allow for a bigger salary, but hoped to attract talent of any level, even if it took time for the new hire to acquire additional licenses and certificates. Reed wondered if an additional, new, Facilities staffer was in the cards. Jennings said it was envisioned the new Operator might be under the Buildings and Grounds purview for some of the time to assist Brian Richard. Richard chimed in on the current arrangements and constraints he worked under as the Building and Grounds Supervisor. Assisted at the moment by a part-timer, Richard felt that a more affordable solution (to supplement the work he and the part-timer do) would be to have the Experienced Operator assist him with bigger projects, working out the balance of labor between both sides of the Department. Richard added that the present subcontractor who assisted in some of the larger B&G projects presently was getting older and would not be able to work for the Town indefinitely- and Richard wasn’t sure about finding someone to fulfill that role when the subcontractor chooses to retire.

Turning to the electricity line item, Reed wondered why the cost of electricity YTD had been roughly \$29,000, but in prior years it had been \$84,000 (and again in this Budget \$84K was requested). Katelyn Barker offered the explanation: a malfunctioning meter. While there were still expenses for electricity, it just wasn’t being captured. Parker also explained that

some of the electricity instability was due to changing electric rates and energy generated by the Town solar field at Page School. Phillips suggested a closer analysis of these peculiarities and trends in the future.

On the public street lighting line item, Innes wondered about the dramatic drop off in cost for the present year, and it was established that a line item transfer had eased these cost burdens.

Examining a \$200 request from the Tree Committee (for professional membership in the MA Arborist Association), Reed queried Hills if this was a necessary expense. Hills replied said that it seemed to be worth it to the Town.

Wile motioned to recommend the DPW portion of the FY25 Budget minus \$30,000 from the tree removal line item. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to recommend the DPW Budget as amended. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).

Article 23: Replacement of Annex floor. The number listed in the draft Budget of \$49,200 was increased to \$60,000. This would include replacement of piping and floor coverings. The job would bring the new flooring down to the concrete, and include the removal of any remaining asbestos in the flooring.

Article 34: Replacement of Public Safety complex roof and retaining wall. It was determined this expense could be pushed off to a future Town Meeting. Richard testified that the roof had three years left in it before serious issues became prevalent. Richard felt a metal roof would be a cost-effective future choice at the complex.

Article 24: Replacement of Council on Aging A/C unit. Brian Richard spoke to the somewhat pressing need to get a new air conditioning unit in the SAGE Center. Parker felt that the Town could delay the replacement to the future with an eye toward decarbonization.

Article 25: Replacement of emergency generator for Annex and Town Offices. Brian Richard expressed his belief that the installation of a new generator should be a high priority for the Town. Parker felt that they could delay the replacement to the future with an eye toward decarbonization.

Article 26 and 27: Page School flooring repairs (26), Page School improvements (27). Richard spoke about the need to pay attention to historical issues to inform the Town on future problems, involving Pentucket officials to get a better idea especially with regard to failing flooring. Jennings said that the challenges facing the floor replacement were funding at the right amount at the right time, and the school schedule around which the work would have to take place. The group debated about the urgency of the flooring replacement. A preventative maintenance program had been on the books, but Jennings suspected the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted it, and it had not been returned to. Finding the damaged flooring areas in Page would require removing the top layer tiling, which could be a large expense and a lot of work. Richard also elaborated on the Article, saying it included funding for small repairs to broken doors, plaster, and ceiling tiles, too.

Article 32: Keyless entry for Town Offices: Enhancing security and flexibility for Town Office Building (and Annex) through electronic key system. Richard said the proposed system would allow access to be provided through electronic means to the building, and doing so would enhance security by logging entries and prevent the need to replace or cut keys. Wile wondered if re-keying the entire building be cheaper for West Newbury in the short term. Richard talked about a walkthrough he had conducted with a keyless entry expert. That expert had said the cost would be about \$1,000/door, and require wiring, which could pose difficulties. The rewiring would present an opportunity to finally get handicap access on some of the exterior doors in the building. The group wondered if it would be less expensive to wire the exterior doors only, and leave the standard key system in place for interior doors. Katelyn Barker stated that by having a remote-controlled e-key system, access could be granted easily and from off-site, and allow "users" to gain access to multiple offices at once (rather than having to have separate keys for each place they intended to go). This approach would still prevent unauthorized access, and once no longer needed, access to the buildings and offices could be completely cut off.

Article 31: Telecommunications upgrades at Town Offices: Replacement of phones and related equipment. Jennings and Wallace recapped the history of the bidding process and what had been learned so far, but stressed that the full cost was not yet known. They discussed the pros and cons of wireless versus hard-wired phones. Professionals being consulted in the project strongly advised to have separate cables for phones and data, rather than a single one.

Article 34: Public Safety Complex. Funding for interior and exterior improvements. Richard stated that previous DPW Director Wayne Amaral had identified these problem areas, with some large repairs needing attention. Among the problem areas are rot, peeling paint, and exterior lighting fixtures, among others. Richard stated that he felt the repairs did need to be done, and that he planned to do some of the work in-house and with a subcontractor. Concerns were raised about the high price tag given it was being done in-house *and* by a third party. Richard broke down some of the expenses, including the cost of materials for the square footage, and the rental of equipment and machines. For the cost, Phillips felt it would be better to contract the project out completely.

Article 23: Wile motioned to recommend Article 23 at the cost of \$62,000. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to recommend Article 23. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. Ross Capolupo stated he would do the rationale.

Article 24: Wile motioned to remove Article 24. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).

Article 25: Wile motioned to recommend Article 25. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes motioned to recommend Article 25. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes stated he would write the rationale.

Article 26: **Wile motioned to recommend Article 26. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Innes motioned to recommend Article 26. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Innes stated he would write the rationale.

Article 27: **Wile motioned to remove Article 27. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

Article 33: **Wile motioned to remove Article 33. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

Article 42: **Wile motioned to remove Article 42. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

Article 28: Purchase of DPW plow. Hills spoke about the present condition of the vehicle: a 13-year-old truck beginning to show rust and wear, and recapped some of the specs to be included on the new vehicle. He told the group that vendors and sales people suggested purchasing the new plow truck now rather than waiting due to supply chain concerns. Parker reminded the group to stress that there was no alternative powered carbon-free that was available (hence the purchase of the combustion engine-powered truck). **Wile motioned to recommend Article 28. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperlakis motioned to recommend Article 28. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (5 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Sperlakis said he would write the rationale (with comments from the Select Board policy included).

Article 29: Zero-Turn Mower. Funding of a new Zero-Turn Mower for the DPW. Hills stated that the present mower was 22 years old, and imbued with overheating and electrical problems, necessitating its replacement. Hills also told the Board that the next youngest mower was a decade old. The mower is included in the capital program. Parker mentioned that a John Deere battery-operated mower could be introduced in the near future to replace the next mower to die. **Wile motioned to recommend Article 29. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).** Sperlakis motioned to recommend Article 29. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). Jim Sperlakis stated he would write the rationale.

Article 30: Accessories for Trackless Vehicle. Funding of accessories for trackless vehicle. The Article would provide for an "arm" (or "boom mower") for mowing over guard rails or in other less accessible spaces, mounted on a trackless vehicle set to be acquired by the DPW. The compact vehicle would be used year-round, in the DPW's plan, serving as a sidewalk plow in the Winter to get added value out of it. Wile wondered if it would be a better value to let the machine sit for Winter use only, to minimize wear and tear. Based on concerns about wear and tear, and the suitability of the present fleet, it was determined that this Article 30 would be a low priority. **Wile motioned to remove Article 30. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

At this point, Rick Parker, Zooming in from a different location, exited the Meeting.

At this point, with the conclusion of the DPW Budget review, the DPW staff exited. The Select Board and Finance Committee discussed how to streamline the process even further next year. Phillips felt that the Budget should be more closely examined and pared back, suggesting that to save time (and Town money) that the line items for the Budget should reflect only immediate priorities. Wile and Jennings responded by saying that the Budget from the DPW reflected new leadership- with both Richard and Hills as long-time DPW employees with years of experience finally being given the reins. Being in charge allowed them to promote line items that may have not been considered previously. Wile said he would like to speed the process up, but it allowed for the appropriate parsing out all 63 potential Town Meeting Articles.

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

With the Finance Committee formally adjourned, Phillips, Wile, and Reed discussed ARPA monies for water-related projects. Phillips hoped to get clarity on the final financials for the Water Department for the sake of the Finance Committee's work in prepping for Town Meeting. Wile explained his feelings on outlays for the water main replacement, stating in his view the allotted \$625,000 in ARPA funds was no longer necessary and could be reduced due to the lower-than-expected sum needed to get the work completed. Phillips insisted that the original money allotted would help the Water Department with their debt service regardless, and put the Department in better shape financially. Wile felt that using the ARPA funds for anything other than what it was originally intended (securing materials) was problematic. Reed asked about the procedure for modifying the Board's decision to get the funds back. Jennings said that the mechanics of that process would be under the Select Board's jurisdiction but it might generate ill will. If the wording was originally crisper, Wile argued, the problem would have been avoided. Reed wanted to wait until Parker was back in West Newbury to decide on the issue and Jennings said that the item would be put on the February 26th Agenda for discussion. The general attitude leaned toward not revising the agreement.

Wile motioned to adjourn the session. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (2 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain [Parker not present]). The Session adjourned at 9:59pm.