

# Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

October 22, 2024

8:00 PM

**Present:** Jason Cole (Chair), Scott Sullivan (Vice Chair), Steve Noone, Corinne Hogseth, Dave Wellinghoff (remote), Christi Andersen, Allison Jones (remote), Greg Jarboe and Dr. Gang Chen

Mr. Cole called the meeting to order.

## 1. Citizen's Concern

None

## 2. Finance Committee Business

Meeting Minutes Review: September 24, 2024 meeting minutes were distributed prior to meeting.

Mr. Noone made motion to approve, Dr. Chen seconded.

Roll call vote: unanimous 5-0-0

ACTON WATER DISTRICT - Ms. Jones reported out. Increased cost on water bill, residents expressed concern about large Q3 increase. The AWD encouraged residents to pursue the "Water Smart" monitoring program.

SELECT BOARD - Mr. Cole reported out. Mr. Cole commented that Mr. David Martin will be presenting on the Special Town Meeting, so he will hold on that topic.

Acton Restaurant week is this week.

Acton Food Pantry lease approved for \$1/month, 10-year lease with two (2) 5-year renewals; this is 19-21 Maple Street.

Wayfinding signs have been tabled until a complete agreement is reached.

DPW - waiting to see cost estimates. Next DPW Building Committee meeting 11/7, room 204. Narrative is strong but would like to see numbers attached

ALG - not use the untaxed levy capacity for FY26. Discussion ensued on whether or not the DPW project should be discussed at ALG. The Boardwalk campus and the NAFS

were not, but those projects were not contentious. A SB member commented it doesn't affect next year's budget, so it shouldn't have to be included in discussion. A SB member inquired if FinCom is on Board, answer that FinCom is awaiting further numbers.

Mr. Noone commented that a decision shouldn't be based on whether or not the project is controversial. Also, ALG is a 3-year plan. So, just because DPW may not hit FY26, it shouldn't preclude the conversation. Subject to consensus for all 3 years.

Ms. Andersen commented that she sat on the ALG when the NAFS was discussed.

Next Meeting Dates:

November 5, 2024, 7:30pm

November 19, 2024, 7:30pm (Acton Memorial Library)

### **3. Special Town Meeting**

Mr. Martin spoke off a presentation: Select Board voted to call a Special Town Meeting for November 25, 2024.

Placeholder Articles to date:

- Authorize Acquisition of 19 and 35 Wetherbee Street
- Authorize Collective Bargaining Agreement
  - Facilities, Cemetery, Public Works
  - Public Safety Dispatch
- Ambulance - question was asked if a cost would hit FY25 or FY26; not sure at this point

Warrant closes on Friday, October 25, 2024, 12:00pm. This closing allows time for people to file Citizen Petitions.

Gas-powered leaf blowing issue, could that be on the STM Warrant? Mr. Martin commented the Warrant would have to be re-opened, for that to happen.

19 and 35 Wetherbee Street discussion:

19 Wetherbee: Parcel 124 and 35 Wetherbee: Parcel 189

Family selling property has been waiting until the town would be ready

- 32 acres
- \$3.6m selling price, plus \$50k closing, \$30k conservation
- About a \$4m appraisal based on land being developed
- Town was awarded a \$500k land grant; must have a Town Meeting approval and be under contract in 2024
- Contingent upon CPC approval
- \$1.3m CPA set-aside, \$1.9m CPA bonded
- Sellers to remove old house and radio towers
- Whole property will be placed under a conservation restriction

Ms. Hogseth - conservation restriction in perpetuity? Mr. Martin - very difficult to reverse

Mr. Noone - Receive a loan for remainder amount needed? Mr. Martin - deal closes before FY26, so will need to work with the CPC. Bond to be paid by the collection of CPA money

Mr. Sullivan - What are pros and cons of purchasing this land? Pro - have conservation land. Mr. Martin - Maybe the Nature Conservancy would be interested in buying it if the town doesn't purchase it. The bottom of the parcel is already town-owned conservation land.

Mr Sullivan - do we have a state objective to purchase conservation land every year? Mr. Martin - For land acquisition, the Open Space Committee monitors and makes a recommendation. 10% of CPC is for open space. Balance is \$1.3m CPA set-aside.

Mr. Sullivan - land that isn't ideal to own that could be sold to offset this purchase? Mr. Martin - There are tiny parcels, but not aware of particular parcels.

Mr. Noone - how are the parcels zoned? Mr. Martin - residential

Ms. Andersen - Caouette land we encountered an environmental problem. Are we setting ourselves up for some liability? Mr. Martin - We have to conduct some due diligence; regarding radio towers, but iron is not an environmental concern. other than that, not aware of anything else.

Mr. Jarboe - if this doesn't pass at Town Meeting and owners find a different buyer, to what extent with MCI Concord will ripple up to this property? Mr. Martin - don't believe any connection with MCI Concord, owners may find another buyer like a developer.

Mr. Wellinghoff - CPA portion, time frame for payback? Mr. Martin - there is discretion, a Finance decision. Mr. Wellinghoff - It should be paid off relatively quickly. And current assessment/what are we paying for taxes? Mr. Noone - it has been assessed at \$400,000 for tax purposes

Mr. Cole - no impact on this year's budget? Mr. Martin - Correct, debt service most likely starts in FY26. The "bucket" is a percentage. So, CPC will just have less money for distribution to other projects. We pay \$80,000 for Wright Hill. Mr. Noone - CPC 1.5% surcharge to tax payers with a State Match. Percentage taken off this top number. If CPC can't hit the minimums in each category, it carries over to the next year.

Mr. Cole - what is allowed use under CPC conservation? About 3-5 years ago, the land was identified for a possible new water treatment plant. Is that an allowed use? Would this plan restrict that use? Mr. Martin - Yes, it would restrict this discharge use. Passive recreation-used site: hiking, parking for main use, very little else.

Mr. Cole - would like in writing that the acquisition of this land with a conservation restriction would not allow for a discharge site. Mr. Martin - yes, town can provide this.

Ms. Friedrichs - In terms of CPA limitations, confirmed Mr. Martin's response regarding the restrictions. She also expressed concern about land purchases being discussed in Executive Session, if the seller is already aware of the details. Ms. Friedrichs encourages this purchase for conservation land. Tax status - if one files for agricultural, it is very little tax money collected.

Mr. Martin - As a reminder, can't use CPA money if don't meet the requirements; one can read the MGL.

Mr. Cole inquired who would like to take the lead on preparing for Fincom's vote. Mr. Jarboe volunteered.

Mr. Martin - Recommend a FinCom member take on Collective Bargaining and Ambulance. Mr. Noone will be Collective Bargaining and Mr. Bourdon will be Ambulance.

#### **4. Cost Cutting Initiative**

Ms. Andersen reported out. November 19th, first listening session, need to confirm location. Confirmed it will be at the Acton Memorial Library. Also, listening session at Senior Center on December 3, 2024, 6:00pm - 7:00pm

Mr. Jarboe drafted a statement that will be shared on a Newsflash. He drafted a short, medium and long version. Mr. Jarboe read the three (3) different versions. FinCom members made suggested changes. Mr. Jarboe and Ms. Andersen will finalize and send to Town Manager's office for posting.

#### **5. School Budget Task Force Update**

Ms. Andersen reported out. Tori Campbell runs these meetings. They are looking at 6 main items:

- Only using reserves for one-time purchases
- Saved money switching over to MIIA
- Transportation adjustments (i.e. compressing routes)
- School start times
- Eliminating School Choice
- Closing an elementary school - Save about \$1.4m, but class size may be an issue, and a lot of harm to students

Consultants - worked with 300 schools to date. Consultant gave additional cost-savings ideas such as not rounding up FTE's.

Mr. Cole - does the Consultant believe that the ABRSD is rounding up FTE's? Ms. Andersen - no answer yet; this and other issues are what the Consultant is pursuing. Ms. Andersen also spoke about how the Consultants discussed the dynamics of Social Workers and the mental health of students.

Next meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2024

Mr. Cole would be interested in learning more about the single-tiered busing idea.

Dr. Chen - is there a monetary savings goal? Ms. Andersen - No

Ms. Hogseth - Are people feeling comfortable speaking up? Ms. Andersen - discussions are being pursued encouraging different viewpoints. Ms. Hogseth commented that larger class sizes might be fine. Also, Acton doesn't have growth. Ms. Andersen discussed the importance of quantifying data. Ms. Hogseth, for example, doesn't see 1,000 students coming back anytime soon, so that needs to be discussed when discussing and figuring out cost savings and data quantification and review.

Mr. Jarboe - Drop in enrollment isn't unique to Acton. An idea that could be further pursued: what is the impact of cell phones in the school system.

Dr. Chen made motion to adjourn, Mr. Noone seconded.  
Unanimous roll call vote, 9-0-0

**Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting**  
19 & 35 Wetherbee Street presentation