

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of March 25, 2009**

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by the Chair, David Escalante, at 7:00 pm in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at Town Hall.

Present from the Finance Committee:	David Escalante, Chair Lisa Zappala, Vice Chair Scott Brightman Richard Creem	Richard Reilly Michael Taggart
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Also Present: David Davison, Assistant Town Manager – Finance Director

There were no public comments.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 20: Citizens' Petition - Quiet Zone Study: Present for the discussion were Ms. McKnight, representing the petitioners, Mr. McKnight, representing both the petitioners and the Transportation Committee, and Mr. Allen, chair of the Transportation Committee. Mr. Creem recused himself from the discussion because he is a member of the Transportation Committee.

Ms. McKnight stated that efforts to have the Board of Selectmen support a quiet zone study one year ago failed. The purpose of the study would be to determine what supplemental safety measures would need to be implemented in Needham at train crossings so that the trains would no longer blow their horns. There are different options to make crossings safe. The advantage of a quiet zone is to increase the marketability of residential units in the area near the quiet zone. The \$12,000 appropriation requested would allow the Town to engage consulting services to determine what safety measures should be adopted by the Town at train crossings. Nothing can be implemented without a study first.

Mr. Allen stated that a professional opinion regarding whether a quiet zone is even possible and how it can be achieved is needed. Once recommendations are made, the cost of implementation can range from \$70,000 to \$750,000 per crossing. Mr. Allen stated that the Transportation Committee did not state that the Town should pursue implementation of a quiet zone. The Transportation Committee only recommended to the Board of Selectmen that an initial study of a quiet zone be done. The Board of Selectmen chose not to go forward with it.

Mr. McKnight stated that the study is necessary. A quiet zone cannot be implemented if the train crossings cannot be made safe without the train horns.

Mr. Escalante commented on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and the interaction between the Citizens' Petition and the CIP. Mr. Escalante stated that he is sympathetic to citizens' petitions.

There was a discussion of the possible safety measures that are implemented for a quiet zone. There was a discussion of where funding for the study could be obtained.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Articles 3 through 9 - All Zoning Articles: Present for the discussion were Ms. Newman, Planning Director, and

Ms. McKnight, member of the Planning Board. There was a discussion of the additional parking that will be needed for the Hospital expansion. Ms. Newman stated that the Hospital was given a special permit where a parking survey can be done at year 2 and year 4 of the expansion. If there is insufficient parking on-site, then funds will be needed for additional parking. Ms. Newman will provide a copy of the special permit to the Executive Secretary of the Finance Committee.

The goal of the zoning changes is to create a more vibrant Town center. There was a discussion of whether the proposed zoning by-law changes will be an incentive to developers to rebuild properties in the Town center. Ms. Newman stated that a developer is interested in redeveloping the theatre block. She stated that the developer who has been rebuilding the Chestnut Street corridor is also very supportive of the zoning changes. Ms. Newman also stated that the community provided feedback that it was looking for an incremental change to the Town center, not wholesale change.

There was a discussion of the incremental revenues to the Town from the incremental development. Ms. Newman stated that there is not a detailed fiscal analysis. A total buildout over 30 years of 200,000 square feet is expected to yield between \$50,000 and \$80,000 per year in additional revenue.

There was a discussion of the expected improvements to roads, sidewalks, and traffic signals. Mr. Davison stated that the current light signals had already been planned to be replaced. There will be a new light at School Street and Chestnut Street, for which the Hospital is paying. Mr. Davison stated that, based on conversations with the Town Engineer, the cost of redoing the intersections will not be materially different whether the zoning changes are adopted or not.

Mr. Escalante stated that the role of the Finance Committee is to advise Town Meeting on financial implications of warrant items. Mr. Escalante stated that the zoning changes are too big for the Finance Committee to state that it cannot ascertain the fiscal implications of the zoning changes. Mr. Escalante asked questions about the overall plan for the Town center based on tables in the Downtown Study Report.

There was a discussion of the parking in the Town center. Ms. Newman explained that she is exploring private/public partnerships for parking.

There was a discussion of the need for additional office and residential space. Ms. McKnight stated that a market analysis and report were completed that indicated that there is a market for office space, especially medical office space.

There was a discussion of the possibility of structured parking. Structured parking could be built across from the Needham Junction station, where there is some land. There was a discussion of land that once was railroad land but is now privately owned. Ms. McKnight stated that a parking structure is envisioned at some point in the future, but it could be 10 years away.

Mr. Escalante stated that the public/private partnerships for parking could cost millions of dollars in the aggregate and there does not seem to be a sense of where the funds would come from or what the plan for funding would be. Ms. McKnight stated that the expectation of the Planning Board is that there may be two or three development projects per year. If the infrastructure is not there to support the projects, then the permits will not be granted. The zoning by-law change provides an incentive to development, but if the infrastructure does not exist, then the development will not happen.

Mr. Davison stated that zoning laws have no implied obligations on towns to undertake any infrastructure improvements. Private property owners must comply with zoning laws. Mr. Davison stated that, if the Town were to build structured parking, there would have to be action taken by Town Meeting. Mr. Davison stated that the infrastructure for the areas to which the zoning changes would apply is already in place. The incremental costs of changed use are immeasurable. Sidewalks have to be maintained today. Roads have to be maintained today. Mr. Zimbone stated that the Planning Board zoning plan is a concept rather than a commitment that anything will occur. The effect of the zoning by-laws is to give the Planning Board the right to grant permits.

Discuss and Vote as Appropriate May Town Meeting Warrant Article 51:

Appropriate for RTS Enterprise Fund Cash Capital: Mr. Reilly stated that the pick-up truck does not seem prohibitively expensive to maintain so that there does not seem to be any rush to replace it. Mr. Taggart stated that the vehicle cost \$125 to maintain this year. The new RTS Superintendent will not be driving the vehicle home. There should be less mileage put on the truck. There does not seem to be a need to replace it now. Ms. Zappala stated that a strong case has not been made for the replacement of the pick-up truck. Ms. Zappala stated that the RTS Enterprise Fund is supported with a Town subsidy and that saving money on replacing this vehicle could save the Town on its subsidy. Mr. Creem stated that the Finance Committee had asked for replacement cycles for vehicles so that there can be an organized plan for vehicle replacement. The vehicle is now due to be replaced based on the replacement cycle. Mr. Brightman stated that, in all likelihood, the truck would have to be replaced next year if not replaced this year and questioned what that would do to the replacement cycle. Mr. Escalante questioned the need for the truck to drive around the RTS. Mr. Escalante also questioned whether the truck is at end of life if it only cost \$124.73 to maintain this year. Mr. Reilly stated that it is a useful vehicle but questioned whether it needs to be replaced now. Mr. Taggart stated that he is fine with this pick-up truck as the vehicle needed to do the job, but sees no reason why the use of the vehicle cannot be extended another year.

Discuss May Town Meeting Warrant Articles 17, 18, and 19: Report of Town Meeting Study Committee, Establishment of Procedures Committee of Town Meeting, and the Definition of its Duties, Votes and Resolutions of Town Meeting:

Mr. Creem stated that he has serious concerns with the Procedures Committee that is being proposed because it could interfere with how the Finance Committee works. Mr. Creem stated that he wants to better understand what the problem is that the Town Meeting Study Committee is trying to fix through the Procedures Committee.

There was a discussion of the omnibus article. The Finance Committee's concerns come down to the Procedures Committee. There was a discussion of the possibility of combining Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee presentations to Town Meeting. Mr. Creem stated that the two presentations cannot be combined. The Board of Selectmen are proponents of articles. The Finance Committee opines on fiscal implications. Mr. Reilly stated that there is a legitimate comment about repetition. Mr. Taggart stated that Finance Committee members should delete repetitious statements that would serve only to repeat what a Selectman has just said, but sometimes statements have to be repeated in the

Finance Committee presentation. Mr. Brightman agreed with Mr. Taggart that repetition is sometimes necessary otherwise Finance Committee presentations may not make sense.

Mr. Brightman asked about the Moderator's position.

Accept Minutes of Prior Meetings: Mr. Escalante asked that the minutes of March 11, 2009 be amended to add the words "at Town Meeting" to the second sentence of the discussion of Article 25 on page 4. Mr. Reilly moved that the Finance Committee accept the minutes of March 11, 2009 with the amendment proposed by Mr. Escalante. Ms. Zappala seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 6-0.

Finance Committee Updates: There are four sites being proposed for a new Senior Center: DeFazio Park, Greene's Field, Ridge Hill, and Rosemary Park. The square footage envisioned is 15,000 to 20,000 square feet at a cost of \$5.5 million to \$6 million with \$1.5 million to \$2 million raised privately. The time table for the Senior Center would be a feasibility study at the Special Town Meeting in the fall, design funds in May 2010, funding in May 2011; with the new Senior Center to open in May 2012.

The PPBC is looking at a 15 months construction schedule for the Newman School repairs. The location of modular classrooms is still undetermined.

Ms. Zappala moved to adjourn the meeting at approximately 10:25 pm, seconded by Mr. Reilly. The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote: 6-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Miller
Executive Secretary