

Finance Committee

April 25, 2022

7:00 PM

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**I. Call to Order**

The April 25, 2022 meeting of the Finance Committee was held via remote participation and was called to order at 7:00 pm by Aimee Sawyer, Chair of the Finance Committee. Finance Committee members present: Kevin Bugaj, Paula Daniels, Stephen Evans, Frank Joe Parker, William Rotondi, Aimee Sawyer, Kevin Snyder, and Zach Tsilis.

Absent: Yelena Gordon, Jeffrey Moynihan, and Bonnie Yezukevich.

**II. New Business**

***Reserve Fund Transfers***

Mr. Yunits presented a Reserve Fund transfer request of \$1,100 to the Select Board Office for meeting minutes covered during an FMLA leave.

**Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend a transfer of \$1,100 to account 001-122-5105116. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes 8. Unanimous.**

Mr. Yunits presented a Reserve Fund transfer request of \$5,500 to part-time wages in Data Processing. The position was budgeted for 20 hours and this would allow for 24 hours until the end of the year necessary due to increased Zoom meetings.

Ms. Sawyer asked if the position will be funded at 24 hours next year.

Mr. Yunits confirmed it will be.

Mr. Tsilis asked if the funds are being transferred from the Fin Com Reserve Fund.

Mr. Yunits confirmed and explained the balance is currently \$150,000 and if all proposed requests are approved, the balance will be \$92,400.

**Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend a transfer of \$5,500 to account 001-155-5105116. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes 8. Unanimous.**

Mr. Yunits presented a Reserve Fund transfer request of \$26,000 to the Fire Department for repair and maintenance of vehicles. The account is currently negative \$11,000, largely due to expenses for repairs on an engine that failed inspection.

Fire Chief Simmons explained the expenses incurred for repairs to Fire Department vehicles, the current balance in the fund, remaining expenses projected for the year, and offered to answer any questions from the Finance Committee.

Mr. Evans asked the age of the vehicle that failed inspection and its life expectancy.

Chief Simmons stated the vehicle is 18 to 20 years old and they usually last for about 20 years. He added this vehicle would probably be the next pumper requested for replacement.

Mr. Evans asked how many pumper bench vehicles there are in the Fire Department.

Chief Simmons stated there are four. He added the Fire Department is very successful at preventative maintenance.

Mr. Parker asked if there are any repairs that are safety concerns for the crew, referencing frame issues in the repair documentation.

Chief Simmons explained the vehicle that failed state inspection had to be repaired in order to allow it to be driven. He stated now that the repairs are complete, there are no longer any safety concerns with that vehicle.

**Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend a transfer of \$26,000 to account 001-220-5705246. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes 8. Unanimous.**

Mr. Yunits presented a Reserve Fund transfer request of \$25,000 to the Miscellaneous Account for insurances. The additional expense is \$10,000 for the new water treatment plant that was added to the Town's policy and \$15,000 in additional premium added for workers compensation, which was recommended in the audit.

Mr. Evans asked for details on the audit recommendation for additional workers compensation insurance.

Mr. Yunits shared the recommendation was made based on salaries due to increases in the areas of water treatment plant and school professional employees.

Mr. Snyder asked if there is a breakdown of the premium increase by category. He stated the rate for the school professionals should be relatively low.

Mr. Yunits stated he can check with the agent and confirm back with the Finance Committee.

Mr. Tsilis asked why the Water department's portion would not come out of the Water Department's Retained Earnings account.

Mr. Yunits explained they don't pay their insurance directly, but he can check on the actual exposure and related expense.

Mr. Tsilis asked if the Town's general policy is broken down so the Water Department's portion can be paid from Retained Earnings and reimbursed to the Town budget.

Mr. Yunits stated he will confirm if the Water Department has paid their portion of the increase.

**Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend a transfer of \$25,000 to account 001-940-570. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes 8. Unanimous.**

***Annual Town Meeting Article 2***

Mr. Yunits presented Annual Town Meeting Article 2: Chapter 90 Transportation Aid Program, to accept \$551,445 in State funds. He reviewed the Massachusetts Municipal Association's (MMA) funding and allocation formula. He shared this year the MMA will be providing funds to repair potholes.

**Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Annual Town Meeting Article 2: Chapter 90 Transportation Aid Program. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes -8. Unanimous. Motion Carries.**

***Annual Town Meeting Article 8***

Mr. Yunits presented the Proposed FY23 Capital Budget. He shared the following recommendations of the Capital Improvements Committee:

- \$546,141 from Capital
- \$63,200 from the Ambulance Reserve Fund
- \$590,000 from Sewer Retained Earnings
- \$250,000 from Water Retained Earnings

The starting balance in the Capital Reserve Fund is \$699,744 and remaining balance will be \$153,603.

Ms. Sawyer asked for more information on the \$500,000 expense for the Cobb Street Sewer Station.

Mr. Yunits explained the pumps and motors need to be replaced.

**Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Annual Town Meeting Article 8: FY23 Capital Plan in the amounts of \$546,141 from Capital, \$63,200 from Ambulance Reserve, \$590,000 from Sewer Retained Earnings, and \$250,000 from Water Retained Earnings for a total of \$1,449,341. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes -8. Unanimous. Motion Carries.**

***Annual Town Meeting Article 17: Petition to Amend Norton Zoning Bylaw***

Mr. Paul DiGuiseppe, the Norton Planning Director, introduced the petitioner and project leader, Ms. Anne Brensley of DevCo North America. He shared the Planning Committee unanimously voted to recommend this article to rezone the land previously owned by Reed & Barton.

Mr. Evans asked if there were any comments from the property abutters at the public hearing.

Mr. DiGuiseppe shared the Planning Board held a public meeting in April where there were comments related to potential development. He explained at this time the request is to rezone the property to village/commercial only and there is no specific project associated with the article. He acknowledged the property is located in the middle of a neighborhood and assured the Finance Committee all concerns will be addressed once a specific project is identified.

Mr. Parker asked Mr. DiGuiseppe to summarize the pros and cons of this zoning change.

Mr. DiGuiseppe gave an overview and history of the site and the Town's efforts to assist in revitalizing this property, which has been vacant and abandoned for ten years. He commented this article is a step in the right direction, how the petitioner would be able to properly remediate the land, and how rezoning it would prevent it from industrial development. He commented rezoning the land to village/commercial is a more appropriate fit for that neighborhood and would capitalize on the current real estate market.

Mr. Bugaj asked if the property includes land on both sides of Elm Street.

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained the "property" includes 3 parcels- the large parcel where the building is located is the parcel proposed for rezoning by this article. The property also includes two parking lots (one on Elm Street and one on Cross Street) that are zoned residential (R60).

Ms. Brensley described the project, called "River Works", as a village/commercial development made up of residential and small, retail, community-based shops. She explained the plans to turn the land that has been dormant and requires significant Town resources to remediate into a beautiful development that will generate jobs and tax revenue the community can enjoy. She emphasized the specifics of the project will not be determined until they can speak directly with the abutters to hear what they would like to see.

Mr. Tsilis asked for clarification on the company Ms. Brensley represents, how they came across the project, who would be responsible for remediation, and about the back taxes owed on the land.

Ms. Brensley explained she works for DevCo North America who specialize in projects like this that have legal or remediation issues requiring clean up before investors will take on a project. She emphasized this project is very complex on both a legal and environmental level and provided timeline for the pre-development phase of this project. The timeline for this phase is 12 to 18 months if all goes smoothly.

Mr. Tsilis asked if she is primarily working with the Town Planner, since the ownership of this property is not clear due to back taxes.

Ms. Brensley stated she is the sponsor of the project and will be working with the court to resolve title issues with the goal of becoming the legal owner of the abandoned property.

Mr. Bugaj commented on the project being funded by private equity and asked if there is a timeline for the ROI (return on investment).

Ms. Brensley replied DevCo North America has their own capital and brings in different partners unique to every project. She agreed the timeline is important to consider and factors such as rezoning, remediation, and legal costs will become clear in the next three months and will determine if the project will move forward.

Mr. Rotondi commented not providing a clear picture of the development makes it difficult for abutters to use their opportunity to express their concerns and asked how big of a project Ms. Brensley estimates it will be.

Ms. Brensley explained the vagueness is intentional because there is too much unknown at this point to know if the project will even move forward. She estimates remediation costs will be between \$1.5 and

\$2 million dollars. She acknowledged that in order for the project to make financial sense, the number of units will need to maximize village/commercial zoning, but emphasized the concerns of the community and abutters will be of equal importance.

Mr. DiGuiseppe commented it is not legal to tie a rezoning to a specific project. It is important to keep the article general so the vote applies to the actual zoning bylaws for the parcel and not a specific development project. He added the current zoning for the large parcel is industrial.

Ms. Sawyer also commented the current zoning is industrial and it is located in the middle of a residential area.

Mr. Parker asked Mr. DiGuiseppe what are the risks if the Town votes to rezone the land to village/commercial and this project does not move forward.

Mr. DiGuiseppe replied anything at this site will require a special permit, which entails a higher level of review from the Planning Board as well as public hearings. He commented if the property remains industrial, this developer will walk away and it could be a very long time before another one comes along.

Mr. Snyder asked if the land on the other side of the water is developable.

Mr. DiGuiseppe shared the assessors map does not indicate any wetlands, although it is right on the Rumford River and anything is possible.

Ms. Brensley stated there are no plans to develop that portion of the land, other than possibly a walkway so people can get to the water itself.

Mr. Tsilis asked how this is not considered "spot zoning", allowing the neighbors recourse if approved.

Mr. DiGuiseppe replied the parcel is a 20-acre parcel that was zoned industrial over 60 years ago. The factory which was on it was built in the 1860s before zoning laws existed. He explained he is not concerned that rezoning it from industrial to village/commercial zone which is more in line with the adjacent area will be an issue with the neighbors.

**Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend *Annual Town Meeting Article 17: Petition to Amend Norton Zoning Bylaw by changing the zoning of the 16.25 acres at the intersection of Elm and Cross Street from industrial to village/commercial. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes -8. Unanimous.* Motion Carries.**

#### ***Zoning Amendments Proposed by the Planning Board***

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained there are three proposed amendments that are a result of a number of initiatives in the Town's Master Plan designed to promote economic development, such as making improvements to the village center section on West Main Street. He explained in order to prepare for this, the Planning Board is putting forth a number of small changes in anticipation of bigger changes next year and summarized each article.

#### ***Annual Town Meeting Article 12: Zoning Amendment 175-6.2 Table of Dimensional Requirements***

This article amends the table that identifies the dimensions in each of the Town's seven zoning districts. It removes the language that caps density at seven units and replaces it with "three or more". He stated the Planning Board recommends this change.

***Annual Town Meeting Article 13: Zoning Amendment Chapter 175, Article II: Definitions; 175-4.4 Commercial Uses; 175-4.5 Industrial Uses***

This article also originates from the Town's Master Plan and the plan for West Main Street. It adds additional definitions to the Use Table in the Town's zoning codes that will clearly define the types of businesses allowed in each zone, such as medical/dental offices, artisanal uses, and life sciences industry.

Mr. Rotondi referred to the table and asked Mr. DiGuiseppe to confirm if village/commercial zoning allows for research/life science projects. He referenced the previous article to change the Reed & Barton property to village/commercial.

Mr. DiGuiseppe confirmed this would be allowed by special permit and this is not one of the changes being made.

***Annual Town Meeting Article 14: Zoning Amendment: 175-19.3 Applicability***

This article amends the Town's bylaw provision for affordable housing established 20 years ago requiring six-unit apartment complexes to have one affordable unit. It eliminates this requirement as long as the Town is meeting or exceeding the State's 40 (b) requirement of 10 percent affordable housing.

Mr. Bugaj commented on the many benefits of allowing life sciences industry to Town, its continued growth, and the potential for bringing in high rents with a low footprint per square footage compared to a large apartment complex.

Mr. DiGuiseppe shared that he is working to encourage economic development in the Town and commented on the high tax revenue life science companies would generate. He added bringing in this industry would also work well with Wheaton College's life science programs.

Mr. Yunits shared the Select Board unanimously voted in favor of these three articles.

Mr. DiGuiseppe added the Planning Board also unanimously voted in favor of these three articles and were responsible for initiating them.

*Ms. Daniels left the meeting.*

***Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Annual Town Meeting Article 12, as presented. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes -7. Unanimous. Motion Carries.***

***Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Annual Town Meeting Article 13, as presented. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes -7. Unanimous. Motion Carries.***

***Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Annual Town Meeting Article 14, as presented. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes -7. Unanimous. Motion Carries.***

***Annual Town Meeting Article 16: Petition to Amend Norton Zoning Bylaw***

Mr. DiGuiseppe shared this article aims to rezone land between Mansfield Avenue and Reservoir Street, currently zoned as R60 to village/commercial. The parcel fronts on Reservoir Street and the request is to extend village/commercial zone to this parcel. He shared the Planning Board unanimously voted against this article. The Planning Board was concerned this is a residential area and upzoning it to village/commercial does not fall in line with the surrounding area. He shared several neighbors voiced concerns about traffic and the cost of connecting to sewer.

Mr. Parker asked if the parcel is located on Route 140, across from MA Gas.

Mr. DiGuiseppe confirmed this.

Mr. Tsilis commented since this is a citizen's petition and the petitioner is not present, he is not in favor of this article at this time.

Ms. Sawyer agreed.

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated the petitioner did present the article to the Planning Board and they were invited to tonight's Finance Committee meeting.

Mr. Parker asked if access to the proposed development would be located on Reservoir Street.

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained the plans presented are still conceptual. The petitioner would also like to get access to get to Mansfield Ave, but there are several complications due to the wetlands. He added the Planning Board felt that R60 is the appropriate zoning for this area due to the neighborhood on Reservoir Street.

Motion was made by Mr. Rotondi to recommend Article 16, as presented. Seconded by Mr. Parker. Vote: Yes – 0, No – 6, Abstain – 1. Motion fails.

Ms. Sawyer stated the Finance Committee will reconsider this article if the petitioner reaches out to present at their next meeting.

**Other Business**

Mr. Yunits shared he received a new Cherry Sheet, which reflects an increase of a little more than \$96,000. He explained he will be presenting a budget to the Select Board on Wednesday, with recommendations for cuts on the Town-side to get a two percent increase for the Town and School. He stated the budget is short \$1,704,805 of the requested amount, so he is working on suggestions for cuts to balance the budget. He added he is working with Town council on a draft of the Special Town Meeting Warrant.

**III. Review/Approve Minutes**

There were no new minutes reviewed at this meeting.

**IV. Open session for topics not reasonably anticipated 48 hours in advance**

Mr. Peter Wiggins shared next Saturday is election day.

**V. Adjournment**

**Motion was made by Mr. Parker to adjourn the meeting at 9:04 pm. Seconded by Mr. Rotondi. Vote: Yes – 7. Unanimous. Motion carries.**

The meeting is adjourned at 9:06 pm.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEndnliunds>

Respectfully submitted by:

Anne Simpson

Minutes Approved by Committee on:

9/25/2023

Signature:

Paula Sanil