



TOWN OF NORWELL
Norwell Town Offices, Room 112
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Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes October 18, 2022

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Jesse McSweeney at 7:00 PM. Also present were Town Administrator Peter Morin, Finance Director Darleen Sullivan, and Board Members Mark Cleveland, Bob Perniola, Brian D'Souza, Peter Leppanen, Ned Maguire, Elizabeth Hibbard, and Dane Hutchison. Elizabeth Hibbard arrived at 7:10 PM.

AGENDA

Motion by Mr. Cleveland to approve the agenda as submitted. Seconded by Mr. Perniola and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye; Cleveland aye; Perniola aye; McSweeney aye; Hutchison aye; Maguire aye; D'Souza aye.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes

Tabled

Bills

None

RESERVE FUND TRANSFER REQUESTS

Bridge Street Landing

Mr. Morin requested a transfer of \$5063.22 to cover an emergency repair to the boat ramp at the Bridge Street Landing performed by the Highway Department over the summer.

Mr. McSweeney asked how much use the ramp typically gets; usage is heavy during the summer, which was probably a factor in the need for the repair. This repair should last longer than one made two years earlier.

Motion by Mr. Perniola to transfer \$5063.22 from the Reserve Fund to the Highways line. Seconded by Mr. Cleveland and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye; Cleveland aye; Perniola aye; McSweeney aye; Hutchison aye; Maguire aye; D'Souza aye.

Fire Engine Purchase

Fire Department Chief David Kean has made a request to purchase a used 2005 Pierce Contender Custom Pumper for \$195,000 to serve as a backup vehicle. This vehicle is being used as a backup vehicle in Malden.

Mr. Morin advised this need was created by recent damage caused to one of the fire trucks purchased two years ago and, as predicted at AB meetings last spring, the failure of Engine 2 to pass its safety inspection this year. The Town is presently awaiting delivery on a new, previously approved fire truck.

Chief Kean noted that Engine 2 (a 2006 model) failed inspection in August, and delivery of the new truck is about 1.5 years away due to supply chain issues. The recently damaged truck, Engine 4, will be at the dealer for another six months due to similar issues. Currently, they are relying on Engine 1, a 26-year-old truck that requires constant in-house maintenance; if this goes off-line, they will have to borrow a reserve vehicle from a nearby town and be liable for any repairs.

Mr. Cleveland asked about the damage to Engine 4; the cab door is damaged and the truck cannot be safely operated as a result. Mr. Leppanen asked how the Malden vehicle would be deployed; it would share Engine 1's workload.

Chief Kean added they had hoped to fund the purchase through a warrant article, but the damage to Engine 4 made the need more urgent. Additionally, he would like to secure the Malden vehicle before it is shipped south to the area impacted by Hurricane Ian. Mr. Leppanen asks how much a comparable truck would cost brand new; Chief Kean estimates about \$800,000. He believes that the Malden truck could give 7-8 years of service.

Ms. Hibbard asks if the Department would consider selling the Malden vehicle once the new truck arrives in a year and a half; Chief Kean indicates they will sell Engine 1, which is closer to its end of life, and the Malden truck would be kept as a reserve. He is also working with the dealer to sell Engine 2 for parts. However, these sales will not offset the total cost of the Malden vehicle.

Mr. Morin indicated he has signed the contract for the purchase of the vehicle but has not incurred the expense yet. He does not need a vote until then, which will likely happen by the time the Board begins reviewing articles for the Special Town Meeting in January. Chief Kean added that Malden still needs the truck for a little while longer; it will also undergo inspection and customization at the Town's dealer.

Mr. McSweeney asked how much is currently in the Reserve Fund. Mr. Morin indicates \$350,000; he is preparing a Special Town Meeting article to replenish the Reserve Fund this amount from Free Cash.

Mr. Leppanen asked about the cost to repair Engine 4; this cost is covered by insurance. He also asks if Engine 2 can be repaired; the frame is completely cracked and not worth repairing. Chief Kean reiterated that Engine 1 will share work with the Malden vehicle until the new truck arrives, at which point he will try to sell Engine 1 and move the Malden vehicle into reserve.

SPECIAL TOWN MEETING OVERVIEW AND TOWN ADMINISTRATOR COMMENTS

Mr. Morin distributed a list of resources and identified requests for the January Special Town Meeting, stating at the outset that the Town has the resources to address every request without requiring a debt exclusion or depleting the Town's reserve. Resources available include free cash, which was certified at \$5,369,000, the highest figure in Mr. Morin's tenure, and American Rescue Plan Act funds, totaling \$1,167,000, that are unrestricted. Mr. Morin noted that the Town was able to use ARPA funds to purchase the new fire truck in cash, saving the Town up to \$190K in interest costs. The Capital Stabilization Fund has grown to \$2,100,000 by transferring free cash and retired debt payment amounts into the fund. Overlay Surplus has approximately \$1.6 million, a portion of which will be used to provide tax relief to seniors eligible for circuit breaker tax relief. \$3.3 million is available in Community Preservation Act funds not earmarked for any other purpose.

Highway Article money and some free cash are also available, and the Town has some bonding capacity if needed.

Mr. McSweeney suggested that Board members consider at this meeting what information and/or documentation it might want to request or Mr. Morin or Ms. Sullivan, so it will be available to them in future deliberations.

St. Helen's Property

Mr. Morin advised that the Select Board has entered into a Purchase and Sale agreement to acquire the St. Helen's property for \$9,050,000, contingent upon approval at Town Meeting. The majority of the purchase price is expected to come from Community Preservation funds and bonding. Funding the purchase this way would leave approximately \$250,000 in CPA funds, plus the state match, available for other projects annually and would not require a debt exclusion.

Mr. Cleveland asked about plans for the property once acquired; Mr. Morin noted that, if Community Preservation monies are used for the transaction, the land must be used for allowed Community Preservation purposes, which are affordable housing, open space, recreation, and historical preservation. There is a clear need for affordable housing that Town officials have stressed to abutting residents, and Mr. Morin states they have communicated that at least 100 units of affordable housing will be a part of plans for the property if the Town makes the purchase. Proactively creating such housing gives the Town greater control over what ultimately is built, and if the property were sold to a private developer, the likely result would be a much larger project of market-level housing.

Ms. Hibbard asked if the property has been appraised, and if he and other officials are satisfied the price is fair; she looks at acquisition prices regularly in her career and the price seems high. Mr. Morin noted that they took an approach recently taken by Canton in a similar situation, and offered to beat any bona fide purchase offer by \$250,000. The Archdiocese advised that they had received a high bid of \$8,800,000 for the St. Helen's property, and the Town has asked for an affidavit attesting to this. Ms. Hibbard also asked about establishing a value for bonding purposes; the Town has received advice on this from bond counsel.

Mr. Cleveland asked if the housing envisaged by the Town for the property would be sufficient to get the Town's Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) to "safe harbor" against future 40Bs; Mr. Morin indicated this would depend what is ultimately proposed and plus a number of other factors. If market-rate housing is built on the site, that would increase the SHI required for safe harbor. Select Board member Ellen Allen notes that Director of Planning Ilana Quirk checks regularly with the State Department of Housing and Community Housing as to what the Town's "10% affordable" number is. The latest figures from them have the Town 200-220 units short, but there currently is a two-year safe harbor due to the pending High Street 40B.

Mr. Perniola asked about other uses for the property beyond the 100 housing units. Mr. Morin indicated there would also be an open space component to the plan, but they have talked to the neighborhood about augmenting the abutting senior housing and "that has been seen as acceptable." Mr. Perniola suggests that the housing, if built, could "protect the Town for a long time" from 40Bs.

Mr. Hutchison asked if the final development plans for the property, after purchase, will require Town Meeting approval; it will, and there may be additional components requiring approval. Mr.

Leppanen asks if the Town will be presenting any conceptual plan at the Special Town Meeting; Mr. Morin indicates there will be, and Ms. Hibbard asks who will be formulating that plan; the Select Board is working with consultant Judi Barrett, who has worked on affordable housing concepts in Duxbury and other area towns. Mr. Perniola asks if all of the 100 units will be 55-plus; Mr. Morin believes it will primarily be senior housing. Mr. Maguire asked, if a private developer purchased the property and proposed to build 300 units, if the Water Department could require them to supply their own water. Mr. Morin indicated they would probably have to install their own wastewater treatment, but he believes such a project could not otherwise be stopped, as the Archdiocese informed him that national developers were among the bidders for the property, who would have the resources to wait out any safe harbor the Town might achieve without purchasing the property.

Ms. Hibbard asked if there are any discussions about moving some of the proposed 100 units to other town-owned properties instead of “having one neighborhood bear that burden.” Mr. Morin understands that was the purpose of the Affordable Housing production plan, but trying to get neighborhoods to buy into multiple small projects has been unsuccessful to date. However, there will still be a need for affordable housing at other sites because the safe harbor afforded by 100 proposed St. Helens units will be temporary.

Mr. Cleveland asks why the Town isn’t proposing a 220 unit development so as to reach the 10% threshold. Mr. Morin clarifies they have specified “at least 100” units in the discussions but not “only 100.” He has been using that number so neighbors don’t come away with the expectation “that this property is going to be a park...it’s going to be affordable housing.” However, the Town may not be able to responsibly put 200 units on the property. Ms. Allen’s sense from the SB is that putting 200+ units on that property is “an awful lot for one neighborhood to bear,” and the SB does want to incorporate some recreational and open space uses to give neighbors some benefit. About 3 acres of the property is wetlands that cannot be developed. Ms. Hibbard would like to see a “holistic plan” that incorporates housing on other properties so the Town is not facing more 40B developments two years down the line that it would not have the resources to prevent. An alternative might be to sell other parcels of town land to private developers to offset the cost of this purchase. Ms. Allen indicates this issue will be discussed at the next SB meeting.

Mr. Maguire asked how a new state regulation whereby Norwell, as an “MBTA adjacent” community, must have a zone in which multifamily housing is buildable by right in order to continue to be eligible for certain state grants would impact this and future projects. Ms. Allen notes that the only qualifying transit station, for purposes of the regulation, is the Rockland Park and Ride lot on Hingham Street and the only area within a half mile of the lot is the Accord Park area. The SB previously looked at housing in this area but were advised this would have the appearance of “redlining.”

Ms. Hibbard notes that previous land purchases for housing, including part of the Carleton property and land off Wildcat Lane, have not resulted in any housing and wants assurances that sufficient housing is actually built on it to justify the purchase. Mr. Morin states this has been a point of emphasis, in discussions with neighbors, that the property has to contribute to “solving the affordable housing problem in a meaningful way.” Mr. Cleveland likes the idea of one large project to address the issue but still balks at the cost. Ms. Allen adds that a complete plan, with all numbers and details, will not be possible to formulate between now and the STM on January 23. Mr. Hutchison would like to see as much detail as possible before the Board votes on the article. Ms. Hibbard points out that a “100% affordable” project will require state and federal resources as

well as Town funds, and these come with their requirements. Mr. Morin notes that they may structure the articles and/or the transactions to allow for some market rate or commercial development; Assistant Town Administrator Darleen Sullivan is working on this piece.

Mr. Perniola acknowledges that the \$9 million purchase price seems high but believes it will look like a bargain within a few years given the potential protection it could offer the Town.

Highway Barn

Mr. Morin noted that the February 2020 Special Town Meeting appropriated funding and bonding for construction of the Highway Barn. However, the bids that came in for the project were all higher than what was appropriated. Therefore, Highway Commissioner Ferguson will be asking for an additional \$1.6 million to complete construction of the barn. Mr. Morin believes an additional \$600K in article money can be repurposed for the project.

Mr. Leppanen asked if the increased project cost is primarily due to inflation; Mr. Morin characterizes it as due to “the change in market conditions” including inflation, supply chain issues, and other factors, noting that “costs of public construction have skyrocketed.” Mr. Maguire asks if Mr. Ferguson has looked into scaling back the project; Mr. Morin indicated this had already been done. Mr. Hutchison asked if certain project tasks could be handled in-house. To this point, Mr. Ferguson has acted as the project manager, but Mr. Morin has strongly recommended that an outside project manager be brought in before start of construction, and believes the funds for this is included in this ask.

Town Hall Purchase

Mr. Morin advised that the cost to renovate the existing Town Hall building, originally estimated at \$5 million in a 2019 evaluation, had ballooned to \$11–\$12 million. The existing building is not energy efficient, would be difficult to renovate due to its sturdy construction, and requires significant hazardous materials remediation.

Once the actual cost of renovation was revealed, it was suggested by SB Chair Bruce Graham and others that the Town explore other options in town, and a request for proposals was issued. One response was received, offering a 20,000 sq ft office building at 93 Longwater Circle for \$4.5 million. Mr. Morin characterized this price as very affordable to the Town and the building as meeting all the Town’s requirements.

Ms. Hibbard asks what the plan would be for the existing Town Hall building and if they could hire the broker the Archdiocese used. Mr. Morin’s recommendation would be that the building be torn down or sold “as is”; however, this sale would not be essential to the financing of 93 Longwater.

Mr. Hutchison asks if it would be possible to use part of the building as a community center. Mr. Morin thinks this could be studied, as there is about 7,000 sq ft of extra space in the building. They would not be able to construct a new building on the parcel. Mr. Perniola asks if the School Department could make use of the space. Mr. Morin thinks the Recreation Department currently has the biggest need for a different space.

Ms. Hibbard asks if there would be any benefit to postponing the transaction for a year in hopes prices drop. Mr. Morin thinks the Town should take the opportunity now to meet the need for new Town offices at a very good price, while it is in a financial position to do so, as there are other

renovation projects already on the horizon. “To me, this is the biggest no-brainer on Earth...I’d be afraid to wait.”

Mr. Hutchison asks what renovations will be needed prior to move-in. Mr. Morin believes the entrance will need to be widened and some ceiling work may be needed, but the building is in excellent condition overall. Town officials will be inspecting the roof and HVAC systems this week. There are maintenance and study funds for the current town hall that could be repurposed for repairs to the new building.

Mr. Leppanen observes that presenting all these articles in one Special Town Meeting seems like a lot for residents to digest. Mr. McSweeney agrees but notes that some of these needs have been on the Town’s radar for years. Mr. Morin likewise agrees, but thinks the Town needs to act now regarding St. Helen’s, and delaying action on the Highway Barn and/or Town Hall will only cause costs to go up. Mr. Morin was initially told the de-commissioning process for St. Helen’s would take years, but the property was placed on the market weeks later.

BOARD REORGANIZATION

Ms. Hibbard nominated Mr. McSweeney to serve as Chair; Mr. Cleveland seconded and Mr. McSweeney indicated he would accept the nomination.

Motion by Ms. Hibbard to nominate Mr. McSweeney as Chair. Seconded by Mr. Cleveland and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye; Cleveland aye; Perniola aye; McSweeney aye; Hutchison aye; Maguire aye; D’Souza aye.

Mr. Leppanen nominated Ms. Hibbard to serve as Vice Chair; Mr. McSweeney seconded and Ms. Hibbard indicated she would accept the nomination.

Motion by Mr. Leppanen to nominate Ms. Hibbard as Vice Chair. Seconded by Mr. McSweeney and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye; Cleveland aye; Perniola aye; McSweeney aye; Hutchison aye; Maguire aye; D’Souza aye.

Mr. Cleveland nominated Mr. Hutchison to serve as Clerk; Mr. McSweeney seconded and Mr. Hutchison indicated he would accept the nomination.

Motion by Mr. Cleveland to nominate Mr. Hutchison as Clerk. Seconded by Mr. McSweeney and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye; Cleveland aye; Perniola aye; McSweeney aye; Hutchison aye; Maguire aye; D’Souza aye.

Mr. Perniola nominated Mr. Cleveland to serve as the Board’s representative on the Advisory Board Nominating Committee (ABNC); Ms. Hibbard seconded and Mr. Cleveland indicated he would accept the nomination.

Motion by Mr. Perniola to nominate Mr. Cleveland as ABNC representative. Seconded by Ms. Hibbard and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye; Cleveland aye; Perniola aye; McSweeney aye; Hutchison aye; Maguire aye; D’Souza aye.

MISCELLANEOUS

The social media discussion listed on the agenda was tabled.

Mr. Morin anticipated that two Planning articles and one article from the Board of Assessors would also be added to the STM warrant; these should not require as much discussion.

Ms. Hibbard asked if towns will continue to be able to hold hybrid meetings. These have been authorized to continue until at least March 31st.

FY 2024 Budget Materials and Meeting Procedure

All present discussed how they would like review meetings for the Annual Town Meeting and FY 2024 budget to proceed, including lead time for review materials. Mr. McSweeney noted it is very difficult to make an informed vote on some of the larger budgetary requests, such as those from the School Department, if the Board doesn't receive the details until the night of the meeting. Several members suggested that a late submission for a large ask should be grounds for postponing a discussion or approval vote. Mr. Morin agrees it has been the habit of the schools to submit late requests despite having been asked not to do so. Mr. McSweeney suggests that representatives from the School Committee and the Votech liaison be invited to discuss a more timely submittal process with the Board. Ms. Hibbard notes there is a new School Committee Chair, which presents an opportunity to forge a stronger relationship and set expectations as to the receipt of deliverables.

Mr. Morin notes that after his retirement in December, the Board will be working with Darleen Sullivan, who is currently acting as Assistant Town Administrator, as well as Town Accountant Christine McCarthy and Treasurer Collector Marybeth Carter. Former Town Accountant Donna Mangan was kept on as a consultant, focusing on CARES Act reimbursements, and brought significant reimbursement monies back to the Town.

Mr. Morin briefly discussed the school budget formulation process; he and the Superintendent/School Committee agree to an increase number early on, but he does not have access to an "advance" school budget. Additional upcoming financial challenges include a new trash contract, as well as ongoing issues regarding pension funding/performance and health insurance costs. The Town is in better shape than others in the area due to a strong culture of fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Leppanen would like to receive advance notice of any particularly big asks from the Departments before they come in. Ms. Sullivan notes she will be starting discussions with department heads earlier given this is her first year; these discussions will include current conditions, needs, priorities. She is hoping to have a department's budget in hand before putting them on an AB agenda.

Given that the St. Helen's property is proposed to be partly funded with CPA funds, Ms. Hibbard would like to know how many grant applications have been submitted; Ms. Sullivan indicated that "a healthy number" of requests have been received.

FUTURE MEETING DATES

Late November/Early December

Special Town Meeting - January 23

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Leppanen to adjourn at 8:56 P.M. Seconded by Ms. Hibbard and unanimously voted by roll call: Leppanen aye; Cleveland aye; Perniola aye; McSweeney aye; Hutchison aye; Maguire aye; D'Souza aye.

Jesse McSweeney, Chair