

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes
November 5, 2024
7:30 PM
Town Hall, Room 204

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

Mr. Cole called the meeting to order.

1. Citizen's Concern

None

2. Special Town Meeting Recommendations

Article 1 Authorize Acquisition of 19 and 35 Wetherbee Street:

Jim Colman, current Chair of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), had been invited by Chair Jason Cole to speak and answer questions regarding the Wetherbee property purchase.

Mr. Colman summarized:

CPC voted unanimously to spend CPC monies for this purchase;

The Chair of the Open Space Committee, at a CPC meeting, commented that vacant properties are getting fewer and fewer;

This purchase will have environmental and social advantages;

Conservation Commission representatives attended the CPC meeting; they, also, voted unanimously to purchase the Wetherbee property;

The town is hoping to receive a \$500k grant from the State; State needs to grant this money by the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Jarboe commented the Article is drafted in a way that if the state or gift money don't come through, then total price is in the Article, so may pay less if these 2 funding sources come through. Breakout:

\$1.2m CPA Open Space Set Aside funds

\$1.88 CPA borrowing (including \$80k for closing costs)

\$100,000 ACT (Acton Conservation Trust)

\$500,000 State LAND (Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity) grant

Total price: \$3.68m

A question was asked how can the town be assured there is protection for the use of the land. It was confirmed the protection is in the Article language and in purchase & sale (P&S). If State grants the \$500k, they too have certain land use requirements and restrictions.

Mr. Jarboe commented under then Governor Ed King, restrictions on abutting land were enacted.

Therefore, Mr. Jarboe strongly suggests for FinCom to support Article 1.

Dr. Chen - Inquired about the funding. Mr. Cole commented usually these are general obligation bonds. Barring any problems with CPC, funding should come from the CPA surcharge residents see on their tax bill.

Mr. Bourdon - Commented the ACT is a private entity, one can join the ACT. They are the monitoring authority.

Mr. Sullivan - Inquired about the vehicle in a small body of water. Last conversation let it sit there, or an update? Mr. Cole added to Mr. Sullivan's question - How sure is the town of the unknowns on this property, for example, the submerged car. Mr. Colman responded the owner of the property intends to remove the vehicle from the wetland; they agreed upon method. All towers to be removed. Beyond that, Mr. Colman will refer to the Select Board for further due diligence. No other issues, though, that have come to the Committee's attention.

Mr. John Mangiaratti - Part of closing costs, owner will be requested to remove all towers, demo the house, septic system and to deal with the cars. If not met, property will not close. During the due diligence period, the town will continue if any other issues come up. Goal: close around the June 2025 time frame.

Ms. Andersen - land abutting the Wetherbee property is town-owned property.

Mr. Cole - Inquired about the intention of putting in parking. Mr. Colman commented it hasn't been discussed yet. Wouldn't be surprised if it does happen, but it has to be minimal. The owner/seller wants the Conservation Commission to own the property, so Conservation Commission will have jurisdiction over the property. The land backs up to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. Where the house is now, with very few trees, a possible location for parking.

Mr. David Martin - CPA language has restrictions, accessory parking related to the recreational use only, so no other parking allowed if doesn't fit this accessory parking requirement.

Mr. Cole - Understands the property has quite a bit of water. When comparing figures, purchase price is higher than the "maximum best use". When performed, what percentage of land didn't perc, meaning not buildable. Mr. Martin spoke and wanted to

remind people perc's were not conducted. May be able to go back on some documents to confirm, but approximately 20 buildable lots.

Mr. Jarboe moves to recommend Article 1, acquisition of 19 and 35 Wetherbee Street
Mr. Noone seconded.
Passed unanimously 7-0-0

Articles 2 and 3 Collective Bargaining:
No updates at this time.

Article 4 Town Capital Purchase Replacement of Ambulance:
Mr. Bourdon - Inquired about benefit of lease-to-own versus borrowing.
Mr. Mangiaratti summarized: There are borrowing costs, town must go through rating process, borrow short-term BAN while we wait for project to go out in a future package. So, 7-year lease-to-own builds into our capital investment plan. Last ambulance was leased. Budgeting using 4.25%, so about the same comparing leasing to borrowing. Takes about 2 years to have ambulance be delivered. Trying to get a jump start to allow the ambulance to be ordered. Back-up ambulance (2015) is breaking down.

Mr. Cole - Would like to get Enterprise balances two (2) meetings from now. Is funding available to properly fund this ambulance?
Mr. Mangiaratti - Yes, also take into account the fund pays for Firefighters. Feel comfortable with proper uses? Mr. Mangiaratti confirmed.

Mr. Bourdon moves to recommend Article 4, lease-to-own ambulance
Mr. Jarboe seconded
Passed unanimously 7-0-0

Article 5 Veterans Tax Abatement Annual COLA Increase:
Mr. Mangiaratti commented this is one of the Select Board's short-term goals for tax relief. So, wanted to take advantage of moving on the HERO Act, allowing tax breaks for Veterans.
Mr. Cole confirmed doesn't impact the current fiscal year; correct.

Mr. Jarboe moves to recommend Article 5 Veterans Tax Abatement Annual COLA Increase
Mr. Noone seconded
Passed unanimously 7-0-0

3. Cost Cutting Initiative

Ms. Andersen gave an update. January 7, 21st or 28th are available. MLK is January 20th, so avoid that. Mr. Sullivan recommends Tuesday, January 28, 2025, 6:00pm at Acton Senior Center for a listening session.

Next FinCom meeting, November 19th, 7:00pm, is the first listening session.

Ms. Andersen asked FinCom to submit questions to her to be considered for the listening session. She reviewed some draft questions. Please email Ms. Andersen directly with suggestions. Also, this is an opportunity for FinCom to express their thoughts.

Ms. Andersen would like to hold until the end of the listening sessions regarding what the split should be (Town/Schools).

Ms. Andersen would like the message to go out this week regarding the listening sessions.

4. Finance Committee Business

Meeting Minutes Review:

Didn't distribute the meeting minutes, therefore, 3 sets next meeting.

Liaison Reports:

Mr. Cole attended most of Select Board meeting last night. Did receive the DPW quote of \$46.9m, received schematics and a round of answers from Weston & Sampson.

Next FinCom meeting, 95% will focus on the listening session, but will also ask for ALG guidance after the listening session.

Mr. Martin commented that the DPW Committee is meeting this Thursday evening, November 7th.

Next Meeting Date:

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

Dr. Chen made motion to adjourn, Mr. Bourdon seconded
Passed unanimously, 7-0-0

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

Draft Warrant