

Finance Committee Meeting

July 22, 2025

7:30pm

Acton Town Hall, Room 204

Present: Scott Sullivan (Chair) Jason Cole, Corinne Hogseth, Allison Jones, Steve Noone (7:36pm), Roland Bourdon (7:38pm), Greg Jarboe (remote)

Mr. Sullivan called meeting to order at 7:31 PM

**Public Comment:** None

**Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes:** Mr. Cole presented prior 2025 meeting minutes for a vote: 3/11/2025, 3/25/2025, 4/8/2025, 4/22/2025, 5/13/2025, 6/24/2025

Mr. Sullivan did not receive any edits after circulating minutes to the committee. Mr. Cole made a motion to accept minutes from the meetings listed above. Ms. Hogseth seconded. Approved unanimously by roll call vote (5-0-0)

Ms. Fleckner commented that Ms. Anderson attended the 5/6/2025 meeting, took notes, and forwarded to former Treasurer/Collector Theresa O'Leary. Ms. Anderson will forward to Mr. Sullivan for a future meeting vote.

Mr. Sullivan met with the interns on Sunday night. Interns are about ready for their presentations to the Finance Committee. Planning for 8 interns to present on 8/12 and 3 interns on 8/26. The FinCom plan to pick up the FinCom agenda on 8/26 following the presentations.

**DPW—Next Steps:**

Mr. Sullivan presented a slide of committee feedback regarding the DPW project and asked that members provide comment to ensure that Mr. Sullivan communicates the sentiment of the FinCom accurately.

Mr. Cole: Wants to soften a couple of the bullets—on point #3, not convinced that the building no longer has any value an on point #5 change “all” to “majority” regarding vehicle storage

Mr. Noone: On #5, added not just all of the equipment, but not all of the equipment all of the time. Comfortable with the list as amended. Nothing missing from the list, but #4 is key—staff needs to be separated from the rest of the building.

Mr. Bourdon: #3 and #4 could be combined, comfortable with everything else

Ms. Hogseth: Agrees with everything on the list, including the suggestions made—would add that even if the solution is perfect it cannot be suggested at the same time as an operating override. We need a holistic approach.

Ms. Jones: Any DPW project will require a vote, even if a debt exclusion and not an operating override. Should shorten statements to make FinCom's position clearer.

Mr. Jarboe: Previous proposal was rejected by the voters and town meeting indicated that primary driver was cost—both are facts.

Ms. Hogseth: Disagrees with Mr. Jarboe. The poll taken at town meeting was not representative of the opinions of the people of voted against because it was a much smaller group at town meeting. The 80% of voters who voted at the election, but did not appear at town meeting did not show up because they didn't need to—therefore not representative.

Mr. Jarboe: Though the Town Meeting poll was a smaller sample, 2/3 vote is still needed at ATM to get things through—need both in order to pass. Sentiment of Town Meeting is still important though skewed. It's important to express facts versus FinCom opinions.

Mr. Cole: Timing does matter. FinCom made clear that it was an issue of timing and scope. Something to consider is that there is a movement to have remote participation during Town Meeting, Wayland has moved in this direction, so maybe other towns may be able to do this as well. Increased participation could have an impact on voting outcomes.

Mr. Sullivan: Proposing a joint session with the Select Board to discuss different scenarios where both sides can express what they feel is positive or negative or why or why not something should be done. Residents need to understand the path forward. Wants to walk the public through the scenarios, the options and what's possible so that it's not a binary decision of doing something or nothing. Solicited the thoughts of the group.

Ms. Hogseth: Would not be opposed to another joint meeting, as long as the goals are different from the two previous joint meetings. Felt that the Select Board was just trying to convince the FinCom of their way.

Mr. Sullivan: Wants discussion of possible scenarios and the pros of cons of each. Goal for everyone to hear all of this so that they can understand and digest.

Mr. Noone: Financial projections of school and town budgets are easy to calculate. At the last ALG, the Select Board did not want to look beyond FY27. Need consensus on forecasting before we address other things. Has been working on budget forecasts for both the town and schools. Need to address present issues first before anything beyond that.

Mr. Sullivan: FinCom is being told to wait for things to happen first, but Mr. Sullivan wants to discuss this project prior to starting the budget, so that we're not running into a wall or a deadline. Not expecting a conclusion, but wants to document the various scenarios and their pros and cons.

Mr. Cole: Wants to hear from select board members that they're open to a project other than the one which was presented at town meeting. FinCom asked to not be included in the ALG message and was ignored, has no level of trust.

Mr. Noone: Discussed that there were two reasons the project failed: request and timing—if we can't agree on what the next 5 years looks like and if we'll need an override, we're only looking at half the problem. Taxpayers do not see the difference between an operating override and a

debt exclusion because they don't typically have a 30-year horizon—in a practical sense for taxpayers they're the same.

Mr. Sullivan: The most likely scenario if we do nothing is that we'll be presented with another solution for DPW and will have to decide if it fits or not, as well as the financial impact on the town. Creates potential for a binary decision. It will be too late to make any changes.

Mr. Cole: FinCom said in August that we were not going to support the project and were told to let the voters decide. Willing to discuss analysis but does not want to relitigate the same project.

Mr. Jarboe: We will know more after Thursday's DPW Building Committee meeting, the first one since Town Meeting. Meeting will be a good indicator regarding next steps for the Select Board and if they are listing to the voters. It's clear that cost is an issue. We will know more before our next meeting in August and will have a good sense regarding next steps.

Ms. Jones: Agrees with what others have said, but a project cannot be brought forward that the select board does not support—if we do move forward with one of these meetings then we need a well-defined agenda.

Mr. Bourdon: Prior meetings were a waste of time. Taxes and cost of living have increased in recent years. Need to be respectful of seniors. Expressed concern regarding DPW wash bay and administrative staff being stationed in the DPW building.

Ms. Jones: Project would likely be funded separately as a debt exclusion. Does not impact the town budget and financial capacity. Concept of financial capacity is meaningless of voters approve the project.

Mr. Noone: Bond rating agencies look at the taxpayer's willingness to pay as an indicator. DPW failure indicates that taxpayers are not willing to pay and the operating override the previous year gave a mixed signal regarding their willingness to pay because the vote was so close. Financial capacity is what the taxpayers are willing to pay.

Mr. Jarboe: Echoes that timing is still an issue—worried about the closeness to the override in 2024, but now there's the potential of an override in the upcoming years. Still an issue of timing, but likely in the future and not in the past.

Mr. Sullivan: Town meeting voters want the Finance Committee to collaborate with the Select Board. Select Board is waiting for the results of the consultant's work. Voters expressed a want for better working space for employees and that there are different options on how to achieve that. Want to have this type of meeting where we can participate with open minds, discuss pros and cons and scenarios and use this information when discussing financial impact and costs. Asked members if they would participate in this sort of meeting.

- Mr. Cole always open to communication and conversation
- Mr. Noone: always willing to have a discussion, but don't come to the meeting only looking one year out
- Mr. Bourdon: need to keep open dialogue and build back the trust lost last year. Agrees with Mr. Noone and Mr. Cole's points

- Ms. Hogseth: open to participation, but need the whole picture if we're looking at scenarios to drop in when finances stabilized then ok
- Ms. Jones: would comply with attending, but if we're doing SWAT analyses we will need sticky notes
- Mr. Jarboe: all in favor of having this dialogue as soon as possible, better in the fall and in the spring—this conversation is important, but there's also the DPW Building Committee—welcomes members to attend

### **Capital Planning:**

Mr. Sullivan: The most recent CIP was published in 12/24/24 and covers all town items. Would like to see how town projects line up with state projects, such as Kelley's Corner and the proposed roundabout work in front of Acton Medical and the Piper Rd/Rt 2 Intersection. Concerned about the financial impact of these projects on the town, especially businesses. Which CIP projects have direct or indirect impact on the town? What are the best practices for municipal capital planning? Which items that should be discussed by the FinCom?

Mr. Jarboe: Agrees that businesses have been impacted by the work at Kelley's Corner.

Mr. Cole: Pleased that FinCom has received a long-range CIP, really good start and appreciates the town's effort. Funding, especially in the outer years will be challenging. Need to identify needs versus wants. Let's also leave time to enjoy the outcome of a project before jumping into another and ripping up another street.

Mr. Bourdon: We were told that we needed to build the North Acton Fire Station because of a gap in coverage, but we've recently closed fire stations. Need to pay attention to infrastructure needs at our fire stations. Center Fire Station needs to be open because it's in the center of town. Need to maintain the infrastructure that we have before doing something new.

Mr. Noone: It appears that we are losing businesses and not just in Kelley's Corner. The report recently published by the Economic Development Committee the impact sewer capacity has on this, especially on Rt 119. Very expensive to build sewers but this work is also disruptive to businesses. Will businesses be viable after this work is complete? Will there be new businesses to take their place? Can businesses wait that long? Wishes it was as simple as looking at infrastructure and age but the long-term is a lot more complicated

Ms. Hogseth: is the roundabout a done deal? Mr. Sullivan was unsure.

- Mr. Martin: there is a working design by MassDOT
- Mr. Noon: State has an infrastructure plan, is it on the schedule?
- Mr. Martin: unsure, but can confirm.
- Mr. Bourdon: What is the purpose of building a roundabout?
- Mr. Sullivan: State wants to resolve traffic backing up on Rt 2

Mr. Sullivan: The point is that everything in town is connected, even if the town is not the entity completing that work.

Ms. Hogseth: Regarding the report from 2022 about the electrification of town buildings, not sure how much overlap there is in town between the CIP and that study. Asked for a study to demonstrate the most cost-effective option for that type of work. Has not yet received requested analysis.

Ms. Jones: Read a national study which determined where across the country to makes financial sense and does not make sense to put in heat pumps or electrify. Will find and send to members.

Mr. Sullivan: More to come, wants committee to think about topics/subjects to discuss as a team in the future.

### **Liaison Reports: 7/21 Select Board Meeting**

Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Hogseth reported on Monday's July 21<sup>st</sup> Select Board Meeting:

- Plan presented for indoor pickleball and tennis courts in Nagog Park. Seeking variance from electrification as they wish to use gas for heating.
- Acton for Proaction: \$90k total grant funds awarded to Health and Human Services and DEI to complete a Community Needs Assessment and Equity Audit.
- Acton Power Choice for increase in the cost structure. Voted to utilize renewable energy credits to keep costs the same.
- Town Manager reported at Java with John that Kelley's Corner will be complete by the end of the calendar year and that the work at Prospect and Main will be complete prior to school starting.

Ms. Hogseth: Does MassDOT inform the town that the roundabout is happening or does the town have say? Mr. Martin clarified that the project is not that far along.

Mr. Noone: Nagog Woods currently has courts—a bubble is put up in the winter. Mr. Martin clarified that the proposal is for two air supported structures. Currently one bubble covers 4 courts and the vendor is allowed to use the clubhouse for bathroom use. This is not something new, merely a relocation.

Mr. Cole reported on the most recent EDC meeting:

- two new restaurants are coming to the Trader Joes plaza: one will replace KJ's Caffe and the other will go in to the left of the golf store—also going to be an Indian restaurant moving into the Nagog Plaza.
- Committee revisited how important sewerage is to Great Road— given failure of last sewer extension at Town Meeting, has concerns about cost and unintended consequences
- Restaurant week is coming up and EDC is planning on an extended Shop Small calendar to fully capture the holiday shopping season

Ms. Jones reported on the AWD meetings:

- AWD has received funds from the PFAS settlement, established working group to determine how to use those funds—planning to used them for remediation efforts in the future

- Continued discussions with the MWRA regarding possible tie-in for water service

Mr. Jarboe reported that there is no news from the regional school committees and reminded members of Thursday's DPW Building Committee meeting

**Open Items:**

Mr. Sullivan reported that the Town Manager got back to him regarding his pharmacy claim data request. The Town Manager will not share specific data. Also received a response regarding DPW equipment, but has a few simple questions about the information.

Ms. Hogseth made a motion to adjourn, Mr. Bourdon seconded. Motion passed unanimously at 8:54pm (7-0-0)