

Westwood Finance and Warrant Commission
MARCH 12, 2024 SUBCOMMITTEE PRESENTATION MEETING
IN PERSON
7:00 PM
Meeting Minutes

Finance Commission Chairperson George Hertz called the meeting to order at 7:01PM.

Finance and Warrant Commission members who were present: William Bruce Jr., John Carey, James Ferraro, Lauren FitzPatrick, Mike Gay, George Hertz, George Laham, George Maroun, Christopher Poreda and Alexander Yale. Member(s) who were authorized prior to the meeting, participated remotely via speakerphone: Seth Frederickson.

Chairperson Hertz then granted permission to Westwood Media Center (WMC) to film and record the meeting. The meeting was being recorded only tonight due to the Planning Board Public Hearing and only one meeting can be livestreamed. Residents will be able to watch the meeting on WMC the following day. He also asked if anyone else would like to record this meeting.

He then welcomed all participants, members, presenters and members of public and press to the FinCom March 12, 2024 Meeting. The Chair also welcomed the Town Administrator [Mr. Coleman], Finance Director [Ms. McManus], Superintendent Piwovar, School Committee Chair [Mr. Mullin], WPS Director of Finance and Operations [Ms. Jn-Baptiste], and former FinCom member [Mr. Weller] who were in the audience. On behalf of the Commission, the Chair wished Mr. Weller the best as he is running for a Planning Board position.

Afterwards, Chairperson Hertz led members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Finance Commission administrator, Ms. Wong then called the ROLL.

Members were provided with the final agenda and all other related materials prior to the meeting.

Prior to the evening's presentations, Chairperson Hertz made some introductory comments:

- He mentioned that he will recuse himself from any discussion and votes on any warrant articles on Hale in order to protect the integrity of any decision making that the Commission makes and to protect the integrity of any decision that takes places at Town meeting. Vice Chair Poreda will lead the discussion on the potential article on Hale and the Chair will step out of the room. The Chair will return back to the room when the discussion is over.
- For the March 26th Public Hearing, the Commission will do their final deliberations and vote. When the potential article on Hale is presented, both Select Board member Gotti and the Chairperson Hertz will step out of the room and return when the article is done. In order to comply with the State ethnics commissions concerns, the Chair will also step out of the room during FinCom's final deliberations and voting on the potential article on Hale.

- The Chair asked members to think about which articles they would like to volunteer for the write ups.
- He asked members to submit their Subcommittee reports to Ms. Wong by next Tuesday, March 19, 2024.
- The Chair stated that the Town worked extremely hard this year to put together a budget in such a difficult situation. He stated it is the Commission's responsibility to carefully review the budget and report any concerns to Town meeting. Additionally, if the Commission needs any additional information, they will compile a list of questions at the end of today's meeting and send it to the Select Board, Town Officials, and the School department prior to March 26th Public Hearing.
- Lastly, he mentioned that he reviewed the Subcommittees' PowerPoint slides prior to the meeting and thanked the members for their hard work in putting them together.

Public Hearing Evening Presenters:

- Capital & Long Range Planning Subcommittee – Chris Poreda [Chair], Jim Ferraro, and Lauren FitzPatrick

The Chair introduced the evening's first subcommittee presentation. Vice Chair Poreda, Mr. Jim Ferraro and Ms. Lauren FitzPatrick were present. Mr. Poreda went over their budget review process and the Town's Capital financial policies. He showed a visual pie chart breaking out the proposed capital projects by department and provided an overview of proposed capital articles. Then Mr. Poreda highlighted on the some of the Capital articles for the Municipal and the School. He also referenced a list of Sewer Capital projects, additional Capital projects and other Capital projects that will require borrowing. Lastly, he mentioned that there are two Thurston projects (heating and roofing) that the School Superintendent held back until the school facilities studies is completed. Mr. Ferraro provided some additional information in regards to the generator upgrade and provided some clarity on the School roofing article for \$250,000 versus the High School Roof restoration that requires borrowing of \$2.5 million. The Capital Subcommittee spent time answering other members' questions.

Chairperson Hertz asked the Subcommittee and members if it was beneficial to separate the capital budget from the operating budget and asked for their feedback and suggestions for the future. The Subcommittee and members thought the separation process works considering the 5-year capital plan constantly changing. Vice Chair Poreda commented that the Subcommittee didn't receive any background information on the Conant Road Culvert construction project at its meeting with

department heads, and while the subcommittee did receive information from the DPW and Finance Director before this meeting, there is still some question about the exact scope of the project. The Chair hoped to retain the current process where the Commission will continue to have the Capital Planning as a separate Subcommittee.

One member asked if the School inquired on cost of replacing the roof as opposed to restoring it. Ms. Jn-Baptiste ball parked the number to be \$20 million but will need to verify the information.

Chairperson Hertz thanked the Capital & Long Range Planning Subcommittee for their thorough work.

- Education Subcommittee- William Bruce Jr. [Chair], Seth Frederickson, Caitlyn Jurczak

The Chair introduced the second Subcommittee presentation. Mr. Bill Bruce was present. He mentioned Ms. Jurczack is out sick and Mr. Frederickson is participating remotely via speaker phone. Mr. Bruce went over School Budget process. Then he provided a high-level overview on the school's biggest cost driver and what costs have increased in the past few years. In addition, he showed some charts on the School's overall budget and pointed out 85% of the budget is dedicated to salaries. Mr. Bruce also went over the School's overall proposed budget and highlighted on staffing changes and enrollment details. Furthermore, Mr. Bruce gave an overview on the Special Education budget process including the non-salary Special Education. Towards the end of his presentation, he listed the School's future priorities and pointed out some of the School projects will be impacted by the new district vision strategy plan along with the master facilities studies. Mr. Bruce answered members' questions along with Superintendent Piwowar, Ms. Jn-Baptiste and Mr. Mullin. One member asked if there was a difference in funding the circuit breakers between this year and last year. The School does not have this information at this time.

Chairperson Hertz thanked the Education Subcommittee for their presentation. He will be sending a request to the Select Board in regards to the New Pine Hill school. He wanted to know the estimated final cost of the New Pine Hill School, what is the estimated additional amount of borrowing the School may need to do. The Chair expressed concern on impact on debt service. Mr. Mullin informed the Commission that the School Committee will be presenting an update on the New Pine School at their meeting on Thursday night. The School Committee will provide their presentation to FinCom after their meeting.

- Public Safety Subcommittee – Mike Gay [Chair], John Carey, George Laham

The Chair introduced the third Subcommittee presentation. Mr. Mike Gay, Mr. John Carey and Mr. George Laham were present. Mr. Gay went over the Public Safety's Subcommittee budget review process and highlighted on the percentage changes year over year for the Fire, Police and DPW

departments. He also highlighted on the FY25 proposed budgets and listed key observations for the Fire, Police and DPW Departments. In his presentation, he also included recommendations for the budget review process for the Public Safety Subcommittee. During the presentation, Mr. Gay answered members' questions along with the Finance Director.

Chairperson Hertz had a question relating to Warrant Article # 2, which was presented at the Select Board Meeting held the previous evening. Warrant Article #2 includes, in part, a request for \$800,000 for Fire Department Salaries and Overtime to be funded by the use of Free Cash. The Chair asked if we have an estimated cost of what was spent this year on overtime funds and how does it compare to the budget request for FY25? He expressed concern about the size of transfer request utilizing free cash. He questioned whether or not the Town has properly funded Fire Department Salary and Overtime for FY25 and if this is an appropriate use of free cash per the Town's Financial policies. He suggested the Commission will need to take a closer look at all funding requests using free cash. The Chair also raised a question as to why the Town has chosen not to use free cash to reduce debt service by using free cash to fund some of the proposed borrowing articles.

The Finance Director provided an explanation on the large amount of transfer of Free Cash on Budget Article # 2 to close out the current fiscal year. She also stated the overtime funding is budgeted based on 'normal day to day' overtime operation. Moreover, she has the actuals for the what was spent on overtime for this fiscal year. Lastly, she pointed out a big transfer of free cash will likely occur again in FY26 to close out FY25. The Town Administrator elaborated a little more on how the article for funding is being used. The Chair expressed concern that the Town is proposing to balance the budget by using free cash to cover the Fire Department's needs for FY25. The Chair reiterated in response to a member question that Free Cash is not supposed to be used for operating expenses. Vice Chair added that the Town should build it into their operating budget if they are underfunded due to the Fire Department needs.

Chairperson Hertz praised Chief Silva, Interm Chief Lund and DPW Director Mr. Korchin as excellent department heads.

Vice Chair Poreda wanted to know if the proposed changes to Town Bylaw 184, Article I, in Select Board Article # 4, redefining the term "Animal Control Officer" will be consistent with the current use of a contracted Animal Control Officer from the Town of Dedham. After the meeting Town Counsel confirmed that the proposed changes to Town ByLaw 184 are consistent with the current use of a contracted Animal Control Officer.

The Chair thanked the Public Safety Subcommittee for their excellent presentation.

-Municipal Administration Subcommittee- Sean Weller [Chair], George Maroun

The Chair introduced the fourth Subcommittee presentation. Mr. George Maroun was present. Mr. Maroun went over the scope of their subcommittee's review process and presented charts on the municipal budgets highlighting specifically on general government and human services. He mentioned the vast majority of the Municipal Administration budget consists of salaries and presented an overview of how the Municipal Administration maintained a balanced budget. Additionally, he presented graphs showing the changes for proposed FY25 budget versus FY24 budget for both general government and human services. Mr. Maroun also highlighted on three significant Human services departmental adjustments for Veteran Services, Youth and Family Services and the Public Library. Then he provided an update on the home rule petition article relating to the appointed Treasure/Tax Collection position which is part of an ongoing budget discussion. Lastly, Mr. Maroun went over the Subcommittee's final observations and recommendations on the Municipal Administration. At the end of his presentation, Mr. Maroun spent time answering members' questions.

Vice Chair Poreda proposed for the next year that the Community and Economic Development Subcommittee and the Municipal Administration Subcommittee to meet together with Town officials for budget discussions to minimize budget meetings and then the Community and Economic Development Subcommittee could meet with Ms. Loughnane separately for Planning Board warrant articles discussion. The Chair thought the Vice Chair made a very good suggestion.

Chairperson Hertz and Vice Chair Poreda thanked Mr. Maroun for his presentation.

- Community and Economic Development Subcommittee- Alex Yale [Chair], Kristina Patyjewicz

The Chair introduced the evening's final Subcommittee presentation. Mr. Alex Yale was present. Mr. Yale went over their subcommittee's budget review process. He presented on the key prior year accomplishments and ongoing projects for each subgroup of the Community and Economic Development Division. The subgroups consist of Conservation, Planning & Housing, Zoning & Licensing, Building, Community & Economic Development and Health. At the end of his presentation, he thanked Ms. Loughnane for her guidance in this budget review process.

Chairperson Hertz also praised Ms. Loughnane for all of her hard work and accomplishments which included in hiring a new Town Planner and Building Commissioner. Mr. Yale and Ms. Loughnane spent time answering members' questions.

The Chair thanked Mr. Yale for his subcommittee presentation.

He then thanked all of the members for their subcommittee presentation as it reflects their tremendous amount of work.

Chair's update:

Chairperson Hertz mentioned he watched the last Charter Review Committee's meeting. The Charter Review Committee decided to stay with the universal definition of what constitutes a quorum. There is no special language for the Finance Commission. Additionally, the Charter Review Committee is keeping the language on the appointed Town Clerk. Chairperson Hertz would like some clarification on what it means for the Town Clerk position "to be appointed by the Town Administrator in consultation with the Select Board".

The Chair stepped out of the room prior to the Vice Chair's update.

Vice Chair's update:

Vice Chair Poreda reiterated that after consultation with the Town Moderator, Chairperson Hertz has elected to recuse himself from all discussions and votes on any warrant articles pertaining to Hale out of abundance of caution. Per the Chair's request prior to his recusal, the Vice Chair formed "a rapid Subcommittee" in preparation for a possible article on Hale. The Hale Subcommittee includes Vice Chair Poreda, Mr. Gay and Mr. Maroun. Additionally, the Subcommittee has met once to discuss how the Hale's request came about and things they will need to ask the Select Board if a potential article on Hale is presented before the Commission. He provided the Commission with some background information on Hale Education's request for funding. In addition, he clarified that there is no warrant article on Hale present before the Commission. However, at FinCom's First Public Hearing, Select Board Madam Chair Cummings stated that there could be an article on Hale. Furthermore, Vice Chair Poreda pointed out some key issues at play with any warrant article regarding Hales's request for funding a conservation restriction on its land. He stressed on the issue that there is little to no time to vet a warrant article since the Commission has not received any information from the Select Board to review. Vice Chair expressed concern on the timing of when the substantial document on Hale will be distributed to the Commission as they will not be able to fulfill their obligation to the Town if they didn't thoroughly review any document before making a recommendation to Town Meeting. One member pointed out that the substantial document on Hale may be different than what was originally proposed and if their Subcommittee receives any update then they will have to notify the rest of the Commission as soon as possible.

Other Business:

Chairperson Hertz returned to the room after the Vice Chair's update.

The Chair commented that he is very pleased to work with all the members on the Commission and gratified with their willingness to put the time into this Commission. He believes the Town is very lucky to have members who are dedicated to helping the Town. Then he gave former member, Mr. Weller a moment to speak. Mr. Weller expressed his appreciation in working with the members of

the FinCom and hoped to work with everyone in the future. The Chair extended an invitation to Mr. Weller as a mandatory attendee for the Commission's social outing after the Annual Town Meeting.

Old Business:

In preparation for the Final Public Hearing on March 26th, the Chair wanted to compile a set of questions to ask the Select Board, Town Officials and School department. He mentioned that Superintendent Piwowar clarified that School Committee member Ms. Plotkins is presenting on the cost of project for the New Pine School and not on Debt services. One of the questions he wanted to ask the Select Board is what the cost estimate that needs to be borrowed to complete the payment for the new Pine Hill School. Second item, the Chair will request for full disclosure and discussion on what the Select Board plans to using the Free Cash for this fiscal year and how do they justify using free cash on what appears to be operating issues. Members agreed with this request as they would like to see more transparency from the Town. Another member would like to know if the use of Free cash on operating budget has any conflict with any of the Town's financial policies. The third issue is what are the Town's expectations with the high demand on Town side for youth mental health services while existing ARPA funds are set to expire at the end of the year.

The Chair is expecting Vice Chair Poreda to work with Ms. Wong on questions relating to potential article on Hale.

Fourth issue was raised by Vice Chair Poreda on the question for the Animal Control Officer in the Bylaws. Vice Chair Poreda will also send in a request to Ms. McManus on the numbers of the OPEB article. Chairperson Hertz suggested to Vice Chair Poreda to reach out to DPW Director to ask for some clarification on the need for the Conant Road Culvert Construction project. Lastly, some members wanted to know why free cash is not being used to reduce some of the borrowing articles. Chairperson Hertz reiterated to members to submit their Subcommittee reports to Ms. Wong by next Tuesday if they can and to think about what articles they wish to write up on. Vice Chair Poreda stated the article write ups will be due by March 29th.

Members were asked to review and approve the meeting minutes for February 27, 2024. A motion was offered and seconded. A ROLL CALL took place. Eleven members approved the minutes. Two members were absent.

Public and the Press:

The Chair asked if there were any questions from the Public and the Press:

There were no questions from the Public and the Press. For the Final Public Hearing, the Chair will give some time for residents to ask questions during an appropriate section instead of making them wait until the very end of the meeting. Members were in favor of this decision.

Chairperson Hertz thanked members for attending and asked for a motion to adjourn. A motion was offered and seconded. A ROLL CALL vote was taken unanimously in favor.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:31PM

For a complete video of the 03/12/24 FinCom Public Hearing please see the following link:
<https://westwoodmediacenter.tv/>