

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

April 22, 2025

7:30 PM

Acton Town Hall – Room 204

Present: Dr. Gang Chen, Dave Wellinghoff, Allison Jones, Scott Sullivan (Vice Chair, acting as Chair in Jason Cole's absence), Christi Andersen, Steve Noone, Roland Bourdon

Mr. Sullivan called the meeting to order at 7:30pm

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

Alissa Nicol - Member of Select Board and resident. Received Warrant in the mail. Select Board unanimously votes in favor of DPW Facility and FinCom unanimously voted against it. Ms. Nicol highlighted some points of this Article:

- Cost effective ways were known at the time, when it went in front of Town Meeting for the design cost, to build a new facility, 77% of the voters voted in favor
- Project was value engineered to reduce the project by \$9m
- Comparable program needs are right on target and reduced the project by 5,000 sq. ft
- \$700/sq ft is in alignment with similar projects built in last 2 years
- This is the most critical municipal building right now, 55 years old that doesn't meet current building codes/requirements
- Using balance of capital stabilization doesn't mean it is the only important project. Other projects can still be pursued
- Town narrowly passed override last year, but haven't yet touched the untaxed levy capacity
- No debt exclusion during an override year - met that FinCom requirement
- Old debt rolled off, which happened this year - met that FinCom requirement

Terra Friedrichs, Wright Terrace - Respect Ms. Nicol's comments. Never imagined that cost with that planned layout. Spoke about comparable DPW building projects in Burlington, Sudbury, Boxborough and Harvard. Very leery about falling into the, "we spent this much money already..." trap. Stay more in line with Sudbury.

Dean Charter - Vice Chair of the Select Board and Chair of Public works Facility Committee, comments are his own. He is a certified MCPPO and has been in charge of many large public works projects.

Regarding financial uncertainty:

- A long way away from bid opening. Go out to bid in the Fall, open bids in November. Much change can happen from now until then
- Cost risk is absorbed by the Contractor once contract is signed
- Steel and Aluminum - costs will vary if made in America
- If a recession, contractors will most likely become more aggressive to ensure they have work/projects
- \$38m will become \$40m if delayed by 18 months. If too costly, will know that before signing the contract
- The need has been proven and voted by voters, a 77% in-favor vote at Town Meeting when they approved the design cost

Fran Arsenault - Current Chair and resident. Select Board strongly believes the current facility is no longer a workable building.

- Will realize long-term cost savings through efficiencies
- FinCom's primary concern about tariffs and fluctuation of steel costs -something out of our control.

- Delaying project will most surely show a natural escalation of cost
- FinCom - phased design, met that requirement
- FinCom - reduction in square footage, met that requirement
- Tax impact is \$274 for average single-family home \$160 for condominium
- This is a vital municipal project that deals with critical safety issues

David Martin - Sent a spreadsheet to FinCom this evening that shows a historical model of the ALG.

- FinCom: 4.25% growth rate; but is showing 3.0% over the past 11 years; suggests a correction in FinCom's message
- FinCom: FY27 not require an override. Even using untaxed levy capacity it still may not work, so town may need to make reductions
- Real increase of town will most likely be less than the 5.25% current placeholder
- DPW building - When looking at cost, please keep in mind it would be the largest municipal building project in history
- Town is very aggressive in acquiring grants - \$20m last few years
- Capital spending goes up and down, but never \$2m. \$1.6m highest ever, \$1.4m this upcoming year

Mr. Noone - Just received this spreadsheet, hasn't had time to digest all of it. But, quickly, looking at FY21 versus FY26 and excluded debt versus all debt. In those years, town stayed inside the 2 1/2%.

Q3 FINANCIAL UPDATE:

Marianne Fleckner and Ellie Anderson presented Q3 financials on the Operating, Enterprise, Special and Revolving accounts. The town is on target in all areas.

Mr. Bourdon inquired about the Transfer Station revenue. Main reasons: more passes are being purchased and more scrap metal being sold.

Mr. Bourdon inquired about the Commuter Lot and when the loan is paid off. The amount always hovers around \$84k and we will get back to Mr. Bourdon of the year it is paid off.

Mr. Noone inquired about the Operating Budget. Will we have even more money unspent because we pay OPEB and MCRS immediately on July 1st? Yes, but unanticipated expenses such as an HVAC unit may come up and we have vacancies.

WARRANT ARTICLE CONSIDERATIONS:

Article 6 - Authorize Borrowing for Town Capital Equipment and Projects:
Mr. Cole sent comments to some FinCom members, but not all.

Articles 14, 15, and 16 - Authorize Collective Bargaining Agreement for Fire, Patrol and Superiors personnel:

Assigned to Mr. Noone, heard from Town Manager, town is making excellent progress with all Unions, but still defer until next meeting

Article 3 - Budget Transfer:

Assigned to Mr. Noone, still no Budget Transfer. This is a placeholder, so continue to defer.

Article 11 - Approve Home Rule Petition Related to Acton Memorial Library:

Assigned to Alex Lenz, he sent comments on this Article. He implied FinCom reached consensus, but Ms. Andersen doesn't believe so. Therefore, continue to defer.

Article 37, 38 and 39 - Citizen Petitions, Citizens Library Expenses:

Assigned to Alex Lenz, deferred due to not in attendance tonight.

Article 40 - Citizen Petition to Hold Workshop (traffic light at Hayward and Main Streets)

Assigned to Jason Cole, deferred due to not in attendance tonight.

Ms. Friedrichs - Handed out a “Hayward/Main: another Traffic Light?” presentation. Mr. Sullivan commented that everyone is familiar with this Article, no need to discuss further.

Article 13 - Authorize Real Property Disposition - 13 School Street:

Mr. Wellinghoff was not at the last meeting when this vote was taken. It was a split 4-4-0 vote, therefore deferred. Discussion ensued. Mr. Wellinghoff commented in past years overflow lots were needed and used. Currently, 150 resident stickers sold with 169 available spaces. Now the Food Pantry is using the 19-21 Maple Street property. In summary, people are still not going back to the office. Town has fantasized about possible uses of this land, so difficult to take a stand.

Ms. Andersen recommends to still defer.

Article 18 - Commuter Lot & Station Maintenance:

Mr. Wellinghoff spoke of the fund balance, the annual fees for residents and users, both on a long- and short-term basis. Purchased 19-21 Maple Street, now leased by Acton Food Pantry. \$85k is used for debt service. Also, discussion of subsidizing for transportation funds. On budget for FY25.

Mr. Wellinghoff moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded

Unanimous 6-0-0

Article 31 - Amend Zoning Bylaw and Map: Open Space Residential Development:

Ms. Jones recommends to support this Article. Increase property taxes versus increasing revenue. Sent a handful of other communities (approximately 7-9) for comparison and contrast. Incentivize building, this potentially would be a way to do it.

Ms. Jones moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded

Mr. Noone commented affordable housing needs. It provides incentives versus barriers for small houses, so overcame his original objections to this Article.

Dr. Chen - What is the detail behind the property tax increase comments? Ms. Jones - The net new tax receipts factors the property tax in their formula

Mr. Bourdon commented further on this Article, the possible pros and cons of what type of house is built in Acton.

Mr. Sullivan - Ranch house, can contractor build 4 houses if Ranch is demolished? Ms. Jones - Depends on the lot size. Ms. Friedrichs - Explained one part of the new language, 2 per acre, incentive allows more.

Ms. Friedrichs - These other 7-9 communities, are they comparable to Acton?

Mr. Sullivan spoke about more School maintenance costs, while projecting a strained budget, so in relation to school enrollment, this may put more strain on the budget.

Fred Leffler, Grasshopper Lane - What is the main basis of these impact studies?

Ms. Jones suggested to search on Massachusetts impact studies, and what zoning changes the consultants are being asked to assess. Suggest to look at the impact study Lexington conducted.

Ms. Friedrichs - Reminded FinCom that voted unanimously to first conduct an impact study for any major zoning changes. Therefore, please defer.

Ms. Nicol - She is the liaison to BoH. Dover Heights never stated they were going to leverage the MBTA District Overlay.

Mr. Martin - Reiterated factual numbers related to this Article.

Passed 3-0-3 (Wellinghoff, Sullivan and Andersen abstained)

Article 34 - Affirm Home Rule Petition for Checkout Bag Minimum Charge:
Assigned to Jason Cole, defer due to not in attendance tonight.

FINANCE COMMITTEE BUSINESS:

Meeting Minutes Review:

None

Liaison Reports:

Health Insurance Trust (HIT) - Mr. Sullivan attended the HIT meeting on April 17, 2025. Main discussion point:

- HIT voted cash on hand to be sent back to the Town and Schools. \$800,000. An approximate 70/30% split.

Next meeting May 5th, immediately preceding Town Meeting. Discussion ensued about the concern of the workload for this meeting that immediately precedes Town Meeting. Ms. Andersen recommended further discussion, then, happens tonight:

Article 11 - Approve Home Rule Petition Related to Acton Memorial Library:

Ms. Andersen read Mr. Lenz's email to the FinCom Board.

Ms. Andersen Moves to Recommend Mr. Bourdon seconded

Passed, 5-0-1 (Wellinghoff)

Articles 37, 38 and 39: Citizen Petition, Citizens Library Expenses:

Ms. Andersen read Mr. Lenz's email to the FinCom Board.

Mr. Bourdon Moves Not to Recommend, Ms. Andersen seconded

Passed, 5-0-1 (Wellinghoff)

Article 34: Affirm Home Rule Petition for Checkout Bag Minimum Charge:

Mr. Scott summarized Mr. Cole's opinion that the town shouldn't be involved in this matter. Ms. Andersen summarized a recollection of a former FinCom member who would be in favor of this Article. Discussion ensued.

Mr. Martin - Money would be retained by the Retailer.

Mr Bourdon moves Not to Recommend, Ms. Jones seconded

Ms. Andersen suggests FinCom doesn't take a stand on this Article.

5-0-1 (Andersen)

Article 40: Citizen Petition, to Hold Workshop (traffic light at Hayward and Main Streets)

Mr. Sullivan recalls no financial implication.

Ms. Andersen - believes this is a non-binding resolution

Ms. Andersen moves for No Recommendation, Mr. Bourdon seconded

Unanimous 6-0-0

Next Meeting: May 5th, 6:00pm, same location/classroom as last year, next to the Auditorium.

Dr. Chen moved to adjourn, Mr. Bourdon seconded

9:24pm