

Lunenburg Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
October 12, 2023

Members Present: Board Member Tom Gray, Town Manager Heather Lemieux, Vice Chair Chris Menard, Board Member Jean Russell, Board Member Jay Simeone, Chair Evan Watters.

Guests: Chair of the School Committee Carol Archambault, Superintendent of School Dr. Burnham, Chief of Police Thomas Gammel, Chair of the Select Board Michael-Ray Jeffreys, Clerk of the Parks Commission Karin Menard.

1. Call to Order

The meeting opened at 7:03 PM.

2. Public Hearing Open

Motion to open the public hearing by Chris Menard, seconded by Tom Gray. All in favor

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Public Comment

Chris Menard reiterates that there are 2 empty seats on the board and the upcoming budget season is approaching.

No public comment.

c. Presentations by Chairman Michael Ray Jeffreys from the Select Board

Discussion regarding Article I

Chris Menard feels that the remaining ARPA funds should be dedicated toward capital requests. Chris Menard believes it's fiscally irresponsible to not put all the money towards capital requests for items that are needed in the future. Inquiry into what would be done with the 986,000 dollars if that were to be returned. Chirs Menard's preference would be to take that allocated money to start to focus going forward on actions related to capital plans for buildings and other improvements in town. Based on the above-referenced information Chris Menard recommends a vote of no.

Michael Ray Jeffreys does agree that more funding for the reserve is important, but a higher priority needs to be an increase in pay for staff. Michael-Ray Jeffreys suggests 2025 may be a good year to increase reserve funds.

Chris Menard feels the deliberation should go through the normal process and there needs to be a focus on the fiscal aspects of the town and the 986,000 dollars should be treated like free cash.

Michael Ray Jeffreys believes that ARPA gives the opportunity to do things that are not the ordinary capital planning way. Michael Ray Jeffreys argues that we should not be depending on gifts to buy our ambulances and dump trucks.

Public comment

Rhonda -181 Reservoir Road – agrees with the vice chair Chris Menard and inquiries into how much is currently in the special purpose stabilization fund. Rhonda feels that money should be put aside for big-ticket items such as an ambulance.

Discussion regarding Article F

Michael Ray Jeffreys states that 80 percent of the building is currently being used and the other 20 percent is unusable and contaminated with asbestos. There are 40 active leaks in the roof of the building. Michael Ray Jeffreys states this is time sensitive as additional water damage will deteriorate the possibility of improving the building.

Tom Gray agrees with fixing this portion of the roof to at least ensure short-term usage for when other town buildings are being worked on. This building could be used as a temporary workplace.

Evan Watters reiterates that the estimated repair for the portion of the building is 300,000 dollars.

Chris Menard is worried about putting 300,000 dollars into a roof that may be torn down within a few years. Chris Menard may be open to the possibility of closing off the unusable parts of the building and starting demolition.

Michael Ray Jeffreys believes that it's not acceptable to work in that kind of environment.

Heather Lemieux states that funding be coming from the remaining funds that were not used for 30 School Street which was received by the state. Heather Lemieux also agrees with the roof being fixed.

Tom Gray and the Municipal Building Design Committee agree with Michael Ray Jeffreys that this building could be used as an insurance policy for the future.

Chris Menard inquiries into the cost of a temporary office by square foot.

Public comment

Dave Passios- 56 Whiting Street- supports the roof repair. It was built for less than 3 million dollars. Since then, over 50 years there have been minimal amounts of money used for maintenance.

d. Chief Gammel – Police Department

Chief Gammel addresses Article D relating to the current mental health crises, drug issues, and overdoses. police officers respond to mental health crises on a daily basis. The article is looking for a funding source through the opioid relief fund to start a co-response CIT jail diversion program. A mental health clinic is provided to the police department from OpenSky to respond with police to a mental health crisis or overdose. The program would divert non-violent, low-level offenders experiencing a mental health crisis or substance use disorder away from the criminal justice system. A percentage of incarcerated individuals across the United States have a mental health or substance use disorder. The clinician will provide outreach and referral services. A clinician will also be useful for police officers from the daily stress and pressure of their jobs.

Heather Lemieux supports the program and sees this as a benefit to the community.

Committee questions

Tom Gray inquired if this would be an individual or a rotation of clinicians. Chief Gammel confirms it will be one assigned individual.

Chris Menard asks if this would be a 24/7 program. Chief Gammel states that based on the number this would not be feasible.

Evan Watters asks if any police officers are currently CIT-trained. Chief Gammel states there are 5 and 3 more are going to be scheduled for training.

Public comment

Dave Passios- 56 Whiting Street- shares his support for the program.

e. School Department & School Committee

Dr. Burnham superintendent of school and school committee chair Mrs. Shambo address Article E. This is regarding a vote to transfer 232,800 dollars from the fiscal year 23 capital plan to install ductless split climate control systems at the Lunenburg primary school. The initial intent of the project is to manage classroom air comfort. At the prior annual town meeting allocated funding of 232,800 dollars was approved.

Committee questions

Evan Watters asks what will be left unconditioned after phase 2. Dr. Burnham replies with the cafeteria and gymnasium. An additional question by Evan Watter is If approved has contact been made with the first vendor to see if this can still

be done with this budget? Dr. Burnham says if prices increased, they would incorporate as many rooms as possible and push the rest to phase 3.

Peter Beardmore states that air-conditioned buildings of this size would be a multi-million-dollar project. Peter believes that this is the middle ground to solve the problem.

Heather Lemieux agrees with going forward with the plan.

Public comment

Rhonda -181 Reservoir Road- inquires if the AC units only cool classrooms or if they glow throughout the building. The superintendent confirms the original concept was for only a partial building, not the entirety.

f. Parks Department

Karin Menard – 672 Page Street -did the presentation relating to warrant Article K. The location was purchased by the town in 1913 and the deed states it can only be used for parks and playgrounds. The state is asking for a vote to dedicate the property to active recreation purposes. 1 million dollars from the ARPA funding has been approved to move into the next phase. The grant application was received, and they are looking for votes to move forward. This article looks to see if the town will re-authorize the 184,000 dollars for final engineering and design services.

Chris Menard believes there is a financial impact and there is no reason to not support this.

Public comment

No public comment.

g. Other Monied Articles

Article A. Heather Lemieux doesn't have a definitive number but believes that we should be able to raise funding at the town meeting. The assessor's office is working on a new growth figure which will exceed the original estimate.

No public or committee comment.

Article B. Vote to raise and appropriate or transfer from available funds a sum of money or payment of prior years' expenses. Heather Lemieux has no known prior year expenses at this time.

No public or committee comment.

Article C. Vote to raise and appropriate or transfer from available funds a sum of money to fund the first year of FY 24, FY 25, and FY 26 Lunenburg municipal employees collective bargaining agreement. Heather Lemieux has no update, as they are still in negotiations.

No public or committee comment.

Article G. Vote to transfer 1,851.30 dollars from the Sewer Reserve Capacity Stabilization Fund. Heather Lemieux states this is an annual article from the Sewer Commission amending their budget with retained earnings.

No public or committee comment.

Article H. Vote to transfer 534 dollars into the Sewer Inflow Infiltration Stabilization Fund. Heather Lemieux states this is an annual article from the Sewer Commission amending their budget with retained earnings.

Article J. to the end are not monied articles.

3. Public Hearing Close

Motion to close public hearing by Chris Menard, seconded by Tom Gray at 9:21 PM.

4. Votes on Recommendations

Article A. Motion by Chris Menard to recommend approval for Article A, seconded by Tom Gray to recommend approval. The vote was 4 to 1.

Article B. Motion by Chris Menard to recommend deferring to the special town meeting, seconded by Tom Gray. All in favor. A unanimous vote of 5 to 0.

Article C. Motion by Chris Menard to defer Article C, seconded by Tom Gray. All in favor. Unanimous vote.

Article D. Motion by Chris Menard to approve, seconded by Tom Gray. All in favor. Unanimous vote.

Article E. Discussion: Chris Menard wants to see if there are any incentives available to bring the overall costs down. Also, wants to see a list of end-of-life items for the whole school district and a total plan.

Motion by Tom Gray to recommend deferral, seconded by Chris Menard. Evan Watters doesn't see a reason to defer but would like to go to the town meeting with a positive vote. A second motion to recommend approval of Article E. A vote of 4 to 1.

Article F. Motion by Jay Simeone to recommend approval with reservation, seconded by Jean Russell. Jay Simeone feels the article should be more specific. A second motion to recommend approval. A vote of 4 to 1.

Article G. Motion by Jay Simeone to approve, seconded by Chris Minard. All in favor. Unanimous vote.

Article H. Motion by Chris Menard to recommend approval, seconded by Jay Simeone. All in favor. Unanimous vote.

Article I. Motion by Chris Menard to recommend disapproval, seconded by Tom Gray. Motion to recommend disapproval. Recommending dis-approval 3 to 2.

Article J. Chris Menard moves that we find no direct financial impact, seconded by Tom Gray. All in favor of finding no direct financial impact.

Article K. Motion by Chris Menard to recommend approval, seconded by Jean Russell. All in favor. Unanimous vote.

Articles L, M, N recommended by Jay Simeone to find no direct financial impact on the October 4th draft for Article L, Article M, Article N, seconded by Tom Gray. All in favor. Unanimous vote.

5. Town Manager / Finance Director Report

Grant applied for the Best Practices Program and was awarded 25,000 dollars towards a bridge and culvert management plan.

6. Minutes

No minutes to approve.

7. Committee Reports

Evan Watters shares that the Master Plan Steering Committee has a website that will be going live in the next week, Planlunenburg.com.

8. Topics for Future Meetings

No comment.

9. Announcements

No announcements from the committee.

10. Public Comment

Chris Menard thanks everyone for showing up to the meeting and engaging.

No public comment.

11. Upcoming meetings:

a. Oct 26th

b. Nov 9th

c. Nov 14th STM (7 PM – LMHS Auditorium)

12. Adjourn

Motion to adjourn by Jay Simeone, seconded by Chris Menard.

The meeting adjourned at 10:01 PM