

Lunenburg Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
Bilotta Meeting Room
Lunenburg Town Hall
June 27, 2024

Present Members: Chair Evan Watters, Board Member Tom Gray, Board Member Dave Passios, Board Member Jean Russell, Board Member Jay Simeone

Absent Members: Vice Chair Chris Menard, Clerk Tiffaney Tavares

1. Call to Order

The meeting opened at 7:04 PM.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Announcements

There were no announcements.

4. Public Comment

Jay Simeone read in The Sentinel and Enterprise that there were 2 bills related to the MBTA Communities Act to be voted on. The 1st bill was a waiver for towns and cities that had met their 40B criteria threshold. The 2nd bill was related to mobile homes being added to the 40B count. Our Representative Scarsdale and Representative Connolly voted against both.

Jay Simeone states there is a 25-million-dollar federal grant funding, titled the RAISE program, to rebuild American infrastructure with sustainability and equity. This would be done with investments in surface transportation infrastructure that has a significant impact on local and regional impact. Gardner is getting 1.25 million of this funding.

Dave Passios reached out to Senator Cronin's office about whether the Senator may be on board to sponsor or add to an existing bill that allows cities and towns in the State of Massachusetts to assess a local income tax. This is a 2–3-year process.

Dave Passios hasn't heard back from the Senators' office.

5. Finance Director Report

There were no reports from the Finance Director.

6. New Business

a. Review Budget Process/Suggestions for Improvement

Dave Passios states that he is unsure if we have been able to get priorities right because this process has always been rushed. Dave Passios suggests the Town Manager submit their proposed budget earlier in order to have

individual department heads review and discuss with the Town Manager to advocate for their needs.

Evan Watters questions if anyone knows the number of communities that complete their budgets on a spreadsheet versus a municipal budgeting software.

Below is the current budget schedule for FY 25

- September 11: Capital improvement forms are issued to the department members.
- December 4: Capital Planning Committee reviews all requests and starts prioritizing.
- January 2: The finalized recommendations are sent to the Town Manager for approval.
- January 4: Department budget requests are due to the Town Manager.
- January 18: The 5-year financial forecast is received from the Town Manager.
- February 5: The Town Manager budget summary is sent to the Lunenburg Ledger to be published.
- February 13: The Town Manager provides their recommendation presentation.
- March 18: Public hearing
- April 5: Finance report is due.

Members will reach out to other towns to review their schedule.

b. Consolidation of Services/Departments

Evan Watters suggests presenting the consolidation of services/departments to the new Town Manager.

Dave Passios believes consolidation is not going to save money and it will probably cost us money, but the problem is that we have held back on growth and the ability to grow.

There is agreement that this should be part of the budgeting task force along with getting software and hiring issues.

Evan Watters will be pushing for a consolidation study.

7. Old Business

a. Town Manager Search Committee Representative

Dave Passios states he had a good discussion with Tim Murphy and was provided packets of information from his past rounds as a moderator. All meetings for this committee are public and will be posted on the town website on the calendar and zoom. Additionally, the meetings will allow public comments.

b. Budget Task Force Discussion

The Select Board voted to create a Budget Task Force. Renee Emkey will be the Select Board Representative, Anthony Sculimbrene will be the School Committee Representative with Laura Brzozoski as an alternate.

The Budget Task Force Charge provided by Renee Emkey includes:

1. General section: includes recommended scenarios for a 3-to-5-year sustainable fiscal plan for the Town of Lunenburg.
2. Tasks and responsibilities: collect data on revenue and expenditures historical trends and project future estimates based on trends and various assumptions. Benchmarking municipal and school performance programs, expenditures and revenues with comparable municipalities, examine potential revenue sources, overrides and exclusions under prop 2 ½ as well as non-tax and non-override revenue sources in compliance with the town financial policy, evaluate strategies to properly staff municipal and school operations while managing growth and personal costs, capital project funding needs and impacts, assess any increase taxes and fees,
3. Membership and meetings: 5-member task force committee.

c. Meeting with Rep Scarsdale. 1st Middlesex District, and DESE to Discuss School Budget Issues

Evan Watters will be unavailable to attend but he did reached out to Mr. Leighton and Mr. Nazolo about sending a preliminary letter to Representative Scarsdale with a discussion list.

Representative Scarsdale is trying to start a coalition in the rural portion of the State, specifically in her first Middlesex District. She will start meeting with School Board members, School Committee members, School Department members, a Finance Committee member, a Select Board member, administrative members, and several members of the public. The coalition will work to determine and identify what's not working or what needs to be changed to address the lack of funding in more rural towns. There will be a larger meeting across the 220 Districts in the State that received minimum aid.

Below is the list completed by the School Committee of what they would like to address:

- Bus bidding process
- State funding specifically an inflation rider to Chapter 70
- Revenue from the millionaire's tax
- Need for increased local funding and overrides
- Smart growth
- Loss of funding
- UNF funded mandates

Vice Present of the PTO in Town, Mandy Gilman, offered to help write a letter to Representative Scarsdale. Her opinion was to focus on 2 main topics during the meeting. Mandy Gilman suggests focusing on the cherry sheet as those are areas that a Legislator can influence the budget. If Representative Scarsdale seems interested in the bus transportation and bidding process, we could ask her to meet with us and DOT together. If Representative Scarsdale is on board, we could put together a letter and ask other Legislators to sign on. Mandy Gilman provided additional possible options.

Dave Passios agrees with the main topics but also wants the Representative to be aware that the people in the middle are also suffering.

Evan Watters is worried because the Student Opportunity Act is in year 4 out of 6 and what effect that might have.

8. Minutes

June 13, 2024

There was a motion to approve the minutes of June 13th as presented by Dave Passios, seconded by Jean Russell. All in favor. Unanimous Vote (5-0)

9. Committee Reports

Dave Passios states that Green Communities hasn't met but they anticipate putting in an application in the fall for that grant round

Evan Watters reached out to DPW Director, Bill Bernard, to discuss Chapter 90 funding and Bill Bernard was invited to an upcoming meeting. Also invited is the Cemetery Commission for potentially a meeting in August or September.

10. Topics for Future Meetings

Jay Simeone requests the Facility Director provide reports on a regular basis to the Committee.

Dave Passios requests an updated snapshot of the accounts invested list.

11. Important Dates:

- a. 7/19/24 9:00AM - Meeting with Rep Scarsdale, 1st Middlesex District, and DESE to Discuss School Budget Issues (Groton Town Hall)

12. Upcoming Meetings

- a. 7/11/24
- b. 7/25/24

13. Public Comment

Dave Passios states at a prior Select Board meeting there was discussion about outstanding unappropriated ARPA funding. Dave Passios pulled the 10-year capital list from Capital Planning and requested the Board to review several of the small projects. There were a couple projects that could be completed to possibly help move forward some infrastructure projects.

Dave Passios shares information he obtained from Senator Cronin's office. Senator Cronin wants to implement a local income tax by reducing the percentage that we increase our budget by under Prop 2 ½ by a given amount to then flip it over to a percentage of local income tax. This would include no changes to Prop 2 ½. This will shift the burden of the towns revenues needs away from the fixed income seniors and the young families trying to move into town and survive on a lower salary.

14. Adjourn

There was a motion to adjourn by Jay Simeone, seconded by Dave Passios. All in favor.

The meeting closed at 9:23 PM.