



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Finance Committee

Date: 2023-10-11

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Town Hall

Location: Select Board Meeting Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Business

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Chair Ed Ross, Vice Chair Joe Carnahan, Geoffrey Coram, Endri Kume, Joe McDonagh (remote), Marianne McLaughlin-Downing, Emily Sisson, John Sullivan, Mark Zarrow

Members - Not Present:

Others Present:

Chief Financial Officer Sharon Angstrom (remote), Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Angela Binda, Karen Gately Herrick, Rebecca Bailey (remote)

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Jacquelyn LaVerde

Topics of Discussion:

This meeting was held in-person in the Town Hall Select Board Meeting Room and remotely via Zoom.

Chair Ed Ross called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

Liaison Reports

Marianne Downing stated that the Charter Review Committee held its first meeting and elected Chris Haley Chair and Phil Pacino Vice Chair. The Select Board met last night and approved a liquor license, assigned Mark Dockser to the ReCALC feasibility study committee, discussed the search committee for a new Town Manager, and will approve 2024 tax rates at their next meeting.

Joe Carnahan noted that the State Delegation visited the Select Board last month and talked about a lot of money due to come to Reading. They also discussed the roadway pavement plan, remaining ARPA funds, Pickleball and the Warrant, and heard a presentation on the Community Preservation Act (CPA).

John Sullivan shared updates including CPDC approving waivers for a subdivision on Beacon Street, and ReCALC issued a Request for Proposals (RFQ) for a design study on a new senior center.

Emily Sisson noted that the Symonds Way Exploratory Committee was scheduled to meet, but did not have a quorum. She also stated that she spoke with Community Services Director Jenna Fiorente about pickleball and other Recreation needs, and concerns that some tennis courts are in disrepair.

Geoffrey Coram stated that he signed up for the Citizens Police Academy. The School Committee received an update from the Killam School Building Committee, which is currently looking for designers. The School Committee plans to transfer tennis courts from the custody of the School Committee to the Select Board to make them eligible for a particular grant. The School Committee also heard a report on MCAS results, which showed some good signs and some things in need of review, such as the disparity between the scores of the two middle schools. Mr. Coram also noted that a resident proposed a dog park next to Birch Meadow, but it did not have traction.

Ed Ross noted that the Killam School Building Committee is awaiting the Request for Services (RFS) for a designer, and is scheduled to meet next on October 30th. Town Manager Fidel Maltez noted that the deadline was today. Four proposals were received which will be uploaded to the Killam School Building Committee webpage. Mr. Ross expressed his pleasure with the Select Board's vote to reallocate some unused ARPA funds to the Reading Food Pantry. He also commented on the presentation on the Community Preservation Act, which demystified the commitment by individual households, and stated that the return on the CPA for the Town is significant and worth pursuing.

Marianne Downing shared updates from the Council on Aging. She noted that the Finance Committee does not have a liaison to the COA, but the Council has a lot of financial implications. They are spending their awarded ARPA funds, but might not be able to spend the entire \$600,000 before the deadline. She suggested that there may be a capital project for the senior center in the interim, and the Finance Committee may want to designate a liaison for that.

Vote on Recommendations/Guidance for FY25 Budget

The Finance Committee continued their discussion on Free Cash amounts and use. Discussion points included inflation, lower than projected new growth, higher interest returns along with higher interest rates, past amounts of free cash used and regenerated, and ongoing Collective Bargaining negotiations. Chief Financial Officer Sharon Angstrom noted that free cash is still not certified, but she projects it to be \$19.3 million.

Members of the Committee agreed that 4% of the operating budget was an acceptable amount of free cash to use for FY24, with future projections and financial impacts in mind.

On a motion by Joe Carnahan, seconded by John Sullivan, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the use of free cash to support the FY25 operating budget in the amount of \$3.6 million, with \$700,000 for extra capital, which amounts to 4% support of the budget.

Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Vote on Warrant Articles for November Town Meeting

Town Manager Fidel Maltez reviewed the warrant articles for the upcoming Subsequent Town Meeting.

Article 1 – Reports

No Finance Committee report required.

Article 2 - Instructions

No Finance Committee report required.

Article 3 – Amendments to the Capital Plan

The Committee reviewed and discussed several proposed changes to the Capital Plan.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Marianne Downing, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the content of Article 3 to Town Meeting as presented.

Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to Geoffrey Coram.

Article 4 – Amendments to the FY24 Operating Budget

The Committee reviewed and discussed several proposed changes to the FY24 budget.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Joe Carnahan, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the content of Article 4 to Town Meeting as presented. Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to Mark Zarrow.

Article 5 – Prior Years Bills

The Town recently received some bills from 2019, but is working to resolve them with the insurance company. If the Finance Committee needs to vote on this article, they will do it the night of, just ahead of Town Meeting.

Article 6 – Birch Meadow Phase II

The Committee reviewed and discussed an additional \$500,000 applied for under the PARC grant for Phase II of the Birch Meadow Master Plan.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Marianne Downing, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the content of Article 6 to Town Meeting as presented. Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to Emily Sisson.

Article 7 – Trash Carts

The Committee reviewed and discussed the two-part article. The first part establishes a solid waste revolving fund. The second part requests \$900,000 from free cash for automated trash barrels.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Mark Zarrow, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the content of Article 7 to Town Meeting as presented. Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to Ed Ross.

Article 8 – Ladder Truck

The Committee reviewed and discussed the article that requests \$130,000 for unforeseen additional material costs for the ladder truck. The vendor was unable to provide the truck for the original quote. The Town negotiated an additional year of warranty, \$25,000 in parts vouchers, and a \$100 per day penalty for every day the truck is not delivered after May 31, 2024. The funds will come from unspent funds borrowed for the Parker Middle School roof.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Joe Carnahan, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the content of Article 8 to Town Meeting as presented.

Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to John Sullivan.

Article 9 – Grove Street Lot 5

The Committee reviewed and briefly discussed the request for \$170,000 to pave the Grove Street Lot 5 parking lot.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by John Sullivan, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the content of Article 9 to Town Meeting as presented. Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to Joe Carnahan.

Article 10 - Paving

The Committee reviewed and discussed the request to increase the annual local funding of road paving by \$300,000 to maintain a Pavement Condition Index (PCI) score of 79 on local roads. The current funding does not go as far as it has in the past due to inflation, and increased labor and material costs.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Marianne Downing, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to recommend the content of Article 10 to Town Meeting as presented.

Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to Joe McDonagh.

Article 11 – Town Clerk Award

Request to adopt State Law to allow for additional compensation for the Town Clerk. No Finance Committee report required.

Article 12 - Pickleball

This is a Citizen's Petition article, which the Finance Committee is not required to vote on, but because it is a request for funding, Committee members agreed they should vote on their recommendation for it.

Ed Ross stated that he had an issue with the process, and given the size of the pickleball community, could have done more in terms of funding outside of nets and fencing. While he understands their position, there is more of a process for capital projects that should have been followed.

Emily Sisson stated that while she sees the need in the community, the pickleball community has been encouraged to organize and raise funds. They are close on the process, but they should be able to get more organized for Annual Town Meeting in the spring. While this article is short money, someone could come to the next Town Meeting with a more substantial request for an idea that has not been fully vetted.

Angela Binda, member of the Symonds Way Exploratory Committee, stated that she felt this article circumvents the work of SWEC. While Pickleball has been discussed for years, there are other needs the Recreation Department has.

Mark Zarrow noted that the citizens petition is legal and the Pickleball community has the right to do it.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Marianne Downing, the Finance Committee voted 3 in favor and 6 opposed to recommending the content of Article 12 to Town Meeting as presented.

Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – No, John Sullivan – No, Emily Sisson – No, Endri Kume – No, Geoffrey Coram – No, Ed Ross – No.

Finance Committee report to Town Meeting assigned to Marianne Downing.

Financial Forum II and Future Meeting Agendas

The next meeting of the Finance Committee will be the Financial Forum on October 25th, which will include an Economic Development discussion with Senator Lewis, an update and listening session on MBTA Communities, and a presentation on the Community Preservation Act.

Other future meeting topic suggestions include status updates on Capital projects, a summary of revolving funds and dedicated accounts, update on ARPA funds, an update from RMLD, and selection of a liaison to the Council on Aging.

Approve Prior Meeting Minutes

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Endri Kume, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to approve the meeting minutes of September 20, 2023 as presented.

Roll call vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.

On a motion by Emily Sisson, seconded by Geoffrey Coram, the Finance Committee voted 9-0-0 to adjourn at 10:19 pm.

Roll Call Vote: Joe McDonagh – Yes, Mark Zarrow – Yes, Marianne Downing – Yes, Joe Carnahan – Yes, John Sullivan – Yes, Emily Sisson – Yes, Endri Kume – Yes, Geoffrey Coram – Yes, Ed Ross – Yes.