



FINANCE COMMITTEE
Town of Grafton
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RECEIVED TOWN CLERK
GRAFTON MA

Finance Committee
MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, April 12, 2023
7:00PM
Conference Room A
AND
via Zoom

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 by Chair Mark Haddad. In attendance by roll call were Chair Mark Haddad, Vice Chair Greg Marr, Clerk Angelina Correia, Skip Currier, Dan Cusher, Victoria Duckworth, Heather McCue via Zoom, Nick Rioux via Zoom, and Sue Robbins. Staff in attendance were Town Administrator Evan Brassard, Finance Director Mary Lauria via Zoom, Assistant Town Administrator William Blake, and Administrative Assistant Amber Diffenderfer via Zoom.

1. PUBLIC HEARING: Review All Town Meeting Warrant Articles

Mr. Haddad read the Legal Notice.

Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to open the public hearing. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

a. Cable TV Oversight Committee: Article 2 and Article 16

Robert Berger, Chair of the Cable TV Oversight Committee, stated that the funds in Article 2 would be used to upgrade Conference Room F to allow for overflow attendance at public meetings and to purchase new equipment for Town Meeting to allow for a three-camera shoot.

Regarding Article 16, Robert DeToma of GCTV spoke about the need to replace some equipment and purchase a portable PA system and additional streaming interface devices. Mr. Berger noted that this is the final year to pay the bond for the cable studio, and the contributions from Verizon and Charter have not decreased.

b. Board of Sewer Commissioners: Article 15, Article 18, and Article 19

Paul Cournoyer stated that there have been no significant changes to the sewer budget in Article 15 since his presentation to the Committee on March 11, 2023.

Mr. Cournoyer stated that the funds appropriated by Article 18 would be used for emergency repairs to equipment throughout the fiscal year.

Mr. Cournoyer stated that Article 19 would provide funds to upgrade systems as needed. To answer a question from Mr. Haddad, Mr. Cournoyer stated that the Retained Earnings Account still has upward of \$3M.

c. Citizens' Petition: Article 34

Chantelle Kimball stated that Article 34 acknowledges the history of colonization and genocide in Massachusetts, explains how this history is intentionally represented in the state seal, and calls on state leadership to create a new state seal and state flag. She highlighted that 57 communities have already voted on this issue and two dozen more will be voting this spring.

Julie Feeney spoke via Zoom about the importance of individual towns showing support for this change and described the challenges faced by the commission responsible for creating the new seal/flag.

Ms. Duckworth, Ms. Kimball, Ms. Feeney, and Mr. Brassard discussed the local indigenous community's involvement in this effort.

Andy Jefferson of the Select Board noted via Zoom that the Board has not officially taken a position on Article 34, but they have met with and supported the Hassanamisco Nipmuc Band.

d. Citizens' Petition: Article 35

Due to internet issues, Nancie Picconi agreed to come back on April 13 to present Article 35.

Ed Prisby of 25 Danielle Drive stated that he would like to hear the rationale of the article.

e. Select Board: Article 31

Mr. Brassard reviewed Article 31 with the Finance Committee, which would change the Town Clerk's position from elected to appointed by the Town Administrator in 2025 when the current term expires.

f. Town Administrator/CIPC: Article 14

Mr. Brassard presented Appendix B of the warrant to explain how the funds appropriated by Article 14 will be used.

g. Town Administrator/TIF Committee: Article 30

Mr. Brassard stated that the TIF Agreement with Feedback Earth, Inc. would grant tax savings on the \$2M renovation to the building, and the company has pledged to create 16 full-time jobs for Grafton residents and 14 additional positions. He stated that 100% of the taxes would be removed in year one, 75% in year two, 50% in year three, 25% in year two, and 1% in year five.

Leighann Gagnon of 17 Maplewood Drive spoke via Zoom about the lack of outreach to residents in the area to address the odor issues from Feedback Earth. Mr. Brassard stated that these issues should be addressed by the Planning or Zoning Boards during the business's expansion process. He noted that a hotline was put in place to receive reports of odors which were monitored by MassDEP.

h. Town Administrator: Article 3, Article 4, Article 6, Article 7, Article 8, Article 9, Article 10, Article 13, and Article 32

Mr. Brassard stated that the \$7M figure in Article 32 had been reduced to \$3.5M by the Select Board's vote to use Road Stabilization to cover half the cost of the George Hill Road project. He spoke about the grants the Town is pursuing to help fund the project and stated that the debt exclusion would be \$48.26 per household for 15 years if no grants are received.

Dave Robbins noted that the 75 residents on George Hill Road have contributed about \$200,000 to the Road Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Brassard stated that the Free Cash transfer in Article 3 would cover the additional costs of the roof repair at North Grafton Elementary School, and \$123,000 of the \$150,000 transfer would be reimbursed by FEMA.

The Finance Committee did not ask for any additional information about Article 4, Article 6, Article 7, or Article 8.

Ms. Lauria noted that in Article 9, Recreation's maximum expenditure had been increased to \$450,000.

The Finance Committee did not have any questions about Article 10.

Regarding Article 13, Ms. Lauria stated that the budget had changed since the Finance Committee's budget hearings to show the BVT assessment and adjust the Maintenance salary line. She noted that the BVT assessment is a separate article on the warrant but is included in the Operating Budget on ClearGov.

i. Citizens' Petition: Article 33

Mr. Brassard stated that this petition had been withdrawn, but taking Joncas Terrace as a public way could be revisited in the future. He noted that the Select Board voted to order the DPW Director to create a layout and outlined the next steps.

j. Nelson Park Trustees: Article 5

Mr. Currier explained that the Trust Agreement requires trustees to be elected at Town Meeting.

k. Board of Assessors: Article 11 and Article 12

Mr. Brassard stated that Article 11 and Article 12 are brought back bi-annually to continue the Town's practice of granting real estate exemptions.

l. Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical High School: Article 17

Mr. Brassard stated that the BVT budget did not change after the Finance Committee's initial review.

2. Recommendations for the Reviewed Town Meeting Warrant Articles

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to recommend passage of Article 2. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to recommend passage of Article 3. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to support Article 4 as written. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to recommend passage of Article 5. Motion passed 8 – 0 by roll call vote. Mr. Currier abstained.

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to recommend passage of Article 6. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Ms. Robbins to recommend passage of Article 7 as written. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support passage of Article 8. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support the passage of Article 9 as written in the printed document. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to recommend passage of Article 10. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to support Article 11 as written. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support the passage of Article 12. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

The Finance Committee voted to approve Article 13 in the amount of \$73,143,829.00.

- Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to support the General Government budget in the amount of \$13,417,226.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.
- Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support the Public Safety budget in the amount of \$4,463,449.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.
- Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to support the Grafton School Department budget of \$43,427,796.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.
- Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support the Public Works budget in the amount of \$3,595,856.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.
- Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to support the Health & Human Services budget in the amount of \$631,963.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.
- Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to recommend approval of the Culture & Recreation budget in the amount of \$1,475,005.00. Motion passed 8 – 0 by roll call vote. Mr. Cushner abstained.
- Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support the Debt budget in the amount of \$6,082,534.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.
- Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Ms. Robbins to approve Interfund Transfers in the amount of \$50,000.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support the Capital Budget (Article 14) in the amount of 1,789,418.00 of which \$233,218.00 comes from Free Cash, \$60,000.00 from the Sewer Enterprise Account, and \$1,496,200.00 from the Capital Stabilization Account. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Ms. Duckworth to support the Sewer Budget (Article 15) in the amount of \$3,495,180.00. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Ms. Duckworth to support the Cable Budget (Article 16) as presented. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Ms. Duckworth to support the budget of the Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional School District (Article 17) in the amount of \$1,551,295.00 which includes the final debt payment. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support Article 18. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support Article 19. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Marr made a motion seconded by Ms. Duckworth to recommend Article 30 as presented. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

The Finance Committee passed over the recommendation for Article 31.

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support Article 32 understanding that \$3.5M will be paid through a debt exclusion and \$3.5M will be paid through the Capital Stabilization Fund and the Town is applying for grants. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Mr. Marr to support the petitioner's withdrawal and recommend passing over Article 33. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Ms. Duckworth to recommend passage of Article 34. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Mr. Currier to continue the public hearing on Thursday, April 13, 2023. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

3. Review State of the Town Message

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Ms. Duckworth to approve the State of the Town Message as drafted with outstanding thanks and gratitude to Mr. Marr. Motion passed 8 – 0 by roll call vote. Mr. Marr abstained.

4. Bills Payable: Grafton News dated 3/24/2023

Ms. Robbins made a motion seconded by Mr. Cusher to approve the bill to the Grafton News in the amount of \$95.46 for the public hearing notice. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

5. Meeting Minutes

Mr. Currier made a motion seconded by Ms. Duckworth to approve the meeting minutes of March 8, March 11, March 15, and March 21 of 2023 as presented. Motion passed 9 – 0 by roll call vote.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:31pm by Mr. Haddad.

The Finance Committee's meeting materials are available at: <https://www.grafton-ma.gov/AgendaCenter/Finance-Committee-6>

A recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtu.be/yI-Rs4z4Pv0>