



TOWN OF NORWELL
Norwell Town Offices, Room 112
345 Main Street
Norwell, Massachusetts 02061
(781) 659-8000

Norwell Capital Budget Committee Meeting Minutes March 13, 2023

The meeting was called to order by Chair Tim Greene at 7:00 PM. Also present were Town Administrator Darleen Sullivan, Town Accountant Christine McCarthy, and Committee Members Peter Bloomfield, Susan Powell, Meaghan James, Kimberley Dall, and Dane Hutchison.

AGENDA

Motion by Mr. Greene to approve the agenda as submitted/amended. Seconded by Ms. Powell and unanimously voted.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Board Reorganization

No changes were proposed.

FY 2024 DRAFT CAPITAL BUDGET REQUESTS

Mr. Greene indicated that formal votes on these requests would take place at the next meeting.

Town Clerk

Town Clerk Patricia Anderson present to discuss a request from her office for 30 new voting booths (10 for each precinct) at a cost of \$12,826.00. The Town has been using collapsible “suitcase-style” booths for almost 40 years that are wearing out and are difficult to haul and set up. The new booths are more lightweight, do not have to be assembled on site, and come with a five year warranty for parts and labor. She already uses two such booths at Town Hall for early voting.

In response to Board member questions, Ms. Anderson indicated the new booths would be easier to transport and take up less storage space; they could be ready for the 2024 Presidential primaries next year if the request is approved. They afford about the same degree of privacy as the existing booths; voters can also use a “secrecy sleeve” with ballots for additional privacy. She is unaware of any issues with the new booths in other towns. She does not believe the current booths would have any resale value and would offer them to other towns that may have a need. Mr. Greene asked if the price were likely to increase between now and when they could be ordered; Ms. Anderson indicated the price was locked in.

School Department

Director of Finance Warren MacCallum present for the School Department. Many of the Department’s requests have been on the Capital plan for some time and they recently engaged a company to assist with updated quotes. Certain costs have increased significantly, including replacement of the boilers at the high school, whose cost has gone from about \$500K 10 years ago to \$3.5 million currently. They are also doing an updated assessment of the needs at the Sparrell Building for Ms. Sullivan to review; they have tabled all requests for Sparrell until this can be

completed. Major needs over the next five years will include roof repairs and air handlers at the middle school; these costs are also being reassessed and will be integrated into the long-term plan.

Cole School Resurfacing - \$40,000

These funds would be used to resurface the Cole School playground with a “mat-based” product that will allow for easier piecemeal maintenance; the actual cost may be closer to \$35K, as the final quotes have not yet come in, and they will return any unused funds. The existing poured-in-place rubber surfacing was installed 8 years ago and is at the end of its life expectancy; the mats are expected to last much longer: “I would hope to never have to come back here again” with a similar request. Any subsequent maintenance cost could be handled within the current budget. The Vinal School has different playground components and fewer wood chips, so its rubber surfacing does not require replacement at this time.

Middle School Bleacher Automation - \$35,000

These funds would install electric motors and wheels under the middle school bleachers to make them easier to pull in and out; this will allow one custodian to do the job and reduce risk of damage. They were able to make repairs that allowed them to reduce the original ask of \$150K. Any subsequent maintenance can be handled in the current budget. Ms. Sullivan later noted there was unspent article money for high school bleachers approved in FY 22 that could possibly be repurposed to the middle school.

Heating Controls, Cole & Vinal - \$320,000

These funds would allow for automation of recent ventilation upgrades that allow for better cost control; the existing controls have outlived their capabilities, and some adjustments must be done manually by the one staffer trained to do them. The upgrades were undertaken at the recommendation of the Massachusetts Department of Health to assist students with breathing issues. This request could be split into \$160,000 over two years, starting with one school instead of both at once. They do not anticipate the price would increase if the project were spread out over two years. The new controls will likely last at least 10-12 years.

Fencing Repairs, Cole/Vinal - \$50,000

These funds would pay for chain-link fencing repairs due to snow buildup, collisions, and normal wear and tear. Areas of unrepaired fencing present a safety/injury risk. The Department has been working with Trees & Grounds Commissioner Glenn Ferguson on a plan for maintenance and snow storage; T&G is willing to do some of the work, which will reduce the Department’s labor cost. In order to ensure the playgrounds remain ADA compliant, the Department hires a consultant to advise when repairs and maintenance are needed.

Clipper Community Complex Track Resurfacing - \$180,000

Mr. MacCallum noted that if this request can be funded through the capital budget, it will save the Department from having to prematurely tap its athletic field stabilization fund set up for turf field replacement; the fund has about \$650K currently and is estimated to grow to about \$950K in about 6 years when it is needed. The stabilization fund is funded by fees collected from outside organizations that use the fields; funding is a little behind original projections due to Covid shutdowns and competing facilities in the area. They would like to resurface the rubber topcoat before the asphalt beneath gets damaged, which would raise the cost.

Mr. Hutchison asked about the status of Phase II CCC repairs; Mr. MacCallum noted these were being overseen by Recreation and Highways. Members discussed the possibility of raising fees or

using the money in the stabilization fund before seeking capital funding. Questions were also asked about the resurfacing process and the material used for the topcoat.

Ms. Powell asked about the status of the Department's FY 22 capital requests; the Vinal HVAC upgrade work has been awarded to a bidder at the expected price. They have been unable to purchase the van due to supply issues. The funding for kitchen equipment, along with additional Federal and State aid, will likely meet the Department's needs for several years.

Ms. Dall asked how Mr. McCallum would prioritize the Department's five requests. The requests are all different and difficult to rank; the track and the heating controls are very important, and the Cole playground is close to being out of compliance. Mr. McCallum noted the Department has other needs but chose to bring these five forward because of their importance. Mr. Greene reframed the question slightly, asking which request would prefer to put off if one of them could not be funded; Mr. McCallum indicated they could continue to carefully deploy the bleachers manually.

Police Department

Chief Ed Lee present. The Department is requesting funding to purchase a hybrid Ford Interceptor; he has found them to be reliable in his previous position, and they yield significant fuel savings. This will be the third hybrid in the fleet.

Ms. Sullivan noted that the Department typically replaces three vehicles per year; these are normally funded through the annual budget but at this time she was looking for one to be funded through the capital budget. State accrediting agencies take the age of the Department's front line cruisers into consideration. When new vehicles are acquired, they either trade in an older vehicle or convert it into a detective or administrative vehicle.

Mr. Bloomfield asked about the status of previous-year capital requests. Chief Lee noted he was able to fund several such requests through budget or grant funding.

Fire Department

Chief David Kean indicated his only request this year was for \$25,000 to paint the Public Safety building. The Fire wing has not been painted since the building was opened in 1999 and the Police wing, which includes pre-primed wood surfaces, has never been painted; these surfaces will ultimately need repair if not painted. They would like to paint the entire building at once. The \$25,000 cost is the average of the middle two quotes out of four they received. This funding would also cover limited wood trim repairs.

Highways / Trees & Grounds

Highways/Trees & Grounds Commissioner Glenn Ferguson present along with Assistant Commissioner Shane Gokey. Mr. Ferguson opened by noting the Department returned about \$200K of approved but unspent capital funds to free up funds to purchase two dump trucks, one for \$37K and one for \$19K. One of the vehicles to be replaced is 16 years old and the other, nearly 11 years old, failed emissions inspection. Repair expenses this year are running nearly \$100K over budget due to the age of some of the fleet, and vehicles are frequently out for repair for several weeks at a time. Some of the existing diesel trucks must be highway-driven just to bring them up to optimum operating temperature. The new Highway barn includes an indoor parking area for Department vehicles, which will hopefully increase vehicle service life. The four ordered last year from the capital budget have not yet been delivered.

Mr. Hutchison inquired about purchasing used vehicles which could possibly be delivered more quickly. Mr. Ferguson prefers not to deal with used vehicles due to their higher maintenance expenses, as the Department does not have a mechanic on staff. He believes delivery times for new vehicles will start to come down now that the pandemic is over; he is seeing this in other deliveries. Mr. Hutchison inquired how the Department would manage until the trucks are delivered. Mr. Gokey indicated they would utilize the existing fleet to meet the Town's needs, but the absence of the larger trucks during storms meant more trips by the smaller trucks to do the same work.

Ms. Sullivan noted that Federal American Rescue Plan Act funds have been used for recent vehicle purchases and some funds, disbursed at the County level, remained available that needed to be spent before December of 2024.

Ms. Dall asked how the Department managed to return the \$200K of unspent funds; Mr. Ferguson indicated this was through a combination of canceled purchases, purchases at a lower than estimated price, and repairing an existing street sweeper instead of purchasing a new one; these funds were turned back to free cash.

Mr. Ferguson also stated, despite being listed as a School Department request, the Clipper Community Complex track resurfacing work was a Trees & Grounds project—"That field is owned by the Town, not the schools"—and should be under T&G control, but he will work with Mr. McCallum and TA Sullivan to coordinate the work and make sure it gets done properly. Mr. Hutchison asked what department would be responsible for the CCC bathroom renovations; Mr. Ferguson believes it should fall under Facilities "with help from me and the schools." All discussed the distribution of responsibility for playing field maintenance between Recreation, Schools, and Trees and Grounds, and then the presence of PFAS in current and newer turf field materials.

Facilities Department

Facilities Manager Ted Nichols present to discuss three requests for the Council on Aging building. He has held off on certain requests for Town Hall pending the outcome of the Town Meeting vote on the 93 Longwater purchase. Staying in the current building would require major repairs.

COA Carpeting - \$16,000

Mr. Nichols advised there was an ongoing water leak he has been working with Mr. Ferguson to locate and fix; water staining has been noted in the carpet in the room where most programming occurs, and mold may be growing underneath. He will try to fix the leak without touching the existing carpet, but may have to replace some or all of it; the request amount assumes all the carpet will be replaced. The carpet is still in usable condition but is approaching the end of its expected service life.

COA Fire Alarm - \$20,000

Mr. Nichols noted that the current alarm system is a standalone system, installed in the 90s, with no direct link to the Fire Department; an unnoticed after-hours fire could result in a total loss of the building. He has been unable to find a way to network or upgrade the system in a municipally compliant fashion.

COA Emergency Button System - \$6000

Mr. Nichols noted that the library and Town Hall have an EB system to summon police in case of emergency; COA Director Sue Curtin would like one for the COA building given its relatively isolated location. Ms. Sullivan will work with Ms. Curtin to identify possible public safety grant funds for the project.

Members Dall and Hutchison questioned the cost effectiveness of spending on the current building when a request for a new one appeared to be pending. Ms. Sullivan noted that the approval process alone for the new building will likely take years, or possibly longer if a new school building is needed before then. If the 93 Longwater purchase is not approved, repairs to the current Town Hall would also take priority. Any funds approved but not used for the current COA building can be repurposed. Mr. Hutchison had no issue with funding the EB request given its low cost.

Select Board - Records Management

The SB is requesting \$70,965 to fund an ongoing project to digitize all Town Hall records; this will supplement \$65K in grant funding Ms. Sullivan has obtained for the project. She anticipates this request will be sufficient to complete the project, which will start with the contractor creating an inventory and state-compliant retention schedule. The scanned documents will be stored in a secure Cloud platform and be text-searchable. Town personnel are already starting to scan and save digital copies of paper documents. The project is expected to take about 18 months, and will start in one or two departments before being deployed townwide; the physical documents will be retained until the accuracy of the digitized records is verified. Mr. Greene noted that funding for the same project was approved last year; Ms. Sullivan anticipates this will be the final round of funding. Ongoing records management will be part of the operating budget. Mr. Hutchison would like the document scanning/digitization to eventually be handled in house.

Recreation Department

The Department is requesting \$27,000 to resurface the Reynolds Playground. Mr. Greene asked that Ms. Sullivan provide some additional information on the request.

MISCELLANEOUS

Ms. Sullivan gave a high-level review of the state of the Town finances. The Capital Stabilization Fund currently had a balance of about \$2 million; she will email the exact figure to the Committee. Debt service and pension obligation expenses have increased; both the Town and Plymouth County are looking at options to smooth out the latter. Health insurance expenses increased just 2.8%. All union contracts were renegotiated, with the new contracts effective July 1 of last year. She has shifted some capital funding requests to town meeting articles proposed to be funded with free cash. She has budgeted based on local aid figures from the Governor's budget, which tends to be lower than what is passed by the Legislature. She will work with Department heads and former Town Administrator Peter Morin to ensure the budget is balanced. ARPA funds have greatly helped the Town over the past few years, and retired Town Accountant Donna Mangan was very effective at tracking and seeking reimbursement for all qualified expenses.

Ms. Dall asked if unspent article money reverts back to the Town after a period of time; Ms. Sullivan and Town Accountant Christine McCarthy reach out to the recipients if such funds are unspent after a period of time. All broadly discussed ensuring the Town's spending, particularly with temporary funding, is sustainable.

The Committee will meet again on March 20 to vote on all requests. Mr. Bloomfield may have a conflict, but all other members indicated they could attend.

ADJOURNMENT

*There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Greene to adjourn at 9:19 PM.
Seconded by Mr. Bloomfield and unanimously voted.*

Jesse McSweeney, Chair