

Unanimously approved by Finance
Committee at February 16, 2023 meeting.

Lunenburg Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 26, 2023

Location: In-person at Lunenburg Town Hall and broadcast on Zoom

Present: Chairperson Evan Watters, Tom Balish, Tom Gray, Caesar Nuzzolo, Jay Simeone (remote)

Guests: Town Manager Heather Lemieux, Chairperson of the Lunenburg School Committee Carol Archambault, School Committee and Capital Planning Committee member Peter Beardmore

1. Call to Order

Mr. Watters called the meeting to order at 7p.m. and read a statement concerning the Open Meeting Law, and how all public meetings are legally being held remotely. This meeting was recorded and is viewable on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/f3mPFSY148c>

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Announcements: none

4. Public Comment: none

5. Town Manager/Finance Director Report: none

6. Capital Plan Presentation: Ms. Lemieux explained the Capital Planning Process, and also explained that without knowing the amount of money needed to fund abatements, she has reduced FY24 Capital Plan requests from 29 items to 6. The \$2,860,000 in free cash, which would normally fund capital plan requests, will be reserved to fund abatements. The Capital Plan will use \$986,000 out of the Special Purpose Stabilization Fund to purchase the very much needed ambulance for the fire department, and a pair of dump trucks for the DPW. Also included on the Capital Plan are security upgrades for the schools, which will be funded by unexpended capital and tax revenue. Ms. Lemieux also explained that the capital plan amount can be amended as more information regarding abatements is learned. Ms. Lemieux will continue to re-evaluate the FY24 Capital Plan from now until Town Meeting, and will look to appropriate funds as they become available. Ms. Lemieux also pointed out that decisions made on municipal buildings moving forward will have critical impact on items included on the plan in the future. Ms. Lemieux also listed 10-year capital plan requests.

Mr. Watters expressed his concern over the fire alarm system at the elementary school not being on the FY24 Capital Plan. Mr. Gray agreed there should at least be a contingency plan if the system does fail at the school.

7. Tax Abatement/Assessment Discussion: Mr. Watters explained that several Lunenburg residents owning waterfront property received real estate tax bills that are much higher than anticipated. The Select Board has opened an investigation to find how waterfront property taxes could suddenly rise so high. Mr. Watters explained that the Finance Committee does not play a

role in property taxes, however their duties will be impacted nonetheless. The town's overlay account will probably need to be increased at Town Meeting in order to cover abatements. Without knowing the amount needed for the overlay, how to decide on other financial articles could pose a challenge. Mr. Watters suggested members of the committee, and the public to go to the Mass.gov website and look at Division of Local Services (DLS) data, to learn more about property values and assessments.

- 8. MMA Trade Show Re-Cap:** Mr. Watters attended the tradeshow, and learned about economic and fiscal outlook, and heard recently elected Governor Maura Healy talk about Chapter 70 funding, Chapter 90 funding, housing, and economic development priorities. Governor Healy aims to fully fund the circuit breaker, and take a closer look at how small towns are treated regarding Chapter 70 funds. Mr. Watters will write up a report on the show and distribute it amongst committee members.
- 9. Minutes:** Mr. Balish motioned to approve the minutes from the January 12, 2023 meeting, Mr. Gray seconded. On vote, motion carried 4-0-1 (Mr. Simeone abstained).
- 10. Committee Reports** Committee members updated each other on their respective liaison assignments.
- 11. Public Comment:** Mr. Beardmore made clear he was commenting as a resident and not representing any board. Mr. Beardmore expressed his concern over how the latest property value assessments will affect the town in its entirety. Mr. Beardmore is also concerned that there won't be enough time to process all the information in order to have an effective discussion to make the right decisions at Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Beardmore advised the committee to ask the Town Manager for varying scenarios regarding the budget. Mr. Beardmore also asked the committee to give a presentation on Proposition 2 ½, and its effect on total levy, and how that involves the current assessment/abatement situation.
- 12. Next Meetings:** February 9, February 16 –Preliminary Budget Presentation, February 23 –COA, Land Use, Library presentations.
- 13. Adjourn** At 8:20 p.m. Mr. Simeone motioned to adjourn, Mr. Gray seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.