

Lunenburg Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 14, 2021

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

Present: Acting Chairperson Chris Menard, Peter Beardmore (arrived 15 minutes late), Dave Passios, Jay Simeone, Tom Balish, Tom Gray, Evan Watters

Guests: Town Manager Heather Lemieux, Land Use Director Adam Burney, Karen Brochu via Zoom, Select Board Member Lou Franco via Zoom, Lunenburg resident Rhonda Lissio

1. Call to Order

Chris Menard called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.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/ueog2Zsqgtw>

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Announcements: None

4. Public Comment: None

5. Public Hearing on Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles: Mr. Menard opened the public hearing. Ms. Lemieux, Ms. Brochu, and Mr. Burney went into detail on most proposed warrant articles to be heard at Special Town Meeting. Committee members agreed to hold another public hearing on November 4, 2021 to discuss those articles still missing key details.

- a. Mr. Menard read Article A out loud. Ms. Lemieux explained there would be an increase of \$4,912 in the Town Accountant's budget to replace the retiring principal clerk with an assistant accountant, as well as adding four hours for the new position. Ms. Lemieux also explained the technology budget would increase by \$65,352 to cover hiring an outside consultant, as well as an upgrade to Microsoft 365, along with network and infrastructure upgrades. Ms. Lemieux is in the process of applying for grants to assist covering those costs. Whether the town will be awarded the grants will not be known until after the Special Town Meeting. Ms. Lemieux also explained an increase in the town's share of Medicare by \$39,935, however a reduction in the group health insurance along with a reduction in the Monty Tech Assessment will cover that cost. Ms. Lemieux also explained that revenue adjustments reflecting new growth along with changes in the sewer enterprise budget totaled \$156,487 which makes a balanced budget for the town. Mr. Watters and Mr. Simeone asked about whether the schools' technology program came under the town's budget. Ms. Lemieux explained the schools are talking with the town's technology consultant about proposals, and that the schools' technology will be covered separately from the town.

- b. Article B, concerning payment of prior year expenses totaling \$7,519 in technology invoices that weren't known about until after FY21 was closed out. Mr. Beardmore asked whether the technology budget was underspent that year. Ms. Brochu answered that the FY21 technology budget closed out at \$72,000 with \$30,000 to cover salaries. The committee determined there was enough money left in that budget to cover those outstanding invoices.
- c. Ms. Lemieux did not have a number to discuss with the committee concerning the Lunenburg Professional Fire Fighters Collective Bargaining Agreement.
- d. Adjusting Elderly Exemption limits on income and assets: Ms. Lemieux explained the article aims to adjust the exemption amount from \$750 to \$1,000 for those single seniors with incomes of \$31,000 or less and/or assets totaling \$52,700 or less, and those married seniors with incomes of less than \$72,600 and/or assets totaling \$72,000 or less. Ms. Lemieux explained the adjustment would have an estimated impact of \$7,500, which could be covered by the overlay account. Mr. Balish and Mr. Beardmore commented that the wording of the article doesn't explain the exemption amount, which makes the article appear misleading. Mr. Passios opined that oftentimes it's the asset limit that bumps some a lot of the town's seniors out of the program.
- e. Easement of land adjacent to Leominster Shirley Rd: Mr. Menard expressed his concern about the lack of visibility at the current intersection. Mr. Burney explained that the applicant is working with the abutting business to improve visibility by cutting back existing vegetation.
- f. Sewer Enterprise budget: Ms. Lemieux explained the fund will provide an increase in hours for the assistant to Sewer Business Manager to make it a benefitted position. Mr. Passios made clear that those funds would be covered by the Sewer Enterprise fund.
- g. Sewer Commission to transfer \$14,875 into their Capital Reserve Stabilization Fund. Ms. Brochu explained that there is a certain amount of revenue that gets set aside each year to be deposited into Sewer Capital Reserve Stabilization Fund.
- h. Demolition Delay: Ms. Lemieux explained the article was submitted by the Historical Commission. The article aims to amend the bylaw. The committee agreed Article H would have no financial impact.
- i. Salary Administration Plan: Ms. Lemieux explained that the approved positions by the Personnel Committee are to be incorporated into the compensation and classification grid.
- j. T.C. Passios Building Committee Report: The committee agreed to support hearing a report at Special Town Meeting, with hope that more information, and/or a preview will be available at the public hearing scheduled for November 4, 2021.
- k. Mr. Menard suggested discussing both Articles K and L together, and pointed out that there are currently no known values on tearing down and rebuilding the T.C. Passios building. Mr. Passios said there are figures for Article K. Mr. Beardmore expressed his preference to discuss Article K when a comparative analysis among other town building projects are complete. Ms. Lemieux informed the board that the debt exclusion for Article K is \$23,570,000. Mr. Beardmore said he had a discussion with Ms. Lemieux, the Town's financial advisor, and Mr. Menard about debt analysis, and that the voters need

to informed on how the Turkey Hill Elementary School project, as well as any debt incurred from any T.C. Passios project will affect their tax rates.

Ms. Lemieux added that for Article L, the \$250,000 figure may change as she anticipated an actual number from the architect before the next time the article will be discussed. Lunenburg resident Rhonda Lissio commented she would vote no on both articles, and opined that the town has unilaterally decided how to use the T.C. Passios building. Ms. Lissio encouraged the town to control its impulses, and to look at its office space as a whole instead of rendering two buildings useless and charging taxpayers to renovate, or build another 55,000 sq. ft. building, and that the only way to reduce the cost is to reduce the size.

Mr. Menard opined that looking further into how some space can be used would be beneficial for a decision on Article L. Mr. Passios rebutted, saying that the needs of the town have been assessed several times in the last eight years, and it has come to the point where the proposals on the T.C. Passios building need to move forward, and be voted on by the town.

- m. Flat Hill Culvert: Ms. Lemieux explained that easements are needed to repair a culvert on Flat Hill Road.
- n. Ms. Lemieux explained that Article N was voted on already, but the Map and parcel numbers were wrong at the time. Article N reflects the correct numbers.
- p. Ms. Lemieux explained that the parks commission submitted Article P to include Marshall Park in the sewer service area map.
- q. Mr. Burney explained the Article Q aims to rename some districts in town.
- r. Mr. Burney explained that Article R aims to change what the town's bylaw says to match the town's water district map.
- s. Mr. Burney explained that Article S would then update the town's zoning map to reflect the change in the water district map.
- t. Mr. Burney explained that Article T aims to establish lot size requirements in the Limited Business/Residential District and do away with the Retail Commercial District.

At 8:25 p.m. Mr. Beardmore motioned to close the public hearing, Mr. Watters seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.

6. Vote recommendations on Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles:

- a. Mr. Beardmore motioned to recommend approval on Article A, Mr. Passios seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
- b. Mr. Beardmore motioned to recommend approval on Article B, Mr. Balish seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
- c. Mr. Beardmore motioned to defer a recommendation until Special Town Meeting on Article C, Mr. Watters seconded. Upon discussion committee members agreed they may discuss this article again on November 4, 2021. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
- d. Mr. Beardmore motioned to defer a recommendation until Special Town Meeting on Article D, Mr. Passios seconded. Upon discussion committee members agreed they may discuss this article again on November 4, 2021. On vote, motion carried unanimously.

- e. Mr. Beardmore motioned to recommend approval on Article E, Mr. Passios seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
 - f. Mr. Beardmore motioned to recommend approval on Article F, Mr. Balish seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
 - g. Mr. Beardmore motioned to recommend approval on Article G, Mr. Watters seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
 - h. Mr. Beardmore moved to find no financial impact on Article H, Mr. Passios seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
 - i. Mr. Beardmore motioned to recommend approval on Article I, Mr. Watters seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
 - j. Mr. Beardmore motioned to recommend approval on Article J, Mr. Balish seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
 - k. Mr. Beardmore motioned to defer articles K and L to Special Town Meeting, Mr. Passios seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
 - l. Mr. Beardmore moved that the committee find no financial impact for articles M through T, Mr. Watters seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.
- 7. Warrant Letter or Other Content for Special Town Meeting:** Mr. Beardmore will write a letter from the finance committee to Lunenburg voters concerning the potential financial impact of articles K and L to be distributed with the Warrant Articles.
- 8. Minutes:** Mr. Beardmore motioned to approve the minutes of the September 23, 2021, and October 7, 2021 meetings. Mr. Passios seconded. Mr. Simeone stated he did not read the minutes. Motion carries. 6 Yeas, 1 abstain.
- 9. Committee Reports:** Committee members updated each other on their respective committees.
- 10. Public Comment:** none
- 11. Items for Future Meetings:** Mr. Passios suggested discussing the information the Green Communities Committee has collected on replacing the current street lights with L.E.D. street lights. The committee agreed to put the item on an agenda in December.
- 12. Next Meetings:** The joint meeting with the school committee regarding Chapter 70 funds will be held October 28, 2021. A public hearing will be held November 4, 2021 on outstanding warrant articles. Special Town Meeting November 16, 2021.
- 13. Adjourn:** Mr. Menard motioned to adjourn at 8:25 p.m. Mr. Simeone seconded. On vote, motion carried unanimously.