

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of February 7, 2024**

The meeting of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chair Louise Miller at approximately 7:00 pm in the Great Plain Room at Needham Town Hall, also available via Zoom teleconferencing.

Present from the Finance Committee: Smith-Fachetti

Louise Miller, Chair, Carol Smith-Fachetti, Vice-Chair

Members: Karen Calton, Barry Coffman (remote), John Connelly, James Healy, Joshua Levy, Paul O'Connor

Others present:

David Davison, Deputy Town Manager/Director of Finance

Cecilia Simchak, Assistant Director of Finance

Dr. Sue Mullaney, Council of Aging Board

Dr. Ed Cosgrove, Council of Aging Board, Board of Health

Joe Barnes, Communities Preservation Committee Co-chair

Laura Dorfman, Communities Preservation Committee Co-chair

Carol Thomas, Needham Commission on Disabilities (remote)

Tatiana Swanson, Director of Human Resources, Commission on Disabilities liaison (remote)

Gloria Greis, Historical Commission Vice Chair (remote)

Heather Simmons, Needham Council for Arts and Culture Co-chair

Charly Nanda, Needham Council for Arts and Culture

JP Cacciaglia, Economic Development Manager, Council for Arts and Culture liaison

Stacey Mulroy, Park & Recreation Director, Memorial Park Trustees liaison

Hannah Corrigan, Park & Recreation Assistant Director

Cindy Chaston, Park & Recreation Commission Chair

Colleen Schaller, Council of Aging Board Chair

Helen Gregory, Council of Aging Board member

Dr. Rob Partridge, Board of Health

Tim McDonald, Director of Health & Human Services

Tiffany Zike Benoit, Assistant Director of Public Health

Sara Shine, Director of Youth & Family Services

Jessica Moss, Assistant Director of Aging Services for Social Services and Volunteers

LaTanya Steele, Director of Aging Services (remote)

Kristin Wright, Management Analyst (remote)

Citizen Requests to Address the Finance Committee

Dr. Sue Mullaney, Council on Aging Board member, addressed the Committee in support of the Health and Human Services additional funding requests. She wanted to raise awareness of the need for mental health support in the elderly population. In a recent survey 30% reported feelings of isolation and loneliness. The social workers provide critical counselling services and are overwhelmed with the demand. Another need is around accessing and coordinating services

to allow seniors to stay in their homes. Help is needed with home modifications, transportation, and the cost of food among other things. Social workers are adept at identifying and matching the needs to the services. When services are not available, they often take the lead in writing grant proposals and managing the funding for innovative projects. The CATH provides essential programs, support groups and opportunities to socialize. The use of the CATH continues to grow and additional staff to ensure Needham seniors are supported as needed.

Dr. Ed Cosgrove, Council on Aging Board member, addressed the Committee in support of the Health and Human Services additional funding requests for an epidemiologist, public health nurse, mental health clinician and ageing services mental health clinician. Over the years the department has been working on being preventative instead of reactive. The epidemiologist can pinpoint where are or may arise and this type of analysis was used during the pandemic to direct efforts. Needham has one of the best local health departments in the State and are working in the Charles River Regional Health Cooperative to help other towns with shared services, advice and experience in Sherborn, Dover, and Medfield.

Approval of Minutes of Prior Meetings

MOVED: By Mr. Healy that the minutes of the meetings of January 24, 2024 be approved as distributed, subject to technical or typographical corrections. Mr. Connelly seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 8-0.

CPC Administration

Ms. Miller indicated that in FY2025, \$4M in Community Preservation Act funds is anticipated to be collected and 5% is authorized for administrative expenses which is \$82,000. Any funds that are unexpended at the end of the fiscal year go into the fund balance as retained earnings for CPA funds. The committee has administrative staff support and consultants to help with issues such as real estate transactions or Housing Authority.

Needham Commission on Disabilities

Mr. Levy reported that the budget is [unchanged from the prior year at \\$24,05500](#). ~~Of the and is an~~ expense budget, ~~last year~~ only \$70 was spent [last year](#). In addition to the budget, the Commission awards grants. The moneys that are granted comes from the accessible parking fines which the Committee disburses. There is approximately \$7,000 available annually in grant funding. To date in FY2024, \$3,000 has been awarded to the school department for special education costs related to the Integrated Learning Center and the remaining funding available for grants is \$4,848. The Commission is about awareness and advocacy to bring more visibility to issues surrounding disabilities. Ms. Thomas expects that more of the expense budget will be spent this fiscal year, since expenditures were slower during COVID-19. The Commission is raising awareness for their grant program.

Needham Council for Arts and Culture

Ms. Miller reported that the Council has two funding sources for the work that they do. They receive funds from the State which are to be granted to cultural and arts organizations. The Town has supplemented the grant funds with \$8,300 annually for the past two years. The State provided approximately \$9,000. The Town had also allocated \$20,000 of ARPA funding for the Council to fund public art. The Council has funded the pansy mural at Needham Heights, which cost \$15,600. The Council has another mural project that they would like to complete but there is insufficient ARPA funding remaining for full funding.

The Council has a presence at several community events like the Harvest Festival where they gather contact information for a mailing list for interested residents. They have a Facebook page and the Massachusetts Cultural Council website has information and directions on how to apply for grants in Needham. In FY2024 the Council received 38 requests for funding and 29 grants were awarded in amounts ranging from \$100 to \$1,100. Most projects are funded at 75%. Some of the criteria for funding are that the artist be a resident or works or has ties to Needham and benefits Needham residents. Some of the projects funded are a Poet laureate for Needham through the Town Manager's office, drop-in therapeutic art studio, expressive art therapy for children, and the third year of the Multicultural Festival.

In a DSR4 they are requesting \$10,000 to help with funding the second mural project (location to be determined). A minimum of \$5,000 to \$10,000 would be needed for supplementary funding for the second mural that the Council would like to sponsor. Any remaining funds would be regranted under the same guidelines as are used for the state funds.

Needham Historical Commission

Ms. Miller indicated that this was a level funding request for \$1,050. There were no expenditures in FY2023. Ms. Greis indicated that the funding is primarily for public education projects.

Needham Memorial Park Trustees

Mr. Healy reported the budget is \$750 and is used to replace torn or tattered USA and POW flags.

Minuteman High School

Mr. Healy reported on the vocational school. There are currently nine member communities. The total budget is divided among the nine member communities by how many students they send resulting in the Town's allocation for the year. The Minuteman costs include the operational assessment, transportation, debt, capital assessment as well as the new building project costs. It is anticipated that there will be 46 students attending from Needham in FY2025. The FY2025 budget is \$1,823,777 or about \$40,000 a student. In FY2023 the average cost per student in Needham schools is \$23,000 and includes maintenance and repair of buildings but does not include long term capital costs as does the Minuteman cost per student.

Park and Recreation

Ms. Smith-Fachetti and Mr. Coffman are the liaisons to the department. Ms. Smith-Fachetti met last week with Ms. Mulroy, Ms. Corrigan, and Park and Recreation Commissioners Cindy Chaston and Chris Gerstel. The department is accepting applications for the fifth full-time position in the department. Once that is filled, they will be fully staffed. 40 applications for the summer seasonal staff have been received. Salaries are increasing due to the increase in the minimum wage to \$15 per hour and higher rates to attract temporary seasonal staff. Expenses have also risen for repairs and maintenance for the pool and playground by \$14,000 or 35%. There is a decrease to the budget from a transfer of \$30,000 to the DPW budget for restroom cleaning.

In the summer of 2023, the Recreation Department transitioned the summer programs to become a legally licensed summer camp. They are now a certified camp with a certified program. The prior billing issue for the use of sports fields is resolved. There are no DSR4 requests. There are some warrant articles and construction projects they will be looking at.

In response to questions about the financial status of the pool operations, Ms. Mulroy stated that the opening and closing costs for the pool are very high. The pool is operating at a loss. Last year the pool was closed for a week due to the lake flooding the pool, which affected attendance. The pool opening and closing services contract is going out to bid soon, which may affect the budget. Ms. Chaston indicated that the goal for the pool operation is to break even and not lose money. It was not expected to be a big money maker, but it is close to being breakeven. Mr. Connelly asked what can be done to reach breakeven. Ms. Chaston indicated that the shutdown shut down during COVID did not help, and pool fees have been raised as much as can be for municipal pools. The original plan did not anticipate the high cost of opening and closing the pool for the season. In FY2021 the budget was \$770,000 and for FY2025, it is \$1.5M. Pool expenses, seasonal staffing numbers and wages are driving the increases. The programs offered are 95% subscribed and some programs have waiting lists.

The Active Recreation Assets Working Group recommended a feasibility study for an active sports park. Ms. Mulroy indicated that the feasibility study was awarded to CHA Company and the contract was signed last week. She expects to have all the information needed to bring forth a design project in the next fiscal year.

Health and Human Services

Ms. Smith-Fachetti and Ms. Carlton are the liaisons to the department. Ms. Smith-Fachetti reviewed the operating budget. The department has four divisions: Aging Service, Public Health, Veterans Administration and Youth and Family Services. In Aging Services there are increases in services supplies, programing supplies, vehicle supplies, fuel costs and mental health consulting fees.

In the Public Health division BID Needham Hospital agreed to keep supplying the Traveling Meals program resulting in the \$40,000 placeholder for the program being removed from the budget request. There are three DSR4 requests in the budget. This budget was underspent by 18% due to the increase in available grants in FY2024. There is an increase in the substance and

use prevention team. The department is launching Mental Health first aid for Needham residents. They are also ramping up efforts to reach accreditation.

In Veterans Services there is an increase of \$8,000 for the West Suburban Veterans District and \$2,000 for the cost of flags. In Youth and Family Services there has been a significant increase in demand for mental health services. The division provides individual and group therapy, peer tutoring workshops and these services are provided free of charge. There have been increases in expenses for these consultation services and professional seminars. There has been an increase in demand for case management services, a new parent playgroups and a program where students help seniors with grocery shopping. They partner with many community groups.

There has been an increase of 3% in salaries which would increase to 12.5% by including the DSR4 requests.

Ms. Carlton reviewed the six DSR4 requests in order of priority: a data analyst epidemiologist for Public Health, a full-time public health nurse for Public Health, a full-time clinician for Youth & Family Services, one part-time clinician position for Aging services, a part-time front desk support position for the CATH and a part-time environmental health inspector for Public Health.

Four of the positions are currently being funded by ARPA and funds are available only through half of FY2025. They are requesting funding for the second half of FY2025 to maintain these positions. In the FY2026 budgeting there will be additional funding requests to maintain these positions in full going forward. If funding is not approved, then the positions will be eliminated.

The first four requests are recommended by the Town Manager but not the last two.

Ms. Benoit reported that with Opioid funding they are working with consultants for the community engagement. They have conducted key stakeholder interviews, are sending out online surveys, holding small group interviews and will analyze the data. A report with recommendations is anticipated in early April 2024 which will be presented at a community forum. After feedback the progress will be presented at Town Meeting. The final report is anticipated to be completed by the October Special Town Meeting.

Fifteen SAMBOX Narcan boxes have been ordered and are on hand and will be distributed to Town buildings and around the community. The recovery coaching kick-off was January 2nd. The program has been presented to various groups on what services the coach can provide. The coach is already receiving clients.

Mr. McDonald indicated that of the \$145,000 of Opioid funds, \$12,000 has been expended, \$90,000 is encumbered, \$35,000 to \$38,000 will be spent between July and early November. After the Strategic Plan and community engagement is finished it is anticipated that a second disbursement from the Opioid settlement will be requested at the October 2024 Special Town Meeting. Ms. Schaller, Council of Aging Board Chair, urged the Committee to support the budget requests.

Mr. Healy noted that looking at the numbers over a four-year period from FY2021 to FY2025 there has been a 19% increase and with the DSR4 requests and increase of 28%. The concern is that it is unsustainable from a financial perspective. He would like the priorities in the budget compared to each other provided to the Committee in one document. The Town Manager has prioritized each request within each department's budget. If there are additional funds available, he would like to know what the wish lists for the departments are and what the recommendations are.

Ms. Benoit explained the benefits of having an epidemiologist during COVID and beyond. The epidemiologist wrote most of the community health assessment with data pulled from many sources like the police and fire departments, Bid Needham, CDC, Senior and Housing assessments. Data is used to drive the departments' decisions and highlight areas of improvement. Data that is collected can indicate what services are needed and where and can be the basis to pursue grant funding so more services can be provided. HHS brought in **\$1.928M** in grants for this fiscal year to provide services to Needham residents. The epidemiologist can identify areas that need to be addressed so the department can be proactive rather than reactive.

Mr. Coffman asked if there were services that Needham can use that share the cost with other communities. Mr. McDonald indicated there is a regional grant in place that shares services between Needham, Dover, Medfield, and Sherborn. The focus is on statutory reporting requirements.

Committee members expressed surprise that the direct service positions are not listed as higher priorities than the epidemiologist position. Ms. Benoit indicated an epidemiologist can look at the various pieces and provide data so the department can better identify the needs of residents and affect changes. The public nurses do not have the time to make such detailed analysis that is needed.

FY2025 Town Managers Preliminary Budget Recommendation

Ms. Miller prepared a spreadsheet with the FY2023 budgets and actuals, the FY2024 budget and the FY2025 requests with DSR4s and the Town Managers budget and Finance Committee recommendations. The Committee reviewed the budgets and indicated which budgets needed further discussion.

Mr. Connelly would like to see a reduction in the reserve fund.

The Town Manager is recommending a reduction in the Legal budget based on actual expenditures. Concerns were raised regarding the 1688 Central Ave Planning Board brief and legal expenditure for defending the Town in this issue. It was noted that the email correspondence received by Town Counsel regarding the Foster property that was requested has not been forwarded to the Committee. Concerns were raised regarding the value of the legal services received.

There is a meeting scheduled February 28th to discuss the technology portion of the Finance Department budget.

The Building Design & Construction DSR4 for Sr. Project Manager is proposed to be funded by 25% by DSR4 and 75% through the Feasibility Study warrant article. If fully funded by the Feasibility Study that would restrict their ability to perform other tasks not a part of the funding or eligible for MSBA reimbursement.

The Committee strongly felt that the Sustainability Manager position should have been a DSR4. At the April 19, 2023 Finance Committee meeting the Town Manager indicated that the position funding would not be requested until FY2026. The DPW then were able to fund the position and without input from the Committee. Mr. Connelly felt that the amount requested of \$32,000 should not be allowed because the position did not come before the Committee for full vetting. The funding could come from the half-year funding the DPW has for a fleet supervisor. The DPW recognized that more and more of the activities related to a sustainability coordinator was being put upon the DPW so they reshuffled the work to try and meet the needs within the existing headcount.

The Town Manager will be invited to the meeting on February 21st to discuss the Sustainability Manager position.

The Committee is not in favor of funding half-year positions that will turn into full time positions.

Ms. Miller will prepare a draft the Finance Committee letter and will adjust it after the meeting on February 21st. It is due on February 22nd. The recommendations are due in March.

Updates

The next meeting is scheduled for February 21, 2024.

Adjournment

MOVED: By Ms. Carlton that the Finance Committee meeting be adjourned, there being no further business. Mr. Carlton seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a vote of 8-0, at approximately 9:26 p.m.

Documents: FY2025 Department Budget Requests, FY2025 Spreadsheet

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Copley
Administrative Specialist