

**Needham Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting of December 1, 2021**

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Executive Session of the Finance Committee was called to order by Chair Joshua Levy at approximately 7:10 pm via Zoom Video Webinar pursuant to a unanimous roll call vote by the Committee during an open meeting to enter Executive Session under Exception 6 to the Open Meeting Law.

Present from the Finance Committee:

Joshua Levy, Chair ; John Connelly, Vice Chair

Members: Barry Coffman, Carol Fachetti, James Healy, Tom Jacob, Louise Miller, Richard Reilly

Others:

David Davison, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

Property Acquisition

Mr. Levy stated that he learned that a person representing an estate reached out to the Town offering to sell a parcel at 484 Charles River St., known as the “Foster Property”. Mr. Levy’s goal for this meeting is to inform the Committee and get feedback to provide to the Select Board. He stated that he first learned of this in a conversation with the Vice Chair of the Select Board on November 5, and has also spoken about it with the Chair of the Select Board on November 8 and the Chair of the Conservation Commission on November 10. He stated that as of November 23, the situation seemed to be progressing when a notice was received of a scheduled tour of the property for Town stakeholders on December 14. The Select Board is planning to request a joint meeting with the Finance Committee in January. Mr. Connelly stated that he has also spoken to a few people about this, including a phone discussion with Ms. Cooley. Mr. Levy stated that he believes that the Town learned of the potential sale a few weeks before he learned of it, in call to the Conservation Commission. Mr. Healy stated that he would like to get a confirmation of the precise time that the Town first became aware of this potential purchase.

Mr. Levy stated that the property is more than 58 acres, and abuts Town-owned land. The estate also owns two other 3-acre parcels which the Town is unlikely to acquire. He stated that assessments on the properties as of December 2021 showed the smaller parcels valued at \$1.3 million each and the large parcel at \$4.3 million. Ms. Fachetti asked if this was one of the properties in which the Select Board has had a long term interest. Mr. Levy stated that it was on the 2010 list of properties as a top priority of the Conservation Commission. Mr. Reilly asked if other Boards also felt it was a priority. Mr. Levy stated that he did not know. He stated that the Conservation Commission is interested in the large parcel as a field and meadow, and well as for a boat launch. He is not sure if the Town is interested in the entire parcel. Ms. Miller noted that there was already an appropriation for a boat launch 2-3 years ago which has not yet been built. Mr. Levy stated that the Town envisions a few launches along the river.

Mr. Coffman asked how long the Town had owned the abutting property. Mr. Levy noted that the Town purchased the property in 1981 for \$145,000. There is currently a trail that runs through some of their property (in the 3-acre lots) which may have to be moved. Ms. Miller cautioned that if the property is purchased for conservation purposes, the use is very limited. She

asked the selling price, and how the Town intended to fund it. Mr. Levy stated that the starting price was \$18 million. The Select Board had raised the idea of funding partially with CPA funds, and partially with an override. In response to questions from Mr. Jacob, Mr. Levy stated that there is another property with a home that runs from the street into the larger parcel, and that there are some buildings on the parcel itself.

Mr. Healy stated that he objects to the purchase for conservation on several grounds. It is inappropriate for the Town to focus on providing open spaces in the west part of Town. The Town had the opportunity to purchase property on Greendale Ave for open space but chose not to. He would propose if the property is purchased, it should be under the jurisdiction of the Select Board so that it can be used for affordable housing. He stated that he wanted to know when the Town first learned of this, and whether it was before Town Meeting voted on the Emery Grover project. He stated that if there is a purchase, the Town should cut off any property that is not of interest to decrease the amount. Mr. Levy stated that both the Select Board and the Conservation Commission have said that they would prefer to include the riverfront property and the meadow for conservation or recreation. Mr. Coffman stated that the best way to understand what the property would be used for is to find out how the abutting property is used. Ms. Fachetti stated that another important factor is the cost of maintaining undeveloped properties such as the neighboring property. Mr. Levy stated that he would ask these questions.

Ms. Fachetti stated that it is hard to see where this purchase would fit into the financing plan with the upcoming construction projects. Mr. Jacob stated that this property is something “nice to have” rather than something needed and he is not sure the Town has the budget to purchase it. Mr. Connelly stated that it is important to make clear that the Finance Committee has voiced much skepticism, though is open to listening. Mr. Reilly stated that there needs to be a good economic analysis of the costs and benefits of gaining this property.

Mr. Healy stated that it is most important whether the purchase is right for the whole Town, not necessarily whether the Conservation Commission considers it a top priority. Mr. Connelly noted that the Muzi property was just rezoned which will make an area of Town that is already overburdened from an infrastructure point of view even busier while this area already has open space. Mr. Connelly stated that he would like to have a meeting with the chairs of the Finance Committee and the Select Board.

Adjournment

MOVED: By Mr. Healy that the Finance Committee meeting be adjourned, and not to return to open session. Mr. Jacob seconded the motion. The motion was approved by a unanimous roll call vote of 7-0 at approximately 7:40 p.m. (Ms. Miller had left the meeting.)

Respectfully submitted,

Louise Mizgerd
Staff Analyst