

Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

April 23, 2024

7:00 PM

Present: Christi Andersen (Chair), Jason Cole (Vice Chair), Roland Bourdon, Steve Noone, Scott Sullivan, Dave Wellinghoff, Christine Russell, Adam Nolde and Greg Jarboe

Ms. Andersen called the meeting to order.

1. Citizen's Concerns

None

2. Dog Park

Tom Gillespie, representing the Dog Park, presented CPC funding request for the Dog Park. Mr. Gillespie gave a brief history of the creation of a dog park in Acton. Design grant funded by the Stanton Foundation, including stormwater management (costs not originally included because not a requirement at that time). Mr. Gillespie described the proposed location, including a Senior Park. Final design includes an assumed sewer extension. Construction is expected to begin in late summer. Current funding sources:

- design grant \$25k
- town match \$25k
- \$225k from Stanton Foundation for construction of the dog park; this amount, though, is now a few years old.
- Friends of the ACDP raising money with balance of \$10k, can raise \$30k more
- Available funds: \$290k, with maintenance of \$4k/year through increased in dog license fees
- CPA application approved for \$100k. Total: \$390k

What happens if Dog Park doesn't receive \$100k from CPA? Dog Park can not happen. What happens to the land? A bit of an eye sore. Likely of cost doing something will be more. Also, compromising a goal of the Select Board for a number of years and public dissatisfaction.

Mr. Wellinghoff confirmed that if Stanton Foundation money is not used by April 2025, it will be reverted back? Correct. Overall, a combination of stormwater and inflation are the additional costs? Correct.

Mr. Noone inquired how much of the \$100k included accessibility issues versus inflation? Does not have an exact number, but confident the \$100k will meet all needs.

Mr. Cole inquired about sewerage. What is that wildcard? Mr. Gillespie assumed dog park would be built on top of a leech field, that would include a suitable septic system. So, design should remain constant. Mr. Cole asked when the Dog Park needs an answer from the town on the sewerage answer? Acton Housing Authority has stronger timelines and the Town Manager stated end of May answer. Mr. David Martin confirmed the bid went out yesterday, April 22 and should have an answer within weeks.

Mr. Bourdon inquired about rock ledge. Yes, considerable amount, but not affected because don't have to dig down.

Mr. Noone moves to recommend Article 9 Section C, Mr. Jarboe seconded. Mr. Cole inquired what project might not have received money from CPC? Mr. Charter commented most likely it would have been 53 River Street.

Mr. Jarboe - Y, Ms. Russell - N, Mr. Andersen - Y, Mr. Sullivan - A, Mr. Noone - Y, Mr. Wellinghoff - Y, Mr. Bourdon - Y, Mr. Cole - N, Mr. Nolde - Y; 6-2-1

3. Annual Town Meeting Articles

Article 3: (Transfer of FY24 Free Cash)

Will continue to defer until further costs are known. Ms. Fleckner commented that the town's goal is still to be at around a 1% turnback, but at this moment without knowing any unknown costs, for example, vehicle repairs, we do not know tonight whether or not we need this transfer of FY24 free cash.

Article 6: (Town Capital, Infrastructure, Design and Construction)

Ms. Russell moves to recommend, Mr. Bourdon seconded.

Mr. Wellinghoff commented about the fueling station, at end of life. Many vehicles going to electric vehicles. This design will accommodate the new DPW facility. Mr. Bourdon commented cost would be a lot more if fueling station does begin to break down, leak. Mr. Noone reiterated these concerns.

Unanimous

Article 10: (Vehicle Sales, Rental)

Mr. Jarboe summarized this Article, a more moderate Article since its inception. Auto dealers are not concerned because they are grandfathered in. They are more concerned about the new dealership at Nagog Park. Concerned about 2A becoming a mini "Auto Mile".

Mr. Jarboe moves to Recommend, Mr. Noone seconded. Discussion ensued of pros and cons.

Mr. Jarboe - Y, Ms. Russell - Y, Ms. Andersen - Y, Mr. Sullivan - N, Mr. Noone - Y, Mr. Wellinghoff - Y, Mr. Bourdon - Y, Mr. Nolde - Y, Mr. Cole - N; 7-2-0

Article 11: (Amend Zoning Bylaw and Map, Assabet River Overlay District & Powder Mill Zoning District)

Mr. Jarboe summarized Acton and Maynard collaborative, protection of Assabet River while still prudently developing. Economic Development Committee recommends this article while preserving the integrity of the Assabet River.

Mr. Jarboe moves to Recommend, Mr. Bourdon seconded.

Mr. Martin described how overlay zoning works.

Mr. Friedrichs commented it would allow multi-family units, about 1,200 units, 3 stories about Commercial 1st floor. Ms. Friedrichs requested not to recommend.

Mr. Jarboe - Y, Ms. Russell - Y, Ms. Andersen - Y, Mr. Sullivan - Y, Mr. Noone - Y, Mr. Wellinghoff - A, Mr. Bourdon - Y, Mr. Cole - N, Mr. Nolde - N; 6-2-1

Article 12: (Amend Zoning Bylaw and Map - MBTA Overlay District) and

Article 13: (South Acton Village Districts)

Mr. Nolde summarized the town spent 2+ years conducting public forums, studies, etc.. on these two articles. They identified the negatives in addition to what people want to see. This zoning district change seems to address all this information that was collected.

Mr. Nolde moves to Recommend, Mr. Jarboe seconded

Mr. Jarboe commented the Economic Development Committee is recommending these Articles. Discussion ensued about the pros and cons of supporting this Article.

Ms. Andersen inquired specifically about the multi-family housing. Discussion ensued. In the end, majority agreed that more information is needed before a vote can be taken. Mr. Nolde will inquire:

- how many additional units
- Protections from developers putting 3 units on top of vacant commercial
- Mr. Friedrichs recommends tax percentage of commercial versus residential
- How many open lots
- New bedroom count
- Ms. Friedrichs recommends to hear from Acton Water District; she counted about 800 units. Same with Powder Mill. She is happy to work with FinCom to gather these answers for next meeting.

Table Article 13 until these questions are answered.

Article 12:

Mr. Nolde spoke more of Article 12. State's goal is to move City of Boston area to move population density into these outlying areas, like Acton. Finding difficult the state is extorting these Cities and Towns without giving anything in return. Also, what is next? Difficult to recommend. Some folks say have a special Town Meeting in the Fall, on the fence.

Mr. Jarboe commented the irony of the State recommending this. The issue: housing affordability. State not offering enough of new affordable construction. Town employees can not afford to live in Acton.

Mr. Cole mentioned metrics, what is the impact to Police, Fire, roadways, water source, access to schools, etc.... Put off as long as possible in order to have lawyers who can defend this on our behalf.

Ms. Andersen stated a vote of No could represent lack of information. Mr. Cole commented the Attorney General will inform the town we're not in compliance, hence funding take-backs. Ms. Andersen commented a Fall Town Meeting could happen. Mr. Cole commented why put out 1,600 units when 1,600 isn't needed.

Mr. Noone commented about the State and unfunded mandates, this is just a new wrinkle. This is about \$2,000,000 in grants we will no longer be eligible for. State requires a certain number of units? Zero. Mr. Cole disagreed. May be greater than zero in a few years. Mr. Noone recommends vote for this Article.

Mr. Nolde commented town can always have a future Article to withdraw.
Mr. Friedrichs - once a town passes it, you have it for 7 years.

Ms. Andersen commented that FinCom could say that FinCom doesn't know the financial implications.

Mr. Martin - doesn't require sewer, water, wetlands boundaries or permitting. Population has gone up 6%, water usage down 16%.

Ms. Friedrichs - Water has to be provided if they have it. Case will be decided in May if State can constitutionally require this mandate. Recommend wait until decision comes out.

Mr. Nolde moves to No Recommendation, Mr. Jarboe seconded
Unanimous

Mr. Cole - moves the Chair to write a letter to Select Board to remove this Article from Annual Town Meeting, Mr. Bourdon seconded. Passed.

Sample of questions to ask:

What is current bedroom count?

What is maximize bedroom count?

How many classroom seats in schools needed?

Water district opinion?

Service district capacity?

Mr. Noone inquired what is current sewer capacity?

Mr. Martin answered it depends on Powder Mill Place, with that we would be close to capacity.

Mr. Andersen inquired if property in sewer district, does it have right to access?

Mr. Martin answered If not a capacity problem, yes. Mr. Martin further described the privilege fee process and would go in front of Sewer Commission.

Article 14 (Authorize Long-Term Lease - 19 and 21 Maple Street)

Mr. Wellinghoff summarized. Proposed tenant is Acton Food Pantry. This lot is adjacent to MBTA, purchased for \$1.1m to provide parking for commuters. Revenue is about half, so capacity is also about half. \$1.1m borrowed at 4.25%, about \$86k/year for debt payment. Lease payments does not service this debt payment. Lease is lower than this \$80k and change. Language is traditional in this Article. For example, lot could be leased for free. Money collected from Commuter lot parking should go to the maintenance of the commuter lot.

Mr. Jarboe commented the Economic Development Committee recommends. A space for a vibrant community aspect.

Ms. Andersen inquired if any other plans where parking spaces would be lost. In other words, is the town giving up premium spaces? Mr. Wellinghoff answered could happen.

Mr. Wellinghoff moves to Recommend, Mr. Jarboe seconded.

Mr. Jarboe - Y, Ms. Russell - Y, Ms. Andersen - N, Mr. Noone - Y, Mr. Wellinghoff - Y, Mr. Bourdon - Y, Mr. Cole - Y, Mr. Nolde - Y, Mr. Sullivan - Y; 8-1-0

Article 16: (Citizen's Petition - Amend General Bylaws, Gas-powered Leaf Blower Phase Out)

Mr. Jarboe commented Economic Development recommends no: 1). Town's current budget crisis is town and school and not adding more resources needed to monitor this (i.e. Police cost) 2) Market is already moving towards battery-powered lawn mowers and leaf blowers. This is just leaf blowers. Home Depot commented about battery shortages. 3). Landscapers are virtually small businesses and have to comply within a year, not financially possible. Also, need enough batteries as back-up 4) Concern of theft of lithium batteries.

Mr. Russell summarized that many communities are doing this, it is a phase-out of gas-powered leaf blowers. Impact on environment should be considered. Electric leaf-blowers are quiet and climate friendly.

Mr. Nolde commented timing is too short. For home owners who own gas-powered leaf blowers, like himself, Police will enforce this; how many FTES's will have to enforce this? How many new hires, one or two? A minimum of \$100k to town's budget.

Discussion ensued about similar pros and cons of Article.

Mr. Jarboe moves to Not Recommend, Mr. Nolde seconded

Mr. Jarboe - Y, Ms. Russell - A, Ms. Andersen - Y, Mr. Sullivan - Y, Mr. Noone - Y, Mr. Wellinghoff - Y, Mr. Bourdon - Y, Mr. Cole - Y, Mr. Nolde - Y; 8-0-1

Article 17 (AFSCME Collective Bargaining Agreement) and Article 18 (Dispatch Collective Bargaining Agreement)

Mr. Noone reported out no Agreement in place for either Article, but could have something the eve of Town Meeting.
Therefore, still defer

4. Special Town Meeting

None

5. Public Education Update

Ms. Andersen will be presenting Point of View at April 29th Select Board meeting.
Mr. Cole announced Coffee with Select Board Meeting at K&J's cafe, Mr. Cole will attend

6. Finance Committee Business

Members presented liaison reports

Confirm Future Meeting Dates - Ms. Russell Election on April 30th and Annual Town Meeting, will there be a FinCom meeting on May 6th? Yes, 6:00pm
Also, tentative meeting on Thursday, May 2, 2024, 7:30pm if Override fails.
Also, see upcoming meetings under "Public Education" section.

Mr. Jarboe moved to adjourn. Mr. Nolde seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

Dog Park Presentation

Draft Town Meeting Warrant