

ALG Minutes, December 18, 2024, Room 204 & Zoom

Present: JoAnn Berry, facilitator; Dean Charter & Fran Arsenault, SB; Tori Campbell & Yanxin Schmidt, SC; Jason Cole & Scott Sullivan, FC; John Mangiaratti, Peter Light, Marianne Fleckner & Sheri Matthews, staff.

Audience: David Martin & Alissa Nicol, SB; Greg Jarboe, FC, Thom Begin, Asst. Town manager, Ellie Anderson, finance dept., Pat Clifford, LWV, & Tom Beals, Acton Exchange.

Extra info/ documents : Agenda, November 27th minutes, 5- paged FY 26 ALG draft plan

JoAnn was filling in for Bart who is indisposed.

I. Regular business

1. Public Comment

David Martin: last month the SB took a formal vote and reached a unanimous consensus on the DPW building. I apologize in saying that past practice was of formal separate consensus was part of the ALG process. But no member of the SB opposed the debt exclusion; the DPW numbers are to be included in the ALG model.

2. Minutes — passed over

II. FY 25 update

Peter: no major changes; we're on target. The FY 24 audit report has been posted. The projections show enough cash to cover claims for this year. The updated capital plan will be released this Thursday.

John: FY 25 is in the plan; presented first quarter update; we are monitoring projections, expenses, turnovers. The SB appointed an interim town accountant- Christine Cauette; we are continuing to build the finance department under Marianne.

4. Review of Model

Joann: I'm to remind you that all of us have good intentions; no one will catch on fire; there are no unsolvable problems and all the problems do not have to be solved today.

John: model changes (looking at the changes tab)

Recap- final numbers in FY 25 budget; untaxed levy \$1.3M; overlay \$850 (on hold for now); state aid tiny increase; local receipts hit target; there is a surplus but also a concern of going too high in case things cool off; we are comfortable with \$6.5M; free cash increased \$1.69M — it's close to the 3%.

Operating budget for FY 26

35 capital improvements; numbers in budget reflect current costs— they are good numbers to work with. I will be presenting the capital budget on Ja. 13th.

ABRSD has a change in total assessment

Minuteman is much more difficult to pin down; it's now a \$190K deficit which is more manageable; at this point we can close the gap.

The budget is not perfectly balanced as it was at last meeting

FY 27 DPW building \$43M building has so far been reduced \$1.5M; borrowing in the end will cost less; the debt will be carried for 30 years. You can see the impact on the tax tab.

Jason: why are we using all of the \$2M stabilization fund? I don't think it's wise to use it all on one project. I don't like using ALL reserves on one building— does anyone else agree?

John: stabilization is only for capital and needs a 2/3 vote (to be used) the SB has agreed to this use.

Joann: other comments?

Jason: I'm not comfortable with \$2.5M for 30 years— it's almost as much as the twin school— before we've even reached a consensus. I cannot recommend a DPW building at this time or this scope.

Twenty employees— \$100/K per employee— that's excessive; come back with a better plan and have less debt in outer years. We need to see what needs to be removed[from the project]; I'm not on board for \$43M.

Dean: I respect your point of view. I know the building has not changed from what it was 4-5 years ago. It does have the unanimous support of the SB— it's the right time and the right scope. We are getting the numbers Dow: we have substantial changes from eliminating phased construction; another savings comes from adjusting siting and the buffer for Forest Road. We feel it's properly sized/ scope is limited by number of vehicle storage areas; offices, mechanical spaces for repair. Look at the comparable towns and you'll see that they have comparable buildings. I don't want to raise taxes but delays will increase costs.

John: sent out price comparison sheets; all DPW documents have been made public.

Fran: the alternatives would be band-aid fixes which is not a wise investment . We do have to think of the work conditions for the staff.

Jason: there have been some positive movement since the last ALG meeting— 1 year v. 2 year is progress in the right direction; I recognize that the building will be more expensive in the future; but what is a bad plan now will be a bad plan in the future. Radiant floor heating; truck washing.

I think we should investigate public/ private opportunities. Work needs to be done on investigating empty spaces for storage...we need to back off and stop funding wants but just fund needs.

Fran: wearing my realtors hat now—we cannot build for the past; we need to think about the working conditions for our staff— we need to build for future needs; I don't think the building is outrageous at all— just look at the facilities in other towns.

Joann: clearly there is a difference of opinion regarding this project. As a taxpayer coming to Town Meeting what does this look like? What are the options for the voters? There has to be movement on both sides but it's the voters who will make the decision. Right now we are faced with the SB v. The FC— that's not good.

John: for the ALG the purpose is to focus on the FY 26 budget. The building has been in this process and we've been transparent. It seems it won't happen unless we vote to take out the [requirements] for consensus; we could do that.

Greg: I'm the FC member on the DPW and have been to just one meeting. We moved the total from \$47M to \$40M; we can use value engineering to reduce the amount; we need to work on the numbers. I think we need to give the DPW committee the chance for another meeting and see how the numbers are adjusted. It would be nice if we could reach a consensus but I can

see that it will be hard. We need another meeting and to sharpen our pencils. I was around 44 years ago when the ALG was formed; we made consensus what we took to Town Meeting.

Dean: the next DPW meeting is Jan. 29th. There will be tours of the facility on Jan. 25th. I think everyone here should do a tour. We will come back to ALG with refined numbers. Just the testing for the number of geothermal wells will have a big impact on the costs.

Joann: is there a number the FC finds is a cable target; a number the FC feels it can work with?

Jason: no. The focus has to be on needs only ; we feel they have been doing wants and not just needs. Please give us numbers that justify the building; why is doing things inside so much easier? We've asked for hard numbers and not received them. We can't quantify uses for 16-18 years; there have been no hard facts; I can't see my way to a yes.

Scott: in this project we should follow the private sector— don't count people— no company would reserve a spot.....

Dean: there is a great distinction to hold onto employees between private and public sectors. We have a very limited workforce in the office; it's not possible to have remote workers; we have the engineering section; computers and printers; two folks work there in shared office space; shared locker space; there is a distinct between running a corporation and a DPW facility. You should look at the existing conditions and how the people actually have to work.

Scott: I appreciate the difference between public and private. But we should do a work-study; how many hours people are at desks; how many cubicles are actually needed; put files other places; squeeze the space down. The way to prove if you need to double the space is through a work- study.

Fran: we're getting off the ALG process. I think we need to consider possible future needs. We might need a place for lost dogs— we cannot look to the Pat but also consider future needs

Joann: it does seem there are some thoughts to consider: there will be more data in around six weeks; the info from the Jan. DPW meeting will be helpful; the tours so people can see the actual space. It looks now that what is being proposed is hard to understand; it looks like the costs are not acceptable. It's hard to know what to suggest. We gone through a lot of consensus processes and it's been possible to move forward. Moving forward without a consensus— I'm not sure what that would look like

Peter: we are seeing a scenario where the proportion of the deficit of the town will cause a \$1.5M shift in staffing operations. We need to know early what the projected plan will be.

Tori: the elementary task force finding have other changes; stopping open enrollment is not a solution. We are facing some major changes and reductions in staff.

Jason: the \$425 increase in the operating budget— what is it?

John: level services; the entire budget is level services. Looking at the timing; the budget will go to the SB in Jan. The budget will go to the FC on March 6th. We are in pretty good shape. We need the time to sort through it all.

Joann: the next ALG after Jan 29th?

Jason: you need to explain the offsets operation; line 37

John: that was introduced last year; reducing operational costs using \$1.1M from cemetery trust funds; \$300K fro OPEB.

There was a discussion about all the upcoming meetings.
It was agreed that the next ALG would be Feb.12th

Adjourned: 8:30

Ann Chang

NB: please send me your corrections. I will make the necessary changes but will not send out the corrected minutes until a few days before the next meeting to go out with the rest of the packet to avoid OML infractions.