

Finance Committee Meeting

May 5, 2025

5:30pm

Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

36 Charter Rd, Room 104E

Present: Jason Cole (Chair), Dave Wellinghoff, Roland Bourdon, Scott Sullivan, Christi Andersen, Allison Jones, Steve Noone, Corinne Hogseth (5:46 pm), Ellie Anderson (Budget Manager), John Mangiaratti (Town Manager)

Mr. Cole called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM

Public Participation: None

Mr. Cole: Article 6 is assigned to Ms. Hogseth. She is not present, but suspects that she will want to hold a portion of the Article. Moved on to Article 14.

Mr. Noone summarized Article 14 which pertains to a collective bargaining agreement for the firefighters. There are 44 members and the first-year cost is \$69k. This is for a 3-year contract with a 2% COLA with a 1% mid-year increase and a third-year increase of 3%, EMT-B stipend was eliminated, EMT-P reduced to 9%. Includes updated education incentive, light-duty for injured employees and clarified language on sick leave. Considers this to be in line with 3% FinCom guidance.

Mr. Noone made a motion to recommend Article 14. Mr. Sullivan seconded.

Mr. Wellinghoff: What is the updated per FTE cost? If this is a three-year contract, does the additional funding need to be approved every year?

Mr. Noone estimates that the increase is 3% or a little bit higher and confirmed that the additional funding is approved only in the first year.

Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Noone summarized Article 15 which pertains to a collective bargaining agreement for police patrols. This is a 3-year contract with a 2% COLA on July 1st and a 1% mid-year increase for all years of the contract. Some of the annual stipends have been replaced with one-time wage adjustments. There are also changes in family sick leave language and other minor changes regarding detail rates to be comparable with other towns. In line with guidance from FinCom.

Mr. Noone made motion to recommend Article 15. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Noone summarized Article 16 which pertained to a collective bargaining agreement for police superiors. This is a 3-year contract with a 2% COLA on July 1st and a 1% midyear

increase. There are adjustments to the detail rate and the top end of the wage scale to be comparable with other communities. In line with FinCom guidance.

Mr. Noone made a motion to recommend Article 16. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Cole opened discussion regarding Article 6 and asked members to hold any items they would like to discuss further.

A: Hold

F:

Mr. Cole: The borrowing cost will come from the Sewer Enterprise Fund though the borrowing is general obligation. Does not see this as a town-wide issue unless members of the sewer district are not in favor.

Ms. Jones: Where is it specified that the cost will be paid by enterprise fund? Ms. Anderson clarified that it is noted in the warrant and the article motion.

Mr. Cole made a motion to recommend Article items B through F. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed 7-0-1 (Mr. Wellinghoff abstained)

Item A: Ms. Hogseth looking for cost-benefit analysis of installing heat pumps for the electrification project—what is the return on investment? Is there evidence that it is a financially sound project?

Mr. Cole: Are you assured of financial soundness because of Town's climate action plan? The Boardwalk schools were new builds and they cited a 7-11-year return on investment for the geothermal wells. Does not feel that we have the same level of evidence for this project.

Ms. Hogseth: No—does not think that people understood what the outcome of the vote to declare a climate emergency

Ms. Andersen: This is not just about the climate emergency, but the updated building stretch code previously approved by town meeting

Mr. Wellinghoff put in heat pumps a couple of years ago in his own home at 5% of cited cost of this project.

Mr. Cole made a motion not to recommend Article 6 Item A. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Cole: Article 11 was assigned to Mr. Lenz but he is not present. Mr. Cole read Mr. Lenz's prepared comments: This petition is fiscally sustainable, is a forward-looking step, and will improve operational facility. Article does not eliminate or diminish Citizens Library, but creates a more efficient and sustainable model.

Ms. Friedrichs: The Attorney General is planning to review this article. This will not be a simple home rule position and will come at a cost because town counsel will have to build a case

Mr. Noone: That happens regardless with the home rule process.

Mr. Cole made a motion to recommend Article 11. Mr. Noone seconded. Motion passed 4-0-4 (Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Jones, Ms. Hogseth, Mr. Wellinghoff abstained).

Mr. Sullivan: Article 14 is an opportunity to sell the parking lot in South Acton. The Select Board has a goal to generate development in that area. This was fought against by the church at previous Town Meeting, but the church is no longer there and the dance studio has moved. Mr. Sullivan sees this as an opportunity to get development into that area. Counter argument is that parking space is at a premium and is potentially problematic to give up. This could also set the precedent for future sales of properties.

Mr. Cole does not trust this article because it creates a blank check for the Select Board to act without any plan for Finance Committee review.

Mr. Sullivan made a motion to recommend Article 13. Mr. Bourdon seconded.

Ms. Andersen: Development necessitates parking and the parking lot is filling up. There is no place to park when visiting potential stores. The Select Board does not want to have to wait for future town meeting.

Mr. Cole is not opposed to having to call a future special town meeting

Motion did not pass: 3-3-2 (Ms. Jones and Mr. Wellinghoff abstained)

Mr. Cole made a motion to not recommend. Ms. Andersen seconded. Motion did not pass: 3-3-2 (Ms. Jones and Mr. Wellinghoff abstained).

Mr. Cole made a motion to take no position. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed 7-0-1 (Mr. Wellinghoff abstained).

Ms. Jones had new information regarding Article 31, but it did not change her recommendation to the committee.

Mr. Sullivan: Article 32 was previously voted on, but Mr. Sullivan has an amendment which delays enforcement of the bylaw until 2028, giving people more time to prepare.

Mr. Cole questioned if Mr. Sullivan is in favor of the article or not and Mr. Sullivan clarified that he is not supportive of the article, but if it is going to be approved he would like more time to prepare.

Mr. Bourdon questioned the cost to the town to purchase electric leaf blowers and Mr. Wellinghoff questioned the cost of enforcement.

Mr. Cole: Regarding Article 34 and the proposed check out bag minimum charge, there are pros and cons. One pro is the invisible hand to encourage people's behavior—since there is already a

plastic bag band, why not this? One con is that this could be the government trying to control how people behave—should the FinCom have a stance on this?

Ms. Andersen: paper bags are more expensive—this charge allows business owners to recoup some of this cost—but is also a regressive tax because it has a greater impact on people who have less money people

Mr. Bourdon: what revenue does this bring to the town? If there's no impact then why should the FinCom have stance?

Ms. Jones: Article has several exceptions where someone would not have to pay for a bag such as prescriptions, bakery items, bags to prevent things from thawing, bags protecting items from damage or loss. Since just the outside bag comes at a cost and there are so many exceptions, what would this bylaw actually apply to?

Ms. Hogseth prefers leaving the issue to the grocery stores to figure out. Concerned that this will discourage grocery stores from coming into town.

Mr. Cole made a motion not to recommend. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed 7-1-0.

Mr. Cole: Articles 37, 38 and 39 were assigned to Mr. Lenz, but he is not present. Mr. Cole read his comments: These articles are confusing and not fiscally clear. Town meeting cannot make a fiscal decision because it lacks detail. Even if approved, these articles will not restrict Town Manager action.

Mr. Cole made a motion not to recommend. Mr. Bourdon seconded. Motion passed 5-0-3 (Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Jones, and Mr. Wellinghoff abstained).

Mr. Cole: Article 40 relates to holding a workshop—request to have the Select Board go through more listening sessions before they apply for money. The goal is to ensure that there's adequate opportunity for the residents who want to be heard are heard. The only cost is only Select Board time. Article does not ask that Select Board hold up projects or spend additional money.

Ms. Andersen: Questions if this article is non-binding and whether there is a legal definition of a workshop which could present any conflicts or challenges. Also questions how many listening sessions the Select Board does already.

Mr. Cole: Could be called a listening session or something similar rather than a workshop.

Mr. Cole made motion to recommend. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed 7-0-1 (Ms. Jones abstained)

Mr. Noone: Regarding Article 7, there may be a motion by the Select Board to appropriate \$150,000 for studying how to proceed with the project

Mr. Cole: What is the deliverable? This amendment sounds vague. Do we want to give them additional money to move forward?

Mr. Wellinghoff: Has the \$1.225M been spent?

Mr. Mangiaratti: The Town is under contract and the design money spent, but there is some money available from OPM costs. The Select Board acknowledged that FinCom supported the project in concept, but is not supportive of this proposal. Board wants to fund a proposal that FinCom and community can be supportive of

Mr. Noone: Initial reaction was to not give any additional money. We can agree that something has to be done for employees, about the air quality, and that there's not enough vehicle storage, but don't agree on the size. For this to move forward the Select Board and FinCom need to be onboard.

Mr. Cole: What if the money is spent on community outreach to get the word out on the project? This would be concerning.

Mr. Sullivan: This project came up too quick and there are rumors flowing which could impact the project. What if schools decide to close the Conant School? What if the town took some of the space and property and moved the senior center where Conant is, revitalized property to be used as the senior center and split off part to solve DPW problems. There is a lot going on in town which could impact this project.

Mr. Cole: That property is owned by the schools and they would have to sell it to the town. Should we appropriate this funding or ask the town manager to find it in his budget? Mr. Bourdon, did you know what the project would be prior to the \$1.225 being appropriated at town meeting?

Mr. Bourdon: Knew it would be a building, but not necessarily scope of the project.

Mr. Sullivan feels that there as a gap of information which has resulted in a lot of questions this past Fall.

Mr. Noone: What about adding a condition that FinCom has to sign off on the project and what the money is spent on?

Mr. Mangiaratti: The Select Board will present to town meeting a plan for what the money will be spent on.

Mr. Cole suggested that they ask the moderator for time to discuss the amendment after the Select Board's presentation.

Mr. Wellinghoff: Does the \$150,000 create capacity in the \$1.225M design? If not, this creates the potential for spending additional money on design. Would \$150k automatically lead to having to do design all over again? Are we on board with that? Sticker shock.

Mr. Cole: Let's hear what the Select Board has to say, but not supportive of this at this time.

Ms. Andersen is not comfortable with taking any action on Article 3 at this time.

Mr. Cole made a motion to take no action. Mr. Sullivan seconded. Motion passed unanimously. 8-0-0

Mr. Cole made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Bourdon seconded. Motion passed unanimously at 6:28pm (8-0-0)