

## Call to Order

### Roll Call

Chair Moffitt called the meeting to order at 7:01p.m and initiated roll call. Through video conferencing mode, present were Chairperson Eugenie Moffitt-Y, Andrew Betts-Y, Linn Anderson-Y, Mary Ellen Logee-Y, Paul Monticciolo-Y, Kevin O’Handley-Y, John Barry-Y, Spiro Christopoulos-Y and Paul Russo-Y. Also present were Town Manager, Finance Director Donna Walsh and Assistant Town Manager Patrick Lawlor (all arrived later following Select Board meeting.) The meeting was videotaped.

### West Elementary School and Shawsheen Preschool Project – Paula Colby-Clements

Ms. Paula Colby-Clements updated the committee on the progress of the West Elementary and Shawsheen Preschool Projects (see attached PowerPoint presentation.) Highlights of the presentation follow:

- 1) The history and aging dysfunctional structures of both buildings and the need to replace or repair;
- 2) The project options that had been considered included code repair, addition and renovation and new construction in context of site strategy. After extensive analysis, new construction was the most appropriate option;
- 3) Enrollment projections and demographics that were included in the assessment of MSBA build-to-capacity;
- 4) Design and educational plan features and priorities were outlined for both the elementary programs and the Pre-K programs;
- 5) Broad community representation of focus groups in order to reach a broad cross section of the community in order to gather input on what the building should look like;
- 6) Focus groups were gathered throughout the fall to discuss four topics: a) educational planning; b) site design; c) exterior and interior design; d) MEP systems and sustainability. The educational planning included several staff meetings, dozens of interviews and questionnaires and focus group meetings. Site design included vehicular circulation, playgrounds, sports fields and outdoor classrooms. Exterior and interior design meetings discussed a balance of aesthetics, cost effectiveness and technical performance and included discussion of the materials to be used inside and out. The MEP systems included discussions about the mechanical, electrical and plumbing options;
- 7) 2021 project timeline was outlined, which includes community forums, obtaining cost estimates and submission of cost estimates to MSBA. The MSBA board meeting that will grant or deny approval of the cost will take place in April and they will issue what the reimbursement will be. A two-thirds approval vote at Town Meeting needs to take place and then a ballot vote will need to occur. If all goes as expected, the construction should take place in May 2022 and be completed by May 2024. The final demo OF the site would take place in 2023.

Discussion then ensued including the following highlights:

- a) The current entryway to the school on High Plain Rd. will be kept, but available only during dropoff and pickup times as well as emergency personnel at all times;
- b) In order to offset the cost of the entire project, and as the total campus is being repurposed, was consideration be given to selling off parts of the parcel that are no longer useful? Ms. Colby-Clements noted that the remaining land may likely be wetlands;
- c) Compliance with high energy efficiency standards among other schools in town was discussed as it relates to maintenance costs;
- d) MSBA guidelines that quantify the square footage permitted per estimated enrollment was discussed;
- e) Redistricting is expected when new schools come online;
- f) MSBA approval expected mid-April would stand even if date of town meeting is moved out due to COVID. If town meeting is pushed to the fall, the construction estimates may need to be recalculated;
- g) Functional life of the new school is estimated to be 50 years;
- h) Short-term lessons learned from pandemic have resulted in the new building design being technologically advanced, but building ac-caused functionality of school will be realized in technology-related advances, but not long-term building to accommodate social distance requirements is not justified;
- i) The current ballpark estimate of the project is \$145M, which includes everything from building costs to desks to fields. MSBA reimburses 42% of 'eligible' construction costs which translates to \$333/per square foot;
- j) Due to increased construction costs, the net realization is really 23% reimbursement. The eligible construction costs do not include desks and such;
- k) When approval obtained from MSBA, award is guaranteed; reconsideration to a later time not guaranteed if award is refused due to non-approval of Town Meeting;
- l) If the project is not approved by Town Meeting, it will be delayed which will result in higher construction costs in the future;
- m) Addressing concerns of voters ahead of Town Meeting via public forums is critical;
- n) Town Manager's integrated financial plan includes borrowing for this school project as well as the Pension Obligation Bond; and

- o) Public educational forums on West Elementary project and the Pension Obligation Bond for unfunded liability will be scheduled by Town Manager's office.

**Department of Public Works: First Reading Town Manager's CIP**

Mr. Christopulos stated that there were no extraordinary items in the DPW CIP but noted the following: a) an increase in the recycling line item of 203% due to circumstances beyond town's control; b) increased water treatment costs due to record high COVID-related "at home" water use; and c) no increase in personnel.

Mr. Christopulos noted that the two CIP related issues that have been delayed are stormwater management and road maintenance. While he acknowledges other items may be more pressing, he advised we "kick the can" down the road at our own peril because costs increase.

**Water Main Break Discussion – Mr. Cronin and Ms. Kruse**

Chair Moffitt invited Ms. Margaret Kruse, a private resident, to address the committee with regard to her recent emails concerning her cost-saving proposals that she believes would be realized by shortening the current 15-year schedule to replace water mains. She also raised the notion that addressing water main breaks by turning water off faster may minimize water loss and repair costs to adjacent properties (see attached emails.)

Mr. Cronin thanked Ms. Kruse for her input and made the following points:

- a) The current plan for water main replacement at 10 miles/year is aggressive, and the disruption this causes to residents is significant and consequently, there would be little appetite for residents to endure more disruption;
- b) The recent gas company disruptions caused to residents and the replacement of those mains were closer to the surface than water mains are so water main replacement would be disruptive;
- c) Additional work would need to be hired out and he has confidence in the in-house staff to handle these projects;
- d) Present water unaccounted for is 15% (not high for a system of its age) and DPW continue to target 10% loss each year;
- e) Water main breaks may be reported by residents but it is also noted at the water treatment plant and a trained technician is dispatched to turn shut the water main gate off, and untrained person may do more harm;
- f) An additional problem was encountered on the date of Ms. Kruse's complaint in that the utility pole was washed out requiring the utility company's assistance;
- g) Decision was made to not shut water off to residents during delay.

Discussion further ensued including the following highlights: a) whether this is within the purview of the Finance Committee; b) the savings that may be realized is of benefit to the town; c) water

problems in town are common like discolored water and pressure, and there may be appetite for inconvenience to rectify these problems; and d) water main damage caused by water main breaks is insurable but not water main break itself.

### **Integrated Financial Plan and Pension Obligation Bonds – Messrs. Betts and Russo**

Mr. Russo announced that the home rule petition filed with the state was signed by the Governor yesterday. The Town Manager reported that he is working with the Financial Adviser on debt projections and with the actuary on probability testing. Also being reviewed is the impact analysis on the operating budget of not going forward with the financial plans. This information will be available at the next meeting of the Finance Committee on January 27<sup>th</sup>.

The Town Manager discussed the probability of Town Meeting not going forward on the scheduled date of May 3 due to space concerns with the Collins Center and the field house. Rescheduling to a future date to accommodate social distancing at an outdoor good-weather setting is likely, similar to the previous September 12<sup>th</sup> Town Meeting, given that a meeting with two big financial articles will result in a large number of voter turnout. . He believes the MSBA will allow this extension on its award. He will meet with the Select Board on making a decision on town meeting.

### **Liaison Updates**

Ms. Anderson reported she had spoken with Jon Stumpf, former chairman of the Finance Committee, and sends his regards and thanks to the committee.

#### *Permanent Town Building Advisory Committee*

Ms. Anderson reported she had included in the dropbox budget summaries and contingency funds on the Senior Center and Ballardvale Fire Station projects.

#### *School Committee*

Mr. Barry reported the Preliminary School Budget is in the dropbox. A School Committee presentation is expected. He also noted the hiring of the interim superintendent, Claudia Bach. Mr. Christopulos asked that the presentation address current real estate holdings to offset costs of upcoming school projects.

#### *Open Space Task Force*

Mr. Betts reported that the task force is looking to identifying parcels of land along the Shawsheen River that have no good commercial use for the purpose of developing a contiguous path along the river for walking, boat launches, etc.

#### *Police and Fire*

Mr. Monticciolo reported that the Fire Chief will make his presentation to the committee on February 10 and is reaching out to Police Chief to deliver a budget presentation.

#### *Audit Committee*

Mr. Russo reported that the auditor has completed the Financials as of June 30, 2020 which are posted on the website.

**Town Manager – Mid Year Review**

The Town Manager gave an overview of the tax presentation he gave to the Select Board earlier in the evening. He will present the same information to the committee at its next meeting. Mr. Lawlor noted that the Revenue and Expenditure Task Force at its last meeting voted to assess new growth at a ten-year ‘adjusted’ average which is the 2019 ten year average, plus adjustments based on high personal property growth of the past two years.

**Approval of Minutes – December 2, 2020**

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Russo and seconded by Mr. Barry, it was voted to approve the above minutes. Chairperson Eugenie Moffitt-Y, Andrew Betts-Y, Linn Anderson-Y, Mary Ellen Logee-Y, Spiro Christopoulos-Y, Kevin O’Handley-Y, John Barry-Y, Paul Monticciolo-A and Paul Russo-Y. Motion passed 7-0 with Mr. Monticciolo abstaining.

**Next Meetings**

Wednesday, January 27

Wednesday, February 10 and 24

Chair Moffitt reviewed the timeline for the Finance Committee report based on a May 3 Town Meeting. If May 3<sup>rd</sup> date holds, the Fincom book would be due to the printer on April 5<sup>th</sup>. She also stated that departmental budget reviews will be within the above timeframe as well as an all department session on Saturday, March 6<sup>th</sup>. The Town Manager may provide an abbreviated budget on January 25<sup>th</sup> in accordance with the May 3 timeframe for town meeting.

**Adjournment**

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Christopoulos and seconded by Mr. Barry, it was unanimously voted to adjourn. Chair Eugenie (Janie) Moffitt-Y, Linn Anderson-Y, Andrew Betts-Y, Mary Ellen Logee-Y, John Barry-Y, Paul Monticciolo-Y, Paul Russo-Y, Kevin O’Handley-Y and Mr. Christopoulos-Y. Motion passed 8-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:40PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Martin Barraford  
Recording Secretary

*Attachments:*

*Ms. Colby Clements Presentation on School Projects*

*Ms. Kruse emails with regard to water main discussion*