

**TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH**

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AMENDED**FINANCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE – MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, March 5, 2024 – 6:00 PM

Select Board Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Rapa, Chair
Susan Sartori, Vice Chair
Ken Picard, Clerk
Scott Stocklin
Robert Babcock
Jonathan Rea

MEMBERS ABSENT: NA

TOWN: Timothy McInerney, Town Administrator
Jason Little, Finance Director
Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works

OTHER: NA

The meeting was called to order at 6:08 p.m. by Committee Chair, John Rapa.

Newly appointed member, Jonathan Rea, joined the meeting at 6:10 p.m., having just been officially sworn in.

1. Public Comment

There were no comments from the public.

2. Approval of Minutes: February 27, 2024

Motion to Approve Meeting Minutes from February 27, 2024, as Submitted without Modification: Initiated by Susan Sartori.

Motion Seconded: By Ken Picard.

Vote: John Rapa called for a vote to approve the February 27, 2024, Meeting Minutes; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting "aye."

3. DPW FY2025 Capital Requests (Presented by Scott Charpentier)

Scott Charpentier introduced the DPW's FY25 Capital Requests (please see details below), highlighting the inclusion of a Facilities Division within the Public Works Department. This addition, established last fiscal year, aims for a proactive management approach. The division's first-year focus was to assess the condition of municipal assets, leading to a comprehensive facility condition assessment funded by ARPA in 2023. This assessment detailed necessary replacements and maintenance for various building systems noting, for example, many facilities still use their original HVAC systems from when they were first built.

(Please see the DPW FY2025 Capital Request Detail Sheets attached or click [HERE](#) to view online.)

- **Facility HVAC Upgrades / Modernization**

Scott Charpentier discussed the HVAC upgrades Capital Request for FY25 of \$250,000 for town buildings like the police station, library, and senior center, highlighting the shift towards addressing these needs due to a lack of proactive maintenance in the past. He mentioned the facilities division's achievements, including a comprehensive facility condition assessment funded by ARPA funds, revealing the urgent need for equipment replacements due to age and wear. The plan involves a systematic approach to updating these systems, allowing flexibility in allocation based on emerging needs, rather than committing funds to specific replacements prematurely.

- **Police Station Siding Replacement**

Scott Charpentier discussed the need for exterior work at the police station, specifically siding replacement, and painting, initially considered for last year's capital plan. The idea originated in 2018, with a proposal to utilize the Sheriff's Department's work release program for labor, a plan halted by COVID-19. Subsequent assessments revealed extensive damage to the building's clapboard, necessitating a combined \$200,000 request for FY25 to address clapboard replacement or new siding installation. The approach will be determined after a detailed evaluation, considering various material options and the building's condition.

- **Fire Station Brick Pointing**

Scott Charpentier discussed the fire station's brick pointing Capital Request for FY25 of \$80,000. The fire station at 11 Pierce Street requires attention due to deteriorating mortar joints that are causing water intrusion, particularly affecting areas with vital equipment. A masonry assessment recommended sealing the entire building to prevent further damage. The assessment was conducted by a reputable firm experienced in historic restoration. To ensure professional oversight and address liability concerns, technical specifications for the necessary work would be developed by an architect, focusing on preparation, repointing, and sealing processes.

- **Roadway Improvements / Maintenance**

Scott Charpentier explained that roadway improvement and maintenance has consistently been featured in the capital plan since 2014, underscoring ongoing efforts to evaluate and upgrade the town's road network. A townwide pavement condition assessment conducted biennially informs a three-year capital improvement strategy, adjusting for real-time needs beyond initial predictions. Notable projects include comprehensive work on Whitney Street and Forbes, addressing critical areas essential for local businesses and connectivity. Funding combines Chapter 90 allocations, operating budget resources, and the Capital Request for FY25 of \$310,000, aiming to maintain and gradually improve the town's roadway grade, which is currently at a 76 (Grade C). The town's commitment as a Complete Streets Community further ensures multimodal transportation enhancements, integrating sidewalk reconstruction in relevant projects.

John Rapa inquired if the pavement inventory is accessible online for public review, including the condition of individual streets. Scott Charpentier confirmed that both the pavement and sidewalk management reports are available on the Town of Northborough's website, offering detailed, street-by-street insights. Additionally, Scott Charpentier mentioned the annual paving program updates are also posted online. However, finalizing this year's crack seal roads is pending a dry day for proper evaluation, with hopes to publish the updates by next week.

Please click [HERE](#) to access these reports online.

- **Drainage / Sidewalk Improvement Program**

Scott Charpentier explained that last year, the capital plan included separate allocations for drainage and sidewalk improvements, alternating \$300,000 each year. However, this structure lacked flexibility for emergencies. To improve this, the two items were merged into a single \$300,000 annual allocation, allowing for immediate response to urgent needs in either category. This approach enables systematic repair of neighborhoods with significant drainage issues, identified through detailed inspections in 2019, alongside necessary sidewalk repairs. The plan aims for phased repairs to ensure comprehensive infrastructure improvement.

- **Enclosed Public Safety Trailer**

The current public safety trailer, acquired in 2014, proved its versatility during the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting various community health initiatives like vaccination clinics and testing sites. However, Scott Charpentier explained further, its use highlighted specific functional limitations for community events. The proposed replacement, that would be covered by the Capital Request for FY25 of \$95,000, aims to incorporate these learnings, featuring improved access, better amenities like air conditioning, heat, secured storage, and enhanced safety features, including a more practical entryway and an awning to facilitate outdoor activities, offering a more suitable setup for both emergency response and community events.

Ken Picard inquired about reutilizing the current public safety trailer. Scott Charpentier confirmed that the existing trailer would be repurposed once the new one was available, ensuring no loss of emergency functionality. The lead time for the new trailer is estimated to be 9 to 15 months.

- **Bucket Truck Replacement**

Public Works has unique operational needs that differ from those of smaller contractors, especially regarding tree maintenance. Scott Charpentier explained further, unlike a small tree service that might pause operations to repair equipment, Public Works must maintain continuous service for public safety, such as clearing fallen trees from roads after storms. To ensure uninterrupted service, they're proposing to replace an aging bucket truck with a long lead time for procurement, emphasizing the necessity of having reliable, operational equipment ready at all times due to their inability to halt services during repairs. The bucket truck replacement Capital Request for FY25 is \$330,000.

- **Sidewalk Plow Replacement**

To enhance Northborough's snow removal capabilities, Scott Charpentier presented a Capital Request for FY25 of \$300,000 to replace the 2012 sidewalk plow, crucial for clearing sidewalks after snowstorms. This acquisition will complement the existing 2016 sidewalk plow the DPW uses. Due to the specialized nature of these plows, sourcing parts for repairs can be challenging and time-consuming. A reliable, updated plow ensures readiness during critical snow removal periods. Additionally, the inclusion of a flail head attachment will improve roadside brush management, addressing growth accelerated by climate change. This upgrade ensures efficient year-round maintenance of sidewalks and roadsides.

Susan Sartori inquired about the impact of added mowing tasks on the longevity of sidewalk plows. Scott Charpentier assured her that mowing wouldn't affect the lifespan of the machine negatively, highlighting winter conditions as more detrimental due to exposure to salt and extensive operation times after snowfalls. Sue Sartori also asked if there would be a need for additional plows in the future. Scott Charpentier believes that two sidewalk plows are sufficient, explaining that they are currently capable of clearing about 70% of town sidewalks. Scott Charpentier doesn't foresee the need for a third plow in the near future.

- **Hook Lift Truck**

Scott Charpentier discussed the last DPW Capital Request of FY25 for \$340,000, a new hook lift truck. Scott Charpentier explained that the hook lift would be the first new vehicle addition to the DPW fleet in a long time. The aim is to leverage the durability of existing chassis, like the F750, by repurposing them for various uses. Hook lifts are adaptable, equipped with a large hook arm capable of attaching different bodies depending on the need. This versatility is expected to minimize the need for acquiring and repurposing additional vehicles in the future.

John Rapa inquired about the specific attachments planned for the new hook lift truck, referring to its versatile configuration. Scott Charpentier detailed the inclusion of a standard dump, a flatbed, and a material (mulch) body for the hook lift, highlighting its role in enhancing fleet flexibility and efficiency. The significant cost increase to \$340,000

from previous financial trends was attributed to these additional bodies. Scott Charpentier explained the strategic shift towards a hook lift system for its economic advantage and versatility, emphasizing its potential to reduce future vehicle acquisition costs by utilizing attachments for various operational needs, such as catch basin cleaning. This approach aligns with efforts to streamline DPW operations and ensure cost-effectiveness.

Jonathan Rea questioned whether the proposed hook lift truck would replace current fleet vehicles, to which Scott Charpentier, Director of Public Works, replied it would not; and secondly, Jonathan Rea inquired about the \$95,000 proposed trailer and if it could be used for emergency vaccine distribution, to which Scott Charpentier confirmed it could.

4. Water & Sewer FY2025 Capital Requests (Presented by Scott Charpentier)

(Please reference the Capital Budget FY2025 attached or click [HERE](#) to view online for details on Water & Sewer FY2025 Capital Requests.)

- **Sewer Inflow and Infiltration (I&I)**

In the Water and Sewer Division, Scott Charpentier explained, the issue of infiltration and inflow (I&I) poses significant challenges. Inflow refers to surface water incorrectly entering the sewer system, while infiltration is groundwater entering through pipe gaps or manholes. Addressing I&I is crucial for reducing unnecessary water treatment and complying with Mass DEP regulations. A 15-year plan with annual budget allocations supports sewer system investigations, including video inspections and smoke testing. This \$380,000 request, marking the third year of elimination efforts, aims to repair identified leaks, benefiting community capacity and economic development by conserving sewer plant discharge limits.

John Rapa inquired about how water flow into Marlborough is measured and tracked, specifically questioning the means of determining the 500,000 gallons transferred daily. Scott Charpentier clarified that a magnetic meter at the Hudson Street Pump Station monitors nearly all the town's water flow, except for specific areas like the Bartlett Street warehouses and Algonquin Regional High School. This meter, inspected and calibrated annually, ensures compliance with state regulations. During COVID-19, they observed significant increases in both sewer and water flows, impacting financials due to the billing structure with the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). Susan Sartori inquired about what would happen if the town was found to be in violation of the regulations. Scott Charpentier responded by emphasizing the importance of maintaining capacity within regulatory limits to avoid fines or violations from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), highlighting the value of a robust maintenance program.

- **One Ton Utility Truck with Plow**

Scott Charpentier introduced the last Water and Sewer Capital Request for FY25 of \$140,000 for a utility truck. Given their constant use, including daily driving and snow

plowing, these trucks have a lifespan of around 12 years. Unlike personal vehicles that might see less frequent use, these utility trucks are essential, often idling at job sites to power various equipment. For instance, police cars are replaced every five years due to their rigorous use, a much shorter cycle than what a typical car owner might expect. The current utility truck features a steel body, chosen for durability but susceptible to quicker rusting. The school district has shown interest in repurposing the current vehicle. In late 2023, they inquired about acquiring retired trucks from the DPW. Scott Charpentier mentioned that while they're open to transferring these vehicles to the school district at their trade-in value, it's important to remember that these trucks are phased out due to their need for significant repairs. Hence, the school district should be prepared for additional costs beyond the trade-in value.

Scott Charpentier discussed plans to trade in the current truck, expecting a dealership trade-in value between \$10,000 to \$15,000. However, for 2025, the truck won't be traded in at a dealership but sold directly to the school, requiring an upfront expenditure. Jason Little clarified the financial arrangements, noting the school initially allocated \$20,000 in their capital plan for this purchase, reflecting last week's discussions. This amount was listed against the vehicle's cost of \$120,000, although \$20,000 falls below the capital plan threshold. The arrangement shifted when it was decided the regional school district would fund the truck, altering the capital plan slightly. Jason Little mentioned he would distribute a revised capital plan draft to correct a typo and show the \$120,000 funded by Enterprise fund free cash, with \$20,000 from other sources, accounting for the regional school district's payment. This payment from the region, a separate legal entity, would effectively reimburse the water and sewer funds, making the transaction a wash in transfer pricing. Jason Little acknowledged the complexity of the transaction despite its seemingly straightforward nature, inviting any questions.

John Rapa inquired about any surprises in the 2023 facility condition assessment report, particularly regarding the state of the roofs and vehicles. Scott Charpentier admitted he was surprised by the condition of the roofs, having expected them to be in better shape since they weren't leaking, and noted that the age of mechanical systems was anticipated due to the lack of proactive maintenance prior to establishing a facilities division. On the subject of vehicles, Scott Charpentier explained that they follow a structured rotation schedule. The department has 10 large trucks, replacing one every other year for a lifecycle of approximately 20 years, and seven midsize trucks (F600s), replacing one every other year on alternating schedules with the large trucks for about 12-14 years of service each. Scott Charpentier highlighted a specific example of repurposing an older truck with a new asphalt hot box, emphasizing the challenging conditions such vehicles endure.

The discussion continued with **Ken Picard** asking about the apparent singular listing of an emergency generator in the town's assets on the provided spreadsheet, wondering if there were more. Scott Charpentier confirmed there were multiple generators, explaining that the listed one was for the police station. Scott Charpentier noted that the Town Hall's generator was replaced in 2017 following basement flood damage, which was covered by insurance. Scott Charpentier further detailed that all sewer pump stations now have emergency generators as mandated by the EPA, and a new

generator was recently installed at the water garage. Scott Charpentier mentioned a generator at the highway garage but highlighted issues with it not supporting the fuel island or salt shed due to it being on a different electrical phase. Ken Picard questioned the absence of a three-phase generator for the entire DPW garage campus, to which Scott Charpentier agreed was a problem. Scott Charpentier mentioned the town has a portable generator compatible with multiple facilities, including Town Hall and the Hudson Street pump station, and clarified there are backup generators at the senior center and the library as well.

John Rapa had one last question for Scott Charpentier regarding \$800,000 earmarked for the dam removal on Reservoir Street and whether it's being delayed. Scott Charpentier confirmed that the dam removal project has been postponed to the next year, expressing hope that state funding would support the dam removal project. He explained the extensive permitting process and mentioned an 80% grant already received for the design and permitting stages, anticipating similar state support for the construction phase.

John Rapa inquired about potential emergencies related to the dam within the next year. Scott Charpentier assured the committee there was no immediate concern, detailing their regular inspections and the ongoing environmental impact report phase. Scott Charpentier anticipated significant community input during local conservation commission reviews, where residents' attachment to the pond rather than the dam itself would become apparent.

Robert Babcock asked whether the dam was a joint ownership between Northborough, Shrewsbury, and Boylston, to which Scott Charpentier explained it solely belongs to the Town of Northborough, historically serving as a drinking water reservoir. Scott Charpentier continued to clarify that the town owns the dam, water body, and surrounding land up to the high-water mark.

5. Review Updated Capital Plan (Presented by Jason Little)

Jason Little highlighted changes in the capital plan that had been reviewed by the school committee, noting adjustments like the deferment of police cars and the inclusion of fire equipment to be discussed in future meetings. John Rapa and Susan Sartori expressed interest in the significant capital requests, particularly the Peasley School feasibility study, potentially funded by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), noting its impact on borrowing costs. They discussed the importance of state reimbursements and the reliability of MSBA's funding.

Ken Picard inquired about the total capital budget and its funding sources, clarifying the use of free cash among other sources. Scott Charpentier's DPW projects were confirmed to be largely funded by free cash from the general and Enterprise funds.

Susan Sartori suggested discussing the possibility of using ARPA funds to offset some capital expenses, particularly the fire rescue vehicle. Jason Little explained the constraints due to ARPA's timeline and the lead times for fire equipment. The conversation concluded with an

acknowledgment of the need to explore ARPA funds further, considering upcoming significant projects and their impact on the town's finances.

(Please see the Capital Budget FY2025 attached or click [HERE](#) to view online.)

6. Review Meeting Schedule and 7. Next Meeting Date – March 12, 2024

John Rapa announced that there are two upcoming meetings next week: one with the Community Preservation to review the capital budget on March 12, 2024, and another on March 19, 2024, for discussions on police and fire departments, followed by a joint meeting with the Select Board on March 25, 2024. Attendance at the Select Board meeting is optional, leading up to the town meeting on April 22, 2024. John Rapa emphasized the opportunity for further review and encouraged committee members to revisit the material, reflect on it, and forward any arising questions to Tim McInerney for proper redirection. John Rapa shared how involvement with the committee has altered his perception of the town, suggesting members will also view town infrastructure differently through their engagement. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 12, 2024, at 6:00 p.m., with the exception of the Select Board meeting on March 25, 2024, which starts at 7:00 p.m.

The committee unanimously agreed on the next meeting date of March 12, 2024, confirming the start time of 6:00 p.m.

8. Any Other Business to Come Before the Committee

John Rapa asked if there were any further questions or business to address.

Susan Sartori inquired about the deadline for submitting their report to the Board of Selectmen. Jason Little explained that the report is typically finalized at the committee's last meeting, with the chair working with administration to prepare it for inclusion in the town meeting book, though the exact deadline for submission was unclear.

Susan Sartori also asked whether funding mechanisms could change after the warrant is closed. Jason Little clarified that closing the warrant only prevents the addition of new articles, not changes to funding mechanisms.

Tim McInerney added that while the warrant gives notice of the topics for the meeting, the details of funding sources are determined through motions, which could be adjusted up until the town meeting.

John Rapa mentioned an additional meeting would occur just before the town meeting commences to finalize details.

Ken Picard requested clarification on the audience for their report, confirming it's meant for the town body, not specifically the Board of Selectmen, though there's an advisory component to both the board and town meeting.

Jason Little further explained that the warrant might list a menu of funding options to provide flexibility in finalizing the funding mechanism through motions at the town meeting.

Susan Sartori appreciated this approach, acknowledging it provides necessary flexibility, especially in cases like funding discussions for the firetruck last year.

Jason Little recounted a past instance where specific wording in the warrant limited funding options, emphasizing the importance of flexibility.

Susan Sartori also reminded everyone that their role is advisory to the Appropriations Committee as well, ensuring their recommendations align with broader town financial planning.

The conversation concluded with an invitation for any additional business.

There was no further business presented to the committee.

Adjournment

Motion to Adjourn Meeting: Initiated by Ken Picard.

Motion Seconded: By Susan Sartori.

Vote: John Rapa called for a vote to adjourn; it resulted in unanimous approval with all present members voting "aye."

Meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Angie Sowden
Executive Assistant to the
Town Administrator / Select Board

Link to recorded meeting online:

[Financial Planning Committee Meeting – Tuesday, March 5, 2024](#)

Documents used during the meeting:

- [March 5, 2024, Meeting Agenda](#)
- [February 27, 2027, Meeting Minutes](#)
- [DPW Capital Requests Detail Sheets](#)
- [Updated Draft Capital Plan FY25 \(Reflects Water & Sewer Requests\)](#)
- [Financial Planning Committee Proposed Meeting Schedule](#)

