

SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES –March 11, 2024

7:00 p.m. - Chair's Introduction to Remote Meeting

SB Chair Cohen read the current remote meeting notice and confirmed the following Select Board members and others could hear and be heard.

Select Board (SB)

Mitch Cohen, Chair

Kristen Wixted, Vice Chair

Laura Ziton, Clerk

Julianne Hirsh

Lisa Maselli

Others

Diane Wackell, Assistant Town Administrator

Jason Little, Finance Director

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Cohen invited comments from the public. There were none.

7:00 pm – PUBLIC HEARING STREET ACCEPTANCE – HARRINGTON LANE

To consider the layout and acceptance of Harrington Lane as a public way.

Planning Director Laurie Connors informed the Board that Harrington Lane has been constructed but there are a number of minor issues that still need to be addressed by the developer and his engineer prior to conveyance of the roadway to the Town. The developer Craig Callahan, his attorney Eric Weinstein, and his architect Vito Colonna were present to answer any questions. The Planning Board recommends that the Select Board layout Harrington Lane and place the roadway acceptance on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant. If the developer does not complete the outstanding items by April 15, 2024, the Planning Board recommends passing over the Article at Town Meeting and repeating the public acceptance process next year.

Chair Cohen invited comments from the public.

Robert Licht, Historic District Commission (HDC) Chair, called in as a reminder that there is a bylaw that street names need to be approved by the HDC. He added that this street was fine because it was on their list but just wanted to make them aware.

Maselli moved the Board vote to close the Public Hearing; Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	“aye”	Maselli	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Ziton	“aye”		

Ziton moved the Board vote to approve the layout and acceptance of Harrington Lane as a public way pursuant to Northborough Code 9-64-010 and to place an article on the 2024 Annual Town Meeting Warrant for its public acceptance; Hirsh seconded the motion; The roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	“aye”	Maselli	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Ziton	“aye”		

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – January 22, 2024, February 12, 2024

These minutes were not ready for review therefore this item was passed over.

FIRE CHIEF – UPDATE ON FIRE STATION BUILDING PROJECT

Fire Chief Parenti and Dawn Rand, FSBC Chair, were present. The Chief also invited Chair Cohen to participate as an FSBC member.

The Chief provided a presentation to update the Board on the project. He reviewed the history of the current building and provided a timeline for the project from 2012 to present. He discussed the next steps, which include a Special Town Meeting tentatively scheduled for October 7, 2024, with a debt exclusion vote on the November 5th presidential ballot.

The Chief discussed the hard costs which are construction and alternate costs. He indicated that the estimated total construction hard cost is in the range of \$33 – \$37.6 million. The soft costs are furnishings, fees, and contingency. The estimated total soft cost is in the range of \$43 – \$49.9 million. The estimated total project cost is in the range of \$43 – \$49.9 million. Both the Chief and the Chair pointed out that the estimated cost assumes the most expensive options are used to make the calculations. The Committee will continue to reevaluate the options.

After a brief discussion with the members, the Chair entertained questions from the public. Michael Tietjen, 30 Auger Ave – suggested that rather than relocate the 911 memorial on Pleasant Street, they should reach out to Port Authority to see if they can obtain one of the artifacts from ground zero. The Chief replied that there is not much left otherwise they would have done that. He believes that where the 911 statue is located not, there is not much exposure. He has reached out to the Scouts to make the request.

FINANCE DIRECTOR – UPDATE ON FY25 BUDGET PROCESS AND STATUS OF FY24 BUDGET

Jason Little provided an update on the Fiscal Year 2025 Municipal SB Budget for Northborough. Key points include:

- The budget development is behind schedule due to personnel changes, with the final budget hearing scheduled for March 25, 2024, and the Annual Town Meeting on April 22, 2024.
- Community demographics highlight a population of over 15,600, with an average home value of \$624,468 and an average tax bill of \$8,917.
- The budget outlook notes economic uncertainties, a 1.46% increase in local aid from the Governor's Budget, and challenges in maintaining level services amidst increasing school budget requests and fixed costs.
- New revenues include a Proposition 2½ increase, new growth revenue, and increased state aid, totaling "new" revenue of \$2,473,518.
- Expenditures reflect requests for increased school budgets, town budget fixed cost increases, and new positions in various departments, leading to a total town budget increase of 7.82%.

- The capital plan includes requests for police and fire department equipment, DPW facilities and highway improvements, and school department projects, with a significant portion funded by free cash and tax levy.
- Reserves are maintained within the 5-10% policy limit, with a stabilization fund balance of \$5,674,690 as of December 2023.
- Tax impact scenarios are provided, with a proposed 7.0% increase or \$626 to the average single-family home value, and other considerations for budget increases.

The town has a population of 15,667 and an average single-family home value (ASFHV) of \$624,468. With a per capita income of \$64,398, Northborough's average tax bill was \$8,917, representing a tax effort of 14.26%. This places Northborough at rank 70 among surrounding municipalities, indicating its relative position in terms of tax burden and property value within the region.

Members thanked Mr. Little for providing a simple, easy to follow budget presentation.

CLOSE TOWN MEETING WARRANT

The Chair reviewed the draft town meeting warrant containing 65 articles, including reports, and one citizen's petition.

Ms. Wackell informed the Board that the Community Preservation Committee Chair and the Planning Board Chair were invited to attend a future meeting to discuss each of their warrant articles in more detail, so if you have any questions, please hold off until they meet with the Board.

Article 1–13 – Relate to Deputy Moderator/Operating Budgets

No questions

Articles 14 – Relates to Senior Tax Relief

Every year, the state increases some of the thresholds and maximum deferrals allowed for seniors. The board asked Jason for proposed language and requested this to be a standard recurring article to always keep up with the state increases.

Article 15 – Relates to litigation regarding the Marlborough sewer case

The Chair noted that this is a placeholder for a case that may get resolved by town meeting. If it does not, this article will be passed over.

Article 16 – Relates to a status report on the Fire Station Building Project

It was decided that since this is not an article and does not require a vote, it should be moved to the end of the warrant.

Articles 17 – 32 – Relate to Capital Budget requests for various equipment and building projects
Hirsh and Maselli raised questions on article 20. The Chair noted that the purpose of this agenda item is to close the list of warrant articles. He suggested that the two members should set up a meeting with the Town Administrator and the Police Chief to discuss their concerns.

Article 33 – Relates to Feasibility Study at Peaslee Elementary School

The Town may be eligible for a grant from the Massachusetts School Board Authority (MSBA)

Articles 34–36 – Relate to Solar Power Lease and Purchase Agreements for the Roofs of Proctor, Lincoln and Zeh Elementary Schools

The Chair noted these are not borrowing requests, just approval to move forward with the lease agreement.

Article 37 – Relates to the Consolidated Personnel Bylaw

No comments

Articles 38–39 – Relate to Amendments to Appropriations and Financial Planning Committees

The Board decided to remove these articles from the warrant to allow for further discussion and review.

Article 40 – Relates to the Creation of a Health Human Services Department

No comments

Article 41 – Relates to authorization to fund spaces for public parking

The members would like to see more details provided for this article in the warrant.

Articles 42–48 – Relate to CPC articles

CPC Chair will present these articles at future meeting

Article 49 – Relates to recission of authorized, unused debt for various capital projects

Members were pleased to see this article on the warrant.

Articles 50 – 63 – Relate to Zoning Bylaw Articles

Planning Board Chair will present these articles at future meeting

Articles 64 – Relates to Street Acceptances

No comments

Articles 65 – Reports

Following the review of the draft town meeting warrant, the Chair confirmed that the only changes made to this document were as follows:

- moved article 16, status report on the fire station building project, to the end of the warrant
- removed articles 38 and 39 from this draft, regarding amendments to the Appropriations and Financial Planning Committees

Wixted moved the Board vote to close the town meeting warrant; Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	“aye”	Maselli	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Ziton	“aye”		

REPORTS

Lisa Maselli

- Extend a warm congratulations to Edgar Blanchette on becoming the Commander of Northborough VFW. The VFW supports many fundraisers for townwide organizations such as the Boys and Girl Scouts. They also host an open mike night on Wednesdays. Their Instagram account is @vfp234 for more information.
- We have had a ground swell of new volunteers coming forward in the last couple of weeks. Jeff Knight for Appropriations, Rob Babcock, Ken Picard, Jonathan Rae, Susan Satori, and Scott Stocklin for Finance Committee. Thank you all for offering your time and expertise to help us spend our money.
- There are still many openings for other committees, please go to the town website and see what committees you have interests in. Not only is it a great way for newcomers to meet their co-residents, it may create a new direction for the vision of Northborough.
- Feb 29: Suzy Ceslica planned a Be Kind opportunity for residents to meet selectpersons Lisa and Laura at the C'est la Vie Bistro, whose owner is always at the ready to give back to the town. The concerns were the lack of sidewalks throughout town, the projected cost of the new fire station project and Laura will talk a bit more about this event.
- Appropriations Committee met and the new Police Chief reviewed his budget and mentioned the possibility of a Comfort Pup for the station and certain calls. The Senior Center Director, Kendra, also reviewed her budget and listed the many programs and opportunities the center has offered. The Friends of the Seniors donated a large sum of money to help with expenses there and this year there will be more events for residents to enjoy. The interim Health Director and Library Director reviewed their budgets and additional information with grace and articulation.
- March 7: Appropriations met again and the CPC, Finance and the IT department gave their budget presentations.
- And the unveiling of our new monitors in the selectboard room indicate that hybrid meetings are coming soon.

Laura Zitton

- Would like to see estimates before the start of a project to avoid big surprises.
- Participated in the coffee hour coordinated by Community Affairs. A suggestion that was brought up was why not hold municipal elections on a Saturday.
- Attended Financial Planning Committee meeting – reviewing projects.
- Thanked all the volunteers who helped with the State primaries.
- Asked if the clickers were all set for town meeting.

Julianne Hirsh

- Sustainable Northborough is hosting a walk at Edmund Hill Woods on Saturday, April 6th at 10:00 am, led by a conservationist from Sudbury Valley Trustees
- Reminder: under the reappointment policy, the deadline to reapply for boards, committees and commissions is March 15th.

Kristen Wixted

- The Town Hall Feasibility Committee – waiting for final numbers from ICON, the architects, on what the costs of the building could be so the committee is trying to schedule the next

meeting for March 27th to vote to make recommendation to the select board about which building proposal makes the most sense for the town.

- Historical Society is looking for new members
- Scholarship Committee applications for the Northborough scholarship are due by March 15th.
- Also, Scholarship Committee has one vacancy. Their next meeting is March 20th at the Library at 6:30 pm.
- Looking forward to talking about ARPA funding again.
- Norm Corbin wrote an interesting article for the Community Advocate about 4 West Main Street that everyone should read.
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Mitch Cohen

- Northborough Power Choice public input process concludes Wednesday, March 15th. Encouraged anyone that has input or wants to read about it to go to the town website and click on the link.
- Regarding hybrid meetings, March 25th could possibly be the board's first hybrid meeting.

Assistant Town Administrator Report

- The Joint Public Hearing of the Select Board and Board of Health is on Monday, March 18th. The full report regarding the HHS consolidation can be found on the front page of the Town website.

EXECUTION OF CEMETERY DEED 1184 & 1185

Ms. Hirsh moved the Board vote to execute Cemetery Deeds 1184 and 1185; Zitton seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	"aye"	Maselli	"aye"
Wixted	"aye"	Cohen	"aye"
Zitton	"aye"		

OTHER BUSINESS

PUBLIC COMMENT

SB Chair Cohen invited comments from the public. There were none.

ADJOURNMENT

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to adjourn; SB Member Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	"aye"	Maselli	"aye"
Wixted	"aye"	Cohen	"aye"
Zitton	"aye"		

The meeting adjourned at 10:52 pm.

A recording of this meeting is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEBbR-XDJ8&list=PL2mWMhvXDP2jbO2c8kLs09TR8zry9oUyV&index=3>

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda LePoer
Executive Assistant to the
Board of Selectmen

Documents used during meeting:

1. March 11, 2024 Meeting Agenda
2. Street Acceptance Packet –Harrington Lane
3. PDF Presentation – Fire Station Building Committee
4. PDF presentation - FY2025 Budget
5. Draft Town Meeting Warrant
6. Cemetery Deeds 1184 & 1185