

Town of Lunenburg



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Lunenburg Finance Committee MINUTES June 8, 2023

Location: In-person at Lunenburg Town Hall and broadcast on Zoom

Present: Chairperson Evan Watters, Chris Menard, Tom Gray, Tom Balish

Guests: Dr. Kate Burnham, Superintendent, Michael Cassidy, Lunenburg Public Schools Business Manager

1. Mr. Watters called the meeting to order at 7:03pm

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Announcements and Public Comment

Brian Lehtinen introduced himself as the new liaison from the School Committee to the Finance Committee.

Rhonda Lizzio, 181 Reservoir Rd., said she recalled Mr. Jefferies mention there was heat damage occurring at the Primary School due to it being designed to retain heat and that she recalled problems with the fire alarms in that building a few years ago and that some investment was made to either repair or replace that she believed was also due to excessive humidity. She wanted to know if the project being put forward addresses those issues and if not, who is protecting the tax payers investment.

4. Town Manager / Finance Director Report – no update

5. New Business

a. Primary School air conditioning project

Dr. Burnham referenced the letter provided to the Finance Committee saying it outlines the proposed approach to accomplishing, at least to some degree, the original town

meeting vote approving the AC project. She said when they did more exploration following that town meeting a year ago that the engineers gave cost estimates that were in the millions and not the hundreds of thousands so they had to reassess to work within the available funding to accomplish the goal of air conditioning in the building. The proposal outlined is to use mini split ductless systems to provide some air conditioning into the classrooms. Dr. Burnham said that in response to Selectboard Chair Jefferies suggestion that an electrical engineer be consulted to ensure that the current electrical system would support this modified plan that she and Mr. Cassidy consulted with the engineer they used last summer and that the electrical service to this building is more than sufficient to support this plan.

Mr. Cassidy said their goal is to get consensus of the boards that are stakeholders in this project and support that they are maintaining the intent of the original submission. He said there was concern that these were potentially residential units but that they did meet with the vendor today and it was described to him that there is not a lot of differentiation between commercial and residential in these units.

Mr. Gray asked what the average life was using it the way we plan to use it. Mr. Cassidy said the average lifespan if they are well maintained is probably 20-25 years.

Mr. Menard asked if that was in the warranty from the vendor as he doesn't know of anything that would last 20-25 years anymore. Mr. Cassidy said he didn't know the warranty but that he can reach out to the vendor. Mr. Watters added that he believes it would just be the condensers that would need to be replaced within that time frame and not the whole system.

Mr. Gray asked if the current heating system was still in place and how the two systems would interact. Dr. Burnham said there was no impact and that she didn't intend to use these units for heating. She said the intention is to use these units for reduction in humidity and alleviating temperatures in the building in warmer months.

Mr. Menard asked Dr. Burnham and Mr. Cassidy to address the public comment earlier in the evening regarding heat damage occurring in the building. Dr. Burnham said that had been addressed previously and that Mr. Jefferies had toured the building and he noted that there were areas that showed signs of heat stress.

Mr. Menard said that when he read the letter it said that the intent of this project remains the same – managing classroom air comfort – and wanted to know if the purpose was only for air comfort as stated or as asked earlier by a resident to manage the heat so that we don't get heat damage. Dr. Burnham said the primary focus is to make sure they have classrooms that are a comfortable environment for teaching and learning and that the

added benefit is that by air conditioning those spaces you are reducing some of the heat stress.

Mr. Gray asked if these units would be run after the school year ends during the summer to keep the heat down and the damage down. Dr. Burnham said yes that they would monitor and not allow the temperature inside to go above 78 degrees so would be looking to utilize those units even when the building wasn't occupied.

Mr. Watters asked Dr. Burnham to also address the public comment about fire alarms being damaged potentially from heat or humidity. Dr. Burnham that she wasn't aware that any of the challenges they were experiencing with the fire alarms a few years ago was due to uncontrolled humidity but that the repairs have been made and they have had no issues since.

Mr. Menard asked Mr. Passios to make a comment as he is the Finance Committee representative to Capital Planning. Mr. Passios (56 Whiting Street) said this project has been in the pipeline for upwards of 4 years. There were two iterations of it and questions started to come up as to how well vetted the project was initially. He said he is ok with what the school department has come up with as a plan. He said Capital Planning was approached for this iteration but they didn't think they needed to reconvene as it did accomplish the original intent of the project.

Mr. Lehtinen was asked if there was anything he wanted to add as the appointment member of the Capital Planning committee. Mr. Lehtinen said that he agreed with Mr. Passios that this was a climate control project.

Mr. Menard asked what a vote means – if they voted yes, would it move forward, if they voted no would it not move forward. Dr. Burnham said that in talking with the town manager that because this is a fairly unique circumstance that her concern was that there be a consensus from the major boards in town to agree that this project falls within the original intent of the project proposed and approved at Town Meeting.

Mr. Menard said it was his opinion this this project does not fall within the four walls of the original project which was for air conditioning in the entire school not for 2/3 of the school for climate control. He said that the question of whether or not we think this is the right approach given the fact that there was money allocated is ultimately a decision for the town to make at Town Meeting. Mr. Menard questioned what they are being asked to do with the information presented.

Mr. Cassidy responded that they are looking for support from the board to move forward with the project.

Mr. Menard asked if they were lined up to have the project ready to go this summer. Mr. Cassidy said yes, they could.

Mr. Passios said he has the same concerns as Mr. Menard in regards to what you are supporting here and based on his knowledge thinks this may not be the right way to go and it might be just a band aid fix and that holding off another year and come up with a comprehensive project that covers the entire original intent.

Mr. Watters said that although it may be a band aid fix and not entirely within the original scope of the capital plan request it is still within the spirit of the request which is to bring some relief to those classrooms.

Mr. Balish said that from a process standpoint we have a whole capital planning process set up to have projects vetted and that what is being proposed is different enough from the original project that he doesn't feel comfortable saying it should move forward.

Mr. Menard agreed with that sentiment and that the process isn't being followed. He said we need a real plan for this building and that this plan doesn't fall within the original intent.

Mr. Gray said that the issue really goes back to when this project was first proposed and that not enough leg work was done. He said one of the things we need to is have a better handle on capital projects so these errors don't keep happening. He said he feels this will serve the purpose of providing some relief for the kids and that he would support it.

Mr. Balish motioned to support the modified plan outlined in the letter from Lunenburg Public Schools. Mr. Gray seconded.

Mr. Menard asked for clarification as the letter says \$238,000 but at annual town meeting we voted for \$232,800.

Dr. Burnham apologized for the error and that they would work within the budget allocated for this project.

On vote – motion defeated – 2 aye and 2 nay.

b. Master Plan Steering Committee

Mr. Watters said a Master Plan Steering Committee is being convened and charged by the planning board with 15 voting members including a member from the Finance Committee. Mr. Menard's recommendation is for Mr. Watters to be the Finance Committee Representative.

Mr Gray motioned to nominate Mr. Watters to the Master Plan Steering Committee.

On vote – motion passes unanimously.

c. Capital Planning Committee assignment

Mr. Watters thanked Mr. Passios for serving as the Finance Committee representative for Capital Planning.

***Mr. Watters motioned to nominate Mr. Menard to the Capital Planning Committee.
Mr. Balish seconded.***

On vote – motion passes unanimously.

d. Committee liaison assignments

Mr. Gray said he wasn't sure when Municipal Building Committee would be wrapping up but wanted to stay on.

Mr. Watters said that the committee need an interim liaison assignment for the School Committee, Police and Fire and Library until there were new members and the committee could be reorganized due to Mr. Balish leaving the committee at the end of the month.

Mr. Gray said he would take School Committee.

Mr. Menard offered to take the Police and Fire liaison assignment.

Mr. Watters will take the Library.

e. Summer schedule

Mr. Watters went down a list of potential topics for the summer:

- Special Town Funds
- Fiscal Policy to review general fiscal policy – where we are spending funds, how we are spending funds and if the committee wanted to put forward a strategy or at least recommend policy that we would want to present.
- Investments for better return

Mr. Watters said the current meeting schedule he has is:

6/22, 7/13, 7/27, 8/10, 8/24, 9/14, 9/28 and asked if the committee had any conflicts.

Committee discussed their availability.

f. Committee Reorganization

Mr. Watters recommended holding off until there were additional members.

6. Old Business

Tax Assessment/Abatement Discussion

Mr. Watters updated that the last he had heard there were going to be a decent number of abatements being granted. Mr. Menard added that his take away from the last Select Board meeting was that they were intending to wrap up in the next few weeks.

7. Minutes

Mr. Gray motioned to approve the minutes of 10/27/2022, 11/10/2022, 3/30/2023. Mr. Balish seconded.

On vote - motion passed unanimously

Minutes from 3/7/23 and 4/20/23 are being worked on. April 6 minutes are in the drive but need to be reviewed before approval.

8. Committee Reports - none

9. Topics for Future Meetings – none other than the summer schedule.

10. Public Comment

Mr. Passios (56 Whiting Street) thanked the committee for allowing him to finish off the Capital Planning season this last budget season. He mentioned that although the Town Government has done a good job of getting a handle on equipment that we need, groundskeeping, and employee management we are still very much lacking in our infrastructure and we need to get that under control and said that we can't keep saying we can't afford it and sited Turkey Hill Elementary School and the much needed repairs.

Mr. Menard thanked Mr. Balish for serving on the committee and hopes he returns at some point in the future.

11. Upcoming meeting

June 22nd

12. Adjournment

Mr. Menard motioned and Mr. Gray seconded to adjourn at 8:53pm.

On vote – motion passed unanimously.