

Approved September 21, 2022

**Advisory Committee Meeting
Zoom Video Conference
Wednesday, September 14, 2022, 6:30 p.m.**

Those present from Advisory Committee included Shawn Baker, Doug Smith, Susan Clapham, Wendy Paul, Madison Riley, Rani Elwy, Gail Sullivan, David Prock, William Schauffler, Pete Pedersen, Christina Dougherty, Jeff Levitan, Al Ferrer, Jenn Fallon

Shawn Baker called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and introduced members of Advisory in attendance.

Citizen Speak

There was no one present for Citizen Speak.

Article 6 – Hardy Road expansion

Meghan Jop, Executive Director; David Lussier, Superintendent, Wellesley Public Schools (WPS); Leda Eizenberg, Chair, School Committee (SC); Melissa Martin, Hardy liaison, SC; Grant Smith, principal, Hardy School were present

The project design and the roadway expansion were explained and presented (see Meeting Documents).

Questions

- Is this school land or are we encroaching on residential properties?
 - This would not impact any of the residential properties. This is only encroaching on school land.
- What is the background on the traffic studies and the consultants that were hired and the town's comfort level with this?
 - There has been significant analysis on the installation of signalization and the best way to efficiently remove vehicles from Weston Road onto the school site, to circulate that site, and to leave the site effectively and efficiently. Copies of studies are available on the Planning website under the Project of Significant Impact review.
- Is there a right and left turn out of road?
 - Yes.
- Will there be a traffic light and who will maintain the traffic flow?
 - There will be signalization that will be activated when vehicles are queuing. Note: no right turn on red will be allowed, as is a busy pedestrian crossing.
- Is it true that Advisory can't vote until Planning votes and approves this?
 - Planning has voted and the special permit has been issued. Permitting would be complete prior to construction. This is a requirement of PSI and it's an obligation of the town to proceed with the widening of Hardy Road.
- Have there been any studies completed on the safety of student bikers?
 - We completed a comprehensive look at various modes of transportation, including pedestrian and bike transportation. In the site circulation discussions with PBC, there has been extensive discussion about access and pathways onto the site from the neighborhood. The SC has been working in partnership with the mobility committee and Safe Routes to school to make sure that we are prioritizing safe routes on and off the site. Today's discussion has been focused primarily on expanding the right of way but the discussions SC has had include areas that are not visible on the current plan, including the pathways from the neighborhood. In addition, we are ensuring that they're wide enough

so both pedestrians and individuals who are pushing a stroller can all simultaneously be on those pathways.

- What are the thoughts about the street parking in front of abutters homes?
 - Those lines are not parking spaces. There is no parking proposed on Hardy Road. There are parking lots located around the property.
- Has the seasonality been addressed, particularly in winter with snowbanks creating a blind spot when turning out of Hardy Road?
 - Snow operations for the schools take priority. The blind spot is a factor in the radius of the street. Signalization will assist with visibility as well. One of the major driving issues is the safety and the sight line and the inability to exit the site, given the strong flow traffic flow of Weston Rd.
- Is there additional cost for this or is it part of the Hardy construction costs?
 - This project has a gross maximum price of \$70 million and all the site work is factored into that cost.

Article 2 – Town Hall Interior Renovation – Funding Strategy

Tom Ulfelder, Vice Chair, Select Board (SB); Meghan Jop, Executive Director, and Sheryl Strother, Finance Director, presented. Also attending were Amy Frigulietti, Assistant Executive Director; Ann-Mara Lanza, SB; Lise Olney, Vice Chair, SB; Joe McDonough, Director, Facilities Maintenance Department (FMD); Beth Sullivan Woods, SB; and Colette Aufranc, SB were also present.

At the Sept. 12 meeting the SB voted to fund the Town Hall project through free cash, redeployed debt, and ‘inside the levy’ borrowing. Additional information specific to the SB’s decision was provided and discussed. The current project costs were presented. The project is currently out for bids and the numbers will be refined before Town Meeting as bids will be in hand by then. The redeployment of existing funds was outlined and these funds will reduce the overall project borrowing by \$1,402,305.22. The redeployed funds are already borrowed funds. The use of reserves for the project was reviewed. Reserves are quite high following the close of FY22. Current reserves are 20% or \$13.8 million over the reserve policy. The SB voted to use the \$13.8 million towards the Town Hall project. The Free Cash trend was reviewed and the average use of free cash presented. The proposed financing is \$8.5 million borrowed inside the levy and modeled at 25 years at 4%. An advantage of inside the levy borrowing is that bidders can hold costs for a shorter period of time.

Questions

- When are the bids coming in and are there costs you won’t have bids for?
 - The bids are due October 21 and PBC will finalize these by October 21. We will have the “Gross Maximum Price” for Town Meeting on October 24. The only cost for which we will not have a final bid by Oct. 21 is the swing space costs. We have an RFP that’s going out for our swing space. We hopefully will have evaluated three or four various sites and have those costs by Town Meeting as well. We have estimated \$900,000 for swing space plus the contingency.
- A question was asked about the total cost of the Town Hall project including the completed exterior costs and whether it was \$28 million.
 - Yes, it’s about \$28 million, including both the exterior and interior phases. We spent a little over \$5.7 million for the exterior project. For the interior \$1.85 million has been expended towards the schematic design through bidding phase; the anticipated cost for the total interior construction cost is \$22.9 million
- Is there any guarantee that there will not be a debt exclusion?
 - If this finance plan is approved, a debt exclusion vote would be unnecessary. If there were a referendum on the project, signed by 5% of the voters 7 days after the close of

Town Meeting, then the referendum would be voted on at a special election sometime in December; for such a referendum to succeed, 20% of the voters would need to come out to vote to overturn the decision of Town Meeting. The only other mechanism which might require a debt exclusion vote would be if Town Meeting modified the motion to reflect using a lesser amount of free cash; this would result in a higher borrowed amount and, potentially, require a debt exclusion vote for outside the levy borrowing.

- A request was made for the costs of the mechanical systems.
 - Upon return on the bids, we will know those costs more specifically. At this point there is no breakout of these costs, although PBC will have more detail.
- A question was asked about the \$902,000 for the swing space and how those costs were going to be handled year after year.
 - These costs are for moving departments out of Town Hall temporarily. These departments will move back to Town Hall when the renovation is complete; there will not be any recurring costs for leased space once the project is completed.
- A question was asked about the increase in costs over time for the Town Hall interior renovation.
 - Initially when the Town Hall interior was estimated at \$15 million, an additional cost for an annex was included in the proposal. Over time it was determined that the annex was too costly and unnecessary. In March 2020 estimates were \$18 million for the Town Hall interior and \$12 million to build the annex. Experience from COVID brought new requirements for hybrid meetings; different spatial configurations; and different configurations with glass and separation that have all been added to the project. Initial costs have been refined through the various design phases as more is learned about the building and its needs. Efficiencies in the building were found so that HR, Retirement, Veterans Services, and Sustainability could return to Town Hall. In addition, part of the increase in costs year over year is due to inflationary pressures and supply chain challenges. The Annex originally was to house the land use departments, HR, Retirement, Sustainability, Veterans Services, and FMD.
- A question was asked if the contingency was adequate.
 - PBC is satisfied with the contingency.
- A question was asked about the use of free cash and if this would place other projects into the need for a debt exclusion.
 - Every project takes a significant number of years to be refined into a project that can be presented. Future projects have not been fully costed out and presented, but these projects have placeholders. Some of these placeholders have escalated, so people are nervous. However, the scope and timing of these projects has not yet been refined. Pending projects will be kept inside the levy to the extent that they can be, and there are creative ways to do this such as breaking the projects into phases. Some of the projects that are perceived as competing are not at the same place in the queue in terms of readiness to present or prioritization.
 - It's important to keep this project in perspective. This project has been 10 years in the making and it has been through numerous levels of vetting and cost reconciliation. It represents the largest concentration of substandard office space and working conditions in Wellesley for our governmental function. It's a priority project that must be done. After two years, in which there were tax impact decisions through debt exclusions, the town now has the ability to deliver a healthy operational facility without tax impact through a debt exclusion. We are making decisions on the capital plan that is before us now; we approach that in a responsible way of what's the best practice in terms of municipal finance.

- The reserves will still be at the high end of the range, even with this significant expenditure. The town is in an unusual position of having this amount of free cash available.
- A comment was made that the September 12 SB meeting had a lengthy discussion about the financing of the Town Hall Interior project.
- A question was asked about the total cost of the project when the annex was included and that it appears to be about \$30 million so this current cost is less.
 - Two major factors had a significant positive impact on cost. One was the change in the architect and a shift to a renovation that was sensitive to the historic significance of the building instead of a restoration. The second was the total elimination of the proposed annex.
 - The town has been able to fund the land use division in high quality office space at 888 Worcester St for approximately \$120,000 a year in leased space. Over time the town will have to evaluate whether the Annex will be needed or not. It was an immediate more cost-effective way to improve the office space. The ability to bring back more departments to Town Hall than anticipated is a more efficient use of funds. The town tried to efficiently meet other objectives and goals such as reducing our carbon emissions and maintaining the NRC land surrounding Town Hall.
- How did the project change for the Town Hall when it was decided not to build the annex?
 - An entire floor of departments that would have been moved will return to Town Hall. The new architect reimagined the space at Town Hall. In addition, the annex would have eliminated FMD's leased space, as FMD was to move into the annex. The town reversed its thinking on leased space and put the land use departments with FMD in the existing leased space. FMD has been in leased space for 8 years.
 - The SB had to make tough decisions about how to reduce spending and found a better more economical solution, in part by eliminating the annex. During COVID the town wanted to maintain operations and the level of service. The town reduced capital projects; as part of that dismantled the possibility of the annex and found alternatives to reduce costs. The town responded to the realities of COVID immediately in March of 2020 and was aggressive in terms of restructuring the thinking around both the capital and operating budget. Many municipalities that did not respond to COVID and stayed the course they had set for that fiscal year, have had significant financial problems as a result.
- A question was asked about improving the ventilation system or air purification system in Town Hall.
 - There will be greatly improved temperature consistency and air quality throughout the building. FMD has determined the need for MERV-13 filters in all buildings.
- Has the town considered the growth of the number of town employees over the years?
 - Post-COVID workspace needs to be more flexible. Municipal public-facing functions versus nonpublic-facing functions can be separated and spaces developed. Touchdown spaces have been created as well. It's tricky to forecast for any organization in both the private and public sectors because of flexible hybrid work schedules; touchdown spaces are used by multiple people throughout the day and throughout the week. The growth is not exactly known but growth can be accommodated with this greater flexibility, design, and utility of space.
- A question was asked about the 4% rate assumption and if it were realistic, given current rate increases.
 - There is a significant amount of flexibility in timing with the borrowing of the \$13 million. We will constantly analyze our borrowing during the next couple of years to determine the timing of the borrowing. We feel that 4% rate for modeling is adequate.

Administrative

- Advisory members were asked for their feedback on the new Town Meeting webpage linking documents and presentations to each Warrant article. This is an attempt to place all information about articles and motions in one place for Town Meeting Members (TMM). It is the responsibility of the liaison for the Article to get the information. It is on the Town Meeting page under wellesleyma.gov, STM, Oct. 2022.
 - A comment was made that it is a great idea and a request made to add two pieces of data – historical budget and the tax implications.
 - A question was asked if this will enable Advisory to eliminate the Advisory Report. A bylaw change would be needed to eliminate the Advisory Report.

Liaison Reports

Schools/Rani Elwy – SC held their first in-person meeting since early 2020. This was a hybrid meeting for people who wanted to speak. Three major things were discussed.

- (1) The strategic plan development for this school year. There is a 20-person committee; focus groups will be launched in September and October which will include the community, parents, students, and staff.
- (2) An update on Phase Two of the Hunnewell track and field. There is a private fund-raising effort to raise \$1.5 million. An independent committee is launching this: www.wellesleyfieldfund.com. The \$1.5 million is for team rooms, lighting and sound, and bathrooms. DPW will oversee the project, which will be completed by a contractor.
- (3) Superintendent goals were reviewed. There are ten different goals that are part of the district's 2022 - 23 goals and include multi-tiered systems and support; social-emotional learning; DEI; and critical school facilities project. More details can be found in the SC's minutes.

DPW/Pete Pedersen – The proposed stormwater enterprise fund will not be brought to STM 2022 and is anticipated to come to ATM 2023. The PFAS situation is static. The Morses Pond interim system is working fine and down to non-detectable levels at the Morses Pond well; there is no progress on identifying the source of the PFAS; given the regulatory environment, no further technical fixes on PFAS are expected; the current drought and water restrictions in town were discussed. DPW's strategy has been to warn people and currently there is no penalty.

HR/David Prock – At the recent HR meeting the board discussed the matrix of how raises are determined. HR attempts to get people to parity.

CAC/Gail Sullivan – At their recent meeting, CAC provided updates on the projects they're working on. For Annual Town Meeting 2023 there might be a couple of articles that CAC has interest in but those articles will be sponsored by Planning.

COA/Bill Schauffler – A new Executive Director was hired but did not start the job; the COA needs to start the Executive Director search again. The other issue for next year is the kitchen at the COA building. Joe McDonough has been involved and will hopefully come up with a solution, once the requirements are determined. There also may be some private contributions to solve the problem.

Coming attractions

- Presentation next week on Article 9; Public Hearing scheduled for 7 p.m. Advisory will begin to discuss and vote on Articles next week with the discussion/vote continuing to 9/28.

Minutes Approval

Jenn Fallon made and Pete Pedersen seconded a motion to approve the September 7, 2022 minutes.

Approved September 21, 2022

Roll Call Vote

Jennifer Fallon – yes
Jake Erhard – absent
Jeff Levitan - yes
Al Ferrer - yes
Wendy Paul – abstain
Pete Pedersen - yes
Madison Riley – abstain
Rani Elwy - yes
Christina Dougherty - yes
Gail Sullivan – yes
David Prock – abstain
William Schauffler – yes
Susan Clapham - yes

September 7, 2022 minutes were approved, 9 to 0.

Adjourn

Wendy Paul made and Rani Elwy seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Roll Call Vote

Jennifer Fallon – yes
Jake Erhard – absent
Jeff Levitan - yes
Al Ferrer - yes
Wendy Paul – yes
Pete Pedersen - yes
Madison Riley – yes
Rani Elwy - yes
Christina Dougherty - yes
Gail Sullivan – yes
David Prock – yes
William Schauffler – yes
Susan Clapham - yes

Meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m., 12 to 0.

Meeting Documents

<https://wellesleyma.gov/DocumentCenter/Index/1847>

- Article 6 – Hardy Road
- Town Hall Interior Financing to Advisory
- Select Board Budget submission timeline