

FINANCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, January 22, 2020 – 5:30pm
Natick Town Hall, 13 East Central Street, Dlott Meeting Room, 2nd Floor

MEETING MINUTES

This meeting has been properly posted as required by law.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Karen Adelman-Foster, Board of Selectmen representative
Cathi Collins, School Committee representative
Jonathan Freedman, Board of Selectmen representative
Melissa Malone, Town Administrator (arrived at 5:37)
Anna Nolin, Superintendent of Schools
Dan Sullivan, Finance Committee representative
Linda Wollschlager, Finance Committee representative

MEMBERS ATTENDING VIA PHONE:

Julie McDonough, School Committee representative

NOTABLE ATTENDEES:

Frank Foss, Town Moderator
Peter Gray, Director of Finance, Natick Public Schools
Patrick Hayes, Finance Committee Chair
Rick Jennett, Board of Selectmen (arrived at 5:42)
Sean O'Brien, Assistant Finance Director (arrived at 5:50)
Diane Packer, Town Clerk
Lisa Tabenkin, Former School Committee Chair
John Townsend, Deputy Town Administrator/Finance Director (arrived at 5:39)

AGENDA:

1. Open Session
2. Citizens' Concerns
3. Announcements
4. New Business
 - a. Discussion of possible timing for an Operational Override
5. Old Business
 - a. Committee charge – alternate designees
 - b. Continue discussion related to budget planning for FY 2021 and beyond

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6. Meeting Minutes

- a. October 2, 2019
- b. October 16, 2019

OPEN SESSION

Meeting was called to order at 5:34 p.m. by Jonathan Freedman

Ms. Collins suggested that FPC meetings be longer or be scheduled more frequently. After discussion, it was determined that future meetings would start 30 minutes earlier at 5:30 pm.

CITIZENS' CONCERNS

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Freedman stated that based on budget projections, the consensus is growing that an operational override will be needed for FY 22. He would like the FPC to provide recommendations to the Select Board by February 2020 on election timing and milestones for the November 2020 presidential election vs. the March 2021 local election. Ms. Packer pointed out that a Special Election is also a possibility, although she is not advocating for that in any way.

In response to questions from Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Packer addressed some aspects of early voting in November. We have had referendum questions on a November ballot, most recently for the Fire Station in November 2018. The early voting period has been 11 days with the same ballot used for early and election date voting. Unlike with absentee ballots, if you have voted early, there is no opportunity to call back your ballot.

Mr. Freedman asked if we have had early voting for town elections. Ms. Packer indicated no, and she will investigate what would be required. For timing purposes, ballot language must be to the town clerk's office at least 35 days before a local election. Ballots are printed locally and do not involve the Secretary of the Commonwealth (SOC). For this November's election, ballot questions would have to be to the SOC no later than August 5.

Mr. Sullivan pointed out that many more voters participate in November elections. Local elections in March with overrides have higher turnout than those without overrides, but not as many as November elections. Examples discussed included Kennedy Middle School (March 2018, 25.1% turnout), Natick High School (March 2010, 37.8% turnout), March 2017 (no override, 9.7%

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turnout) vs. November 2016 (presidential, 84.3% turnout) or November 2018 (state, 74.5% turnout).

Some considerations discussed included: would an override get lost in the noise of a November election, does increased turnout favor an affirmative vote, would there be enough time to educate voters, would Town Meeting end early enough in spring to have time to determine the override amount, would there be enough time to hear from the community about what they want?

Mr. Hayes provided an overview of alternative ballot question concepts. A menu override has separate questions for funding requests (DPW, schools, recreation etc). Each option would pass or fail independently. A pyramid override has multiple ballot questions involving tiered funding amounts with the same purpose, with each higher tier building on the previous one. If multiple questions pass, the one with the highest dollar amount prevails.

Ms. Malone indicated that the override timing is a political decision and there's never an optimal time. For a November election, Spring Town Meeting would have to be finished early in order to have the FY21 budget finalized. Mr. Foss pointed out that a Special Town Meeting could be structured to hold the non-financial articles to facilitate an earlier end to Spring Town Meeting.

Ms. Collins pointed out that the planning for the previous operational override started in January for an election in March 2008 of the following year.

Mr. Friedman stated that the recommendation made by the FPC will only be a starting point for the Select Board discussions. Ms. Packer noted that an operational override only needs a majority vote of the Select Board.

The timing discussion will be continued at the next FPC meeting. Members were encouraged to read the Division of Local Services (DLS) regulations on Proposition 2 ½ ballot questions. The town administration was asked to assess if November is doable given the thorough analysis that needs to be done, assuming an early end to Spring Town Meeting. Ms. Malone suggested that the school administration will also need to be involved. Ms. Nolin remarked that some of the options discussed such as the pyramid ballot question concept will take more time to bring together.

OLD BUSINESS

Ms. Collins/Ms. McDonough wanted clarification on whether the FPC alternative should be a School Committee member.

MEETING MINUTES

Motion to approve January 8, 2020 minutes:

Moved/Motioned by:	Ms. Collins
Seconded by:	Ms. Adelman-Foster

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Motion approved:	6-0-1
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Motion to approve October 30, 2019 minutes:

Moved/Motioned by:	Ms. Collins
Seconded by:	Ms. Adelman-Foster
Motion approved:	6-0-1

ADJOURN

Moved/Motioned by:	Ms. Collins
Seconded by:	Ms. Adelman-Foster
Motion approved:	7-0-0

Meeting adjourned at 6:38 pm.