

**TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

**May 26, 2020, Tuesday
Via Zoom # 874 1567 5325**

Present: Arthur Mathews, President
Michael Molisse, Vice President
Pascale Burga, Councilor
Kenneth DiFazio, Councilor
Brian Dwyer, Councilor
Jane Hackett, Councilor
Fred Happel, Councilor
Ed Harrington, Councilor
Rebecca Haugh, Councilor
Christopher Heffernan
Maureen Kiely, Councilor

Also Present: Robert Hedlund, Mayor
Ted Langill, Chief of Staff
Joseph Callanan, Town Solicitor
Kathleen Deree, Town Clerk
Richard Swanson, Town Auditor
James Malary, Chief Financial Officer
Lisa Belmarsh, Weymouth School Committee
Dr. Jennifer Curtis Whipple, Supt. of Schools
Brian Smith, Asst. Supt. of Schools
John Sullivan, Weymouth School Committee
Kathleen Curran, Weymouth School Committee

Recording Secretary: Mary Barker

President Mathews called the Annual Town Meeting to order at 7:30 PM. After the Pledge of Allegiance, Town Clerk Kathleen Deree called the roll, with all members present.

A roll call vote was taken; Councilor Burga-Yes, Councilor DiFazio-Yes, Councilor Dwyer-Yes, Councilor Hackett-Yes, Councilor Happel- Yes, Councilor Harrington- Yes, Councilor Haugh-Yes, Councilor Heffernan- Yes, Councilor Kiely- Yes, Vice President Molisse- Yes, President Mathews- Yes. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

President Mathews introduced the new District 6 Councilor, Brian Dwyer.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

President Mathews announced that the Scholarship Fund Committee has been awarding scholarships to recipients since 1992. This is the first year that they have been unable to

acknowledge the recipients in person. This year, the committee has awarded \$106,000 to 54 well-deserving recipients. The list of recipients is on the town website and he congratulated them on behalf of the Weymouth Town Council.

OVERVIEW OF LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2020-Town Council President Arthur Mathews

President Mathews read the following prepared statement:

Good evening and thank you for attending our Annual Town Meeting.

Pursuant to Section 6-6 of the Town Charter, the Town Council President shall deliver an update on the legislative activities of the Council, for fiscal 2020, which commenced on July 1, 2019.

The Town Council has held a total of 51 meetings to date for fiscal year 2020. This includes regularly scheduled Town Council Meetings, Special Town Council Meetings, and numerous meetings of the 12 committees under the jurisdiction of the Council. Because of the co-vid 19 pandemic, the last two months have been virtual meetings.

*Committee meetings: 42
Town Council: 18
Special Town Council: 1*

As the legislative branch of government, the Town Council is responsible for approving measures, new appointments and reappointments, town ordinances, zoning changes and the operating budget for the town, as submitted by Mayor Hedlund. The Council, while deliberating over the budget, and pursuant to the town charter, cannot increase, but can only reduce the budget.

Over the course of this fiscal year, the council approved 12 appointments, including the CFO, and 26 reappointments, including the Town Auditor. The Town Council also adopted its governing rules for the following two years, 2020-2022.

Serving as President of the Town Council is an extreme honor. We work together to solve the problems facing our community. We may have differing opinions but at the end of the day we stand united in doing everything we possibly can, whether it is popular or not, to make Weymouth the best place to live, work and raise a family. I am honored by my colleagues' trust in me to lead this esteemed body and more so, to call each of them a friend, particularly as we are in the midst of a State of Emergency, and making different accommodations to continue to conduct town business.

I would like to take a moment to highlight several measures that were addressed by the Town Council during fiscal 2020. The following projects were earmarked by the Council:

Approved with CPC funding:

- *\$7,480 to preserve select items from Weymouth Public Libraries' Collection*
- *\$182,341 for a pedestrian bridge for access to Lovell Field*
- *\$200,000 to acquire land for affordable housing purposes*

The Council approved several utility petitions by National Grid and Verizon that range from pole relocations, to gas main installations and replacement of aging infrastructure.

We approved measures that call for field and park improvements in several parks in Weymouth. They include:

- *\$410,656 reserve fund transfer to build a playground at the new Tufts Library*
- *\$375,000 from free cash for various parks and fields*

Other Free Cash measures that were approved include:

- *\$1,000,000 added to the Stabilization Fund*
- *\$100,000 to purchase new collections to support maintaining the Library's certification*
- *\$50,000 in matching funds for the Columbian Square project for pedestrian safety measures*
- *\$546,345, along with \$120,000 from the reserve fund, for a new fire engine*
- *\$48,000 for electric vehicles*

The Town Council approved the borrowing authorization of \$4,000,000 to pay costs for two projects:

- *\$1,000,000 for the Talbot School boiler system*
- *\$3,000,000 for road and sidewalk repairs throughout the town*

And approved the transfer of reserve funds to support:

- *\$20,000 for the 2020 Census*
- *\$96,000 for stormwater compliance*
- *\$8,500 for Charter Review Committee's work*
- *\$20,000 for copiers*

In addition, the Town Council voted to support the Weymouth Public Schools' Memorandum of Understanding –Every Child Succeeds Act Transportation Claiming Under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, accepted a local option regarding collections, payments over and abatements, adopted a tax shift, and approved a resolution in opposition to a proposed 40B project. The Town Council authorized the expenditure of CDBG/HOME funds.

The following Ordinance Changes were approved:

- *Traffic Regulations*
 - *Speed limit reduction on Raymond Street*
 - *A Safety Zone designation for a portion of Pleasant Street*
 - *A new bus stop to expand accessibility in town*
 - *One-way designation for Chauncy Street as part of pedestrian safety measures for the Columbian Square area*

- *Rezoning:*
 - *Historic Mill District*
 - *purchase of 13 acres of land and restrictions for Affordable Housing purposes*

The issue of restricting single-use plastic bags is also in deliberation.

I would like extend my sincere appreciation to my fellow Councilors, the employees of the Council and Clerk's Offices, Mayor Robert Hedlund, his Administration, the school committee and the School Department for their ongoing efforts.

Additionally, I would like to extend my appreciation to the residents of the Town of Weymouth, who by their valuable input at meetings and during public hearings have brought to light important issues, and have illustrated the true definition of democracy. The Council appreciates your participation in local government.

The next order of business on our agenda are the public hearings for the fiscal year 2021 budget. Vice President Michael Molisse will proceed with our agenda and the opening of our public hearings.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

20 055-Fiscal Year 2021 General Government Annual Appropriation

20 056-Free Cash for Fiscal Year 2021 Reserve Fund^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 057-Revolving Accounts Annual Authorization^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 058-Gift Accounts Annual Authorization^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 059-Sewer Enterprise Fund Fiscal Year 21 Appropriation

20 060-Sewer Department-MWRA I/I Phase 11 Allocation^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 061-Sewer Retained Earnings-Pump Station Improvements

20 062-Water Enterprise Fund Fiscal Year 21 Appropriation

20 063-Water Retained Earnings-Capital Equipment^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 064-Water Retained Earnings-Water Treatment Plant Upgrades and Improvements

20 065-Community Preservation Fund Annual Appropriation^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 066-CPC Funding for Open Space and Trail Projects^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 067-CPC Funding for Open Space and Trail Projects^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 068-Free Cash for a Rental Assistance Reserve Fund

20 069-Free Cash for a Small Business Relief Fund^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 070-Free Cash for Fiscal Year 20 Snow Removal^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 071-Free Cash for Police and Fire Department Radios

20 072-Amending Measure 19 017

20 073-Paying Legal Department Bills^{[L]_{SEP}}

20 074-Accepting Certain Property Tax Exemptions

Capital Improvement Plan-FY2021-2025

A motion was made by Vice President Molisse to open the public hearing on Measures 20 055 through 20 074, inclusive, and the Capital Improvement Plan for FY2021-2025. These were published on May 15, 2020. The motion was seconded by Councilor Hackett.

A roll call vote was taken; Councilor Burga-Yes, Councilor DiFazio-Yes, Councilor Dwyer-Yes, Councilor Hackett-Yes, Councilor Happel- Yes, Councilor Harrington- Yes, Councilor Haugh-Yes, Councilor Heffernan- Yes, Councilor Kiely- Yes, Vice President Molisse- Yes, President Mathews- Yes. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

State of the Town- Mayor Robert Hedlund

Mayor Hedlund thanked Lois Desmond, who is retiring this year, as the chair of the Scholarship Fund Committee. He noted the unusual format for awarding scholarships this year and that he was disappointed they couldn't gather in person. He recognized the Council for their work this year on a number of issues. He thanked all employees, many of whom were furloughed as a result of the current financial constraints; however a number of departments continue to work through this. He noted that Human Resources and Elder Services have adjusted the services they provide and the Recreation Department has managed to keep some of the larger fields open. Several departments, including those in public safety have stepped up- EMS, WPD and WFD. The Health Department is extremely taxed tracing COVID-19 cases and today they are deciphering regulations by state government in order to reopen. He recognized the Finance department; and noted that this is the 2nd budget due to COVID-19, and he especially acknowledged the Treasurers / Collectors Office and CFO.

He noted several milestones reached in the past year:

- New Tufts Library – September opening (delay, but no cost overruns yet)
- Chapman School project- the school closure allowed staff to get a jumpstart- so the project is ahead of schedule and on budget
- Grants received- highlight:
 - Lovell Field pedestrian bridge
 - SAFER –with the goal towards reopening Station 2 and secure equipment
 - Farmer's Market
 - Green Communities, including street lighting
 - Fore River Avenue Seawall and Infrastructure Improvement
 - Complete Streets
 - Columbian Square
 - Jackson Square
 - Smelt Brook Daylighting
 - Home Elevation Program-oversight
 - Open Space and Recreation Plan Updates
 - Connell Pool & Rink
 - Great Esker Park Trails improvement
 - USDA Farmers Market Promotion
 - Information Technology- Cyber Security

He thanked the Council for their enthusiastic support of the Complete Streets program- this is by far the most ambitious program in paving projects at \$2.3-2.4 million- and he noted they will be doing more than double that in the current fiscal year. Road work will continue through the end of the season and will pick up again in spring.

He highlighted two major capital projects are in final stages and will impact traffic–Great Pond Dam and Commercial Street Bridge (rebid) behind the Venetian. The Compressor Station has been delayed significantly; it was an ill-advised project. They had to contend with a rigged federal system and an unsympathetic Governor. Three appeals are pending. They will continue opposition against it. As for the current schedule, the building is up

and mechanical work is underway; the utility expects to be pumping gas in September. There has been no discussion yet with officials regarding mitigation. Public Safety entities must be prepared. Much of the efforts over the last four years has focused on schools. Efforts continue for progress for Weymouth schools and growth and continued forward progress for the town for the fourth consecutive year.

Presentation of Fiscal Year 2021 Budget- Mayor Robert Hedlund/Chief of Staff Ted Langill

Chief of Staff Langill presented the post-Covid Budget:

Fiscal Year 2021- A New Reality

Managing a Fiscal Crisis - Preparing for the Unknown

Protecting what was built and maintaining existing level of services

How:

- Take COVID impacts seriously
- Focus on revenue collection and monitoring/restricting spending
- Take action now to minimize worse situation later
- Build and maintain reserves
- Wait for unknowns (state budget) and new (unfunded?) mandates
- Use reserves to maintain existing services (offset lost revenue)

The Devastating Impact of COVID-19

Economic Reality

- Loss of jobs
- Unemployment filings
- 15.1% through mid-April
- MA DOR- severe impact to revenues
- Town actual revenues - .5% decline over the previous year (budget based on 3.4% growth)
- Revenue and tax levy decline
- Unknowns-
 - local aid numbers
 - New state mandates / standards – likely unfunded
 - Economic impact- how deep, how long?
 - Comparison unemployment rates with dot.com and housing bubble burst recessions

A Budget of Fiscal Necessity

FY21 Budget process is not the traditional exercise finding revenue to fund new needs but an exercise in fiscal necessity to hopefully be in a position to get through this recession with as much of what built remaining intact.

Preliminary budget includes cuts:

- revenue projections

- every department
- Step increases frozen for non-union personnel
- \$1.7 million in spending
- limit department spending to less than .5% growth

78% of budget increases are result of increases (over FY20) to fixed costs:

- Debt Service- 5.5%
- Employee Health Insurance- 6.4%
- Retirement/Pensions- 3.2%
- Building/Liability Insurance- 50%
- State Assessments- 16.6%

These increases total \$3.8 million in total fixed costs.

Resources available to help manage the fiscal crisis:

- Created a \$1.5 million FY21 COVID Reserve Fund from Free Cash
- \$8.2 million Stabilization Fund- built up from \$1.1 million in four years
- \$5 million in CARES Act funding (cannot be used as revenue replacement-only COVID-19 expenses)

Why necessary to conserve resources for existing services:

- 16% decrease in total state aid
- 7.7% decrease in Ch. 70 educational aid
- tax growth stayed under 3% avg. growth four straight years
- 14.4% decrease in local receipts
- free cash expected to decrease
- need to fund future snow/ice deficits

MA Division of Local Services

- Common sense should prevail. Reserve transfers cannot be used to bypass legitimate budget review approval process
- Discourage the use of non-recurring revenue sources to fund recurring expenses
- Funding operations with one-time revenues without identifying future available offsets effectively postpones difficult decisions necessary to achieve a structurally sound, sustainable spending plan
- Using non-recurring revenues to support ongoing operating expenses is not fiscally sustainable

Mayor Hedlund

- Reduced revenue projections by \$2.3 million
- Reduced spending in 14 of 20 non-school budgets
- Limited total spending growth to 1.8%
- Using recurring revenue sources of funding (tax levy, local aid, local receipts)
- Created \$1.5 million reserve fund to help maintain existing services
- Cut \$1.77 million from FY20 budget levels

School Committee

- Increasing FY21 school operating spending by \$2.99 million

- Transferring \$1.2 million expense (full-day K) from revolving fund to operating budget
- Growing total school operating spending by 4.1%
- Using \$1.9 million in one-time sources of revenue

Mayor's Plan is to Maintain Existing Services in the face of a global pandemic and fiscal crisis

- Delay full day K
- Freeze non- union/non- contractual services

Water & Sewer Enterprise budgets

Community Preservation budget

President Mathews thanked the Mayor and Chief of Staff. He noted there are other measures outside of the budget included in the public hearings tonight. He opened the floor to questions from the Council.

Councilor Hackett noted the projections strike a reasonable and responsible balance for this point in time. She asked what the appropriate process is to use the \$1.5 million in reserve? Chief of Staff Langill responded that it would be used in the operating budget and zero out the reserve. It will require a measure before Town Council in order to spend it. Councilor Hackett asked if that is what procedurally has to happen? Mr. Langill responded that once it's authorized they won't have to come back to spend out of it (like an 02 account). Councilor Hackett also asked about the bonding authorization for Abigail Adams? Mr. Langill responded that Council previously authorized a measure for \$3 million needed to convert Adams Intermediate to a 9th primary school. It includes ADA accessibility, and a transportation building on-site. When it was originally submitted, it was for the internal renovations to start; they have come in over estimates. They are reworking the measure in order to start some of the work now. Councilor Hackett asked if they would be back for additional funding for other things? Mr. Langill responded yes, more likely than not.

Vice President Molisse thanked the Chief of Staff for the presentation and the Mayor for his state of the town. He credited the Chief of Staff for a responsible budget but noted it is still a work in process.

Councilor Happel- thanked the Mayor, Chief of Staff and their staff. He asked if they received any information on local aid from 2020, and with restaurants- what kind of hit will the town take? Chief of Staff Langill responded that there is \$9.5 Million- from the lottery; the state budget writers had a roundtable and predicted \$4.4 billion loss in FY21 and upgraded to \$6 billion and another billion in FY 20. The only component unknown – only level funded local aid- 10% decrease is a reasonable guess; it will be a big hit. The Mayor added- not only is the impact felt from lottery reduction and closed restaurants- what's coming out of the Governor's workgroup is a real problem for small to mid-size operators. The guidelines benefit larger ones in the first phase of opening, which Weymouth doesn't have. It will be a huge hit to the meals tax figures.

Councilor Heffernan- thanked the Mayor and the Chief of Staff. He noted the Governor referred a bill to authorize borrowing for COVID-related expenses. Is the COVID reserve fund structured for this? Mr. Langill responded they have talked about short-term borrowing, but it's not a tool he would use. He doesn't have the details on the state program. Borrowing is a separate tool. Councilor Heffernan noted there is so much uncertainty around this budget and they are working with an incomplete data set right now. States that are opening are not rebounding as they expected. They could be looking at month-to-month state budgets. Proceeding with caution is the best practice to follow right now. Mr. Langill responded that in addition to revised revenue shortfall predictions, they also see a V shaped rebound to the economy, with a loss of jobs and then rebound, but extending into FY23 because of the phased opening of the economy. Councilor Heffernan responded that there is supposed to be aid in the next stimulus, but it has so far been pushed off.

Councilor DiFazio- asked how did the administration decide to level fund despite the doom and gloom prediction? He wouldn't consider it to be the most conservative route. Mr. Langill agreed; it is a very fluid situation. Subsequent predictions weren't being made. There has been week after week of millions of job losses. They will not be able to fund the departments once the 10% from the state comes in and are looking at at least two more years of fiscal concern.

Councilor Kiely thanked them for the hard work. She is concerned with the phasing to reopen and what the impact would be. Mr. Langill responded it will be more devastating than it already is. It will be a while before recovery. Councilor Kiely responded some cities haven't put forward a full year budget. She commended them giving a long term look.

President Mathews asked for an update of the total cost of the maintenance garage and renovation costs included in the amended bond request.

The following are the comments from the public:

Weymouth School Committee Chair Lisa Belmarsh noted this budget season is a lot like the recession in 2008-09. That was also the year Adams and Chapman were split. They have to get through it while staying healthy and creating a whole new teaching and learning model. The Adams measure- there was plan presented and it's just for Adams and this adds work to a plan that is already short on funds. The transportation building was submitted as a capital request that was not funded. They will need to work on a plan for that. She reminded the Council that they and the school department worked tirelessly, and she asked the Town Council to fund the budget as proposed. The school department is not asking for anything more than what the Mayor has proposed for the schools. Less will put school services in jeopardy. She listed how the schools have contributed to the community during the pandemic. She thanked the Mayor and Town Council for their support of the schools.

Chief of Staff Langill responded that the Mayor's office did not ask the schools to spend another \$2 million next year; moving from tuition based paid Kindergarten to a free kindergarten program- which is not prudent at this time. The expense was transferred to the operating budget and \$1.9 will be expended on another program. One-time source revenue spending exacerbates the problems, long term. The decision needs to be delayed. The funds could be used to reduce fees in a tuition-based program to help families that need it. Without facing tough decisions now will make the future difficult. This is nothing more than a disagreement in policies between departments in a fiscal crisis.

Kathy Curran, Weymouth School Committee- states that in terms of full day free k-common sense dictates that they revisit this "pilot" program- She had asked to put it on the agenda. They could assist families or take other action but it does not make sense to empty out a revolving account. It is reckless and she believes they do not do this.

John Sullivan, Weymouth School Committee, agreed with the School Committee chair and noted there's an extent to which this kind of friction was built into the system by the state and the charter. School Committee set up the way it was specifically because of these differences in opinion. There are experts in schools, who think for educational reasons that the budget put forward is the best way to educate children. It is worthwhile. They don't want to make it a one-year program, but will make it work. The school department did not ask for more money. This is a one-time revenue source for one extraordinary year. He suggested further discussion is needed.

Emily Jackson DeRosa, 20 Ashmont Street- urged they maintain the school budget. She hopes after all of this is over, they continue to make meetings accessible by technology.

Caitlin McInnes, 20 Neck Street- echoed John Sullivan's comments. It was an informative presentation. She noted the size of the school department vs. the rest of the town departments. As for Adams and building of a garage, she requested more elaborate specs. Amidst a budget crisis, it should be a school over a garage.

Chief of Staff Langill responded that with the budget numbers- the percentage shows the true comparison. Using spending levels, the town sees a 1.3% decrease, the schools 4.1% increase. The impact of school spending comes back to the town at some point and creating structural deficits hurts the whole town. As for the project for Adams- everything discussed was always part of the original plan.

Cathy Torrey, 14 Riverbank Road- acknowledged the work preparing the budget in this unorthodox time. She noted the library staff has done a great job giving daily updates. She supports education and noted they have an obligation to build on education. She is glad to see the interest in schools, and hopes some may consider running for school committee.

Mike Murphy, 125 Front Street-the effect on children should be considered. The virus could still be around when school starts up in September. This situation is not the same as in the past. This year is all about the safety and keeping socially distant. By decreasing more, the town has put the school students at risk.

Michael Gallagher, 32 Tamarack Trail noted the budget before the Town Council is not the final budget before the town. FY 2021 is only the beginning. FY2022 will likely be the biggest hurt. He cautioned using stabilization in 2021 that may be needed in 2022. He cites that the money from government isn't guaranteed, looking back, it didn't come in the past. It's reckless to look at new programs; he cautions going into 2021 with a program that likely will not be sustainable in 2022.

Gary MacDougall, 131 Southern Avenue –recognizes the complexity of this budget. He supports the school budget; it's important to maintain level funding. They have to look at the whole system holistically if improving education and moving forward. Weymouth is one of the last towns to have a full day K program and is losing kids to Charter schools for a reason. They have to think about why they are losing kids.

A motion to suspend Rule 26(a) was made by Vice President Molisse and seconded by Councilor Hackett.

A roll call vote was taken; Councilor Burga-Yes, Councilor DiFazio-Yes, Councilor Dwyer-Yes, Councilor Hackett-Yes, Councilor Happel- Yes, Councilor Harrington- Yes, Councilor Haugh-Yes, Councilor Heffernan- Yes, Councilor Kiely- Yes, Vice President Molisse- Yes, President Mathews- Yes. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

Ann Pike, 22 Colonial Road- voiced her concern with the compressor station. She noted the soil contains arsenic and she doesn't understand the process.

Elizabeth Foster-Nolan, 54 House Rock Road- asked if there is a hiring freeze on the school side as there is on town hiring. The schools should also be looking at a freeze. She said she understood the need for a full day kindergarten program, but the timing is not the best. She also noted that transparency needs to be better on all sides.

Frank Burke, Sea Street, attended the ZOOM meeting when the Nash School closing was discussed. Revolving fund at that time was just under \$500,000; now it is \$800,000 – what changed? John Sullivan responded that is the amount that was going to be spent on the program. When the town objected, they elected to shift of all funds to revolving to create a program.

Matt Tallon, 105 Trefton Avenue- likes the trajectory of improvement. They have to be conservative, but continue to be creative and find funding where it might not have been available. He challenged the parties to keep in mind that the community is deeply committed to schools, and is willing to pay for quality programs.

A motion was made by Vice President Molisse to close the public hearing on Measures 20 055 through 20 074, inclusive, and Capital Improvement Plan-FY2021-2015 and was seconded by Councilor Hackett.

A roll call vote was taken; Councilor Burga-Yes, Councilor DiFazio-Yes, Councilor Dwyer-Yes, Councilor Hackett-Yes, Councilor Happel- Yes, Councilor Harrington- Yes, Councilor Haugh-Yes, Councilor Heffernan- Yes, Councilor Kiely- Yes, Vice President Molisse- Yes, President Mathews- Yes. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

ADJOURNMENT

The next regular meeting of the Town Council Meeting has been scheduled for Monday, June 1, 2020.

At 10:48 PM; there being no further business, a motion was made by Vice President Molisse to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Councilor. UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Written correspondence re: public hearings, from **Laura Sabadini, 386 Front Street** and **Heike Mertens-Tuplin, 12 Emmeline Road**, both in support of the school budget

Respectfully Submitted by Mary Barker as Recording Secretary

Approved by Arthur Mathews as President of the Town Council
Voted unanimously on 13 July 2020