

CAPITAL PLANNING COMMITTEE
Meeting Minutes Dec 12, 2023, 6:30 PM
Scituate Town Hall - Select Board Hearing Room

I. Committee Attendees, Richard Taft, Michael Gibson, Tom O’Grady, Paul Forrer, Chris Carchia, Carey Borkoski

A) Invitees Nancy Holt (Town Accountant), Jim Boudreau

II. Call to Order

III. Approval of Agenda – 6-0

IV. New Business

A) Discuss / Vote Recommendations for FY 24 Capital Plan

i Roll call on all capital items to determine what items may need additional discussion or vote.

a Motion made to accept all but 4 items.

0 Approve town administration recommended plan except for 4 items 6-0

b Items held for additional discussion.

1 Repairs to SHS Science Lab –

- ◆ It was generally agreed repairs to the science lab are not a capital expense.
- ◆ The need for replacing faucets is a symptom of school’s neglect of regular maintenance items, over a long period of time. Two years ago, the school intended to address neglected maintenance by adding a line item of \$250,000 to its operating budget for general maintenance.
- ◆ As part of this year’s capital planning review, the school administration recognized it has not increased its maintenance budget to account for general inflation over the past few years, nor had it endeavored to assess whether the maintenance budget was adequate to address repairs associated with building operations.
- ◆ The school operating budget exceeds \$50M and may contain enough discretionary spending power to pay for the requested repairs from its operating budget.
- ◆ Prioritization of operating expenses to include repairs so that classrooms are fully functional for education is the responsibility of the school committee and school administration. It is not the responsibility of capital planning.
- ◆ Different individuals expressed that the current school administration should not be responsible or penalized for past neglect by requiring them to include these operating repairs in its estimated \$50M+ school operating budget.
- ◆ Rather than declining to recommend capital funds for the requested repairs, it was suggested that the funds be approved with a message to change current operating procedures relating to maintenance expenses.
- ◆ Informal discussions subsequent to the recent school administration’s review of its capital budget were relayed to the Capital Planning Committee. In those discussions, there was a recognized desire to increase future maintenance budgets and to

better quantify the level of maintenance funding in the school operating budget.

- ◆ Motion to recommend SHS Lab Upgrade request – 5 Yea – 1 No

2 Electric Ride Mower

- ◆ An electric mower is more expensive than a conventional mower. It will cost the town approximately \$20,000 more in first cost compared to a comparable gas-powered mower.
- ◆ The Public Grounds Department reviewed its experience when it attended a local demo day to understand some basic details on how electric mowers work and their potential advantages.
- ◆ Electric Mowers are quieter than gas powered mowers allowing them to minimize nuisance noise permeating into occupied building space. When grounds around buildings are mowed, they require several mowers to be used. It is expected that the single electric mower can be used for areas closer to buildings while gas powered motors are kept further away.
- ◆ Acquisition of an electric mower is viewed, in small part, as an experimental exercise to get more comprehensive knowledge of the technology. There was limited understanding of the long-term replacement or operating costs for high-cost items such as batteries. Electric mowers are much heavier than gas mowers and caution should be exercised on wet grounds or steep embankments.
- ◆ The requested amount represents the cost for a demo mower. It is assumed an unused new electric mower would cost more.
- ◆ Motion to recommend an Electric Ride Mower request – 5 Yea – 1 No.

3 Repairing recreational tennis courts and modifying some of them to accommodate Pickleball.

- ◆ The 5 Recreational Courts are deemed to be in terrible shape. These courts were resurfaced for tennis, just a few years ago, and the work was not properly done resulting in cracks and other defects.
- ◆ The \$1.2M capital request is believed to be a reasonable investment that improves the town's recreational activity and quality of life.
- ◆ There has been a dramatic increase in popularity of pickle ball.
- ◆ Pickle ball and tennis, while similar, are not compatible for long term use on the same courts.
- ◆ High school tennis courts are not part of this proposal. HS Tennis courts design phase has been approved. The Town Administration noted that the reason for delaying the timing of repair to the recreational tennis courts was to maintain enough tennis court space for high school tennis program. When those improvements are completed the recreational tennis courts project would likely be recommended by the Town Administrator.
- ◆ The repair to the recreational tennis courts was not included in the recommended list of capital projects by the Capital Planning Committee.

4 Scituate harbor dredging

- ◆ The need to increase user fees managed by Waterways Enterprise is necessary to properly generate free cash to offset the depreciation expenses of extensive waterways infrastructure that are not fully captured in government cash accounting.
- ◆ Boat slip fees are considered below market rates.
- ◆ Boat slips and moorings have had one price increase in the past 10 years.
- ◆ Membership has a very low turnover.
- ◆ A low membership turnover and below market rates has resulted in the exclusion of an unknown percentage of boating residents to this town enterprise.
- ◆ It is not unreasonable for the town to support below market rates for recreational activities provided that there is some recognition that membership turnover creates a reasonable chance for more resident boaters to have enjoy the below market rates for town boat slips or moorings.
- ◆ The need for dredging should be the overriding concern in approving this budget request over whether the town waterways enterprise is appropriately operating its facility.
- ◆ The Capital Planning Committee can decide to vote yes or no on requested capital items. It does not have a conditional vote option.
- ◆ There have been some instances where reviewing of policies by the Capital Planning Committee has resulted in a department changing their procedures.
- ◆ General consensus is that the waterways department could do more to increase user fees and rates for boaters.
- ◆ There are varied needs for town waterways that range from commercial users, and recreational town boat service. Commercial lobster fleets are affected by the need for dredging and their needs to be considered.
- ◆ Having a commercial fleet is a huge bonus to the town when applying for other seashore grants.
- ◆ Motion to approve dredging request – Yea – 5, No - 1

B) Discuss / Vote Presentations of Recommendations to Select Board

V. Old Business/Other Business

- A) Review of prior departmental submissions
- B) Review of upcoming meeting agenda

VI. Approval of minutes

- A) Motion to approve, amended to change the date and add names. Approve 6 - 0.

VII. Adjournment, 6-0