

Town of Concord
Capital Planning Task Force
Minutes
Jan 14, 2020
Selectmen's Hearing Room

Present: Cynthia Rainey, School Committee member; Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Todd Benjamin; Hugh Lauer; Elise Woodward; Terri Ackerman, Select Board member. Also present: Dee Ortner, Fin Com liaison; Ian Rhames, Assistant School Director of Finance & Operations; Karlen Reed. Absent: Dr. Laurie Hunter, School Superintendent; Kerry LaFleur, Finance Director, and Jared Stanton, Director of Finance and Operations, Concord Public Schools.

Mr. Benjamin called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM on January 14, 2020.

After discussion, the minutes of the January 6, 2020 meeting were approved as amended.

VOTED: To approve the minutes of the January 6, 2020 meeting as amended.

Mr. Benjamin confirmed that the Public Hearing will be held at 7 PM on March 2, with the Task Force meeting to prepare at 6:30 PM.

Defining "Very Large" Projects

Ms. Rainey began the discussion of defining "very large" projects.

Mr. Crane described the 3 tiers of our current process:

Tier 1-Under 100,000 cash capital in the operating budget

Tier 2-Borrowed, but not excluded, voted as separate warrant articles

Tier 3-Excluded debt over a dollar threshold (\$1 million? \$2 million?)

Mr. Lauer explained his informal "rule" of roofs, roads and fire trucks, and the town's policy of spending at least 5% of its operating budget annually on capital items.

Ms. Rainey stated that the 2nd tier and 3rd tier may be intertwined, for example capital planning includes an analysis of whether to replace the roof and boiler in a building (Tier 2) or build a new building (Tier 3). She stated that it may be difficult to limit a capital planning process to Tier 3, if it is intertwined with Tier 2.

Mr. Crane commented that "very large" might sometimes mean "politically very large" projects, such as parking at the high school.

Mr. Lauer opined that the way we've been doing it for 30 years is process-driven and it has worked well.

To sum up, Chairman Benjamin stated that our definition of very large projects might be based on dollar threshold, process, political components, or all 3 of these. He asked members to reflect on this and be ready to continue this discussion at our next meeting.

There was further discussion about how multi-year projects and "project creep" would fit into the definition.

2002-3 recommendations of the Facilities Planning Committee

Mr. Lauer stated that the Town has never had one "capital plan." The Town Manager and Superintendent each have capital plans, but they are not integrated, prioritized and sequenced.

He also stated that the 2002-3 recommendations of the Facilities Planning Committee were actually followed by the Town. Some members did not agree that these recommendations were followed. It was agreed that everyone would read the report before the next meeting, so that this issue can be resolved.

Best practices from DLS and other towns

Ms. Ackerman highlighted some of the handouts from Mark Kost's talk (Westford) and the Division of Local Services recommendations. She advocated for annually publishing a graph of projected debt. She repeated a previous recommendation that the Fin Com Handbook include a section on Capital Planning.

Chairman Benjamin suggested a dashboard or Executive Summary with graphics.

Mr. Crane stated that the Town already has a capital planning process. Not all of it is distributed to the public, for example there is a detailed CIP booklet with too much information. He then showed his Power Point on Cap Plan from Longmeadow, which he will distribute to Task Force members. He advocated having a list of criteria and showed examples.

Ms. Ortner stated that she had spoken to Mark Kost from Westford and he offered to come speak to our committee. She also highlighted the Implementation Charts from Envision Concord.

Preparing for Public Hearing

Elise suggested 4 sections for the Public Hearing:

Background: What the Task Force is supposed to do---goals, charge

What capital planning the Town is already doing

Proposed recommendations

Ask for public input-for example, what they consider “very large”, what they believe is missing from the current process

Mr. Crane stated that we need to package the capital planning process in a way that the public can digest it easily.

Mr. Rhames gave an example of 300 pages of detailed financial reports that were successfully consolidated into a 2-page Executive Summary.

Public Comments

Ms. Reed inquired who will be the parties to decide if a project is “very large”? She also commended the Task Force for its work.

Mr. Crane remarked that the Town of Longmeadow has the same process as Westford, but it doesn't work well. The Longmeadow Capital Planning Committee took up a lot of time and then rubber-stamped what the Town Manager recommended.

Next Meeting

Chairman Benjamin reminded everyone that at our next meeting Jan 29, we will start to take items and put them into the work plan. Our agenda will include:

- Develop an integrated systems-based list of criteria
- Discuss whether to recommend a Capital Planning Committee or not
- Prepare for the public hearing
- Continue discussion of the definition of “very large” projects
- Resolve whether or not the town actually followed the 2002 recommendations of the Facilities Planning Committee. Why or why not?

The meeting adjourned at 6:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Terri Ackerman
Clerk, Capital Planning Task Force