



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH

Town Offices
63 Main Street
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Financial Planning Committee January 16, 2014

Present:

Jason Perreault
Michael Hodge
David DeVries
Roger Leland
Richard Smith (arrived 7:09 following approval of minutes)
Heidi Bourque-Gleason (arrived 7:10 following approval of minutes)

Also Present:

John Coderre, Town Administrator
Dr. Charles Gobron, Superintendent of Schools
Christine Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Schools
Cheryl Levesque, Business Director, Schools
Patricia Kress, Chairperson, Northborough School Committee
David Kane, Town MIS/GIS Director

Meeting convened at 7:07pm by Chairman Perreault.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

December 5 2013 regular meeting - Motion to approve (Leland) was seconded (DeVries) and passed 4-0.

December 10 2013 Special Joint Meeting with Town Boards to review Financial Trend Monitoring System indicators - Motion to approve (DeVries) was seconded (Leland) and passed 3-0-1 (Hodge abstaining).

January 9 2014 regular meeting - Motion to approve (DeVries) was seconded (Leland) and passed 4-0.

Update on Lincoln Street Elementary School Building Project

Dr. Gobron distributed copies of the architect's slides presented earlier in the week to the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission. He reviewed the floor plan and the site layout. Cost estimates based on the schematic design are being obtained now. The final project cost, to be presented at Annual Town Meeting in April, will be determined mid-February at a meeting with Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), the state agency that approves reimbursement grants for school construction projects.



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The primary change is the addition of a new gymnasium at the back of the existing building, along with music space, storage, and restrooms. This area can be made accessible to the public off-hours when the rest of the school facility is closed and locked. The current gym area will be converted to media center and computer lab, addressing one of the most critical programmatic needs. Overall, the design respects, preserves, and reuses the existing structure to the greatest extent possible.

The project is sized for 270 students, dictated by MSBA's expert methodology to project enrollments. This number is below the current Lincoln Street School population (~300). In response to committee members' concerns about this, Dr. Gobron and Mr. Coderre agreed the number seems low based on the Town's recent experience. However, MSBA's analysis is driven by current community data (population growth trend, birth rates, residential build-out, build permits, etc.). After careful review of the study, they found no basis to challenge the result. As a contingency, the architect's design identifies space outside a back corner of the building where three additional classrooms could be built at a future date if sustained enrollment turns out to be higher than projected. Also, the combination of classrooms and other instructional spaces offer some flexibility to accommodate an enrollment bubble at a grade level.

The site layout separates bus pick-up/drop-off from parent/visitor access and main parking area. A paved access will encircle the entire structure to allow emergency vehicles to reach any part of it. The paved access and parking areas are organized so as to greatly reduce the amount of impervious surface in close proximity to the wetlands surrounding the site border.

It is anticipated that the classrooms will be renovated in two phases. Half of the students will remain in one wing of the building, while the other wing is under renovation; when complete, they will move to the finished wing (the ultimate destination for those grade levels), and the second wing will undergo renovation. The other half of the students will be housed in modular classrooms for the duration of the renovation, returning to the main structure when the second wing is complete. Disruption on the transition between wings will be minimized since only half the students and teachers will be moving during the school year. The modular classrooms will be located in front of, and connected to, the main building. Dr. Gobron explained that the modular unit provides adequate light, heat, air conditioning, electrical service, and restrooms. The environment is very much like typical commercial office space. Students and teachers will find it at least as comfortable, probably more so, than the existing pre-renovation classrooms.

Review of School Department Capital Requests

Funding for the Lincoln Street School renovation is the only FY15 project being requested by the school administration at Town Meeting this year. Dr. Gobron presented a draft plan for the schools' capital needs in subsequent years. The plan is still in draft form and at least one item not currently in the plan may be added (Zeh boiler replacement). The placeholder estimates for cost of future Peaslee School and Melican Middle School renovations will be revised based on experience with Lincoln Street School.



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Review of MIS Department Capital Requests

Mr. Kane distributed a detailed handout describing the status, issues, and proposal to address the private fiber link and networking equipment that connects the Police Department, Fire Department, Town Hall, and Library. Currently the Town leases the fiber from Charter (~10K annually), but owns and maintains all networking equipment connected to it. The contract with Charter has expired and, due to changes in its business model, Charter seeks to offer reduced service levels at a much higher annual cost (~30K) than the prior arrangement.

In response, Mr. Coderre and Mr. Kane have negotiated a 5-year continuation of the current lease terms, with the Town's option to terminate with 75-day notice. In that time, the Town will purchase and install its own fiber, then discontinue the lease arrangement with Charter. The project proposal includes upgrade of the Town-owned 1998 network switching equipment, which has reached the end of its useful life. The new equipment will allow for higher data transmission speeds and improvements in service, security, maintenance, reliability, and redundancy. Return on investment for the fiber network itself is estimated to be less than five years, plus the cost of the new equipment.

Next Meeting Date and Committee Meeting Schedule

Next meeting is Thursday, January 30th at 7:00pm - Review FY15 capital projects for Department of Public Works. Two additional meetings will be scheduled at that time. DPW Director Dan Nason has done a great deal of work over the past year to evaluate current conditions and develop comprehensive master plans for water/sewer and roadways. That information will be presented to the Committee to provide context for the specific capital projects planned for FY15 and beyond.

Annual on-site inspection of school buildings and grounds is expected to take place in February, date TBD. The schools are usually toured in sequence, without specific start times for each except the first. Since Lincoln Street School is of most interest this year (being the subject of a substantial funding request for renovation), it will be first in the sequence, so that its inspection time is definite.

Any other business to come before the Committee

Richard Smith, the Committee's appointee to the Town Staffing Committee, gave an informational status update on that committee's progress. All Town departments have appeared before the Staffing Committee to present their staffing needs, with largest manpower requests coming from Police, Fire, and DPW. The Staffing Committee is preparing an interim report, and expects next to engage a consultant to evaluate data on manpower, service levels, and workload, and assist to quantify the staffing needs of the police and fire departments.

Meeting adjourned at 8:49pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jason, Perreault, Chairman