

Capital Planning Task Force Minutes
March 31, 2021 – Final. Approved at April 28, 2021 meeting
Via Zoom

Present: Terri Ackerman, Select Board member; Elise Woodward, Stephen Crane, Town Manager, Karle Packard, citizen, Cynthia Rainey, Concord School Committee, Parashar Patel, Finance Committee Liaison, Jared Stanton, Director of Finance and Operations, Laurie Hunter, Superintendent of Schools

Absent: Kerry LaFleur, Concord Finance Director,

The meeting was convened at 3:05

The minutes of 3/03/21 and 3/17/21 were both reviewed, amended, and approved. The next meeting will be held on 4/14

The committee moved to a discussion of the draft template. Mr. Patel presented a slide with tier 3 project examples, including project duration. The second slide showed the project impact to an Average Single Family Tax Bill and the total impact of the project in 2021 dollars. Also shown were the impact on the FY23 tax bill and the impact of the project in the peak year tax bill.

Ms. Ackerman commented that she supported adding the median tax bill. Ms. Ackerman would like to see all of the current excluded debt. Ms. Ackerman questioned whether it is the committee's job to recommend a presentation or an actual spreadsheet to the decision-makers.

Ms. Ackerman also recommended some representation of a need assessment for the project. Mr. Patel questioned whether the committee wants to see just tier 3 project debt or all excluded debt. Mr. Packard commented that the template/spreadsheet should represent tier 3 excluded debt. Ms. Ackerman indicated three types of debt, Operating budget debt, non-tier 3 debt, and then debt for very large projects. Would we assume that a needs assessment has been completed for projects or perhaps we should include it in the template to ensure that it is clear to the decision-makers that this is an essential component of capital planning.

Mr. Patel volunteered to work on a graph to illustrate current and future tier 3 excluded debt. Mr. Packard indicated that it is important that the template/graph information be tailored for consumption by the general public, not just decision-makers. Ms. Ackerman asked for clarification on the flow of the creation of the spreadsheet/template.

Mr. Crane commented that we could probably simplify the illustration of the debt information to simple graphs and then indicate a typical payment, etc. Mr. Crane commented that we should show all excluded debt, not just the debt for very large projects. The committee agreed to a consensus on the approach.

Mr. Crane confirmed that the committee agreed to a line graph being the primary instrument to show the debt service projects accompanied by more detailed tables with backup and a calculator for every tier 3 project. There was more discussion about various approaches to the template or a graph. The template is a tool to generate the information.

Ms. Rainey commented that we might need to define better what a needs assessment would look like. Who would be responsible for assuring that the appropriate needs assessment has occurred for a very large project and what town needs may still not be met with the current very large capital projects?

Mr. Crane felt that the change in the middle school scope was a natural part of the process. Ms. Woodward said that in her experience that large capital projects always have stakeholders coming forward with requests to enlarge the scope. Ms. Woodward requested that the committee come up with ways to put safeguards into the process to protect the large capital projects from unintended consequences. Ms. Woodward used the recreation department as a good example of a department that does not have a very large project on the horizon but may have needs that may be included in a very large project. Mr. Packard questions how the process allows for town department needs and stakeholder needs.

Mr. Crane indicated the town is constantly getting feedback on town needs. A proposal for large capital project may go to the school committee or the Finance Committee. And then be presented to the Finance Committee as a warrant article.

Mr. Crane commented that there would be a building committee established for a very large project that would seek public input and participation.

Evaluation criteria should include additional municipal expenses and/or add school department operating expenses.

Ms. Ackerman commented that we should continue the discussion about adding criteria for the definition of a needs assessment. How do we have an enhanced process that is properly vetted by the public with “teeth”? Ms. Woodward asked that Ms. Ackerman work on this and present at the next meeting.

Ms. Woodward said that she would forward some documents Ms. Rainey sent to the committee regarding DLS/MMA capital planning recommendations.

Citizen Comment

Ms. Reed commented that the graph would be very useful. Please keep in mind that how you choose an enhanced process or a standing committee—this will not be perfect. Allow flexibility of adjustment, because you will need that flexibility.

Ms. Woodward commented that we will not vote on the proposed recommendations today, but we will at our next meeting.

Mr. Patel clarified that the current Finance Committee position does not have a recommendation for the process.

Ms. Woodward read an email from Mr. Banfield, submitted as a private citizen.

Mr. Packard thanked everyone for showing patience as we develop the process.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:35.

Respectfully submitted by Cynthia Rainey