



**Finance Committee  
Regular Meeting  
02/14/23**

I. Call to Order

PRESENT: Zosack, Marden, Gustison, Luoma, Ackerman, Bender, Bevilacqua (6:09 PM), Tingle

ABSENT: Archibald

II. Minutes Approval

1. Finance Committee - Regular Meeting - Feb 6, 2023 6:00 PM

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Thomas Ackerman
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Marcia Zosack
<b>AYES:</b>	Zosack, Marden, Gustison, Luoma, Ackerman, Bender, Tingle
<b>ABSENT:</b>	Archibald, Bevilacqua

III. Old Business

School funding- Superintendents have been advocating for additional funding. The 14% increase this year hits hard as cost of living has increased greatly but you can still only raise 2.5%.

IV. Whittier Vo-Tech

Maureen Lynch, Superintendent. Kara Kosmos, Business Manager.

Hard year to come before us as the budget has not come from the Governors office yet, anticipating it in two weeks. Whittier has added a Marine Technology program which has been a great success. This year Merrimac is down 9 students, which we can assume will bring the assessment down as well. There are about 1,280 students at Whittier and 400 adult evening students. Next year looking to add a school psychologist for mental health, among various other department teachers. Anticipating a 5% increase budget wise for next year. Next year is the last year of ESSR funds, which has greatly helped keeping the budget manageable. Building security consists of a guard shack at the front of the school, the front desk uses lobby-guard to scan a visitors license, with a total of four security guards. Also have a lot of departments who cater to the public, so constantly keeping that in mind. In the middle of a feasibility study for the building- deciding between renovating and new construction, but the prices are about the same. If going the renovation route the City is requiring the building to install a sprinkler system, which was estimated at \$6 million as of 3 years ago. There is an option for a renovation/addition but that doesn't solve a lot of the ADA issues. A new construction would be built at the football field. A code upgrade cost to the district \$271,000,000 with no reimbursement. An renovation/addition with \$310,000,000 with MSBA reimbursement. New construction \$286,000,000 with MSBA reimbursement. Solar building \$289,000,000 with MSBA reimbursement. The new building will enhance all the programs, it will solve issues with heat, AC and roof leaks. The MSBA has determined we are eligible and through the study we have found more issues. With a new building they could now accommodate 1,400 students, but the assessment would be significant to the Town's so the number will stay at 1,280 students.

V. Commission on Disabilities

Chris Gaudet, Chairperson

Looking for support at Capital Planning for \$45,000 for sidewalk and walkways throughout Town. In September of 2021 the Commission did a study and created a Transition Plan which is what we are working off of. Currently working on Church Street, most of the funding has been coming from Grants and Earmarks. With grants we have approximately \$90,000 to finish that project. After that we are looking to move on to Union St. Ext. with the goal of connecting the schools to Downtown. Cost is approximately \$24.51 per linear foot of sidewalk, curb cuts are about

\$2,395 per cut. 77,000 feet of sidewalk in Merrimac needs to be done, totaling approximately \$2 million. Under the AAB curb cuts are required to be done as roads are re-paved, but there is not enough funding to do that.

## **VI. Conservation**

Michelle Green, Agent. Jon Pearson, Chairperson. Greg Hochmuth, Member. Bill Andrulitus, Member.

The Conservation Commission's two main charges are to administer the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act and Merrimac Wetlands Bylaws. For over twenty years there was an Agent who served both Merrimac and West Newbury without a formal agreement. Last year a formal agreement was put in place with hiring a new agent, Merrimac's portion at 12.5 hours a week. As of this coming July 1st West Newbury is terminating the agreement to take on the agent full time, and we are requesting 25 hours per week for solely Merrimac. Surrounding Town's are also seeking agents and will consider a new joint agreement. The Commission maintains that 12.5 hours per week is not enough to complete the job or attract a qualified candidate. The West Newbury position will be 40 hours with an increase in workload with Open Space. Amesbury has hired a full time agent- they were initially advertising for 25 hours with no luck. Rockport recently lost their agent and didn't have enough commissioners to conduct business- when that happens permit applications are applied for and then it falls back to the state, which only deals with the state and not local bylaws. Georgetown is looking promising as they have recently lost their Agent. You need someone with an environmental background, policy or regulatory role to interpret the findings. Merrimac is fortunate as there is a full board with two alternates and the members are very knowledgeable while we transition to a new agent.

## **VII. Open Discussion (Non-Educational)**

FY23 Grant information has been distributed, Federal and State shown separately. The grants usually don't come into play with the omnibus budget. Each Department seeks out numerous grants each year to help aid in additional projects. Denise McClure who we are using as a planner helps with anyone who needs assistance with all parts of the grant process. The Board of Selectmen will be restarting the Strategic Planning Committee after the budget process and Town Meeting is over. Unfunded mandates are hindering all parts of the government. Next week will have the Finance Directors Recommendations.