

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes Monday, February 27, 2023

Present: (Z – zoom)

Finance Committee

Roll Call 13 in attendance:

Douglas Shea (Vice Chair)

Josette Burke (Clerk)

Audrey Grace

Kathleen Foley Greulich (Z)

Steve Hendricks

Jean Kenney

Leigh Ann Luetzen

Lawrence Pitman

Adrienne Rogers (Z)

Mark Sullivan

Mark Trudell

Lisa Van der Linden

Scott Wassel

Absent: Dennis Crowley, Brian Bain

Additional attendees:

Jim Johnson, Patrick Shield, Jodi, Cuneo, Catherine Feeley, Elizabeth Gaffey, Jack Fisher

The meeting was called to order by Douglas Shea at 7:10pm.

Meeting minutes of recorded meetings include time stamps from the video for viewing actual content.

The video can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bigKO8tIMU0>

Approval of minutes is based off of the printed word and not the video

Prior Year Unpaid Bills Article (1:16)

Town Administrator Jim Johnson stated that he is recommending No Action on the Prior Year Unpaid Bills Article at this time. This can be revisited at a later time if something comes up before Spring Town Meeting.

Eastland Circle Citizen Petition Article (2:00)

Catherine Feeley, resident living at 5 Eastland Circle, presented the Article on behalf of her and her neighbors. In 2000, funds were requested as a betterment to improve Eastland Circle. The project was halted when a family that lived there at the time pulled out, and it has been sitting stagnant since. This Article is requesting the remaining \$185,000 necessary to fully fund the rest of the project. This betterment would include installing catch basins and repaving the road.

Jim Johnson described the betterment process. After receiving authorization from Town Meeting, the Town of Walpole would hire the contractor to complete the project. Over the next 20 years, the four houses on Eastland Circle would pay for the cost of the betterment as a tax to the Town.

Catherine Feeley stated that Eastland Circle is a private way, which is why any improvements would have to be in the form of a betterment. There used to be no mail delivery or trash pickup, but now there is. The Town also plows snow.

Mark Trudell asked if the road would be paved with a chip seal or a true hard top. Jim Johnson stated that the current road is dirt, so it would be a full asphalt paving with an asphalt berm. Because there is already access to the sewer system, the road will not need to be torn up at a later date.

Brian Bain asked why the residents of Eastland Circle have waited so long before bringing this Article to Town Meeting. Catherine Feeley stated that the process simply took a long time because there were a few unintended obstacles and holdups.

Jim Johnson stated that this betterment will likely not require approval from the Planning Board. Once the Article passes Town Meeting, no other municipal approval is required. Catherine Feeley stated that the project has already been approved by the Conservation Commission.

Lisa Van der Linden asked if the residents of Eastland Circle are thinking of petitioning for the street to become an accepted street in the future. Catherine Feeley stated that there are many aspects of Eastland Circle that would make it difficult and expensive to convert to a public road that confirms to the Town's standards, such as its width and the lack of sidewalks.

Steve Hendricks asked what happens if someone on Eastland Circle sells their house. Larry Pitman stated that the betterment stays with the house, so if the owner wants to sell it, they either have to pay it off or transfer the cost to the buyer.

(17:47) Motion by Lawrence Pitman and seconded by Mark Trudell for **Favorable Action** on the Eastland Circle Citizen Petition Article.

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Town Clerk Corrective Action Article (19:24)

Town Clerk Elizabeth Gaffey presented the Corrective Action Article, which would give the Town Clerk the authority to correct any scrivener's errors that occur in the drafting of Articles, even after the approving board or committee has granted approval.

Mark Trudell asked if the Town Clerk's revisions would have to take place before the Article is submitted to the State. Elizabeth Gaffey stated that she could make minor changes even after the Article reaches the office of the Attorney General.

Elizabeth Gaffey stated that any changes made would not be unilateral, but rather many people would evaluate the need for the change before she corrects anything. Any changes would be noted in a footnote stating when and why the revision occurred.

Mark Trudell asked if this would be a procedural authorization or a bylaw change. Jim Johnson confirmed that this would just be a procedural authorization.

(24:33) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Scott Wassel for **Favorable Action** on the Town Clerk Corrective Action Article.

The motion passed 13-0-0.

Board of Assessors Articles (25:30)

Jack Fisher, Chair of the Board of Assessors presented the two Board of Assessors Articles concerning senior exemptions. These articles would index the income and asset level requirements of Walpole's senior tax relief programs to the cost of living to allow it to grow with inflation. Since the last time the levels were adjusted in 2011, there have been steep declines in the number of retired citizens eligible to take advantage of senior exemptions, and this would help remedy that.

Lawrence Pitman asked if the senior tax relief programs eliminate the tax burden or just delay the payment to be transferred to the next owner of the property. Jack Fisher stated that the exemption simply reduces their tax bill with no shift whatsoever.

Lawrence Pitman asked how the tax relief applies to any surviving minor children when they turn eighteen. Jack Fisher stated that he believes the tax exemption would end when the child turns eighteen but he cannot think of any examples where any child under the age of eighteen has become the property owner when the parent or legal guardian passes.

Scott Wassel asked if the tax relief is granted quarterly or annually. Jack Fisher stated that the exemption is annual, which usually affects the 3rd and 4th Quarter tax bills.

Lisa Van der Linden stated that the wording of the tax relief program's guidelines regarding surviving spouses and minors is very confusing and should be reviewed. Jack Fisher stated that he would take a look at the exact text.

Josette Burke asked if the program is opt-in or if eligible participants are enrolled automatically. Jack Fisher stated that each participant has to apply for the program annually and provide proper documentation. Income limits, asset levels, and the five-year residency length requirement must be verified by the Town.

Leigh Ann Luetzen asked if other towns have also adopted similar cost of living increases for their senior tax relief programs. Jack Fisher stated that some have, but not every community in the area has.

Lawrence Pitman asked about the financial cost to the town that these programs create. Jack Fisher stated that for FY22, they awarded a total of \$2,275 of exemptions to the participants in one program and about \$28,000 to the participants of the other. It is uncertain how many people will enroll because of the limit changes and how much potential town revenue will be lost to the program in the upcoming years.

Mark Sullivan asked why the amount granted for total exemptions is higher than what Jack Fisher described. Jack Fisher stated that the figure Mark Sullivan was referring to includes all of Walpole's tax relief programs, including those for veterans, people with disabilities, and surviving spouses of police officers who were killed in the line of duty.

(39:30) Motion by Scott Wassel and seconded by Mark Trudell for **Favorable Action** on Article 20.
The motion passed 13-0-0.

(40:04) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Josette Burke for **Favorable Action** on Article 21.
The motion passed 13-0-0.

(40:55) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Kathleen Foley Greulich for **No Action** on Article 10.
The motion passed 13-0-0.

Approval of Meeting Minutes (45:40)

The Finance Committee suggested some minor changes to the Meeting Minutes for October 6, 2022 and February 13 & 16, 2023.

(46:50) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Adrienne Rogers to approve the meeting minutes for Thursday, October 6, 2022 as amended.
The motion passed 9-0-4 (Jean Kenney, Lawrence Pitman, Lisa Van der Linden, and Mark Sullivan abstained).

(48:40) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Scott Wassel to approve the meeting minutes for Monday, February 13, 2023 as amended.
The motion passed 8-0-5 (Audrey Grace, Jean Kenney, Lawrence Pitman, Lisa Van der Linden, and Mark Sullivan abstained).

(50:15) Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Leigh Ann Luetzen to approve the meeting minutes for Thursday, February 16, 2023 as amended.
The motion passed 7-0-6 (Audrey Grace, Jean Kenney, Kathleen Foley Greulich, Lisa Van der Linden, Scott Wassel, and Steve Hendricks abstained).

Adjournment (51:11)

Motion by Mark Trudell and seconded by Josette Burke to adjourn.
The motion passed 13-0-0.

The Finance Committee adjourned at 9:00pm.