

FIRST DRAFT



Natick Finance Committee

Pursuant to Chapter 40, Section 3 of the Town of Natick By-Laws, I attest that the attached copy is the approved copy of the minutes for the following Meeting:

Town of Natick Finance Committee

Meeting Date: August 24, 2021

The minutes were approved through the following action:

Motion:	xxx
Made by:	xxx
Seconded by:	xxx
Vote:	0 – 0 – 0
Date:	<date>, 2021

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce Evans

Secretary

Natick Finance Committee



TOWN OF NATICK

Meeting Notice

POSTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF M.G.L. CHAPTER 30A, Sections 18-25

Natick Finance Committee

PLACE OF MEETING

Virtual Meeting accessed via Zoom:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82893989644>
Meeting ID: 828 9398 9644 Passcode:
7whXt2 One tap mobile
+19292056099,,82893989644#,,, *489873#
US (New York) Dial by your location +1
929 205 6099 US (New York)

DAY, DATE AND TIME

August 24, 2021
at 7:00 PM

Notice to the Public: 1) Finance Committee meetings may be broadcast/recorded by Natick Pegasus. 2) The meeting is an open public meeting and interested parties can attend the meeting. 3) Those seeking to make public comments (for topics not on the agenda or for specific agenda items) are requested to submit their comments in advance, by 2:00 PM on the day of the meeting, to the Chair: phayes.fincom@natickma.org. Comments will be posted on NovusAgenda and read aloud for the proper agenda item. Please keep comments to 350-400 words. 4) The Chat function on Zoom Conferencing will be disabled.

Posted: August 20, 2021 10:30 AM

MEETING AGENDA

- 1. Call to Order**
 - a. Pledge of Allegiance & Moment of Silence
 - b. Advisement of Pegasus Live Broadcast and Recording for On-Demand Viewing
 - c. Review of Meeting Agenda and Ordering of Items
- 2. Announcements**
- 3. Public Comments**
 - a. [Committee policy & procedures available via this link and also at the meeting location](#)
- 4. Meeting Minutes**
 - a. [Review & Approve Meeting Minutes for April 1, 2021 & April 20, 2021](#)
- 5. New Business**
 - a. Annual Reorganization - Election of Finance Committee Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary
 - b. Finance Committee Retreat - i. Fall meeting preferences (start time, virtual or in-person meetings, schedule) ii. Google Drive review and Member info update iii. Subcommittee assignments and responsibilities review iv. Town Administrator conversation on budget timing and Natick Community Organic Farm v. SATM 2021 session debrief vi. FATM 2021 preview
- 6. Committee Discussion (for items not on the agenda)**
- 7. Adjourn**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Hossam Behery, Member
David Coffey, Member
Jeff DeLuca, Member
Bruce Evans, Secretary
Todd Gillenwater, Vice-Chairman
Bill Grome, Member
Kat Monahan, Member
Richard Pope, Member
Linda Wollschlager, Chairperson

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Dirk Coburn, Member
Cathy Coughlin, Member
Julien LaFleur, Member
Jerry Pierce, Member
Phil Rooney, Member
Chris Resmini, Member

Annual Reorganization - Election of Finance Committee Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary

Ms Wollschlager nominated Mr. Evans as Secretary, seconded by Mr. Gillenwater, voted 9 – 0 – 0

Roll-call vote

Mr. Behery = yes	Mr. Grome = yes
Mr. Coffey = yes	Ms. Monahan = yes
Mr. DeLuca = yes	Mr. Pope = yes
Mr. Evans = yes	Ms. Wollschlager = yes
Mr. Gillenwater = yes	

Ms Wollschlager nominated Mr. Gillenwater as Vice Chair, seconded by Mr. Grome, voted 9 – 0 – 0

Roll-call vote

Mr. Behery = yes	Mr. Grome = yes
Mr. Coffey = yes	Ms. Monahan = yes
Mr. DeLuca = yes	Mr. Pope = yes
Mr. Evans = yes	Ms. Wollschlager = yes
Mr. Gillenwater = yes	

Mr. Gillenwater nominated Ms. Wollschlager as Chair, seconded by Mr. Coffey, voted 9 – 0 – 0

Roll-call vote

Mr. Behery = yes	Mr. Grome = yes
Mr. Coffey = yes	Ms. Monahan = yes
Mr. DeLuca = yes	Mr. Pope = yes
Mr. Evans = yes	Ms. Wollschlager = yes
Mr. Gillenwater = yes	

Fall Meeting preferences

Ms. Wollschlager said there are several alternatives – a) meet in person, b) remote only, c) hybrid mode. Ms. Wollschlager said she i And I have to say right now that I'm not sure how that would work since masks are required at Town Hall and I'm not sure whether there would have to be a quorum physically present if we went with a hybrid approach. If we do go that way, I think there's a way to make it possible because other boards have such as the Select Board and the School Committee.

Mr. Evans said he can offer a perspective on that since his wife is on the Planning Board and they are going with a hybrid model. They surveyed the six members and there was a three – three vote to meet in person or continue to meet virtually, so they're investigating what it will take to do a hybrid model and there are a lot of unknowns in terms of what you have to do is provide public access. He opined that the hybrid model makes it much more difficult for the Chair since she has to monitor on-site and virtual activities.

Ms. Wollschlager added that even with a hybrid model, all our votes would still have to be roll call. Ms. Wollschlager said the hybrid model may cause confusion for the citizen sponsors and public to decide whether they come in person or participate via Zoom. My sense is that we probably want to continue virtually for of fall and revisit this for Spring Town Meeting.

Mr. Grome said his preference is to continue meeting virtually because we don't have to worry about potential snowstorms and would prefer not to have a mask on. Ultimately, we will get back to sitting around the table, but he'd prefer to wait until masks are no longer required in Town Hall.

Mr. Coffey said we should stay with the zoom since there's too much uncertainty in terms of increased exposure rates so we're better off continuing to do it this way for everybody's safety at this time.

Mr. Gillenwater said if he were being selfish it's simpler to attend from his office than it is to go to Town Hall and staying virtual makes sense from an epidemiological standpoint, so he is okay with meeting virtually.

Mr. DeLuca said staying with Zoom makes sense. I think if we went hybrid, the logistics would be incredibly difficult - you have to monitor the physical room and the Zoom meeting and it would be difficult for the members and the public to follow. Also, what would happen if there's a technical issue with the Zoom and only some members are meeting at town hall, we probably would need to cancel the meeting. The bottom line is that meeting on Zoom seems to be working fine for these meetings and it also incorporates public input too.

Ms. Wollschlager agreed, noting that if we were to go hybrid, we would need someone to actively manage the Zoom meeting and coordinate the Chair because she can't watch on the screen and pay attention to people in the room at the same time.

Mr. Pope said he would be a fan of Zoom permanently, even after COVID was over and stated that he thinks it's better for larger public input, and a larger breadth of members who could participate and attend. Mr. Pope continued to say that he wants to meet everyone in person, but that could be solved by a dinner outside of a meeting.

Ms. Wollschlager agreed and noted that she really likes some aspects of Zoom (in increased public participation) and said that if we do go back to meeting in person, she thought the hybrid model may be a great way to go. It's also easier on Finance Committee members - It's a whole lot easier if a member has something early the next day, that member can log off prior to the end of the meeting as long there was a quorum without them.

Mr. Evans said he didn't think it's our problem to solve this alone. He noted that any of the televised boards are going to have to deal with the hybrid model. Ultimately, two things are likely to happen. One is that we'll need to figure out a town-wide policy of how we handle this. From a logistics point of view, people have become comfortable with virtual meetings and it increases citizen involvement, allows people to tune in when they want to, or when there's a particular topic that interests them.

Ms. Wollschlager reviewed the Committee's Google Drive for new members. The Drive has the member list and subcommittee assignments. In the interest of privacy, she said she blanked out address information, but requested that members verify their information in the first tab in the spreadsheet. The 2nd tab is for the serial numbers in our Chromebooks and she said that members who are looking to get a Chromebook for Finance Committee work to let her know and she will arrange for the member to get more (Mr. Scurlock returned his Chromebook, but it is not in working condition at present).

Ms. Wollschlager pointed out that Mike Linehan and Jim Scurlock are no longer on the Finance Committee - both of them might come back at some other point in time, but their commitments just did not permit them to serve at this time, so we need to find people for certain subcommittees. Mr. Evans has, once again, volunteered to be the Chair of the Education and Learning subcommittee, which is awesome, but we need to add another new member to that subcommittee. Ms. Wollschlager asked members to let her know which subcommittees they would want to serve on or whether there is like to switch from one subcommittee as soon as possible. If you're wondering what these subcommittees do, there's a tab in this workbook that has descriptions that I keep going back and looking at.

We typically ask people to be on two subcommittees, so unless you're on the Capital subcommittee or the Education and Learning subcommittee, you won't have a meeting in the fall. However, we need one additional member on the Capital subcommittee and two new members on the DPW subcommittee. If a

member is the chair of a subcommittee, we typically do not ask them to be on another committee or another major committee. So with Mr. Evans taking over the Chair of the Education and Learning subcommittee, you will not have time to be co-chair of the DPW subcommittee. Mr. DeLuca added that, in his experience, the Education and Learning subcommittee is probably the heaviest lift of all the subcommittees. Ms. Wollschlager agreed, noting that the two big ones are Education and Learning in General Government subcommittees and have the most meetings.

Ms. Wollschlager met with Mr. Jamie Erickson, our newly hired Town Administrator and we talked about various things including how things could go better with the budgeting process. There is an Article on the Fall Annual Town Meeting warrant that's still being worked out to potentially delay when the preliminary Town Administrator budget needs to be submitted and I told him that the way would be acceptable to her as long as we delayed the start of Town Meeting, noting that we can't compress the schedule any further. As you know, town bylaws specify that Town Meeting be scheduled for 2 weeks after the town election on the first Tuesday of that week. If we delayed the start of Town Meeting until after April school vacation week vacation, it would buy us essentially two weeks. As members who have participated in the budget process, the Committee doesn't have key numbers available until the end of February. Mr. Errickson was suggesting having the preliminary budget available in early February. This idea came before the finance committee many years ago when I first got on the Committee, but it was not well thought-out and was universally panned, so there's a lot that would need to be worked out and that may not even be worked out for this fall.

Ms. Wollschlager also asked him about the Natick Community Organic Farm (NCOF). As many of you know, since a number of members have questions about this, the issue isn't resolved. The town received some insurance proceeds (the barn that burned was on the town of Natick's property insurance) and they're still working out with NCOF how things would work. NCOF might be interested in rebuilding and owning the barn and if they do that, there are a number of contractual things that would be necessary. Mr. Errickson said there would be no financial impact to the town this fall; the insurance proceeds are sitting in an account and will eventually go to free cash for the following fiscal year and the town will have to figure out how that works. But Mr. Errickson is looking to renegotiate or restructure the contract because for those not familiar with the farm contract, it's fairly non-standard. In addition to that, we get to get information about the private fundraising they've done as well as apparently Representative Linsky got NCOF some money, so we want to make sure we have a full picture of the money that is available for this. One issue is how the potential insurance can be moved from the town's accounts to NCOF and whether that is even possible.

Fall Annual Town Meeting Preview

There are 39 articles on the warrant and we have a shortened schedule because we will not have 2 meetings due to Rosh Hashanah (September 7) and Yom Kippur (September 16). It's always challenging in the fall to fit everything in so it's going to be even more challenging now. I'm not expecting the financial articles to be ready until closer to the end of September and Mr. Errickson said he wasn't expecting certified free cash until early October, so that will once again be a challenge. The good news is that the Planning Board has also already heard some of the planning articles, so we should be able to hear those earlier - they've already heard four of them and two more are coming up in the beginning of September, and they will be hearing the citizen petition articles at the end of September.

Mr. Evans commented on the planning Board hearings that, given past history, Citizen petitions typically take multiple meetings to be ruled on by the Planning Board and they are required to provide a three week notice for their meetings. Ms. Wollschlager agreed, but noted that the Committee will have the information from their preliminary hearing, even if it's not a final vote from the Planning Board, which is what we did last fall as well.

Ms. Wollschlager said the Committee's first meeting will likely be in early September. Mr. Evans asked if it would be possible to ask Mr. Errickson to provide us with those Articles that are typically on the fall Town Meeting warrant that request no action be made available in early September. Ms. Wollschlager said she was not very successful at doing that last spring because many of the articles were financial articles, but said she would suggest that Mr. Errickson. Right now, it looks like October 7 will be our last meeting before we need to write the Recommendation Book. Obviously, if things come up, we might need to be meeting either right before or during Town Meeting, since there's always a possibility that something might come up. The reason for it being October 7 is that the following Monday is a holiday (Columbus/indigenous Peoples Day), so we need to get the book done so that is completed by October 12. This is when we are statutorily obligated to present our recommendations to Town Meeting, a week in advance of Town Meeting. Typically, we send out an initial letter with our recommendation votes that typically takes a day to print and then distribute; the Recommendation Book takes longer to print and mail to Town Meeting members. So we do the letter in order to make sure that we get everything to Town Meeting members one week in advance of the start of Town Meeting.

Ms. Monahan asked whether all the meetings start at 7 PM. Ms. Wollschlager said the full Finance Committee's meetings typically start at 7 PM which makes it a lot easier for people to get home, although fewer people are going into work these days, but if you do, that gives you enough time to get home. Ms. Monahan noted that she has a two year old who sleeps in the room that she uses to participate in meetings.

Ms. Wollschlager quickly reviewed the warrant articles – many of the articles are pretty standard articles such as hearing committee reports, disposition of unused funds, etc. Ms. Wollschlager said there is a citizen petition for Parks and Recreation minimum wage increase and she is talking tomorrow to the chair of the Select Board who is advocating for the Diversity Officer position and will discuss the other Select Board-sponsored articles. There is another citizen position for an easement, another citizen petition for South Natick Dam mitigation, zoning articles presented by another citizen (George Richards) as well as a zoning article from former Town Meeting member, Peter Golden. We have a charter amendment from the Town Clerk and I spoke with her about that Article, it reflects a change in MGL and she thinks this may be something that's could potentially be on the consent agenda. The moderator has an article to propose a hybrid Town Meeting. There are a few articles from the Town Meeting Practices Review Committee (TMPRC). For those of you that are Town Meeting members, and even for those of you that are aren't, the TMPRC have completed a revision of the Town Meeting Member Handbook that's available on the town website. If you go to the town website, and you click on the newflash and then view all you'll see the list of news documents, it was posted on July 29. Ms. Wollschlager will send the link out to the Committee. The TMPRC we'll be reviewing the Town Meeting member handbook and they'd like the comments back soon, by the beginning of September.

Spring Town Meeting debrief.

Ms. Wollschlager said it's really hard to generalize because last year was distorted by COVID and this year was still not business as usual. But if you can think back to the subcommittee process, to our meeting process about things that worked well and didn't work well, if anyone has any thoughts about that. For example, the subcommittees had a lot of meetings; we had six General Government subcommittee meetings, eight Education and Learning subcommittee meetings, and two DPW subcommittee meetings. We started having the subcommittee process really be responsible for a lot of the budget work a couple years ago and the general consensus was that this was a good idea and was working rather than trying to rehash the budgets at our full committee meetings.

Mr. Grome said the biggest problem that the subcommittee have is reviewing budgets and 3 or 4 meetings going because, as things change, town administration comes back to us with an update and, in

some cases, the recommendations that were going to go to Town Meeting didn't take place until the article actually got on Town Meeting floor. Mr. Grome said, In general, the timeliness and correctness of the information that we receive at the subcommittee meetings is critical. He felt like some of the presenters came in, knowing that the information is not 100% finalized, just go through the motions of making a presentation knowing they're going to have to come back when they had the final updates. Mr. Grome said he would like to see presentations made to the subcommittees only when the information is rock-solid. Ms. Wollschlager said if the Committee waited that long, it would be meeting during Town Meeting.

Mr. Evans agreed with Mr. Grome's points. However, as Ms. Wollschlager pointed out, last year was a particularly difficult one in terms of having a lot of moving parts that that the impact COVID on the budget process, with nothing settled in the budget until extremely late in the game. Mr. Grome said it was also was variable in terms of what some of the departments could provide. Many of them had to provide updates because they were blindsided by the prior administration. He said he is not taking shots at anyone, just summarizing what he saw. Moving forward, he hopes that the state has more of an idea of how to develop its budget in this environment and when the FY23 budget is set, this will be less of an issue so we can have fewer of these fits and starts.

Mr. Gillenwater said he definitely thinks the subcommittees add value; If nothing else, the frustration and everything else that the subcommittee members feel is just slightly more limited, as opposed to having the full Committee be upset. That said, he noted that he empathized with Mr. Grome's position that, even as late as the day before, if it ends up that they don't have the numbers, town administration and the subcommittee chair should cancel meeting. Ms. Wollschlager summarized that the subcommittee chairs stay in contact with the department heads to really understand what is going to be available at the meetings. Mr. Gillenwater said he agreed and said there is no shame in canceling the meeting if the information is not available. Ms. Wollschlager said she believes that different subcommittees had different experiences last year, noting that the General Government subcommittee probably had the greatest amount of change. I think the Education and Learning subcommittee was just working through everything, but everything didn't come together until the last minute on the NPS budget. Mr. Evans said they had two meetings with DPW and they were well prepared. The only thing that came up with DPW was this whole PFAS issue that came up with the last minute, so we had a little churn on that with the capital article. But otherwise, they did have some issues with their budget, but they were they were very quick to point out those errors and correct them. Mr. Marsette did an excellent job of pulling that information together for us. And in particular, the job he did on all the PFAS stuff was, you know, if you could write a textbook on how to how to inform a Finance Committee on a complicated topic, this would be a great case study in how to do it well.

Ms. Wollschlager said she wanted to get our thoughts on record while our memories are relatively fresh so that we can look and how we might improve, as opposed to trying to rush this through in the spring when we're preparing for another Town Meeting. Ms. Wollschlager said the concept of having the budget available later might work for us and there are some other things to consider. She said she has with the Moderator about maybe putting more things on the consent agenda, but said she said it may not help us as much as it would help Town Meeting.

Ms. Wollschlager asked whether there are things that we did not receive last year but want to receive each year. The TMPRC article about standardizing what financial information should always be included in budget was useful, but wanted to check with the Committee whether there are things that we ought to be receiving from the administration or department heads up that were not getting now. Mr. Evans noted that one of the things that happened at Town Meeting was the town administration felt they were blindsided by this TMPRC request and the takeaway from that was to have the TMPRC and town administration discuss it and determine what was feasible. For his vantage point, he hasn't heard

whether progress has been made in this area. Ms. Wollschlager said she believes that things have been worked out between the two groups

Ms. Wollschlager said for Fall Annual Town Meeting, the Finance Committee doesn't typically have information on how the town budget has done in the previous year and that's frustrating to her. Here we are, a few months after the close of the fiscal year and we don't know how the town has done in the previous fiscal year. I've heard some very preliminary presentations from Mr. Townsend about providing better information with more detailed long range plans. As you know, there's talk of a possible operational override – we should know what's being discussed in this area. One of the things I'm going to be talking about with the Select Board Chair tomorrow, is the role of the Financial Planning Committee *FPC) - is there still a role for that and is it going to become active again or is this something that the Finance Committee needs to step up to handle. She said she had some conversations with Mr. Gillenwater about that as well. Mr. Evans thanked Ms. Wollschlager for bringing that to the attention of the Select Board Chair. We need to be looped in to that communication and not suddenly find out that an operational override is going to be placed on the local election ballot.

Ms. Coughlin said one of her frustrations in the past has been the representatives from the Finance Committee that go to these Financial Planning Committee meetings, and then don't share the results to enable members to get a fuller financial picture. Ms. Wollschlager agreed and noted that she started scheduling time on our agendas for people who are on outside committees to inform other members on what's going on in these outside committees. Mr. Evans said, having said that, that there has not been an FPC meeting in at least a year, so if this is the vehicle to get this information sorted out, we should do so. Ms. Wollschlager said when she first got on the FPC, one of the first conversations that they had was whether the FPC was still useful, so if it does start up again that will also be a topic of conversation.

Mr. DeLuca said in light of the potential discussions of an operational override, he'd like to broaden the scope a bit to incorporate a few other things in there. He said a town-wide audit overview can be discussed in the FPC. in his opinion, another item should be to get presentations on the setting of the actual tax rate and any split tax rate discussions. Another item that we should be getting more information on is the status of the pension liability and OPEB liability and the investment aspects of these. He stated that, on multiple occasions, he has asked for a schedule of investments on some of those accounts to enable him to look into some of the items for the returns that we've received on these investments. He said he cannot recall seeing a schedule of investments. Ms. Wollschlager noted that the retirement accounts are under the control of the Retirement Board and town administration. Mr. DeLuca said he understands that, but there's no reason that we cannot be shown status of the investments and where the assets are being deployed.

Mr. Gillenwater said there's an Audit Committee meeting next Thursday where we're going over some of the audit results, management letters, findings, etc. Like many other things in government COVID, threw some of the audit work into scheduling difficulties and conflicts, but we're pretty much at the point of where things are being finalized and we have final memos and things like that. So the sum of those subsidiary and asset schedules are on my list of things to look for and, if they are not available, he will ask that they be made available in the next cycle, and he'd like to see one or two financial statements as well. Some of that has to do with school stuff and it mostly revolves around how difficult would it be to have MUNIS set up some recurring financial statements that would be useful to some of our subcommittees such as the Education Committee? Wouldn't it be great to have a deep detailed cash flow and sources and uses segregating the schools as opposed to being rolled up into everything? Ms. Wollschlager noted that town administration and school administration are working on how MUNIS can be used to address some of the issues that we've heard in the past about some of the information not being available to the schools. Mr. Evans said he asked how the MUNIS issues were coming along and whether the obstacles had been removed.

Mr. DeLuca noted that we should check with town administration regarding cleanup of accounts, so we get a listing of outstanding accounts that might still have funds in them but can be closed, where funds are, and what balances are in those accounts. This might be under the purview of audit, but I think it'd be nice to have a list of where the town has its accounts. Mr. DeLuca opined when the last time they did an RFQ for the investment rates the town is getting on their accounts.

Ms. Wollschlager said we've seen a number of instances where town administration during the past few town meetings where the town has gone back to close out unused funds from previous town meeting authorizations and utilize that money for, typically, capital items.

Public comments policy

Ms. Wollschlager said she wants to get clarity on the town's public comments policy and social media policy. She brought this up previously with the Select Board chair wants to check back on what's happening with it. This was something that Town Counsel, at one point, thought about taking a stab at, but I don't think that lead anywhere.

MEETING ADJOURNED – 8:15 PM