October 28th, 2019 Minutes

Finance Committee Meeting

**Present:** Daniel Lewenberg, Arnold Cohen, Hanna Switlekowski, Anja Bernier, Ann Keitner, Patricia-Lee Achorn, Ira Miller, Charles Goodman, Gordon Gladstone, Edward Philips

**Absent:** William Brack and Anil Ramoju

1. **Discuss Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Article 1: Long term lease authorization for other solar locations & PILOT with lessee/operator of system was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant:
	+ Estimated total of $12,715,000 to $18, 564,000 revenue over 20-year lease term for all proposed solar projects including landfill project from Article 2.
* Members of the Energy Advisory Board George Aronson, Lajos Kamocsay and Silas Fyler attended.
* Areas in question for projects identified in Article 1 include Gavin’s Pond parking lot, East Elementary parking lot and Heights Elementary roof.
* Residents/abutters in attendance expressed concerns regarding safety and property values associated with solar installation for Gavin’s Pond parking lot.
* Members of the Finance Committee and the Energy Advisory Committee addressed concerns:
	+ Every town owned parcel over 2 acres was assessed and the selected areas were considered optimal solar project sites.
	+ Several other nearby towns have similar solar installations, including in Canton, Wayland High School, Lincoln-Sudbury High School parking lot and the Diocese in Braintree.
	+ Safety concerns are important and should be addressed in the future as the project progresses if the project is approved.
* October 29th, 2019 a Select Board Meeting will consider revisions to Article 1.
* Further discussion and voting on Article 1 and all articles will be at Special Town Meeting Monday, November 4th, 2019.

Article 2: Long term lease authorization for solar energy at former landfill & PILOT with lessee/operator of system and amend Chapter 181 of the Acts of 2012 to authorize Select Board to enter into leases up to 30 years was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant:
	+ This article would authorize the Select Board to enter into agreements to let and/or lease the former landfill property located off Mountain Street for a period of 30 years to finance, develop, own and operate a solar photovoltaic energy system and supplying solar energy.
	+ This article would further authorize the Select Board to negotiate and enter into a payment in lieu of a tax agreement with the lessee/operator of the solar photovoltaic energy system developed at the former landfill property and take other related action.

Article 3: General bylaw change: amend Chapter 43: Legal affairs to authorize the town administrator, with approval, to enter into land lease agreements up to thirty years was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant:
	+ This article would authorize the Town Administrator to solicit, award and enter into lease or license agreements for the use of land owned by the Town of Sharon that is declared surplus, without the necessity for further authorization by Town Meeting.

Article 4: General bylaw change: amend Chapter 221- Signs to permit billboards in Business District D and Recreation & Residential Overlay District within 350’ east of I-95 was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant:
	+ Not a zoning bylaw change.
	+ Up to eight billboards, with initial lump sum payments of $125,000 on each and monthly payments of $893.00 on each.
* Concerns regarding proximity of billboard to homes was discussed, and that billboards are not within 1000 feet of homes.

Article 5: Acquire Rattlesnake Hill for open space purposes was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant:
	+ No increase in taxes for Town of Sharon taxpayers for this purchase due to use of Town of Sharon Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds and borrowing.
	+ $7.5 million would be funded by CPA and borrowing and $2.5 million from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the anticipated purchase price of $10 million.
* Funding for purchase was discussed. Every taxpayer in the Town of Sharon pays 1% tax surcharge to CPC. Undesignated CPC funds and those earmarked for open space will be used to make the investment and pay interest on the borrowings. Those funds will be replenished in the future with tax revenue.

Article 6: New High School Funding was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant:
	+ Cost to the town for the project is approximately$110 million. Remaining $53 million will be paid by the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) if the town votes in favor of funding. Failure to approve the Article would remove Sharon from the MSBA process.
* Concerns regarding debt load and Town of Sharon credit rating were discussed, including a potential higher burden on schools as families move in and older residents leave, and projections that capacity may be met at current elementary schools within 5 years.
* Fred Turkington, Town Administrator, discussed Town of Sharon’s financial and credit standing:
	+ The Town of Sharon has created a financial buffer and has clean financial audits, resulting in good bond ratings.
	+ Voting in favor of Article 6 would allow the Town of Sharon to take advantage of historically low interest rates.

Article 7: Acquire land on South Main Street for traffic improvements was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant.
	+ Article 7 would authorize the Select Board to acquire a permanent easement, a permanent highway easement and temporary construction easements along the south-easterly side line of South Main Street between Interstate 95 and Gavin’s Pond Road.
	+ To convey the easements to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or others for widening South Main Street and the installation of traffic lights and pedestrian signals at the intersection of Old Post Road and South Main Street.

Article 8: Acquire 18 Briar Hill Road was discussed.

* Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, read summarized Finance Committee recommendation from special town meeting warrant.
	+ Article 8 would authorize the Town of Sharon to raise and appropriate funds for the purchase of 18 Briar Hill Road, which abuts where the Town water tower is situated, to provide an area for construction equipment and to address abutters concerns regarding vegetation and access driveways.
1. **High School Project Tax Impact Calculator now available**

Daniel Lewenberg, Finance Committee Chair, encourages residents to view the High School Project Tax Impact Calculator which is now available on the Town of Sharon website. The calculator estimates the tax impact of the proposed Sharon High School Project.

# **Adjournment**

**MOTION:** by Anja Bernier **SECONDED:** by Ann Keitner to adjourn **VOTED:** 10-0-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 09:26 pm.