

MEETING OF THE
CAPITAL PLANNING AND FACILITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2023 – 10:00 AM
GEORGE PARENT CONFERENCE ROOM

The Capital Planning and Facilities Advisory Committee held a meeting on Thursday, February 16, 2023, Committee Chair Harnois called the meeting to order at 11:00 am.

Agenda Item #1 - Roll call

Four members were present. Committee Chair Harnois, Councilor Mike Marketti, Adriana Robaina HR Director/Asst. Town Manager, Jonathan Parent, Director of Technology, Citizen Member Conrad Letourneau. Also present were Dr. Jeffrey Villar, Southbridge Public School Superintendent, and Seth Racine, SPS Business Manager, Charlie Blanchard, Interim Town Manager.

Agenda Item #2 – Consider accepting the meeting minutes from January 26, 2023.

Motion to accept it as amended.

Unanimous of all present

Agenda #3

Review and discuss the Southbridge Public Schools Capital Requests for FY 2024 – 2029

Dr. Villar stated that they structured their request under two priorities, basic safety requirements, and emergency repairs.

For their basic safety requirements, he is requesting \$280K of Capital funds for two projects. First to ensure that the schools can communicate with 911 emergency services they would like to upgrade their phone systems. Dr. Villar stated that you need to be able to call 911 from every room in the school. 911 needs to know which room dialed 911 and be able to establish the location and have the ability to call back. All schools need to be upgraded so they are complying with the new laws. The upgrade would satisfy the two new recent laws that were passed. Second, they need to replace a 15-year-old maintenance truck as the back of the truck is rusted. The truck will be used to plow the schools.

Emergency repairs request – In 2019 the Town of Southbridge hired a firm to create a facilities study. That report stated that elements within the building had exceeded their life cycle and required a planned capital repair budget. The report also noted that the town was at a crossroads with its school buildings and that they needed immediate repair.

The town report outlined \$35 million in additional repairs within 6 years. In FY2024, \$9.2M in FY2025 \$16M in repairs. Elementary schools and Cole Ave need to be renovated and all need new roofs. The school has experienced a number of emergency repairs since the report including patching roofs, replacing windows, water heater repairs, and asbestos removal from the Cole Ave facility.

Seth Racine, SPS Business Manager stated that there is a real opportunity for Southbridge to take advantage of State Aide funding. The MSBA takes a percentage of all of our sales tax and uses it to fund

approved building projects. They have two different programs, emergency repairs or help fund major renovations and repairs.

As an example, the City of Lawrence, a receivership district is receiving \$120M dollars for two new elementary schools. That is 80% percent of funding for school renovations. Citizen Member Letourneau asked if being in receivership would give us an advantage in getting money. Seth Racine said yes. Dr. Villar said another factor that gives us an advantage is that we have a 90% percent high-needs population (economically disadvantaged, English language learners, or special education students). The other example is the Spencer-East Brookfield Regional School district was awarded \$45M to renovate its high school.

A master plan is required to apply for the funds. We have contracted an Architectural firm to create one which will give us an advantage. The study may take a year. We need it to know which direction we need to go. A condition of the MSBA is that Towns will not leave the renovated buildings for at least 10 years. If you move out prior to the ten years they will ask for their money back. They are working with an architectural firm and are requesting \$350k for emergency repairs.

Dr. Villar said that part of the \$350k will be used to replace a section of the roof that blew off of West Street School and a window that a child pushed out that was completely rotted. During a windy cold weekend, another window was pulled out that ripped part of the structure out. The issue is that he can't tell you exactly what will fail but can tell you that things will fail because the schools haven't been updated for 30 years. Cole Ave building is in rough shape. Does the town want to invest in that building?

Councilor Marketti asked if we would require the list to be itemized and broken down for the \$350k. Chairman Harnois stated that it would be hard to break that down at this point as long as the committee and council would be okay with it as long as it stays within the categories. As long as the money is used for those types of things.

Councilor Marketti said that he had no problem with the phone upgrade request because it was specific. He asked if the vehicle request was for FY2024. Dr. Villar said that he would like to purchase the vehicle in FY 2024 as it generally takes 6 months to one year to get one. The current truck is fifteen years old and has been used to plow extensively. The problem is that the body is rotting and eventually is going to fail. He believes that the Town can put the vehicle out to surplus to recoup some value. They have upgraded three trucks since Dr. Villar's tenure with the schools. Councilor Marketti went over the Towns vehicle policy which states that the town would like a repair history, evaluation, and appraisal if possible. Councilor Marketti would want to see more information on the condition of the vehicle but he is not disputing the request. The school currently has five vehicles in its fleet.

Councilor Marketti said that the funds that the school is seeking for the MSBA state aide funding opportunity to renovate the schools is money that the town would have to borrow. He asked what do we have to do in order for the state to give us that money. Seth Racine said that there are many steps in the process to go in front of the MSBA. To apply the town needs to give a vote that they are approving the application. The minutes and votes are included in the application. From there if the application moves to the next round there is a study to make sure what the costs would be and the commitment. There are many steps involved that need strong coordination between the town and the school. The

application process starts in January and ends in April. The school would like to apply by next January if possible.

Agenda #4

Discuss and vote to elect a new committee chairperson.

Chairperson Harnois suggested Adriana Robaina as the new committee Chairperson. Councilor Marketti nominated Adriana Robaina and there was a second. The committee was unanimously in favor.

Agenda #5

Committee Member's Forum

Chairperson Harnois stated that we still have recreation and water and sewer that still needs to come forward with their request. She said that Butch Jackson was working on the water and sewer and stated she would forward the committee everything she had to date.

Citizen member Letourneau asked Chair Harnois if the \$2.5M that we have in the Capital Account is what comes out of property tax or enterprise funds. Chairperson Harnois said that it is a combination of everything including some borrowing.

Councilor Marketti spoke to Councilor Steeves and at General Government and they did not vote on changing it from a three-year to a five-year for useful life. The committee agreed to make a recommendation to change it to five years. Councilor Marketti will convey this to Councilor Steeves.

Councilor Marketti asked if we had a policy for Capital Stabilization. Chair Harnois said that we don't have one and that the committee should talk about creating a policy. We currently have \$1.5M in that account.

We need to look at our policies and update them once in a while.

Agenda #6

Discussion of the next meeting date

The next meeting will be held on February 27, 2023, at 11 am. Meeting date was rescheduled to March 6, 2023.

Agenda #7

Meeting adjourned at 11:46 am