

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
COMMITTEE ROOM
WOBURN CITY HALL
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2024, at 6:08 p.m.**

Voting Members present: Chair Charles Viola, Councilor Joanne Campbell, Councilor Robert Ferullo, and Councilor Darlene Mercer-Bruen. Absent: Councilor Joseph Demers

Non-voting Members present: President Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Lou DiMambro, Councilor Robert Toro, and Councilor William Pappalardo

Also present: Mayor Michael Concannon, Fire Chief Donald Kenton, Deputy Fire Chief George Poole and City Auditor Charles Doherty

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Reading and approval of previous meeting minutes: Motion made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to dispense with the reading of and approve the minutes of the meeting of August 26, 2024; all in favor, 4-0-1.

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Order to appropriate \$30 million for reconstruction of Fire Stations 4 and 5 and to authorize borrowing of said funds: Mayor Concannon said he realizes this is a significant request. He said there is a team that has been working on this issue. He said he has invited Chief Kenton, Deputy Chief Poole, City Auditor Doherty and Police Chief Robert Rufo to participate in the discussion. He said Firefighters Union President Shawn Wiitala, and building consultants Patrick Saitta, President, Municipal Building Consultants, 200 Sutton St., North Andover, and Rick Rice, Principal, DiNisco Design, 99 Chauncy St., Boston, MA, are also present. He said five years ago the City Council was presented with a plan to enhance the fire stations in the city. He said significant progress was made. He said the goal was to build a brand-new fire headquarters and renovate the three other viable stations. He said the new headquarters cost \$23 million. He said he was on the City Council at the time and was pleased to vote in favor of the appropriation. He said the hope was that any remaining money would go toward the renovations of the three remaining stations. He said there was not enough money leftover to make an impact

at stations 4, 5 and 1. He said the cost of everything went up. He said he asked Chief Kenton and the rest of the team to look at what was needed to make the fire stations sufficient for 20-40 years. He said the number they have is \$30 million. He said that amount will allow the city to build a new Station 4 on the same site for approximately \$14.5 million. He said it will be a 3-bay station that will serve the city's needs, accommodate staff and satisfy the needs of the northeast corner of Woburn for many, many years to come. He said the new Station 4 will house a ladder truck, an engine and potentially an ambulance. He said the next step would be relocation of Station 5. He said the current location and topography is insufficient to accommodate a fire station of the size they are looking to build. He said one of the tasks will be to find a location on the West Side that can accommodate a new fire station. He said that cannot be done on the current lot. He said if the city moves quickly it may come close to the same financial commitment for Station 4. He said the remaining money would be used to rehab Station 1. He said the top priority is identifying a new location for Station 5. He said Chief Kenton has looked at this plan. He said the City Auditor can provide information about the debt. He said the debt service for the Woburn High and Malcolm White Elementary schools and the Shamrock Elementary School projects is coming off the books and that annual debt is roughly equivalent to the cost of the debt for the fire stations. Chief Kenton said the buildings are in tough shape. He said one of the reasons the 3-bay station is desirable is so it can house an aerial truck. He said there is a need for a new piece of apparatus. He said the aerial is needed in East Woburn where the city's industrial base is. He said the fire department is trying to meet the growth of the city. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if the plan to reconstruct Station 4 is imminent. She said if the city doesn't get to step two of this process fast enough, it will be more than \$30 million. Mayor Concannon said the expectation is the city will work in a time from to get this done within budget. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked City Auditor Doherty if the debt that is wrapping up will compare to the interest rate for this new appropriation. City Auditor Doherty said the annual debt service has been about \$8.9 million for the past couple of years. He said the partial bonds are for the high school, Leland Park construction, cleaning the landfill and the Shamrock School. He said there is another \$1.89 million coming off the city side and \$2.36 million in water and sewer debt service coming off the books. He said he met with bond counsel last week. He said 30-year bonds are being offered at a very favorable rate right now. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said hooray for the city's AAA bond rating. Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Campbell to suspend the City Council's rules to allow any member of the council not on the committee to address the appropriation; approved, 4-0-1. Councilor DiMambro asked what the relocation plan is. Chief Kenton said there will be little difference in response times from Station 1 or headquarters when Station 4 is closed. He said when Station 5 is being built, the existing station can still be used. Councilor DiMambro asked what will happen when Station 1 is being renovated. Chief Kenton said the new Station 4 will be able to accommodate the renovations at Station 1. He said he expects construction of each new station to last 14 months. President Dillon said Woburn has a residential population of about 40,000 but during the weekday working hours it swells to more than 200,000. He said the City Council needs to support this. He said the city is at a point where it is in danger if the city does not get going on this. He asked if either station 4 or 5 has a decontamination room. Chief Kenton said there is nothing like that at either station. President Dillon asked the chief to explain why a decontamination room is necessary. Chief Kenton said cleaning gear is critical to firefighter safety. He said the new stations will have decontamination rooms. President Dillon said the city has an obligation to support the firefighters so they can do their jobs professionally and safely.

He said firefighters are a 9 percent higher risk for cancer and having the ability to clean their gear at the station is an important component. Councilor Toro asked if a 12–14-month time frame for construction of the new stations is reasonable. Mr. Rice said that is the plan. He said 14 months is reasonable. He said it might be 16 months, if the city can get the existing Station 4 taken down expeditiously. Mr. Saitta said the new stations will be pretty straightforward to build. He said he thinks that schedule is realistic. Councilor Toro asked when the city can expect shovels to be in the ground. Mr. Rice said the time frame for design to going out to bid is about nine months, and there is the 6-week bid period, so here could be shovels in the ground in 10.5–11 months. Councilor Toro said he would like to hear from Mr. Wiitala on behalf of the firefighters union. He said asked who is involved in the design of the building. Deputy Chief Poole said he was a member of the union when he was involved in the building development team for the new fire station headquarters and the union's concerns were taken into consideration. Mayor Concannon said the city wants to build a fire station that takes the safety needs of the firefighters into consideration. Councilor Pappalardo asked why the administration is opting to go from renovating stations 4 and 5 to building anew. Mayor Concannon said five years ago the thought was that the new headquarters could be built for \$30 million, along with whatever funding the city accrued from selling stations 2 and 3. He said whatever was left over after the construction of the new headquarters is clearly not going to be enough money to renovate stations 4 and 5, and subsequently the guidance was changed to new buildings rather than renovation. Chief Kenton said it is impossible to renovate station 5 due to space limitations. Councilor Pappalardo said he does not dispute that the stations are in disrepair, however he is worried about how much money the administration is spending and how it will impact the taxpayers. Chief Kenton said station 1 can be rehabbed, but stations 4 and 5 were built in the early '60s, and contain asbestos, lead, and black mold. Councilor Pappalardo reiterated he does not dispute the buildings have lived past their usefulness, but he said he would like to see some financial figures. Mr. Rice said the real issue is the need for 3-bay stations, to accommodate the growth of the city. He said another bay cannot be added to Station 4, due to a lack of space. He said it is the same thing with Station 5. He said there are site issues that would limit Station 5 to a 2-bay station. Councilor Pappalardo said the original plan was to refurb and asked why that was the original intent five years ago. Mayor Concannon said that was a proposal to the City Council, and the focus was on the new headquarters. He said the hope was any money left over would help the city refurb the other stations. Councilor Pappalardo said the new headquarters is a palace that cost \$23 million. He said by comparison building new substations seems like it would require an awfully big financial hit. Mayor Concannon said the team brought the cost of the new stations down to a minimum. He said the number was bigger initially. He said costs have gone up since the new headquarters was built. Councilor Campbell said when the council voted to fund the new headquarters there was a hope there would be extra money left. She said upgrading the South End station was important. She said the fire union showed up to ask the council for money to pay for a second set of turnout gear but the previous administration did not initially support spending the money. The City Council felt strongly it was important. Councilor Pappalardo said he 100 percent agrees that the firefighters need to have a second set of turnout gear. Councilor Campbell asked what the upgrades would be at the South End station. Mr. Rice said hot zone amenities will be added. Chief Kenton said the living quarters and bathrooms will be upgraded. Mr. Rice said they also have to do code upgrades to the physical plant. Councilor Campbell asked what will happen to the land at Station 5. Mayor Concannon said several locations are being considered. He said there are a couple of city-owned parcels that may work. He said if they

don't, they will have to consider other options. Chief Kenton said the Fourt Corners area would be ideal. Councilor Campbell said she does think upgrading the fire stations is critical. She said there is also discussion in Ward 6 about the Altavesta School and asked if that is also being taken into consideration. Mayor Concannon said he thinks that can be managed. He said the School Committee has formed an ad hoc committee to consider options for the Altavesta School. He said the committee is still working and he expects there will be a robust community discussion. Mr. Wiitala said the new 3-bay station at Station 4 is a necessity. He said two simultaneous calls wipe out the entire fleet. He said the city also has to serve two major highways. Councilor Pappalardo said the firefighters need to get what the need but he is concerned about the impact on taxpayers. Councilor Ferullo said from an occupational standpoint the fire department needs this stuff. He said Engine 4 and Engine 5 are 2-bay stations. He said 2-bay stations are obsolete. President Dillon said he appreciates Councilor Pappalardo's questions. He asked if the city could even pull a building permit for Station 5 today. Mr. Rice said it could probably not. He said there are wetlands considerations. He said it is unlikely the city could build there. Councilor DiMambro said \$14.5 million sounds like a lot, but it is a small price to pay when you consider there are 200,000 people and two major highways in the city. He said he understands it's a burden but safety is priority one. Chair Viola said safety is paramount. He said if the fire department doesn't have the right equipment, safety will be imperiled. He asked if any soil samples have been taken from the Engine 5 site. Mr. Rice said no soil samples have been taken. Mayor Concannon said they will have to be considered as part of the disposal. Chair Viola said he understands Councilor Pappalardo's concerns, but the council also has to consider what the taxpayers need in terms of public safety standards. Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Campbell that the order "ought to pass;" 4-0-1.

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MOTION made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to adjourn; all in favor, 4-0-1. Chair Viola adjourned the meeting at 6:55 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees

