

**CITY OF WOBURN
CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON LIAISON
WOBURN CITY HALL
COMMITTEE ROOM
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2024, at 6:37 p.m.**

Voting Members present: President Jeffrey Dillon, Councilor Robert Toro, Councilor Robert Ferullo, Councilor Joanne Campbell, Councilor Lou DiMambro, Councilor Charles Viola, Councilor Joseph Demers, Councilor Darlene Mercer-Bruen and Councilor William Pappalardo

Also present: Mayor Michael Concannon, City Solicitor Mark Salvati, Planning Director John Cashell, and City Auditor Charles Doherty

* * * * *

Reading of previous meeting minutes: Motion made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Ferullo to waive the reading of and approve the minutes of August 26, 2024; approved, 9-0.

.

* * * * *

Order authorizing Mayor to enter in friendly taking of 6 Common Street: Mayor Concannon said the city has initiated what is known as a friendly taking. He said that is a legal term. He said he has submitted an order to begin the process of a friendly taking. He said after he was elected, he was approached about the city's interest in acquiring the building next door. He said he has had preliminary discussions with the owner. He said the owner understands this is a decision that is made by the City Council. He said the administration has spent time negotiating with the owner. He said the City Solicitor has done some research into how municipalities buy buildings. He said he has made several visits to the building with city officials, including the City Solicitor, the City Auditor, the Building Commissioner and the City Engineer. He said he felt it was appropriate to get an appraisal. He said the building was appraised for \$1.18 million. He said there were negotiations back and forth. He said they agreed to a price of \$1.377 million. He said it will cost an estimated \$160,000 to upgrade and renovate the building to meet the city's needs. He said there have also been discussions with various department heads about possible uses. He said he has a rough idea of which departments might fit. He said he has discussed the possibility of the Building, Conservation and Engineering departments, but no decisions or plans have been made until the city decides it wants to buy the building. He said the owner came down in price to \$1.377 million. He said City Solicitor Salvati continued to press the issue. He said they would need to make about \$160,000 in improvements to the building. He said he knows there will be other costs. He said City Solicitor Salvati went back to the owner and got them to agree to \$1.25 million. He credited City Solicitor Salvati for his negotiating skills. He said the monetary figures mean nothing until the City Council approves a dollar figure. He said there is a tentative agreement. City Solicitor Salvati said a friendly taking involves the use of a building for public purposes and there is an agreed upon price. He said the city would have clear title and it would be like a purchase. He said a municipality can't purchase real estate for more than 25 percent

above its assessed value. He said he thinks this will be a much simpler process. He said he has memoranda signed by several department heads in favor of the purchase. Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Demers to receive from City Solicitor Salvati and make part of the permanent record a letter dated September 20, 2024, and entitled "RE: 6 Common Street," with supporting documentation as follows: 1. Appraisal by Peterson Lachance Regan Pino LLC; 2. Appraisal by Robert P. Reardon CAE, MRA; 3. Estimate for build out by Clair and Swymer; 4. Offer from City to Seller for \$1,250,000; 5. Evidence of Utility bills for prior year; 6. Woburn Assessor information page; approved, 9-0. Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Demers to receive from City Solicitor Salvati a letter dated September 23, 2024, and entitled "Re: Purchase and Renovation of 6 Common Street – City Hall Annex Building," with letters in support of the purchase from the following municipal employees: City Auditor Charles Doherty, City Clerk Lindsay E. Higgins, Theresa Murphy, Administrator, Woburn Conservation Commission; Grant Writer/Administrator Kevin McDonough, Human Resources Director Shawna Healey, Building Commissioner Thomas C. Quinn Jr., Planning Director John Cashell, Chief Procurement Officer Orazio DeLuca, and Treasurer/Collector Timothy Donovan; approved, 9-0. City Solicitor Salvati said he hopes the City Council will find there is truly a need for this building. He said there are some things the city can't provide in the current building. He said the city has to by law provide a nursing area. He said there should be a break room. He said there is no meeting space. He said he and HRD Healey don't have space for union negotiations. He said storage is an issue. He said the city is required to keep some paper records. He said with the demolition of the old Plympton School and the potential sale of the Wyman School, the city needs storage. He said the City Clerk's storage areas are just bulging. He said the Conservation Commission's offices are under a staircase. He said the Planning Director can't have visitors. He said the grant writer has a 4-foot by 8-foot cubby. He said City Hall has 26,000-square-feet. He said Billerica has nearly the same number of residents and about 100,000-square-feet of town hall space. He said Burlington has about 20,000-square-feet of space in two buildings but several departments work elsewhere. He said Burlington has a population of about 26,000. He said Reading has about 21,000-square-feet of space and serves about 26,000. He said Winchester has about 30,000-square-feet and services about 23,000. He said Stoneham has about 20,000-square-feet and services about 23,000. He said funding could come from the stabilization fund. He said there would be no tax increase for this purchase. He said there would be no impact on the bond rating. He said the boiler is fairly new and has 400-amp electrical services, but the city will be obliged to add fully accessible bathrooms and exterior ramps. He said the funding request includes \$250,000 for upgrades to the building. He said there are intangibles involved with the purchase of this building. He said while the commercial real estate market is on a downturn, the value of the property is likely to increase. He said the city will have control over who will be its neighbor. He said if the city sells the building later, it will be more valuable. He said the purchase of the building will boost morale. He said tight quarters can make for unhappy employees. He said extra space will provide a better work environment. He said there has been discussion about working remotely but that is impractical for some department employees who interact frequently with the public. Councilor Mercer-Bruen asked if he could have a copy of City Solicitor Salvati's notes. City Salvati said he can submit that. Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Demers to accept a document from City Solicitor Salvati entitled "6 Common Street Committee Meeting 9/23/2024;" approved, 9-0. Mayor Concannon said there is a uniqueness to this building in that it is right next door to City Hall. He said he thought the city

missed an opportunity to purchase the Santander building when it became available. He said he absolutely believes the city needs the space. He urged councilors to talk to department heads and ask them directly. He said there is a clear need for space. He said there is a building right next door. He said the city is at a point where it needs to do that. He said \$1.25 million is a good sale price. He said if you split the difference the city is getting it cheaper. He said to him there is some value to getting the building next door. He said he thinks they can make it work. He said there is a once in a lifetime opportunity to buy this building. Councilor Toro said he has two questions about the purchase – does the city need it and is the price fair. He said the letters from the City Hall employees answer his first question. He said the city would no longer need to store materials off-site or with a third party. He said the letter from the Human Resource Director references the need for a nursing area. He said the need for more space is justified. He said the answer to the question about whether the purchase of the building would have an impact on the tax rate has been answered because the city is going to use money in the rainy-day fund. He said the building is an appreciable asset. He said if the city were to sell the building in 5-10 years it's going to be worth more than it is now. He said he is in support of it. Councilor Viola said he wants to echo Councilor Toro's comments. He asked if an annex is needed. He said it is pretty evident it is needed. He said it is cheaper than putting the files off-site. He asked City Auditor Doherty if the city buys the building how much will be left in the rainy-day fund. City Auditor Doherty said there is roughly \$15 million in there now. He said it is well above the level the city will need to maintain a AAA bond rating. Councilor Viola asked if anyone has looked at the roof. City Solicitor Salvati said the appraiser looked at the roof. Mayor Concannon said the appraiser's report is favorable. Attorney Salvati said the roof was last refurbished in 2006. Councilor Ferullo said he appreciates the need for storage but he does not want the building to just become a storage house. He said the first floor seems like a great place to accommodate a customer service component. Mayor Concannon said the building has a full, dry basement. He said the first floor would be used for office space. Councilor Ferullo said this is an awesome opportunity. He said if the city doesn't buy this building it will be asking why it didn't take advantage of this opportunity. Councilor Demers said he remembers when the basement at City Hall was a holding cell for the police department. He said the city has come a long way. He said the city has closed the Clapp, Plympton and Hurd schools, the North Woburn fire station and the Central Square fire station, along with the old Wyman School. He said the city has sold or given away a lot of space. He said he thinks the purchase of the Martini building will add a lot of cohesiveness to City Hall. He said failure to comply with federal labor laws could become a liability for the city. He said this is not just about storage. He said sometimes the office settings at City Hall are too intimate and people won't come in. He said he thought a lot about this over the weekend. He said a capital expense is a smart move. He said he thinks it's a wise move. He said he thinks the building is worth the amount that's being reported. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said the biggest questions for her are whether this is going to cost the cost more money in taxes and if it is this a good investment for the taxpayers. She said the city wants our employees to be comfortable but she was struggling to see how this would benefit residents. She said the acquisition of the Martini building will absolutely benefit their constituents. She said the Conservation Dept. has no space. She said she would like to see more of a detailed breakdown of the ADA requirements. She asked how old the roof is. City Solicitor Salvati said the roof is 16 years old. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she knows a roof needs to be replaced every 20 years. She asked if the roof is going to be replaced now. Mayor Concannon said he does not believe the roof needs to be replaced imminently. City Solicitor said the existing layout consists of cubicles.

He said he envisions four separate offices. He said there is also a mezzanine of about 1,200-square-feet that could be offices but it won't be open to the public. He said the basement is in very good shape. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said having the Conservation, Building and Engineering departments seems like a nice group that belongs together. She asked where the administration is with the old Wyman School. Mayor Concannon said the city is only 2 ½ months into the process of deciding the fate of the old Wyman School. He said the School Committee voted to turn the school over to the city and now the ball is in his court. He said he will seek guidance from the City Council about the disposition of the old Wyman School. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she would like to see something sooner than later. Mayor Concannon said the council can expect that shortly. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she has taken a lot of time with this decision. She said she has given it a lot of consideration. She said this really is the right decision for the city. Councilor DiMambro said he struggled with this at the beginning. He said President Dillon and he debated this. He said he wanted to find out for himself. He said it helped speaking with department heads. He said the City Clerk gave him a tour of the storage areas. He said one of the employees was eating lunch in what was pretty much a closet. He said that showed him how tight things really are. He said the City Clerk also has to keep records in perpetuity. He said the City Clerk showed him how much hard copies of records her department has to keep. He said these are important records. He said the Building Commissioner is out of storage space. He said the annex is literally 25 feet from where the committee is sitting right now. He said you can't get any more convenient than that. He said he has come to the realization that acquiring the Martini building makes complete sense. He said the price for what the city is getting for \$1.25 million is a good deal. He said it is a beautiful building and it blends well with City Hall. He said he is in support of this. He said it took him a couple of months to get there. He said this is a good opportunity. Councilor Campbell said she remembers when the building was for sale the last time for \$750,000. She said she spoke to former Mayor Scott Galvin about buying the building then but he wasn't interested. She said she thought it was a lost opportunity. She asked if the city needs the building. She said the answer is yes. She said her biggest concern was the \$1.5 million appropriation. She asked if taxes will go up. She said she does not want that to happen. She said hearing the money will come from the stabilization account is comforting. She said she envisions there will be some sort of walkway between the two buildings. City Solicitor Salvati said if the buildings are connected, it triggers something with City Hall that the city does not want to deal with. Councilor Campbell said it would be crazy for the city to not go forward with the purchase of the Martini building for \$1.5 million. She thanked the administration for explaining the friendly taking aspect of the transaction. She said she is against getting rid of the old Wyman School. She said the Wyman School has been a prominent building in that area. She said to get rid of it would be a shame. Councilor Pappalardo admitted the Martini building is a beautiful building in a great location. He said he goes back to what will be the impact on taxpayers. He said when the administration first brought this up, he asked what amount of space the city needs. Mayor Concannon said the city needs at least as much space as the Martini building provides to function efficiently in 2024. Councilor Pappalardo said he knows there have been discussions about remote work. He said that may free up some space. Mayor Concannon said he looked at working remotely. He said there are very few functions in City Hall that could accommodate working remotely. He said in-person collaboration is critical to what we do here. Councilor Pappalardo said everyone said that before the pandemic. He said stuff can be figured out. Mayor Concannon said service in general did suffer during the pandemic. He said just because the city did it when it had to, doesn't mean the

city should be doing it now. Councilor Pappalardo asked if the state is doing remote work. Mayor Concannon said he is sure they are, but he does not know how effective it is. He said he would welcome ideas about how to work remotely in an effective manner. Councilor Pappalardo said he can't imagine the city needs to keep every piece of paper in this building. Mayor Concannon said they are converting as many records as they can to electronic versions but there is still a need for some departments to retain hard copies of records. Councilor Pappalardo said the Martini building is in a perfect spot. President Dillon asked when the current City Hall building was built. Director Cashell said City Hall was built in the 1930s. He said in 1900 the population of Woburn was about 5,000. He said that figure remained pretty consistent until after World War II when there was a growth spurt. He said when he first started working for the city in 1985-86, the Martini building was sold for \$159,000, for which the city could have acquired it. He said a few years ago it was sold for \$750,000. He asked what the value is going to be in 10 years. He said it is only going to get higher in price. He said if the population of the city is going to grow, there is going to be a need for an annex. President Dillon said this historic City Hall has served the city well. He said it is time for the city to consider other options for space, and the most likely venue is the building next door. Director Cashell said the police station also used to be in City Hall. He said there was also a district court in the building. President Dillon said part of the discussion has been about what the city does for the citizens. He said the city has to make sure it is run like a multi-million dollar company. He said people may be put off having to meet with the Conservation Administrator in an office under the stairs. Councilor Viola asked if there was any discussion with the Information Technology Dept. about security upgrades for the annex. President Concannon said he has talked to Information Technology Director David Mastronardi about the new building from an IT perspective. He said upgrades for both the annex and City Hall are being looked at. Councilor Viola said he imagines the city could get a better deal on security upgrades for two buildings. Councilor Demers referenced the earlier comments about the disposition of the old Wyman School. He said he plans on holding community meetings, especially with the direct abutters. Councilor Demers also referenced comments about working from home. He said state employees did work from home after Covid and some continue to do so but the trend is turning back toward in-person office work. Councilor Pappalardo said remote work is all about the execution. Councilor Demers said he appreciates where Councilor Pappalardo is coming from. He said there also collective bargaining considerations in regard to working remotely. Councilor Mercer-Bruen said she respects everything Councilor Pappalardo said about working remotely. She said people who come to City Hall expect to see a building that is staffed. She said people want to see city employees face-to-face. Motion made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Viola to suspend the City Council's rules to allow anyone in the audience to address the order; approved, 9-0. Freddy Bafuka, Senior Pastor of the First Church of Woburn, 322 Main St., said the congregation has been trying to revitalize the church. He said he did not know about this meeting until yesterday. He said the discussion has been very informative. He said in many ways it makes sense for the city to buy the Martini building. He said he understands why the city wants to buy the building. He said the First Church had a friendly relationship with the previous tenants. He said he mentioned to the former tenants that the church was considering starting a learning center and a faith-based school. He said the insurance company that was there thought that was a terrific idea. He said there were people who were going to match the expenses of the learning center dollar for dollar. He said they were considering an after school program. He said the church has a history in Woburn. He said the First Church serves Burlington, Winchester and

Woburn. He said the church sold the land upon which City Hall was built. He said the land was sold in 1926 because the church needed money. He said it would have made sense for the church to buy the land back from the entity to which it sold the land in the first place. He said parking has been an issue. He said the previous tenant leased parking from the church. He said City Hall employees have been parking next to the church since the insurance company left. He said parishioners have raised this issue but he has not reached out to anyone at City Hall. He said at some point there is going to have to be a discussion about parking. He said parking will be one thing to consider. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Viola to return to the regular order of business; approved, 9-0. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Mercer-Bruen that the order “ought to pass;” approved, 8-1, with Councilor Pappalardo opposed.

* * * * *

Order to review options to improve downtown parking: Mayor Concannon said he wants to give the committee a quick update about the downtown parking situation. He said the city is already working on this. He said the city has entered into an agreement with a consultant, Tighe & Bond. He said the consultant has been tasked with coming up with ways to improve downtown parking. He said the consultant has submitted a memorandum regard scope of services. Motion made by Councilor Demers and seconded by Councilor Viola to receive and make part of the permanent record documents from Tighe & Bond dated August 7, 2024, to Casey Hagerty, Economic Development Manager, City of Woburn, with the subject line “Scope of Services – Downtown Woburn Parking Management Plan;” and a Woburn Center Parking Map, approved, 9-0. Director Cashell said the documents reference a downtown parking study that was conducted in 2012 but not completed. He said there is an opportunity at no cost to the city for the study to be updated. He said it will be a quick study. He said the city in the coming months should have an idea of the parking analysis and what can be done to improve the situation. He said the parking map identifies existing parking areas. Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Viola to ask the Planning Dept. office to send a copy of the parking map to the members of the City Council; approved, 9-0. Motion made by Councilor Mercer-Bruen and seconded by Councilor Viola to ask the Planning Dept. office to send a copy of the Tighe & Bond memorandum to members of the City Council; approved, 9-0. Director Cashell said downtown Woburn is relatively flat. He said the city has an emerging parking area off Manns Court. He said the area is all cleaned up. He said everything is prepared. He said all that work was done in-house. He said there was some money the city needed to spend by June 30. He said the lights are optional. He said it really will supplement downtown parking with 50 spaces at a minimal cost. He said the DPW really came through for the city. Councilor Demers said there have been proposals for parking on Magazine Hill that involved demolition close to the cemetery on Park Street. He said there were concerns the burial ground would be disturbed. Director Cashell said the effort to create parking on Magazine Hill fell flat because it got out of control cost-wise. Councilor Demers asked if Magazine Hill will be a part of the scope of study. Director Cashell said the consultant is going to look at all of it. Councilor Demers asked how many parking spaces are available in Woburn Center. Mayor Concannon said that is one of the things the city is trying to ascertain. Councilor Demers said the number one goal ought to be balancing the parking needs of residents and businesses. Director Cashell said the city is going to seek public input and that will be one of the considerations. He said at this point nothing

is set in stone. He said one of the goals of the survey will be to update the numbers. He said there was a metered system when he was growing up. He said he does not know if the city will revert to parking meters, but that could be a source of funding. He said a parking fee could go a long way toward improving the city. Councilor Viola said Medford had meters for about 6-8 years. He said that city found out the meters had a negative effect on business and less people were going shopping or to restaurants. Mayor Concannon said nothing has been decided. He said there are all sorts of outcomes under consideration. He said everything is on the table. Councilor Viola said he is aware of a couple of business in Medford that suffered. Councilor Ferullo said former Woburn Police Officer Michael Piazza and current Officer Mario Pascuccio have an intimate knowledge of the downtown area from their respective years of police work. He said it would be worth it to hear what they have to say. He said Officer Piazza took notes and studied the patterns in Woburn Center. Mayor Concannon said he can make sure Tighe & Bond connects with Officers Piazza and Pascuccio. President Dillon said he knows of different communities that have boxes where you can use credit cards to pay for parking. He said most parking spaces are free for the first 15 minutes. He asked how much is the grant that was awarded to the city. Director Cashell said the grant is \$45,000. Mayor Concannon said the grant was part of a downtown improvement package. President Dillon said State Rep. Haggerty was instrumental in the receipt of that grant. Director Cashell said Ms. Haggerty has been instrumental in forwarding the effort to improve downtown parking. President Dillon said he has seen how hard Ms. Haggerty works. Councilor Mercer-Brien asked if the mayor's office requires contractual approval from the City Council to proceed. Mayor Concannon said the administration is proceeding. Councilor Pappalardo said he is thrilled to see this. He said it is a great step toward addressing the parking issues in downtown Woburn. He said the Woburn Redevelopment Authority is also doing a fantastic job with the downtown area. Director Cashell said the downtown area has been as close to him as his family. Councilor Pappalardo said the work at Manns Court happened quickly. Councilor DiMambro said he is pleased the downtown parking situation is being examined. He asked if one of the components of the survey would be determining how many cars are parking for 2, 3, 4 or 5 days at a time without moving. He asked if a parking garage is under consideration. Director Cashell said all of those topics will be considered. He said there will be a meeting at 3 p.m. on Thursday to kickoff this particular study. He said it will be the first of several meetings. He said a lot of input is needed on this. Councilor Campbell said she is so happy to know that the parking situation in Woburn Center is being discussed. She said she is also pleased the administration is coming to the City Council for opinions.

* * * * *

Motion made by Councilor Campbell and seconded by Councilor Viola to adjourn;
approved, 9-0. President Dillon adjourned the meeting at 8:24 p.m.

Attest: _____
Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees

