Warrant Committee  
October 21, 2020  
Zoom Conference Call

(Conducted pursuant to the Executive Order dated March 12, 2020 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, Gen. L. c. 30A §20 et seq. and 940 CMR 29.01 et seq.)

Present: George A. Ashur (Chair), Erin G. Bradley (Secretary), Rosemary C. Bouzane, Kathleen A. Cassis, Brian G. Foster, Clinton Graham, Susannah H. Hegarty, Douglas B. Scibeck, John E. Driscoll, Scott D. Johnson, David Humphries, Emily Cavalier.

Absent: Christine J. Gimber, Ohene Asare, Brigid Gaughan.

Guests: Michael Dennehy (Town Administrator), Melinda Collins (Chair of the Select Board), James Jette (Superintendent of the Milton Public Schools), Shelia Varela (Chair of the Milton Public School Committee)

Meeting called to order at 6:08 p.m.

1.) Chairman remarks:  
6:08 p.m. On a motion from Erin G. Bradley, seconded by Kathleen A. Cassis, the minutes from September 30th, 2020 were approved with one member abstaining from the vote.

2.) Warrant Discussions:  
a.) 6:10 p.m. Ms. Collins addressed the Warrant Committee. Ms. Collins discussed article 2 from December Special Town Meeting. Article 2 recommends the Town appropriate $750,000 for the Stabilization Fund. Ms. Collins recapped to the Warrant Committee that the Town and Schools had collaborated on an estimated budget for Fiscal Year 2021, not knowing at the time future fiscal impacts of COVID-19 on the State. Collectively, it was decided to be fiscally conservative in the hopes that monies would be returned to the Stabilization Fund. The State provided more than previously estimated aid from Chapter 70 and the Town also realized additional growth.
Ms. Collins then discussed article 1 recommended that the Town vote to appropriate $590,000 ($250,000 additionally to Reserve Fund, $180,000 additionally to Schools, $100,000 additionally to Fire Overtime and $60,000 additionally to Employee Benefits: Group Insurance). Ms. Collins also noted some other Town department needs, although not related directly to this article. Ms. Collins discussed the Library is not collecting fines and is suffering a revenue loss. Additionally, the cemetery suffered a great deal of damage due to what residents described as a “micro burst”. Ms. Collins noted that given these events and the unknown future, it was decided it was best to transfer $250,000 into the Reserve Fund and if the monies are not all allocated it flows to free cash.
The Warrant Committee asked if the Library expenses and Cemetery expenses be paid out of the Reserve Fund. Ms. Collins noted that the Library is suffering from revenue loss and not additionally expenses. Ms. Collins noted that Mr. Dennehy and Ms. Dexter have worked closely with Town Departments on how to stretch each budget. Ms. Collins also explained that the additional $250,000 in Reserve Fund and the $750,000 in Stabilization Funds puts the Town in a favorable position for bond ratings. The Warrant Committee requested Ms. Collins to recapped the events that led up to this article and the appropriations for this article. Ms. Collins explained that in Fiscal Year 2021 budget, that the Select Board and School Sub Finance Committee had estimated lower Chapter 70 funding from Legislators, and $350,000 more in growth than the Assessor’s office had estimated. Ms. Collins clarified that Chapter 70 funding is specifically for schools.

The Warrant Committee asked Mr. Dennehy to discuss Fiscal Year budget of 2022. Ms. Collins noted that the State Legislator has preliminary said the budget for 2022 is not good, but haven’t given any specific details.

b.) 6:28 p.m. Ms. Varela recapped to the Warrant Committee that these new school positions were a request from Fiscal Year 2021, however to the economic fallout from COVID-19 these requests were placed on hold. Ms. Varela then recapped the requested positions included: Elementary Reading Specialist, Elementary Math Interventionist, 2 Technology teachers, High School Science Teacher and Middle School World Language Teacher. Ms. Varela offered a recap for why each new position is needed. Mr. Jette also offered why each position is needed.

Dr. Pavlicek reviewed the Milton Public School enrollment. Dr. Pavlicek noted that there has been an outward migration of Milton Public School students in Kindergarten and 1st grade. Dr. Pavlicek believes this is due to COVID and private education allows for full day in person learning. Milton Public Schools were expecting 370 students for Kindergarten and there are 311 currently enrolled. The remaining 59 families that were expected to enroll, about half will take another year of preschool and enroll in kindergarten the following year. The other families went to private education for the kindergarten year. Dr. Pavlicek believes most of those 59 students will come back into the Milton Public School the following school year. Dr. Pavlicek noted that 200 new students have enrolled this year, in all grades. The Warrant Committee asked what the current student enrollment was, Dr. Pavlicek noted it was approximately 4,350 student and an additional 892 Milton students are enrolled in private education institutions. The Warrant Committee asked Dr. Pavlicek about the Chapter 70 state aid that was in the amount of $408,000; the Town has allotted $180,000 for the new positions mentioned previously. The Warrant Committee noted that left approximately $225,000 Chapter 70 money, and would that money be used for future educational costs to offset using money from General Fund for education. There was a concern this money would be used for something other than education costs. Dr. Pavlicek noted that before COVID-19, the state was going to implement a new Chapter 70 formula that included “Student Opportunity Act”, which would benefit the Milton. This money was considered when the Fiscal Year 2021 budget was done, because the Town was conservative and believed the state would delay it. However, the state did not give the
full amount it had originally promised but they did give more money largely due to Milton student population. Dr. Pavelicek noted that $180,000 was for the new positions, $60,000 for employee benefits and the rest of the money would go into the Stabilization Fund or the Reserve Fund. It was not “ear marked” for school exclusively and the use would be determined on how the money from these funds are needed. The Warrant Committee asked about the number of staff and students whom have tested positive with COVID-19 at each school. Mr. Jette noted that Milton has 14 confirmed cases over the last three weeks. The Warrant Committee asked Mr. Jette if there was a plan for the schools to go full in person at any time. Mr. Jette noted that there is a plan, the virus is going the opposite direction the documents the schools have already published will be the return to school policy. Mr. Jette noted that flu season is not the time to push to return to in person learning. Mr. Jette confirmed there is no set number to allow full return to school, but many mitigating factors. The Warrant Committee then asked Mr. Jette about the contract tracing policy for Milton schools. Mr. Jette noted that faculty and parents have been very forthcoming in letting the schools know as soon as possible when a positive test. Otherwise, the Town has to reply on the Board of Health, outside of the Town to notify the schools.

c.) 7:03 p.m. The Warrant Committee reviews article 2; Stabilization Fund Appropriations.

d.) 7:06 p.m. On a motion from Erin G. Bradley, seconded by Kathleen A. Cassis, the Warrant Committee votes in favor to approve article 2 Stabilization Fund Appropriations with 11 yays and 1 abstention.

e.) 7:07 p.m. The Warrant Committee reviews article 1; Amend Departmental Appropriations - Fiscal Year 2021.

f.) 7:11 p.m. On a motion from Susannah H. Hegarty, seconded by Scott D. Johnson, the Warrant Committee votes in favor to approve article 1; Amend Departmental Appropriations - Fiscal Year 2021 with 11 yays and 1 abstention.

g.) 7:11 p.m. The Warrant Committee discusses who will write comments for Special Town Meeting December articles 1 and 2.

7:15 p.m. On a motion from Scott D. Johnson, seconded by Kathleen A. Cassis, the meeting is adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lynne Hoye
Warrant Committee Clerk