

TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
MONDAY – DECEMBER 12, 2011 – 7:00 p.m.
TRAINING ROOM – PUBLIC SAFETY COMPLEX

PRESENT: Advisory Board Members – Bill Johnson, Chair, Duncan Phyfe, Belden Divito, Joe Oliveira and Gail Dumont. Jamie Piedrafite came in at 7:30 p.m. Meredith Fagan was absent.

Also in attendance Ed Vitone, Chair Board of Selectmen, Doug Briggs, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

Due to a lack of quorum of the Board of Selectmen, Bill Johnson called the Advisory Board meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and stated that they were meeting to review the FY13 budget parameters. Briggs distributed an overview to all present.

Briggs stated that the FY12 Revenue and Expense numbers were a projection only. He also noted that they are waiting for the DOR to certify values, which should be within the week. He noted that the total amount presently in the Capital Fund and the Stabilization Account really shows how the Town has advanced.

Briggs stated that he is trying to guesstimate the tax rate for next January at this time. He also noted that we have increased our revenues and we are spending less and he has empowered the Department Heads to stay within their budget.

He stated that right now he was trying to narrow in on the budget. He stated that he has listed new growth at \$20,000 for FY13 but it could be more. He added that they are trying to keep a level tax rate and that the tax rate covers two-thirds of our budget. Vitone also noted that we have three revenue sources: number 1 is the real estate tax; number 2 the motor vehicle tax (which has gone down in the last two years); and number 3 state aid.

Briggs stated that he was looking at changes in revenues with a \$255,000 total tax levy increase. He listed what he sees as anticipated revenues for FY13 and they included the solar pilot agreement at \$125,000, with \$75,000 for the Light Dept. and \$50,000 for the Town. Vitone noted that the Town may get a reduction in state aid because of this solar pilot and Briggs gave a short explanation as to why this would occur. Vitone stated that they should account for this state aid reduction by deducting \$35,000 from the revenue total. It was also noted that the rate payers would definitely see some savings come out of this pilot agreement.

There was some discussion on the present pilot agreement with the Light Department and it was noted by Bill Johnson that the Advisory Board may vote to ask to see the Light Department's budget and how they function. Vitone did note that the Ashburnham rates are lower than most other communities.

Briggs explained that the \$65,000 solar building fees shown on his report was a one-time only revenue and Vitone added that it was basically a percentage of the actual project.

Briggs also discussed the building department fees for the Briggs School Project noting that they have already paid the Conservation Commission fees in the amount of \$24,000. He explained that there was a lot of expense associated with the inspectors on this project and the fees represented the cost to the Town. Vitone noted that even though the fees were waived in the past, the new policy is that they will not be waived. He also noted that inspection fees were included in the Briggs Project estimate and Briggs added that the fees were not reimbursable. More discussion followed on this topic. Vitone asked Briggs to look at the estimates voted on the Town Hall Renovation Project and the Public Safety Building Project to see if fees were included.

Briggs stated that the "regionalization" note on his spreadsheet was still an unknown and that they were looking at many different alternatives. He stated that any regionalization would be added on as revenue.

Vitone explained further that the agreement with Ashby on the Town Administrator's services had been extended until the end of February and at that time they would meet again and may discuss setting up a multi-year agreement.

Bill Johnson noted that any non-recurring revenue should be put in the stabilization account but that they could also look at these funds to target some of the big issues facing the Town like the DPW.

There was some discussion on the Town Administrator's position now with the running of two towns and Briggs noted that things are replicated in Ashby via Ashburnham and things will be clearer after the initial six month trial period. He added that he feels that it is possible to sustain this as a future position. Vitone added that once they consolidate some department heads it would be easier.

A short discussion followed on the State's proposed \$4 million grant for regionalization and Briggs stated that we would be applying.

Briggs noted that we would be receiving more money from the FY08 ice storm, about \$10,000 which would also be one-time revenue.

Briggs gave a brief explanation of the \$165,000 negative amount under revenues and expenses on the spreadsheet noting that these were for the indirect charges for the Light Department.

Briggs reviewed the FY13 Expense changes noting that the Capital Plan shown went up by \$35,250 and that they would need this amount unless they put off the ambulance for one more year and put the \$75,000 in the capital account.

He also mentioned employee raises in the amount of \$35,000 as a COLA scenario and added that the employees haven't had a raise in two years. He also noted that if the Quinn Bill fails then there was \$45,000 available there. He stated that he has asked the Department Heads to look at cost saving opportunities, such as joint purchasing and they need to continually do this. He added that they should look at mutual aid and regionalization where there are a lot of opportunities.

Johnson asked Briggs for a budget timeline for the Advisory Board. He also asked what the \$10,000 was for the Town Hall under the Capital Plan and Briggs stated that it would go towards different needs such as the leaks in the roof. He noted that this past year they replaced windows downstairs and also will be getting some lighting in front of Town Hall as it is a safety issue.

Piedrafite inquired about the telephone polls and when they would be taken down and Briggs responded that he has contacted Stan Herriott and that the Light Board would be discussing this at their next meeting. He also noted that this was on his "task list" so he would follow-up.

Johnson asked what the process was to prioritize revenues and Vitone stated that the Selectmen made a list with the DPW as the very first priority to be addressed.

There was a short discussion on the possibility of pilot payments from Cushing and Briggs stated that there was a "verbal only" possibility for \$100,000 from them as a three-year commitment, but it hasn't been finalized.

A short discussion also followed on what they would expect this year regarding the allocation method for the school and Vitone stated that they wouldn't know anything firm until the budget is certified some time in March or April.

At 8:30 p.m. Dumont motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Phyfe. Motion was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Turcotte
Assistant to the Town Administrator