

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES
NOVEMBER 20, 2006
SELECTMEN'S OFFICE, TOWN HALL**

This meeting was aired live on local cable television Channel 8.

PRESENT: Jonathan Dennehy, Chair, Mark Carlisle, Member, Chris Gagnon, Clerk, Kevin Paicos, Town Administrator, Paul Boushell, Interim Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

- I. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** Dennehy called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. and read the agenda. Carlisle moved to accept the agenda and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Dennehy stated that before they began he wanted to welcome Kevin Paicos back from his training mission and he noted that we appreciate his service to our country. Dennehy also wanted to note that this ends Paul Boushell's service here as Interim Town Administrator. He stated that Paul did an incredible job of keeping the Town running while Kevin was away.

Dennehy also wanted to give an update on the town owned property on Winchendon Road stating that he has been working with Bob Fichtel of the Focus Committee on this as a possible site for the relocation of the Highway Barn. He added that they are doing a title search on this property.

Gagnon also mentioned that the Briggs Building Committee is looking at sites and other town owned land and it's good that these surveys are being done.

- II. **PRESENTATIONS, REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE**

- A. **Tax Reclassification Hearing:** In attendance were Assessors Dick Coswell and Donna Burton. Dennehy stated that this hearing is an annual agenda matter.

Carlisle motioned to enter into the Tax Reclassification Hearing and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Dennehy then read the ad for this hearing.

"The Board of Selectmen will hold a tax classification hearing on Monday, November 20, 2006 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall. The purpose of the hearing is to inform taxpayers and interested persons of the choices open to the Selectmen in setting a single tax rate for all real estate and personal property, or two tax rates, one for residential and open space and one for commercial, industrial and personal property. Members of the Board of Assessors will be present to explain the options available in choosing the classification. Taxpayers and interested persons may submit oral or written material at the hearing."

Dick Coswell began by going over a few statistics and numbers on new growth in the Town. He stated that the Town's value in 2005 was \$560m, in 2006 \$625m and in 2007 \$660m and added that this indicates that the level of values has stabilized.

He noted that the number of single family homes in Ashburnham in 2006 was 2,270 and in 2007 2,323. He stated that new growth actually went down this year at \$120k compared to \$182.8k last year.

Coswell then stated that the Board has to decide on whether they want to set a single tax rate or two tax rates.

Gagnon motioned to keep the single rate of taxation and was seconded by Carlisle. Motion carried.

Carlisle motioned to close the tax reclassification hearing and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Dennehy asked about the timetable on setting the tax rate and Coswell stated that they hadn't received a letter yet from the Department of Revenue and that they had to work with Jim Shanahan now. Dennehy asked if they were on track and Coswell responded that they were even a little ahead of schedule. Dennehy noted that the tax rate needs to be set for the January 1st bills now that the Town has quarterly billing. Dennehy thanked the Assessors for their report and the update.

- B. Senior Tax Work-Off Program:** In Attendance were Mary Lee Muessel, Fred Sweeney, Ellen Deangelis and Ellen Hayes. Muessel gave an explanation of how this program works, stating that the money earned comes off their tax rate. She noted that they had 9 people participate in the program this year. She added that they earned a total of \$5,817 but the value to the Town is immeasurable. She noted that it's a win/win situation with the community benefiting.

Ellen Hayes who was a participant in the program stated that she loved the job she had working at the Library and she earned \$600 towards her tax bill.

Ellen Deangelis, also a participant in the program, stated that she had worked for two years at the Briggs Library and that she highly recommends it.

Fred Sweeney stated that he and the Board are very pleased with Mary Lee and that she is doing a great job.

Paicos noted his thanks to Mary Lee Muessel for all the hard work she went through to get this program going and he also thanked the Assessors office for their part in the program. He went on to state that the Town gets vastly more in return with this program. He also thanked the Board of Selectmen for creating this program and he added that he is looking forward to expanding the program in the future.

Carlisle reiterated what was said and noted that this is a wonderful program and that this is a huge untapped resource for the Town.

Dennehy stated that he hopes to accommodate more seniors and Muessel agreed stating that they are set at 10 right now and would like to have more.

Dennehy noted that the program sounds like it's a great success and he thanked Muessel for putting it together.

- C. Correspondence:** Dennehy noted that there wasn't any significant correspondence for this meeting.

Gagnon noted that both he and Eric Smith had attended the legislative breakfast put on by MRPC and that they found it to be informative. He stated that they covered the results of the Small Community Survey and the Municipal Health Work Insurance Group and noted that this wouldn't be available until next year.

- D. Town Administrator's Update:** Kevin Paicos commented on the uncollected tax title properties issue by stating that he had already started working on this before he left for his military training. He noted that Anne Cervantes had met with Coppola & Coppola, our Special Counsel for Tax Matters, last week on this issue and she has a good plan in place. He added that he would have more details on this issue for the December 4th meeting.

Paicos then thanked Paul Boushell for covering while he was gone. He went on to say that he has known and trusted him for a long time and that he is very capable and does a great job, noting that he did a marvelous job here while he was gone for his military training.

Dennehy noted that regarding the tax title properties, he wanted to hear more regularly from both Kevin and Jim Shanahan on the revenues. He also inquired about the audits and Paicos responded that they would be in their hands on Monday.

Paicos also stated that the budgets are well underway and Dennehy suggested that it would be wise to figure a budget calendar.

Dennehy noted that both he and Chris Gagnon have been working on the Capital Exclusion Program and have learned that it would be a great idea and would give the school an opportunity to get things done on their capital and maintenance items list. He added that it's a way to provide extra dollars to the school district.

Dennehy stated that the DOR gave their permission to do this for the past year but that they would have to amend the state statute in order to do it for this year. He noted that they have been lobbying our legislatures and that Senator Brewer has been very supportive, as well as the MMA, and the MASC. He added that hopefully this would move forward.

Paicos wanted to add his thanks to Sylvia and the other Town employees for keeping things running smoothly while he was away. Carlisle stated that Paul Boushell did a great job.

Dennehy inquired about the status on the DPW position and Paicos stated that they have many applications and that he will appoint a screening committee to choose and could even have a decision by the week after next.

- E. Public Safety Building Committee Update:** Gagnon stated that Paul Boushell's first job here as Interim was to deal with the landslide issue at the building site. He added that with his expertise and instruction, change orders were completed and the work is well underway. He also stated that after Thanksgiving P.J. Keating would put the base coat on to resolve the water drainage issue.

Gagnon went on to state that the architect has said in a month he would be one half of the way thru the designing phase and that at that point they would check on where they stand budget wise. He noted that things are moving well.

III. OLD BUSINESS

Dennehy stated that it was time to do something with the Hastings Road property, noting that maybe they should move to litigation. Paicos stated that they were about to become proactive and that any support from the Selectmen would be great but isn't required.

Paul Boushell stated that they have already sent a letter via first class mail, certified mail and also hand delivered and that the 10 days has passed for a response. Dennehy noted that they should take action as they have given the resident many opportunities with correspondence. He added that the Selectmen want to lend their support to take all means necessary. Dennehy motioned to the above and was seconded by Gagnon. Unanimous vote. Dennehy also added his thanks for all efforts on this.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Affordable Housing Plan Update:** In attendance was Eric Smith, Town Planner, and members of the committee; John MacMillan, Joe Kalagher, Pat Dennehy, Nancy Fisk. Karen Sunnarborg, Consultant was also present.

Dennehy stated that the plan submitted by the committee was 142 pages long and it provided important recommendations. He thanked the committee for all their work on this plan.

Eric Smith began by stating that the Committee wanted to thank Karen Sunnarborg and added that they were very happy with her work as their consultant. He stated that this plan allows the Town to meet the annual housing projects and it also shows the Town's needs. He noted that they did have a public hearing on this on November 2nd.

Karen Sunnarborg proceeded by stating that this plan needs to meet a number of requirements in order to be subsidized and that affordability restrictions need to be enforced. She then gave a condensed review of the plan stating that the Town needs a certain number of units created to be rid of unwanted 40B Project. She added that the Committee needs the Board of Selectmen to basically approve the overall plan.

Sunnarborg noted that the State wants to see some good faith progress but that they realize the goals are high. She added that it is promoting smart growth.

Carlisle inquired where the Town stood and Smith stated that the Town is 1.2% for Affordable Housing. Carlisle noted that this would give the Town more control over 40B with this plan in place. Sunnarborg added that with this plan in place the developers get a better message. Carlisle stated that the developers would have strict guidelines and it would be legally binding.

Paicos stated that in his career he has done this three times and he complimented Karen, Eric and the Committee for this outstanding piece of work. Smith stated that it only took 3 months and it is quality work. Gagnon stated that they did a great job.

Dennehy stated that he doesn't agree with some of the recommendations but that he does support the plan and moving forward with promoting affordable housing in Ashburnham.

Dennehy stated that they need to anticipate and control affordable housing. Gagnon inquired as to how many units were planned in the 40B project and Smith responded 26 or 27. Sunnarborg noted that once we reach 30 units we could have 2 years covered.

There was continued discussion on areas of concern, in particular, zoning issues that were in the plan.

Gagnon motioned for the Town of Ashburnham to accept the Affordable Housing Plan as submitted and was seconded by Carlisle. Motion carried.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. October 16, 2006 – Regular Meeting

Carlisle motioned to approve the minutes of the October 16, 2006 Regular Meeting and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

B. November 6, 2006 – Regular Meeting

Carlisle motioned to approve the minutes of the November 6, 2006 Regular Meeting and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

VI. OTHER MATTERS

Dennehy stated that the next meeting would be on Monday, December 4th.

Dennehy also noted that the Public Safety Building Committee's next meeting was on November 30th at 7:00 p.m.

He also announced that the Town Hall would be closing on Wednesday, November 22, at 1:00 p.m. for the Thanksgiving Holiday and would reopen on Monday, November 27th.

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 8:38 p.m., Carlisle motioned to enter into Executive Session to deliberate upon matters which, if done in open meeting could detrimentally affect the position of the Town regarding the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property, contract negotiations with non-union personnel and not to reconvene into open session. Gagnon seconded and the motion carried.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:56 p.m., Carlisle motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Turcotte
Administrative Assistant