

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES
APRIL 9, 2007
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 and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

Also in attendance: Advisory Board Members – Bill Johnson, Ed Tree, Leo Janssens and Dottie Munroe. Department Heads – Larry Barrett, Paul Zbikowski, Mary Lee Muessel, Eric Smith, Linda Ramsdell, Carla Clifford, Jim Shanahan and Don Ouellette.

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA: At 7:00 p.m., Dennehy read the agenda. Carlisle moved to accept the agenda and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

II. OLD BUSINESS

B. FY08 Budget Review

Paicos began by explaining the budget and the reason for all the Department Heads to be in attendance.

Dennehy inquired about the Book Budget for the Library and Paicos noted his Budget Change Memo #3. He stated that due to the fact that the Monty Tech budget came in lower than anticipated it provided enough money to write Change Memo #4. Dennehy noted that they could check the Library off their list of concerns.

Gagnon noted that he saw “thought and compromise on every single line in the budget”.

Paicos stated that the DPW Highway budget showed a deficit of \$50k and that \$25k was in balance right now.

Dennehy touched on the \$17k for pay increases in the Non-Departmental budget noting that they would need to see the employee pay plan before the Board of Selectmen approves this to be sure that there are enough checks and balances. He added that if we get this solidified by the fall Town Meeting, the \$17k could be found for this at that time.

Paicos pointed out that the By-Law says we shall have a pay plan and that he was very optimistic about the plan so they could leave the money in the budget. He noted that he is concerned that the money will be spent quickly and once it's approved it would be hard to find after the fact. He added that the money can't get moved out to other accounts and that the pay plan should be implemented without any problems. Dennehy noted that he didn't think it would be implemented by July 1.

Paicos stated that the Snow & Ice account would always have a deficit and it could take two more budget cycles to fix it. Dennehy stated that it doesn't have to be a balanced budget item. Bill Johnson, Advisory Board Chair stated that they had talked about the merit pay and that he personally was not comfortable with it adding that he had significant issues.

Paicos stated that the Town will always be in a position to evaluate the employees and that we will never really know how much will be needed but that we have always funded the budget 2 to 3 months prior.

Gagnon noted that the employees have the COLA increase and longevity pay already.

Dennehy stated that when the Advisory Board takes a position on Thursday, then the Selectmen will decide on this issue.

Dennehy then asked for discussion on the DPW budget. Johnson noted that Don Ouellette has done an outstanding job and that he was very impressed and looking forward to many improvements in that department. Paicos noted that the DPW budget is strictly a maintenance budget. He added that the Water/Sewer has two new employees due to the new meters to be installed. He noted that the new rates have been funded and that he recommends this plan.

Dennehy inquired as to the Water/Sewer Commissioners and their position and Ouellette stated that he would be meeting with them the next evening and that he would give the Board an update after. Paicos added that he does not anticipate any changes to the budget.

Dennehy noted that the Police budget was next for discussion. He stated that Chief Barrett did an overtime analysis and he did a great job and made it make more sense. He stated that Barrett did a great job and that now they were able to better understand where we are.

Barrett stated that the focus is on the lack of manpower issues, and the budget is a maintenance budget only. He reiterated that manpower was the main issue to be addressed.

Dennehy stated that the Fire budget was the next topic. Chief Zbikowski stated that the biggest difference in the budget was contractual and the union agreements. He added that under ALS, they need to guarantee 24 hour coverage.

Dennehy stated that he didn't want to hire someone this year to only lay them off next year. Zbikowski noted that he had hoped the ambulance revenues would be up this year but they are less due to half as many calls and accidents, which is a good thing.

Note: Supt. Mike Zapantis, Dave Christianson and Leonard Beaton of the School Committee were in attendance.

Bill Johnson stated that the Advisory Board had voted on a position for additional personnel both for Fire and Police. He noted that the Town needs more personnel and that the trend is that the schools get more revenue than the towns. He stated that the Advisory Board recommends to not continue the new growth practice to the schools, but to keep \$106k to hire a new police officer and a paramedic. He stated that they are asking the Board of Selectmen to change the numbers to reflect this in the budgets.

Dennehy inquired how this would work procedurally speaking and Paicos stated that they had voted \$55k for police and \$59k for fire and that votes have to be taken to add/minus these on the budgets involved.

Paicos noted that timing is an issue and that the formula that has been in place for the past 3 to 5 years was 2.5% of the prior year budget and 50% of new growth taxes go to the schools. He also added that harmony between the schools and towns is very rare and the questions that arise are: a) an override plan? B) published in the warrant? and c) the controversy if there is lower numbers and the override fails.

Dennehy stated that the Advisory Board has voted but they need to vote again on the separate budget numbers. He added that they will need to take a position now in order to publish in the warrant and he asked if it was the Advisory Board's call to make or the Selectmen's. Paicos stated that it was the Advisory Board's recommendation per the Charter.

Dave Christianson noted that the schools would lose the same percentage from Westminster as well as Ashburnham if this happens.

Johnson stated that it isn't too late to do this, but if the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator don't support it, they would look at it again.

Gagnon noted that we have seen a "runaway growth" but he can't agree with how the attempt to change this is achieved. He added that he can't support it on this budget but that he would support finding a way to find relief for this runaway growth.

Johnson stated that it is the Selectmen's and the Advisory Board's responsibility to look after the others (departments) besides the school. He added that the schools will never have enough money so when will it end?

Dennehy stated that nothing has changed in five years and that it's an "ugly ramification" in State government where schools get the increase and the town gets \$15k. He added that he doesn't want to put the school district in a deeper hole.

Zbikowski stated that there has been talk about maybe putting an override for the Town. Dennehy stated that he does support the Chief but the timing is an issue. He stated that they need to re-double their commitment to the budgets to get additional personnel and they will have to see what the state can do for us now and then next year do a town override.

Dennehy noted that there may be a debate on Town Meeting floor regarding this issue, adding that this is a tough call and he personally was not in favor of this due to the timing.

Paicos stated that the override number could change and he suggests that in 48 hours they should meet to take their positions. Dennehy noted that they had a bit more work to do before they could take a position but he did agree on a meeting. He noted that a meeting would need to be posted 48 hours prior. He added that they should get the chairs of all the boards together to get some common understanding.

Dennehy stated that they would need to know what number they would be taking a position on. Dave Christianson noted that the next evening they would discuss this further and would clarify the number.

Mike Zapantis stated that he would never pit the schools against the fire, police or DPW and that he would like to see the Selectmen put an override for fire, police and the school. He added that this was not the time for this and noted that this leaves a bitter taste. He noted that this is the eleventh hour.

Dennehy apologized and stated that this is a two-way street and the Selectmen all agree that they don't recommend this action but need the number for the override vote. He added that we have no positive response from the state and they are not performing their job. He also noted that there is a need to communicate more with each other on this.

Dennehy stated that he wanted the record to reflect that when budgets start up there are normally tri-board meetings that would happen before. He also noted that they would be wise to follow Paicos' advice to meet.

Gagnon stated that he shares the potential for an override for public safety and the school. Dennehy noted that they should remember that the Selectmen represent the people and that they should try to work together.

Paicos noted that this reflects the reality that they are facing this issue a month later than usual. He added that he is working with an outstanding Advisory Board, School Committee and Board of Selectmen and that they will work this out.

Dennehy suggested that they move on noting that we all really need to continue to underscore the Capital Exclusion statute and get this passed.

Mary Lee Muessel then asked if she could be heard regarding Article 23. Dennehy noted that before they move on he wanted to check to see if there were any other school issues to be discussed. Mike Zapantis noted that he passed out a handout with other changes to the override amount. He noted that he anticipates Ashburnham's override would be in the \$500k range. Dennehy thanked Zapantis, Christianson and Lenny for attending the meeting.

Dennehy then gave the floor to Mary Lee Muessel. She stated that the Council on Aging was pleased with the feasibility study article but that the wording could be changed.

Paicos noted that articles could not be rewritten at this time. He noted that the motion would be in more detail and be more specific. Dennehy noted that contrary to rumors, the VMS building would not be bull-dozed and that they have a full year before the fire and police vacate the building in order to look into how best to utilize this building. He suggested that all groups be brought together to discuss the best use of the building and that there is a capital item to replace the furnace. Dennehy noted that there is time to consider this carefully.

A short discussion followed on what the Senior Center study should consider and to address senior issues. Dennehy noted that at Town Meeting anyone can get up to explain the article in detail.

Carlisle motioned to approve Article 23 as written and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Paicos asked for a vote on the budget noting that they could take a position on our budget, not on the school's at this time. He added that he does not anticipate changing his recommendation unless the Selectmen change.

Gagnon stated that they could certify the budget now and then recertify if it changes. He made the motion to accept the TA's FY08 Budget as presented at \$12,534,500 and was seconded by Carlisle. Motion carried.

Dennehy then motioned to remove the Merit Pay line item from the Non-Departmental budget and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Paicos stated that he would do Budget Change Memo #5 to reflect this motion. He also noted that the budget is based on the \$15k Governor's budget and that it could go up or down and we would know more in July. He stated a cautionary note to have the pay for the performance plan in the Personnel By-Law. Dennehy stated that he wasn't against the plan and Paicos noted that we legally need to have one. He added that if it's not built in now we can't guarantee it will be there later and not funding now doesn't change the reality. Dennehy noted that they want to be sure that the plan is exactly what they want.

Paicos noted that his greatest fear is who will write the reviews before he leaves as we have an obligation and we owe our employees. Dennehy reiterated that this needs to be done in an appropriate timeframe. Carlisle noted that it would be only allocating the money and not approving the plan. Dennehy noted that the motion was already made and seconded.

Capital items were discussed next. Dennehy noted that the Police were looking for a cruiser at \$34,000 out of capital exclusion. Chief Barrett stated that they may add the trade in (old vehicle) to their fleet instead of trading it and he wanted the Selectmen to consider this. He added that right now the vehicle has around 84k miles and that they put on 40k a year. He also noted that they are trying to look beyond and start to preplan now.

At this point there was a short discussion that followed. Dennehy stated that the proposal was to trade in the vehicle on the purchase of the new cruiser.

Dennehy then stated that the DPW had a list of items. Paicos noted that these were his recommendations and added that these capital requests would bring our capital reserves down by half. He noted that the L7400 truck w/sander would be a 3-year lease and we could use Chapter 90 money. He noted that Ouellette stated the street sweeper should be replaced and the cost of a used one was \$32k. The tractor w/boom mower was discussed and it was decided to check with the Light Department to work with them on the brush trimming. The DPW Director's truck was needed as he is using a truck that should be utilized by a Superintendent. The other items were discussed and approved as noted on the summary sheet attached. Dennehy motioned to take the Town Administrator's recommendation for all items under the DPW except to defer the Tractor w/Boom Mower to the fall Town Meeting. Carlisle seconded and the motion carried.

A discussion followed on the Fire Department Capital items and it was decided to approve the Incident Command Vehicle, the Forestry Truck and the tires and rims for the tanker truck. Dennehy motioned to follow the Town Administrator's recommendation for the Incident Command Vehicle as debt exclusion, to defer the South Station repairs to the fall Town Meeting and to go ahead with the Tanker Truck tires and rims.

He also noted that they would scratch the apparatus garage. Paicos noted that he recommended the forestry truck. Gagnon noted that the South Station facility should be kept in some semblance of repair. Johnson stated that they should defer and revisit this in the fall. Dennehy stated that he would amend the motion to include the Forestry Truck as a capital improvement expense and Gagnon seconded. Motion carried.

Paicos noted that the Custodian, Ed Schlott did tremendous work with Roy Bros. to get an estimate to replace the heating system at the VMS Building. Leo Janssens, who works for a heating and air-conditioning company stated that he didn't recommend doing this at this time but to get the study done first.

Dennehy motioned to recommend the Police cruiser replacement and was seconded by Carlisle. Motion carried.

Dennehy also made the motion to recommend the truck for the Animal Control Officer and was seconded by Carlisle. Motion carried.

Gagnon noted on Article 25 that they should talk to Leo Collette about which dams in Town are most dangerous. He noted that the Lake Watatic Dam could cause damage to some homes. After a short discussion it was decided to wait on this article.

Article 29 was discussed next and Paicos noted that Tweedo's wanted to create an extra license to sell all alcoholic beverages at their establishment. He noted that Tim Fissette was present to answer any questions or concerns the Board might have. He stated that this license is called a "Special Act license" and that it doesn't affect the Town's number of licenses. Fissette stated that he wanted to change to a full liquor license and that he was encouraged by his neighbors to do so. Dennehy noted that the Board would assist in the process.

Jim Whidden was present for Article 30 as Bruce Johnson, the advocate for this article was unable to attend the meeting. Whidden read a memo from Mr. Johnson asking for the Board's support of this article. Dennehy inquired if the Water/Sewer Commissioners denied this and Eric Smith, who was also present, stated that they had denied it and then Johnson came to him as Town Planner to see if there was any other options. It was noted that Dennehy voted no on this article but it was a unanimous vote to recommend.

Dennehy noted that the following articles would be deferred to Tuesday; 2, 4, 21, 22, and 27.

III. OTHER MATTERS

Dennehy noted that the next meeting would be Tuesday, April 17th.

Dennehy stated that the Annual Town Meeting would be on Saturday, May 5, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. at Oakmont. He noted that there would be a joint meeting of the Advisory Board and the Board of Selectmen at 9:00 a.m. that morning before the ATM.

Dennehy announce the Annual Town Election on Tuesday, April 24th.

Paicos thanked all the Department Heads for attending this meeting.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

At 11:25 p.m., Carlisle motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator