

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES
JUNE 2, 2008 – 6:30 PM
VON DECK LECTURE HALL - OAKMONT REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL**

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

PRESENT: Chris Gagnon, Chair, Jonathan Dennehy, Member and Maggie Whitney, Clerk, Paul Boushell, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

The following Advisory Board members were present after 7:00 p.m.: Bill Johnson, Chair, Leo Janssens II, Dottie Munroe, Jamie Piedrafite, Frank Lombardo, Marie Zbikowski, and Belden DiVito.

- I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA: At 6:35 p.m., Gagnon read the agenda. Dennehy motioned to approve the agenda as read and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.
- II. PRESENTATIONS, REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE

- A. **Correspondence:** Gagnon noted a letter received by the Board from a resident, Kelly Hansen, regarding the committee to be formed to study the Lake Watatic property for a possible Town Beach area. He stated that they would keep her request on file. He reminded everyone of the Walk-Thru scheduled for Saturday, June 14th at 10:00 a.m. at this Lakeshore property.

Whitney stated that Leo Collette has requested to be on their next agenda to discuss the Watatic Dam and his concerns. She added that the cost to repair this dam could run the Town around \$300k to \$400k. Dennehy stated that this was just another “unfunded mandate” from the State to which Boushell added “an expensive unfunded mandate”.

A short discussion followed on the removal of trees and shrubs in front of the Town Hall to which Whitney stated that she personally thought it looked good. Boushell did note that when the Town Hall was originally built there weren’t any trees or shrubs in front of the building.

Dennehy noted that a letter was received by the Board from the Department of Revenue stating that the request for a Financial Management Review for Ashburnham is scheduled with a start date of early November 2008 and that they would contact the Town Administrator. He also noted that this would be a three month process.

Dennehy inquired about the request from Stan Herriott to look into retirement benefits for Town employees and Boushell stated that he has asked the Treasurer to prepare a detail cost analysis on this and that it would be a collective bargaining issue in the future. Whitney stated that she didn’t see how the Town could do this right now as it is a funding issue.

Dennehy also discussed the letter sent to Dr. Zapantis by the Town Administrator regarding busing and the fact that the busses are not listed in the Ashburnham tax role, but are listed on Marlborough's tax role. Boushell noted that he was sure that Zapantis would take care of this. Dennehy stated that the School District should follow up on this and Boushell noted that he would follow-up with the Assessors.

At this time a short discussion followed regarding an email sent by Mark Carlisle on Kevin Paicos' and his safe return from Afghanistan and the possibility of some type of celebration in his honor.

- B. Town Administrator's update:** Boushell stated that the move to return to Town Hall is in phase 2 and his intention would be to close on June 19th at noon, be closed on June 20th and open on Monday, June 23rd at 1:00 p.m. He noted that they are moving gradually and that the month of June would be busy.

Whitney stated that Boushell had sent out a memo to all departments and boards on spending in FY08 and she asked that this "no spending" request also continue through July 1st. Dennehy noted that the economic forecast is bleak and that the Board would be discussing this and would begin right away to make the budget work for FY10. He stated that he was deeply concerned and that no part of the budget was sacred.

Gagnon noted that there was a request for an earlier start time for the Selectmen meetings during the summer months and suggested 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. Dennehy noted his concern that this may be difficult for him and Gagnon stated that they would think about this and discuss the possibility at the next meeting.

At 7:11 p.m., Whitney motioned to open the Public Hearing for the Liquor License Transfer for Tweedo's Variety & Pizza, Inc. and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Gagnon read the ad that was placed in the Gardner News on Friday, May 16, 2008. It read as follows:

"The Ashburnham Board of Selectmen, acting as the Local Licensing Authority, will conduct a Public Hearing on Monday, June 2, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. at Oakmont Regional High School in the Von Deck Lecture Hall, 9 Oakmont Drive, Ashburnham, Massachusetts, at the request of Tweedo's Variety & Pizza, Inc. for a transfer from a Retail Package Goods Store Wine and Malt Beverages to an All Alcohol Package Store. The Manager of Record will remain Kathleen L. Fissette."

Dennehy made the motion to waive the abutters list and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Boushell stated that Tweedo's has gone thru all the necessary steps at this point. There was a short discussion that followed and all present were in favor of this transfer.

Tim Fissette stated that he appreciated all the assistance he has received from Paul Boushell, Senator Brewer and Representative Rice.

At 7:15 p.m., Whitney motioned to close the Public Hearing and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Dennehy made the motion to approve the liquor license transfer for Tweedo's and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

- C. Public Safety Building Committee update:** Gagnon stated that it had been two weeks since any meetings had been held. He noted that the architect is working diligently and Chief Barrett is at the project on a daily basis. He stated that they are weighing bids on the blacktopping and they are working on the final change orders on the contents of the building.

III. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Review and Approval – Board of Selectmen Appointments for FY09:** Gagnon proceeded to read the list of appointments, which is attached to these minutes.

Whitney noted two changes to the list of appointments. The first was to appoint Don Ouellette as the Board's representative on the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee as well as an appointment as an alternate on the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission. It was also noted that Maggie Whitney would be appointed as the Board's representative on the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission.

Dennehy motioned to accept the list of appointments as amended and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

- B. Thanks for a well done Memorial Day:** Gagnon expressed the Selectmen's thanks to the Thomas P. Sweeney Post 142 American Legion, the Donald A. Gates 5509 V.F.W., the Oakmont/Overlook Marching Spartans, Steven Higley, Joseph Gaidanowicz, Fernand Sweeney, Joseph Von Deck, Almont Hart, the students of Ashburnham, the clubs and organizations, individuals and the citizens of Ashburnham for outstanding participation in a truly great event. Dennehy also noted their thanks to the Ashburnham Light militia. Whitney stated that this was the most attended Memorial Day event in years.

Dennehy also expressed the Board's thanks to Steve Nims and his crew for the perfect condition of the grounds and added that they deserve a lot of credit for doing such a great job.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Review of June 17, 2008 Special Election Ballot Questions:** Whitney stated that she researched the history behind the VMS Building which was provided by Mr. Phelps and noted that it was built in 1945 at a cost of \$500 for the plans with the actual cost of the building at \$150k. She distributed handouts on the history of this building.

Gagnon read each ballot question and the article pertaining to each which was passed at the Annual Town Meeting on May 3, 2008. (Copy of the ballot is attached to these minutes.)

Gagnon noted that Question 1 was the School Override which would be a permanent Prop. 2½ override with a tax impact per \$1,000 of \$.26. He also noted that both the Selectmen and the Advisory Board recommended this article at Town Meeting.

Gagnon stated that Question 2 was on the VMS Building Feasibility Study which was an amended motion on the floor of Town Meeting by Town Counsel. He noted that this would be a one-time increase for the taxpayers and that the Selectmen did recommend this article at Town Meeting. Bill Johnson noted that the Advisory Board didn't have enough time to review this in order to vote on their recommendation.

Gagnon stated that Question 3 was the road 10-year improvement program. He noted that this was a Debt Exclusion and a short discussion followed on the tax impact if this ballot question was passed. It was noted that both boards recommended this article at Town Meeting.

Question 4 was the Briggs project which Gagnon noted was recommended by both Boards at the Town Meeting. Gagnon stated the tax impact would be \$.61 per \$1,000 and that the State would pay over 50% of the \$400k and that this would not be permanent. He added that the funds could be borrowed in 1, 2 or 3 years. Whitney noted as an historical fact that J.R. Briggs Elementary School had their dedication back in 1968.

- B. FY09 Reverse Budget Review:** Gagnon noted that due to a vote at the Joint Meeting of the Selectmen and the Advisory Board before the Annual Town Meeting, Article 2 was amended by \$288,000. A discussion followed which included the Town Accountant regarding finances, expenditures, income and revenue, for the Town's FY08 Budget.

Shanahan noted that they were very conservative on the income projection due to the economic times.

Gagnon stated that they found that there was a shortfall in the amount of \$137,039 and Shanahan responded that it must have been an error in the formula used for the school, not really a shortfall. He did state that the Water/Sewer rates were changed a few times which may have caused the error.

Shanahan went on to note that holding the line on spending is a good idea, as he is watching the revenue projection very closely. He added that he would review the Water/Sewer rate impact in December to see how it is working out. He noted that the tax recap would be done in October this year and then after the holidays, he would start to really look at what is available. He stated that in January or February he would have a better idea of where the Town stands financially.

Shanahan briefly touched on the Water and Sewer collections and where they stand at this time. He noted that the collections weren't aggressive enough at only 82% compared to last year's 90% but he sees that turning around. Dennehy noted that the Water/Sewer bills are now linked with the real estate property taxes so they should be paid in a timely manner.

Boushell clarified the oil usage and what can be ordered for the Public Safety Building. Whitney questioned if there would be a deficit and Boushell noted that each department is still bottom-line but that they may have to go to the Reserve Fund. Dennehy added that the Reserve Fund is mainly set up for this reason, to cover any shortfalls.

Shanahan explained the unappropriated funds as well as the overlay funds. Johnson inquired if tax title was included in the unappropriated funds and Shanahan responded that it was included. Johnson stated that most old tax money is a one-time revenue and is being used to balance the budget. Shanahan stated that once the funds are certified then they can be moved to the general fund balance and he added that once free cash is certified then it would be moved to the stabilization fund. Dennehy noted that it would take several years to accomplish this once the economy is better, maybe in 2010 but not in 2009.

A short discussion followed on how to proceed into the future to accomplish funding the Stabilization fund as well as Free Cash.

Johnson inquired as to what would be certified in the fall and Gagnon reminded both Boards that \$155,800 would be going to the school at the end of the year in the fall. Shanahan stated that Free Cash would be a sizeable amount in the FY08 Budget and once it's certified it would be available for appropriation. He noted that he would do journal entries in order to balance the budget which would include covering the shortfall in snow and ice.

Johnson stated that they were working together as boards and would even work together more in the future. Dennehy noted that they should all know how Free Cash is calculated and that they need to take ownership of the Town's budget as the Town Administrator and the Town Accountant both work for the Selectmen.

Gagnon asked if the bottom-line adjustment would be made by July 7th and Shanahan noted that it would. Whitney stated that they needed more detailed reports from the Accountant and Shanahan responded that they should look at their monthly reports more closely and ask questions.

Gagnon stated that they would review the FY08 Budget adjustments at their meeting on July 7th. He also noted that the Selectmen want the Accountant to meet with them on a quarterly basis. Shanahan noted that the FY07 Audit had not been closed as of this date.

Gagnon stated that the Selectmen would like to see a calendar from the Accountant on issues and events. Gagnon asked Shanahan to put together an outline of goals and

a schedule and then plan to meet quarterly with both the Board of Selectmen and Advisory Board to review the finances.

Gagnon inquired about the Overlay Surplus Account and Shanahan stated that this was part of the tax recap sheet which includes abatements, etc. if not used. Dennehy noted that this can be carried forward and that the new proposed Capital Planning Committee should work on this.

Johnson inquired about appointing members to the Capital Planning Committee and Boushell stated that it hasn't been officially approved yet by the Attorney General's office and once the Town Clerk receives the okay, they can appoint this committee.

Johnson stated that he had a few official requests. The first would be to please date all the reports and the second is to get reports in advance of meetings in order to peruse them beforehand. He also inquired about the energy costs and the significant deficit in the budget. Dennehy suggested that with certified money in the fall they put \$50k in the Reserve Fund in order to fund requests for the additional fuel costs. Dennehy added that in previous years the Town Administrator wasn't allowed to cut the energy line in the budget and Boushell added that now that it is set as the bottom line, it may be different, but they do watch every line very closely. Boushell also noted that he does support that \$50k be transferred to the Reserve Fund for energy expense.

Johnson stated that "extraordinary times require extraordinary measures". He added that Boushell's stop on spending is admirable and is the reason spending is down.

Gagnon commended Boushell for being so frugal on behalf of the Town.

V. OTHER MATTERS

Gagnon read the following reminders from the Town Clerk:

- Absentee ballots are available at the Town Clerk's Office and absentee voting ends at noon, Monday June 16th.
- Special Election is on Tuesday, June 17, 2008 – polls open at 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at J.R. Briggs Elementary School Gym, 96 Williams Road.

Gagnon reminded everyone about the Walk on Lake Watatic which would be held on Saturday, June 14, 2008 at 10:00 a.m., at Lake Shore Drive.

Gagnon announced the next meeting would be on Monday, June 16, 2008.

VI. FUTURE AGENDA ISSUES

Gagnon noted that Leo Collette has asked to be on their agenda for June 16th to discuss the Lake Watatic Dam issue.

Gagnon also noted that on July 7th they will go over the FY08 Budget adjustments from the Town Accountant. Shanahan did state that he may not be ready to discuss this at the July 7th meeting and this was noted by the Boards. Shanahan stated that it would probably be ready around July 15th and that he would require the Board of Selectmen as well as the Advisory Board to come in and sign the forms. He noted once this is accomplished they could review it at their meeting on July 21st.

Whitney reminded everyone of Downtown Day which is scheduled for Saturday, June 28th. She also inquired as to the status of the water trough at the Victorian House Restaurant and whether it had been removed yet. Boushell responded that it hadn't been moved yet and that there were a few complications but it would be done soon and it would be refurbished and placed back on Town property. He noted it would cost around \$3,000 to move it.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, at 9:08 p.m. Dennehy motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte
Assistant to the Town Administrator