

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM  
JOINT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
AND THE ADVISORY BOARD - MINUTES  
NOVEMBER 17, 2008  
FAIRBANKS MEMORIAL TOWN HALL - UPSTAIRS**

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

PRESENT: Chris Gagnon, Chair, Jonathan Dennehy, Member and Maggie Whitney, Clerk, Kevin Paicos, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Members of the Advisory Board who were present: Bill Johnson, Dottie Munroe, Marie Zbikowski, James Piedrafite and Leo Janssens.

I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

At 7:06 p.m. Gagnon read the agenda with a motion by Whitney to approve and a second by Dennehy. Motion carried.

II. PRESENTATIONS, REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE

**A. Presentation to Cushing Academy – Certificate of Appreciation**

Gagnon asked Headmaster Jim Tracy to come forward to receive the certificate. He noted that this was given to thank Cushing for all they have done on behalf of the Board of Selectmen and the citizens of Ashburnham. Tracy thanked the Board noting that the certificate wasn't necessary and that it was the citizens of the Town that should be thanked.

**B. Correspondence**

Gagnon stated that he received some letters from an active Brownie unit in support of not closing the Library and he proceeded to read a few. He noted that they would certainly do everything that they could to not close the Library.

**C. Town Administrator's Update**

Paicos touched on a few points in his update, which is attached. He explained how important it was for the Boards to vote on the cuts to the FY09 Budget. He also noted that at the meeting on November 24<sup>th</sup>, he suggested that anyone wishing to speak should be allotted 30 minutes for a presentation. Gagnon stated that this meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> would be an informational presentation and would be posted as a joint meeting with Jeff Lawrence, the Town Moderator acting as host. He added that everyone is invited.

Paicos proceeded to explain the alternative funding plan that he outlined in his recent memo to the Boards. He went over all the options to help ease the budget crisis in the Town, which included the override passing, the proceeds from the sale of the land at Lake Watatic, use of one time proceeds, cutting the budget by \$155,887 and not making the appropriation to the school.

Paicos stated that he needs the final vote on the warrant and that it needs to be written to include all the options.

Paicos noted the meeting on the FY08 Audit would be held on Thursday, November 20<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. in the upstairs meeting room at Town Hall.

A discussion followed on unemployment benefits for the former Interim TA Paul Boushell. Paicos noted that Boushell should not be eligible and that they needed to check with Labor Counsel on this. More discussion followed on what transpired and how to resolve this situation. Paicos stated that he would not pay any unemployment for Boushell until this is resolved. He also noted that they need Labor Counsel's advice as soon as possible in order to budget for this if needed.

**D. Public Safety Building Committee Update**

Gagnon noted that the project was pretty much completed and that they are working on the last number crunch.

**E. Chairman's Report (attached)**

Gagnon noted his pleasure in attending the Habitat House Dedication on Saturday, November 15<sup>th</sup>. Whitney also attended and stated that it was a really nice event.

Gagnon read the highlights from a letter he composed to DESE in response to concerns regarding the school budget and asked for a motion to approve sending this letter with his signature as Board of Selectmen Chair. Whitney made the motion and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried. Gagnon stated that he would mail the letter the following day. Paicos noted his concern with this letter which states a fact instead of a recommendation. Gagnon responded that the intent would be known by the recipient and a vote was taken with all in favor to send the letter.

Gagnon stated that he wanted to entertain a motion expressing support by the Board of Selectmen for the \$250,000 Proposition 2½ Override request. Whitney motioned to support the Prop 2½ override request and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion was unanimous. Bill Johnson stated that the Advisory Board had voted their support for this as well at their meeting held on November 5<sup>th</sup>.

Whitney read a letter regarding a similar time in the Town's history back in 1991 regarding an override situation. It was unanimously noted that the letter was very thoughtful and conveyed their feelings during this difficult time.

Gagnon noted that the meeting scheduled for November 24<sup>th</sup> would be posted as a joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Board but that the intention would be to turn the meeting over to Jeff Lawrence to moderate the presentations. He noted that the meeting would be posted for 6:30 p.m. and that Sylvia would be scheduling the presentations.

Gagnon then touched on the Town Accountant position and the fact that Saturday would be his last official day with the Town. He noted that they had received 8 or 9 applications to date and only two of these presently work part time for a municipality

and it was apparent that they would need interim service and perhaps they should look at bringing in one of these candidates before they might be hired. Dennehy did not think that this would be a good idea and stated that he didn't have any objection to having Jim Shanahan come in to help out until someone is hired. He added that he wanted to go ahead and go into the interview process. Whitney voiced her objection to having Shanahan continue on an interim basis.

Dennehy noted that they should allow Shanahan to work for a few weeks and to move quickly to begin the interview process and to hire a permanent Town Accountant with Shanahan staying on for 2 or 3 weeks after to get this person up to speed.

Gagnon stated that he could go ahead and schedule the interviews for Tuesday and Wednesday of the following week and perhaps even have someone hired by Thanksgiving.

Paicos stated that they should not rush the decision as this is an important position and he also noted that no one knows the charter of accounts like the current accountant.

Dennehy motioned to offer Shanahan work on a week to week basis and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried. Johnson noted that there should be a back-up plan in place and Dennehy stated that the DOR is presently working on this very thing with the Town. Gagnon stated that he would schedule the interviews.

The sale of the Lake Watatic land was discussed and a motion was made by Whitney to table the sale until public support is apparent and was seconded by Gagnon.

Dennehy noted that he was not pleased with this decision stating that the Town Meeting voted to not transfer to the Board of Selectmen and that vote did not have an impact on the auction being held by the Treasurer. He added that if the override fails, the other option would be to let the Treasurer auction this property, and that they would still have complete control of the sale. Gagnon responded that they don't have the tangible option now. He stated the question whether to have Dennehy keep going on this sale or to table it. Whitney again made the motion to table this sale and Gagnon seconded the motion. Dennehy stated that he was opposed.

Gagnon stated his concerns about the Town Administrator's release of information and stated that he would entertain a motion to instruct the Town Administrator that all future information releases would be sent to the Selectmen and Advisory Boards only and information would be released to the public through or after the Selectmen's meetings. Discussion followed with Paicos noting a reminder to the Board of Selectmen that once an informational email is sent out, it becomes public record.

Whitney made the motion that was requested by Gagnon and included the following "unless the Town Administrator is requested to do so for public information" and Gagnon seconded. Dennehy voted not in favor.

Gagnon then motioned to have the December 3, 2008 Special Town Meeting at Oakmont Regional High School and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

### III. OLD BUSINESS

#### A. Continued discussion – FY'09 Budget Cuts

#### B. Continued discussion on the Special Town Meeting Warrant

Discussion on A and B were combined.

Paicos went over his November 10, 2008 Budget memo. Gagnon stated that there should be a budget spending freeze and noted as an example that the COA had purchased groceries under the Professional Development account. Whitney asked for a motion to freeze Professional Development and Supplies spending. Paicos noted that there was little Professional Development money available. Gagnon noted that this would be a symbolic action and that he would have Shanahan print out reports to see what was paid and then they would discuss this at a later date. Dennehy noted that they did need to put a freeze on spending but more refined. Whitney stated that every community is putting a freeze on spending. Gagnon stated that he would make this his mission and would report back.

At this time Gagnon went over Paicos' suggestions on cuts in funds. Johnson noted that they needed to provide information to the Town on what needs to happen.

A discussion followed on Paicos' report on use of one-time money as a suggestion to reduce the cut list as he was instructed by the Board. Johnson noted that this money should be placed in the Stabilization Fund and that they should concentrate on the override. Jeff Lawrence agreed that the override question needs to be the focus right now and getting it passed.

Gagnon stated that the most difficult thing would be closing the Library and losing accreditation for 5 years.

Dennehy made the motion to accept the FY09 Budget cut list as presented by the Town Administrator and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried. It was also noted that the Advisory Board had voted unanimously to accept the FY09 Budget cut list as presented by the Town Administrator.

A discussion followed on a third option that could be voted on at the Town Meeting which was the use of balances in Special Articles in order to balance the budget. Johnson stated that the consensus of the Advisory Board was to not put these items on the warrant for the FY09 Budget as the use of these funds would be a disservice to the community. Dennehy agreed stating that at some point they needed some fiscal discipline and they would have to be able to defend this action. Whitney made the motion to put these funds aside at this time as Johnson noted and Dennehy seconded. Motion carried.

Dennehy stated that they needed to decide what the scope of discussion would be if the override failed. He noted that the townspeople need the option to choose what cuts, and what is decided at this meeting would frame the Town Meeting floor discussion. Discussion followed on this topic.

It was noted by Gagnon that the override vote of \$250,000 would mean that the tax impact would be approximately \$75 per household.

Both Articles 1 and 2 were discussed and a motion by Dennehy was made to remove them both at this time and seconded by Whitney. Motion carried. Dennehy stated that he personally liked the idea of Retiree Health Insurance but the timing was bad.

Article 7, the Proctor Street easement, was also discussed. Dennehy motioned to approve this article and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried. Paicos stated that this article would be moved to number 1 on the warrant.

Gagnon brought the discussion back to Article 3 on the STM Warrant and Paicos suggested that the insurance funds be put in the Town's Stabilization Fund. Dennehy motioned to go with this suggestion and Whitney seconded. Motion carried.

Article 4, which included funds available from Special Articles, was the next point of discussion and Whitney motioned to remove this article from the warrant. Dennehy seconded and the motion carried.

Paicos stated that Article 5 would balance the Town budget and that Article 6 would balance the budget with the cuts in order to fund the school whether the override fails or passes.

Paicos then reminded both boards that the Planner and the Conservation Agent were not on the cut list, adding that the Conservation Agent was a negative number on the list. Gagnon stated that in FY05 and FY06 it was noted that the Town asked for a shared Conservation Agent and that the voters never wanted a full time agent and they should eliminate this position from the Town budget as the Conservation Commission had enough money to pay the salary.

Paicos suggested that if the Board wants to make this solely as a revolving account they should do this for the next budget in 2010. Continued discussion followed on this topic.

Paicos stated that there would be a significant deficit for FY10 and that lay-offs on July 1<sup>st</sup> won't be avoided. Paicos stated that he estimates that five lay-offs would have to occur. He added that he is trying to encourage employees to look for other employment.

#### IV. NEW BUSINESS

#### V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was noted that the minutes listed on the agenda would be passed over until the next meeting.

#### VI. SCHEDULE OF COMING EVENTS

Gagnon announced the November 20<sup>th</sup> meeting with the Auditor and the Accountant as well as the November 24<sup>th</sup> special information meeting. It was noted that both

meetings would begin at 6:30 p.m. and would be held in the upstairs meeting room at Town Hall.

Gagnon also noted that Town Hall would be closed for the Thanksgiving holiday on Wednesday November 26<sup>th</sup> and Thursday, November 27<sup>th</sup>.

VII. OTHER MATTERS

Gagnon proceeded to read all the Town Clerk reminders as listed in the agenda.

VIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION (held at 6:00 p.m.)

IX. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, at 10:28 p.m. Whitney motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sylvia Turcotte  
Assistant to the Town Administrator