

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES
MARCH 3, 2008
VON DECK LECTURE HALL, OAKMONT REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL**

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

PRESENT: Mark Carlisle, Chair, Chris Gagnon, Clerk, Jonathan Dennehy, Member, Paul Boushell, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Also in attendance – Jim Shanahan, Town Accountant.

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

II. **PRESENTATIONS, REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE**

A. **Correspondence:** Carlisle noted that they received a request from MRPC asking to support the Town of Boylston in joining the Northern Worcester County Economic Target Area (ETA). He went on to state that right now it consists of Ashburnham, Barre, Clinton, Fitchburg, Gardner, Hubbardston, Lancaster, Leominster, Lunenburg, Rutland, Templeton, Westminster and Winchendon. He stated that in order to join, Boylston needs a support letter from all the communities in the ETA. Boylston's commercial vacancy rate is over 20% so adding them to the ETA would not negatively affect the required qualifying criterion of the vacancy rate that allowed the Northern Worcester County ETA. The Board unanimously agreed to go ahead with the support letter for the Town of Boylston.

Carlisle then stated that the Board received a letter from DCR on the potential acquisition of approximately 95 acres of land on Lake Road and Packard Hill Road in Ashburnham. The Board approved the 120 Day notice period waiver and also the certificate of announcement on the consideration of the acquisition of this land by the state. Dennehy noted that on the cover letter it should be noted that the Board strongly supports this land acquisition.

Dennehy stated that the Board received an email from a resident on East Rindge Road noting the poor condition of the roads and the poor snow removal. He stated that the Board knows and understands that the roads are bad in Town and he added that the DPW is working to fill the potholes. He also wanted to remind the residents that they should pay attention to the DPW Director's road proposal as they need input from the residents. He stated that on Thursday, March 27th at 7:00 p.m. a Road Forum would be held at the VMS Building and that all concerned residents should attend.

Dennehy also noted that a letter dated February 27th was received from the Federal Court and was signed by all our four representatives stating that they could not attend the Tri-Board Meeting to be held on Tuesday, March 4th. He noted that he called Senator Brewer's office and that his aide stated that there still wasn't any word on the lottery money and that he was told by the aide to be conservative.

- B. Town Administrator's Update:** Boushell stated that the final lease amendment was ready for the Selectmen's signature at this time. All members signed the lease.

The floor was given to Jim Shanahan, the Town Accountant. He began by stating that the tax rate had not yet been set and he went over in length the reasons for the delay. He noted that in order to comply with the DOR we had to reclassify revenues. He added that the revenues needed to be brought up and that if we don't reach these numbers, it would have to be raised by taxes in the following year. He also stated that both the Treasurer and the Collector should be very aggressive.

He also noted that due to the issues with the Water and Sewer enterprise that have been a concern with the DOR, he would be meeting with the Commissioners on April 8th with his recommendations on how to correct these issues.

Shanahan stated that Whitney Park Estates was his biggest concern as \$150k could go far to sustain the operation of the Town and that it is worth pursuing. Dennehy stated that they are waiting for the deeds to come back from Town Counsel and that this should be expedited so that Dymek can start building his units. Shanahan noted that a payment schedule should have been put on this in his opinion. Dennehy added that this should be a priority for all town departments and that they should expedite the bureaucracy. Shanahan again noted that he still has concerns.

Carlisle inquired as to how many other towns are being held up by the DOR and Shanahan stated that there were 39 other towns in the same situation.

Carlisle stated that he has concerns as well with the Water-Sewer Departments and that this will be addressed in April as he feels we haven't done enough planning. He stated that we will invite the Water-Sewer Commissioners to attend the Selectmen's second meeting in the month of April. Shanahan added that the Water-Sewer Commissioners have to take the steps to fix this now, not later. He noted that this won't happen again next year as the Assessors should start the process and send the information in early around September or October not December as it was done this year. This would help things to fall into place.

Gagnon stated that we may want to ask other towns how they set their taxes successfully.

Gagnon also inquired as to what share the Town gets from the harvesting of forest in Town by the State. He stated that he inquired about this a while ago and he never heard back. He was concerned about where the revenues were from this. Boushell and Shanahan stated that they would look into this and get back to him.

Carlisle noted that the number one priority is the Water-Sewer issue. Gagnon stated that the commission needs a few more people as they have been running short-handed for some time now and this is part of the problem.

Shanahan stated that they would be pushing to get this done next year by starting the process in September and October. The Board thanked him for his update.

Boushell noted that when he worked to balance the FY09 Budget he did not use the \$115k that was cut by the State to be more conservative. He added that in two weeks he would be ready to give a very detailed review on the tax rate, the FY09 Budget and the ATM warrant. He noted that right now the budget is balanced, barely, until House 1 comes out. He also stated that spending was halted for FY08 in July and that the budget will change once the final numbers are received.

Bill Johnson stated that his problem was that there are rules and that they should have had the budget beforehand per the Town Charter and that they need to do things in a more timely manner.

Dennehy noted that the Board will try to make a point to attend the Advisory Board meetings scheduled for the review of the FY09 Department budgets.

A short discussion followed on capital budgeting.

Gagnon suggested that they should look at figuring a finance chart for the next ten years to what the tax impact would be. Boushell noted that he had already asked the Treasurer to start figuring this.

Dennehy stated that no one board can put a capital plan together – it takes teamwork. He also stated that we don't always operate pursuant to the by-law rules of the Town.

- C. Public Safety Building Committee update:** Gagnon stated that there would be a construction meeting at 2:00 p.m. the next day and a full meeting at 6:30 p.m. as well. He noted that the project has been uneventful and is running well.

III. OLD BUSINESS

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Preliminary Review of ATM Warrant:** Boushell stated that there were 30 articles with 15 or 16 basic housekeeping articles. He noted that the remaining 15 articles hadn't been dressed up yet with Town Counsel. Dennehy stated that they should run through each article quickly for the sake of those watching. They were as follows:

Article 1 – Is a standard article on the reports of Town Officers and Committees

Article 2 – Also standard – Budget article

Article 3 – This was the School Budget Override article which he suggested should be moved to the end of the warrant.

Article 4 – This is payment of prior year invoices which is a customary article.

Article 5 – Light Dept. article which is also customary.

Article 6 – Compensating balance authority for Treasurer – customary article

Article 7 – Tax anticipation note authority for Treasurer – customary article.

Article 8 – BOS contract with Mass Highway – customary article.

Article 9 – Expend Chapter 90 road repair money – customary article.

Article 10 – DPW Director Road Repair Proposal – non-customary article.

- Article 11 – Capital exclusion road/sidewalk repair money – customary article, but may not be needed if Article 10 passes.
- Article 12 – Boat excise money – customary article.
- Article 13 – Building demolition – customary article.
- Article 14 – Reval for Assessors – customary article
- Article 15 – Delinquent tax collection – customary article.
- Article 16 – Discontinue sections of Bush Hill and Kelton Roads – it was noted to insert legal language.
- Article 17 – AWRSD Capital Exclusion Override – was recently added as a customary article.
- Article 18 – J. R. Briggs Feasibility Study – not customary article – in the amount of \$400k.
- Article 19 – Transfer from Capital Improvement Fund – customary article – will transfer the \$80k back from DPW.
- Article 20 – Citizens petition re: \$90k for architectural services to design plans for VMS building.
- Article 21 – Updating of Assessors maps – not customary and amount is not known.
- Article 22 – Inspection of real estate for verification of data quality – not customary from Assessors. (It was noted that Boushell would get further explanation of these two articles from the Assessors)
- Article 23 – Citizens petition – to schedule a financial management review
A short discussion followed with Bill Johnson regarding further information about this review.
- Article 24 – Citizens petition – to amend by-laws regarding capital budgeting.
- Article 25 – To authorize selling town-owned property – submitted by Focus Committee re: Highway Barn relocation. A short discussion followed with the Board deciding to meet with the Focus Committee on April 7th to discuss this further.
- Article 26 – Revolving account for animal control impounding fees
- Article 27 – Set up inter-municipal agreement for Animal Control Officer
It was noted that these two articles should be inverted with the inter-municipal agreement first.
- Article 28 – Money for furniture to move back to Town Hall out of Capital Improvement Fund.
- Article 29 – Water tank loans. Dennehy noted that we hope to be eligible for federal grant at low interest rate which would have an impact on water users only for 40 years. He added that if we don't get the grant then we may not go for it.
- Article 30 – Filing of all meeting minutes with the Town Clerk.

Bill Johnson stated that a customary article was missing, to move money into the Stabilization Fund. It was noted that this article would be added as number 31.

Dennehy noted that we would get better language from Town Counsel as well as more information. Boushell stated that in two weeks the warrant should be finalized with Town Counsel.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 19, 2008 – Regular Meeting

Dennehy motioned to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2008 Regular Meeting and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

VI. OTHER MATTERS

Carlisle announced the Road Presentation on Thursday March 27th at 7:00 p.m. in the Senior Center at the VMS building and once again encouraged residents to attend.

Carlisle announced a Rabies Clinic would be held on Saturday, March 22nd from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Highway Barn. He added that they should bring their current rabies certificate and that the cost would be \$10.00.

He then announced that the Water/Sewer Commission needs a member, preferably someone with a financial background and that anyone interested should send in a letter of intent.

Gagnon wanted to stop a rumor that he heard regarding the local cable TV station by noting that they are doing fine, contrary to the rumors. He noted that they are not broke and as a matter of fact are now broadcasting on 2 channels, 8 and 9.

Carlisle stated that the next meeting would be on Monday, March 17th.

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:56 p.m. Gagnon motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte
Executive Assistant to the Town Administrator