

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES
APRIL 22, 2008
CABLE STUDIO, 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, Gary Howland, Conservation Trust, Don Ouellette, DPW Director and the following members of the Focus Committee; Bob Fichtel, Pat Frederick and Sallie Thoma.

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

- a. **Notice Ashburnham-Westminster Rotary re: Spring Benefit for local charities:** Carlisle noted that this event would be held on Saturday, April 26th at the Wachusett Village Inn from 5:00 to 11:00 p.m. with an International Buffet and dancing to music provided by a local DJ. He added that tickets were \$25 for adults and \$10 per child.
- b. **Notice from DCR (Department of Conservation and Recreation):** Carlisle stated that they have received notice from the DCR of a proposed acquisition of a conservation restriction on approximately 866 acres of land in Ashburnham. Gary Howland stated that this land is already in Chapter 61 so it would not be a tax loss to the Town. A quick vote was taken by the Board to announce this proposal and their approval to shorten the 120 day notice period. It was unanimous.

Dennehy wanted to acknowledge Mr. Von Deck for sending him a very detailed history on the Scout House building and area. He thanked Von Deck for this very interesting historical information.

- B. Town Administrator's Update:** Boushell noted his thanks to Sylvia for handling things while he was in the hospital. He stated that the ATM Warrant was completed and the briefing book was almost ready for distribution.

Boushell stated that the Town Hall staff had a tour of the almost completed renovated Town Hall during the past week. Dennehy stated that he also went on this tour and that the renovations were "breathtaking" and "really spectacular". He added that he can't wait to rededicate the building to the Town and to move in. He noted that the lower level would be utilized by the Land Use Departments. He

added that the Town Hall Renovation Committee needs to get a lot of credit for their hard work and ultimately preserving the historical flavor of the Town Hall.

Dennehy stated that the move back would take place in the next couple of months and that the project is largely on schedule. He added that they should have the use of the full grounds for Memorial Day services.

- D. Public Safety Building Committee update:** Gagnon stated that everything is going along fine with the project and that the sheetrock has been completed on the inside. He added that the completion date is still mid to late August.

III. OLD BUSINESS

IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. General Discussion with Water/Sewer Commissioners:** Carlisle noted that they would schedule this discussion with the Commissioners for another meeting in the future.
- B. Transfer Station “Pay as you Go” Program:** Gagnon gave a brief history on the transfer station in Town. Don Ouellette, DPW Director then stated that the majority of residents have their trash picked up and pay for it, but there are still some residents that go to the transfer station on Saturdays. He noted that Waste Management doesn’t want to be responsible for collecting the money anymore, thus the “Pay as you Go” idea. He added that if this vote at Town Meeting doesn’t pass there’s a good possibility that the transfer station would be closed by July 1st.

Ouellette noted that this really comes down to how to handle the money. Dennehy stated that they may have to send a town employee to handle it and Gagnon suggested that maybe someone on the Senior Tax Work-Off Program or a high school student could handle this. Ouellette noted that in his opinion they should hire someone for 5 hours on Saturday at \$11.00 or \$12.00 an hour and also noted that there isn’t any liability issue with this. He stated that if it’s approved at Town Meeting then it would be implemented on July 1st.

Ouellette also touched on the Ashby Road Bridge situation noting that the state can’t finance it but that they would pave Route 12 this year from River Styx Road to Center Street. He noted that all of Route 101 and even Water Street were moved onto the TIP Annex list (a \$2.6m project plus sidewalks) slated for 2011.

Ouellette added that the DPW could do this bridge for under \$150k where it would probably cost the state \$800k. He also noted that if the Town takes care of the bridge then the state would take care of Water Street and stated that by the time funds are approved in late August, the construction season would be over, so they can’t count on this to go forward this year.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 17, 2008 – Regular Meeting

Dennehy motioned to approve the minutes of the March 17, 2008 Regular Meeting and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

B. April 7 & 8, 2008 – Joint Meeting w/Advisory Board

Dennehy motioned to approve the minutes of the April 7 & 8, 2008 Joint Meeting w/Advisory Board and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

C. April 14, 2008 – Special Joint Meeting w/Advisory Board

Dennehy motioned to approve the minutes of the April 14, 2008 Special Joint Meeting w/Advisory Board and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

VI. OTHER MATTERS

Gagnon inquired about the Article for the VMS and if the language had been corrected as noted at the Board's meeting. Boushell stated that it was corrected at the meeting where it was brought to Sylvia's attention that she had made an error.

Gagnon also brought up an idea regarding the school coming to some agreement with the Town to purchase the technology that was put in for the temporary Town Hall offices at Oakmont. He noted that they could ask for a value from the school. He also mentioned that these were unforeseen costs incurred when the Town offices moved in. He stated that they should consider discussing this option at their next meeting or with the school directly.

Gagnon then noted that the Council on Aging was having a forum on Saturday on the future use of the VMS Building and he stated that they should be considering a kind of public forum with the Scouts, the Lions Club, boards and committees regarding meeting space. He noted that a meeting should be held with these groups to discuss the need for civic space. Dennehy stated that this was a good idea, to have part of the building for the seniors and the other part for committees and boards.

A short discussion followed regarding cable lines both at Town Hall and at the VMS Building. Gagnon noted that the live drop will be wired for cable at the Town Hall and that the upstairs would also need to be wired. He added that they would be locating the live drop at the VMS as well.

Both Dennehy and Gagnon agreed that it would be beneficial to meet with everyone on meeting space and that they would announce at the next meeting when a public forum would be scheduled for this topic.

Carlisle then noted that some Focus Committee members were in attendance to present an update on their charge, which was the Highway Barn move. Bob Fichtel, the Chair of this committee gave the Board an update. He stated that the Committee has been working on a matrix on properties with a favorable rating and he noted that the number one site is the corner of Turnpike and Williams Road which is a great location close to many Town departments. Fichtel went on stating that the Committee wanted to ask the

Selectmen to put up for auction, properties taken by tax foreclosure to help alleviate any tax burdens on the taxpayers. He provided the Selectmen with a list of properties to be auctioned off and noted that there are many lots around the Sunset Lake area with a sale value of around \$39k.

Dennehy noted that if the Focus Committee was settled on the number one site location, he encourages them to go forward. He also noted that he could support the idea to dedicate funds obtained from selling town-owned properties. It was noted by Fichtel that the owners of the property that they consider their number one site, have stated that the land is not up for sale at this time.

Gagnon noted that it is a great way to acquire the site in question by selling properties and using the funds. Dennehy agreed.

Don Ouellette stated that if the soil is good on this property, then it would be a great location and that he would support it.

Fichtel questioned if all the town-owned properties on the listing would be auctioned off at the same time and Dennehy stated that they would. He added that the Treasurer is the authority and has the responsibility to do this as long as there are no title problems. He noted that the last auction was done in 2005 or 2006 and that this would generate income for the Town.

Gagnon suggested removing easements on the Westshore Drive lots and that they should be looked at individually.

Dennehy stated that they would look at the list and then they would discuss this again at another meeting to solidify a list for auction. Dennehy stated that this was a good job by the Committee as well as the Treasurer and added that the Town is fortunate to have such a great list of properties to discuss in this way. Carlisle thanked the Committee and Ouellette for the update.

Carlisle noted that there was a need to clarify statements and concerns brought forward regarding the DOR by Advisory Board member, Maggie Whitney. He began by noting that the first issue was that funds were not certified before the fall Special Town Meeting and that the Town was also under increased scrutiny due to the Water/Sewer issues, which have been resolved. Boushell stated that he made a bad decision regarding the funds not being certified before the STM and apologized for his bad judgment in this instance.

Carlisle then noted that the next week, more allegations were sent by Maggie Whitney to the DOR. He went through point by point, with responses to each. The first was that the school had not been paid their assessments since January. Jim Shanahan explained this by stating that the tax rate had not been set yet and funds were not available but that the School was aware of this and they didn't have a problem with it. He added that the Treasurer maintained Town operations until the tax rate was set and the school was okay with this.

Carlisle stated that the next issue was regarding invoices for the Library and Shanahan explained that this was merely a miscommunication and that there were no bills outstanding.

The next issue was the fuel card for the Fire Department and the allegation that it was shut off for non-payment by the Town. Shanahan stated that the bills were always paid on time and the cards were never shut off. He noted that there was an issue at one time with taxes being charged and the fact that the Town is exempt but that was all resolved.

The invoice for the Conservation Trust was the next issue and Shanahan stated that this issue came about because the proper paperwork wasn't submitted but that this has been resolved and will be paid this week. He added that if the proper paperwork wasn't submitted, the auditor would question this if it were processed without following the proper procedure.

Carlisle stated that the \$160k was also mentioned in Whitney's correspondence to the DOR and this was explained by Shanahan. He stated that these funds couldn't be used and he moved it to the general funds and that there was never a plan to spend this money. He added that it would be certified in the fall along with the \$92k and \$82k from the school funds.

Shanahan said that as a result of these allegations, the FY07 audit is going to be delayed. He also noted that he would be accelerating things on the tax rate some time in the fall with the tax recap completed by the end of October or the beginning of November at the very latest.

Dennehy stated that he wanted to officially request a meeting with the Board of Assessors, the Town Accountant, the Town Administrator and the entire financial team to set a firm binding schedule to avoid what happened this year and to not be at the mercy of the DOR again.

Gagnon noted that he saw this as a good thing for the Town that this happened.

Carlisle stated that this was a total breakdown of communication and protocol and he added that the Advisory Board Chair had stated that he was not aware that Whitney had done this. Dennehy stated that questions should have been asked and then this could have been avoided. He added that as a representative of the Advisory Board she should have had a vote and followed protocol.

Shanahan stated that as Town Accountant he won't spend any more time answering emails that were sent to the DOR as he spent a lot of time on this for the past two weeks. He stated that his reputation of 34 years has been questioned by this and that this could actually cost the Town more money. He added that in the future the Town Administrator should be called with any questions.

Dennehy stated that if the DOR wants documentation we should provide it, but the problem remains that if these types of things are put to the DOR, they should have been put on our agenda, through the appropriate channels. He noted that there is a structure in

place to assure that things are done correctly and that anyone with questions should come forward and discuss them in open session.

Boushell stated that once he heard about this issue with the DOR he called them to come to meet with him regarding these allegations. He also asked the Chair of the Advisory Board if a vote was taken and he was told that there was no vote.

Dennehy again stated that he was always available to assist anyone with any issues and Carlisle added that they would get these things sorted out. Shanahan stated that the Auditor will be coming in with a plan for an agenda in order to meet the timetable and Gagnon stated that they would dove-tail this agenda with the Board of Selectmen's agenda.

Carlisle made the following announcements:

- Town Election, April 29th – polls open 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at J.R. Briggs Elementary School Gym at 96 Williams Road.
- Absentee ballots are now available.
- Annual Town Meeting, Saturday, May 3rd at 10:00 a.m. at Oakmont Regional High School Auditorium.
- Dog Licenses are now available at the Town Clerk's office.

Carlisle also stated that a public meeting to review the Feasibility Study of the VMS Building is scheduled for Saturday, April 26th at the VMS Building at 10:00 a.m.

He also stated that the next meeting of the Board of Selectmen would be held on Monday, May 5, 2008.

Don Ouellette announced that he would be having an auction to sell the old clutter at the DPW around May 30th. He noted that he would have more definite information to pass along once things were solidified. Once more details are available, Carlisle noted that this would be announced at a future meeting.

VII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:44 p.m. Dennehy motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Gagnon.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte
Assistant to the Town Administrator

TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
FY09 BUDGET PROJECTION

<u>ARTICLE</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>AMOUNT</u>	<u>FUNDING SOURCE</u>
Reconstruction Roads	9	7,000,000	Loan Prop. 2 ½
Reconstruction Rds. & Sidewalks	10	170,000	Prop. 2 ½
Revaluation R/E	13	10,000	
Treasurer Legal Services	14	20,000	
VMS Building	16	90,000	
Police New Cruiser	21	34,000	
Moving Back to Town Hall	26	35,500	
Replacement Ashby State Rd. Bridge	28	250,000	Loan Prop 2 ½
Briggs School Feasibility Study	33	400,000	\$160k STM 10/20/07 Balance Prop. 2 ½
Total		8,014,500	

AVAILABLE FUNDS

FREE CASH	7,087.00
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT	121,914.81
STABILIZATION FUND	71,467.87
LOCAL AID FY09	115,000.00

VOTED BY BOARD OF SELECTMEN AND ADVISORY BOARD – APRIL 8, 2008

ARTICLE 14	\$ 10,000 - (TREASURER)
ARTICLE 21	34,000 – (NEW CRUISER)
ARTICLE 26	10,000 – (TOWN HALL MOVE)
ARTICLE 33	28,000 – (BRIGGS STUDY – ASHBURNHAM SHARE)
ADDITIONAL EMT	51,000
RESERVE FUND	50,000 – (TO DEFRAY FUEL COSTS)

TOTAL \$183,000

ADDITIONAL LOCAL AID	\$115,000
FROM 2 ½ PLUS GROWTH	70,000

TOTAL \$185,000 (FUNDS AVAILABLE TO COVER ABOVE)