

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM  
JOINT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
AND THE ADVISORY BOARD - MINUTES  
OCTOBER 6, 2008 – 6:30 PM  
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, Belden Divito, Leo Janssens.

- I. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** At 6:30 p.m., Gagnon read the agenda. Whitney motioned to approve the agenda and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Whitney suggested putting off the review of the Special Town Meeting Warrant until the next meeting due to the continued budget discussion planned for this agenda. Paicos explained that this was very time sensitive and shouldn't be delayed.

II. **PRESENTATIONS, REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE**

- A. **Correspondence:** Whitney noted and read the contents of a letter from Senator Brewer regarding the FY09 State Budget and the \$223m shortfall.

Dennehy noted that they had also received letters from concerned citizens asking the Board of Selectmen to get along better. Gagnon agreed with this request.

- B. **Town Administrator's Update** (Report is attached to these minutes): Paicos stated that it was imperative that the FY09 Budget cuts be decided on at this meeting tonight. He also stated that the audit is on track. He noted that hopefully by the end of October they would see the audit done and free cash certified before the town meeting and that it was all on track. He stated that the tax rate would be set on time as well.

Paicos stated that he would be working on the dam repair grant once the budget situation is completed.

Paicos touched on NIMS Training stating that Bob Salo is trained to teach these classes. He stated that he would be sending out a memo with the schedule of classes and that the Town needs to get in compliance in order to be eligible for any available grants.

He noted that he met with Christina Sargent that afternoon to begin planning the Town Hall Dedication Ceremony. He stated that he was thinking of holding this event before the Board of Selectmen meeting, perhaps on October 20<sup>th</sup>. Gagnon

noted that Dave Sargent was planning on being at that meeting to present the Committee's closing report so that would probably make sense.

Paicos stated that they would plan to have this ceremony from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Monday, October 20<sup>th</sup> with some light refreshments available after which they would hold the Board of Selectmen's meeting. Gagnon agreed.

- C. Public Safety Building Committee Update:** Gagnon stated that W.B. Mason has been there installing the furniture for the past week. He also noted that there was an issue with the locking system and that is being taken care of and the punch list is being worked on. He stated that the building was covered under the Town's insurance as of today and that the flag raising ceremony was held at 5:30 this evening. He added that the next day, 911 would be in effect and that the Dedication Ceremony was scheduled for Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup> from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- D. Chairman's Report:** (Copy attached) Gagnon stated that he met with Paicos last week and discussed a number of issues. He also noted that the Town Accountant, Jim Shanahan would be in attendance at a Special Meeting to be held on the audit review with the Auditor and at that time they would go over the events of the past year.

At this time Whitney suggested that they allow the seniors to present their case to the Board. Gagnon noted that the seniors had formed a committee and he asked them to review their findings. Brian Aho, COA Chair, was the spokesperson and stated that the committee was formed to find dollars and cents on moving or staying at the VMS. He stated that two committees were formed to conduct this research. Handouts were distributed to the Boards and Aho went over the summary report beginning with the cost to stay at the VMS for the next seven months. He noted that Roy Bros. gave them an estimate of \$9,600 while Huhtala came in at \$4,600. He also noted that they were told to look at installing a master dial with a timer. He noted that right now the building is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week but once fire and police moved out it would only be open 5 days a week for 6 hours a day.

Paicos noted that in his opinion Roy Bros. estimate would be more accurate and Janssens stated that they should put some stock into what was stated in Huhtala's memo and that they could probably work with an estimate somewhere in between like around \$6,651 which would include the electricity.

Aho read the list of heat loss reduction improvements which included creating dead air space at the entrances to the Senior Center at a cost of \$451.16 for the handicapped entrance and \$344.13 for the main entrance with the awning. He also mentioned the fire entrance which Gagnon noted didn't really need to be used. Aho went over the cost for permanent air curtain entrances which would be \$707 per door. He also noted that they would insulate the windows with plastic or thermal curtains which would reduce heat loss by 25%.

There was much discussion regarding these measures. At one point Paicos stated that they need to keep in mind that the value of the oil currently in the tank was \$15,300 which should be added to the total estimate to remain at the VMS.

A discussion followed on the cost to move and to secure and winterize the VMS building. Aho noted that the plumbers that were asked couldn't give an estimate and stated that it wasn't a good idea to close the building. Paicos stated that the mechanical engineer that he spoke to indicated it could be done safely with no cost to restart once they moved back in. He also noted that the DPW could winterize and close the building at no cost. Paicos also stated that it is not an uncommon practice to winterize a building. He added that the cost to cover this under the insurance would be no more than \$2,000 which is a standard fee with a minimal inspection.

Paicos again emphasized that decisions had to be made at this meeting and that it is time sensitive.

Paicos stated that it comes down to two choices, Oakmont or the VMS. Dennehy stated that he was impressed with all the work the Committee had done. He suggested that, in order to move things along, and in light of the obvious reluctance of the seniors to move, he proposed to have the seniors stay in the VMS and to cut the budget accordingly.

Whitney motioned for the Board of Selectmen to direct the Town Administrator to keep the Senior Center open at the VMS Building. Paicos reminded Whitney that under the Town Charter, the Board of Selectmen has no authority in this instance.

Dennehy stated that they could express their opinion and Gagnon added that it could be a strong recommendation with a dollar figure and Paicos agreed. Dennehy inquired what the current budget was for the VMS Energy and Utilities and Paicos stated that it was \$25k.

Paicos stated again that the \$15k worth of oil now in the tank would not be considered a savings. He stated that they would need to at least budget \$1,000 for boiler burner repair and maintenance, \$1,400 for electricity and between \$2,200 and \$8,200 for oil. He noted that the school's offer was timely and extremely generous and staying at the VMS, if the money ran out, they would have to shut down all programs. He stated that "I like the certainty of Oakmont".

Dottie Munroe stated that she had a concern about the CORI check that would be required if they moved to Oakmont. Paicos stated that it would be at no cost and for staff only. Gagnon stated that all regular visitors would have to be checked but that there was no time limit involved. Munroe also questioned if 10 parking spaces would be sufficient and who would physically move them there. Gagnon stated that the DPW would do the moving for them.

There was some discussion on a suggestion by Johnson to move the funds being cut to the Reserve Fund.

Continued discussion by concerned citizens in the audience followed regarding the Council on Aging move. Paicos stated that the funds needed to stay at the VMS were as follows: \$6,000 for oil (plus the oil already in the tank); \$1,400 for electricity;

\$1,000 for boiler maintenance; \$1,500 for temporary repairs; which total \$10k rounded. He added that they could cut \$15k out of the present budget for the VMS.

Paicos also noted that this would all be contingent on the decision made at the Town Meeting in November. He stated that if they run out of money then they would have to close the doors so the better plan was to move to the School as this is more certain.

Dennehy stated that he wanted to ask the Council on Aging and the Committee if they are comfortable with the numbers that Paicos noted at a total of \$10k. He added that this would be a huge effort on their part and they need to be sure they can live with it.

Gagnon stated that he personally thought this was a good proposal. Johnson asked if the funds could be put aside in the reserve fund and Paicos stated that it is a practical problem and it would still be an appropriation and wouldn't reduce the numbers.

Whitney asked for a show of hands from the seniors present who agreed with the \$10K proposal and it was unanimous.

Paicos then stated that it would be \$2,400 for electricity for the full year so they would adjust the amount to \$14k with \$11k remaining in the budget.

Dennehy motioned to reduce the current VMS budget by \$14k and allow the seniors to stay in the Senior Center at the VMS Building and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

At this time Chris Picone, the ConCom Chair gave a short presentation on the Conservation Agent position. He stated that the position as full-time was beneficial to the taxpayers and he explained this statement.

The Planning Board Chair, John MacMillan, asked to read a statement regarding the Town Planner position and what he has accomplished. He also noted how the Planner has been a catalyst on many committees and that losing this person would be a step backwards for the Town.

ConCom member Lorraine Desouza also made some statements on keeping the full-time Conservation Agent, but was asked to cut it short by Gagnon so that they could continue the work on the budget as it was time sensitive.

Paicos then stated that he was pretty sure that another meeting would be needed on the budget as he found that the budget was way out of balance and they would need a third round of cuts and there would be no place to go but lay-offs.

Gagnon stated that these presentations should be made at a pertinent meeting as personnel cuts would not be discussed at this meeting.

### III. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Continued discussion – FY09 Budget Cuts:** Paicos began the discussion by stating that the original budget was out of balance by about \$200k. He noted that in the past he always presented a 5-year Revenue/Expense Forecast but this wasn't done this year. He added that no one took the expenses and balanced it with the revenue. He stated that he had been working with the Accountant and this is when he found the \$200k shortfall. He noted that he would take all the cuts that are approved tonight and then find out where we stand.

Paicos also stated that the numbers were wrong in the motion voted on the budget at the Annual Town Meeting and it was a \$392k math error, overstating revenues by this amount. He stated that this is a clerical error but they cannot report anything other than what was in the motion. He stated that basically they will need to negate/rescind the budget that was approved and have a new corrected budget on the floor, line by line.

Paicos stated that he needed to increase the Town Administrator budget by \$11k for the Interim TA buyback, vacation for clerical in the amount of \$1,500, and the TA car allowance of \$5k for a total of \$17,500. He also noted that the budget for the computer expenses was underfunded in the amount of \$10k which is needed for the leasing of the 3 servers and he stated that he would need to analyze this and have it ready for town meeting. Gagnon asked if they could get a competitive bid on the computer services and Paicos stated that they would go out to bid.

Paicos also noted that the Legal budget may not be adequate so they need to increase that account by \$10k as well, as last year this account was at least \$50k. Paicos stated that the budget is not anywhere near where it should be.

Paicos noted that vehicle fuel was another concern but that fuel could go down within the next 3 or 4 months which would mean that Reserve Fund transfers may not be necessary to cover the energy expenses. He did state that he would advise all the Department Heads to live within their budgets.

Gagnon asked if everyone was in agreement on the \$107,435 budget adjustments, cuts. Dennehy motioned to approve and Whitney seconded. Board of Selectmen vote was unanimous. Advisory Board was also in full agreement.

Paicos noted that he had no news to report from the School on the oil situation but that he would go ahead and put together a bid, as it takes at least a few weeks to put together. He went on to say that the Town would see a great savings if we went with another oil bid, but he cautioned that there might be legal issues.

Paicos touched on the Cushing Trust and how Ron Reed pointed out that funds could be taken from this trust to help with the shortfall. He also noted that he would only take \$38,500 out of this fund as he did not want to touch the actual principal. Dennehy motioned to take \$38,500 from the Cushing Trust and was seconded by Whitney which was a unanimous vote of the Selectmen. The Advisory Board voted unanimously in favor as well.

Paicos explained the cut in the Police budget noting that this was not a lay-off, they just wouldn't fill the vacancy that would occur when an officer retires. The Advisory Board was all in favor of this cut as well as the Board of Selectmen.

Paicos stated that he found that he could cut another \$10k out of the Property Liability Insurance line account. He noted that all the cuts he has made so far were going toward the \$155k to the School but that they still would need more cuts.

He stated that the next cuts would be personnel. He added that they were cutting 10-15% of the entire town budget.

Dennehy motioned to approve the cuts in the Property Liability Insurance line and was seconded by Whitney. Unanimous vote. The Advisory Board approved the cuts by unanimous vote as well.

Paicos stated that their original goal was to offset the \$147k from the overlay surplus and the \$155k to the school. He stated that if that was all that needed to be cut they would be short approximately \$50k to \$70k. He stated that the starting budget wasn't balanced so he would need to cut more. Paicos stated that there could be an additional \$500k that may need to be cut.

Paicos touched upon the Water/Sewer indirect cost and the fact that this would be an additional \$30k in new revenue. He noted that a vote by the boards was not needed and that the Commissioners would take care of this.

Paicos stated that an additional \$11k could be taken out of the 40B project funds and Dennehy did voice his concern, noting that this is a dangerous practice. Paicos stated that this is what he calls "voodoo economics".

Dennehy motioned to approve the above cuts and was seconded by Whitney. Unanimous vote. The Advisory Board voted in favor unanimously.

At this point, Police Chief Barrett asked the Board to approve a Mutual Aid Agreement which would encompass all of Central Massachusetts. He noted that it's not new, it just expands this agreement at a regional basis and all towns can benefit. Dennehy motioned to approve the agreement and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

#### IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. **First review of draft Special Town Meeting Warrant:** Gagnon stated that the two Boards needed to review the draft of the warrant and he read through each article. At Article 4, the VMS design of renovations, both Dennehy and Whitney stated that they felt it should not be kept on the warrant at this time. Both Boards were in agreement and this article was taken off the warrant.

Johnson inquired if, under Article 5, any funds could be transferred to the Reserve Fund rather than the Stabilization Fund and Paicos stated that he would check the law and if it was okay, he had no objections.

Paicos stated that he recommended that they go ahead with Article 7, which was the purchase of a police cruiser. Dennehy stated that if Paicos can find the funds for this then he would recommend they keep this article on the warrant. Gagnon noted that they would leave it on until the next meeting.

Paicos stated that he would ask Don Ouellette, the DPW Director to come to the next meeting to explain Article 9, which is the purchase of a used front end loader.

At Article 11, the Meeting House Hill water tank, Paicos stated that this has to be done and if it qualifies for 40 year money the increase would be minimal. Leo Collette the W/S Commission Chair stated that the tank would be placed at the top of the hill near the cemetery. He stated that this would need to be discussed further and the best solution would be to replace it. He added repairs should be considered and done at the very least. Dennehy stated that this should stay on the warrant and not go to the Capital Planning Committee at this time. Whitney stated that they should leave it on and discuss it further at the next meeting.

Articles 14 and 15, the Retiree Health insurance issue were discussed and Whitney wanted it noted in the record that if this costs the Town any money she is voting “no”. Dennehy stated that he was skeptical as well. Paicos stated that the insurance representative is working with him and that a presentation would be done for the Board in the near future which would show a savings for the Town.

Dennehy stated that he wanted to be on the record as being against Article 17, the Affordable Housing Trust. Gagnon stated that they would have Donna Brooks at the next meeting, on October 20<sup>th</sup>, to give the Boards an overview of this article.

Paicos briefly reviewed the two articles for Habitat and explained how this program works

- B. Vote by the Board on United Nations Day Proclamation:** Gagnon read the proclamation for their vote. Dennehy motioned to approve the proclamation and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

## V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

### A. September 23, 2008 – Joint Meeting w/ Advisory Board

A few changes were requested in these minutes and they were noted.

## VI. SCHEDULE OF COMING EVENTS

Gagnon stated that the next meeting would be held on Monday, October 20<sup>th</sup>.

## VII. OTHER MATTERS

Gagnon read the following Town Clerk reminders.

- Friday, October 10, until 5:00 p.m., last day for filing applications for absentee ballots for voters for the Special Election.
- Tuesday, October 14, Special Election, polls open 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at J.R. Briggs Elementary School, 96 Williams Road.
- Wednesday, October 15, final voter registration for State Election of November 4<sup>th</sup>. Hours are 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- Monday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> at 12:00 noon is the last day for filing applications for absentee ballots for voters who will be out of Town for the State Election.
- State Election, Tuesday, November 4<sup>th</sup> – polls open at 7:00 a.m. and close at 8:00 p.m. at J.R. Briggs Elementary School Gym, 96 Williams Road.
- Special Town Meeting – November 13, 2008

It was noted by Whitney that the next Rail Trail Clean-up was scheduled for the upcoming Saturday.

## VIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

## IX. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, at 10:58 p.m. Dennehy motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sylvia Turcotte  
Assistant to the Town Administrator