

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM  
JOINT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
AND THE ADVISORY BOARD - MINUTES  
NOVEMBER 20, 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, and Leo Janssens. Also in attendance was Bill Fraher, Auditor, Jim Shanahan, Town Accountant, Anne Cervantes, Treasurer and Carla Clifford, Collector.

Gagnon stated that this meeting was held to review the FY08 Audit with the Auditor, Bill Fraher, the Town Accountant, Jim Shanahan as well as the Town Treasurer, Anne Cervantes and the Collector Carla Clifford.

Fraher was given the floor and distributed a very well done report which highlighted key financial information for the Town since 2004. He then proceeded to review each point

Fraher explained the trend shown in the report as steadily declining through the years. He also noted that almost every town is seeing this trend. He touched on the Water/Sewer enterprise fund and Shanahan noted how the Water Enterprise is working to get away from the deficit they have shown for a few years now.

A discussion followed on Free Cash.

Fraher did note that the negative Net Budgetary Variance was due mostly to the Snow & Ice deficit. He also touched on his concern regarding the limited sources of revenue the Town presently has. A discussion followed on the FY08 and FY09 expenditures.

Fraher stated that Education, Public Safety and Public Works make up most of the Town's budget. He also touched upon Debt Service and the Town's total reserves which he noted continues to decrease and leaves the Town at a very low percent for anything unforeseen.

Fraher noted that the only issue he wanted to mention was #7 in his management letter regarding Town Meeting Actions and Related General Ledger Entries. He stated that 2008 was not a normal year for Ashburnham and that he would not consider this issue as serious, but that he would advise the Town Officials to look at the controls, look at the recap and look at town meeting more closely. He added that they should look more closely at policies and procedures and that this did occur in a very refined period.

Paicos noted that FY09 will look even worse with a further down-trend and that the audit would look a lot worse. He added that this is due to the budget which has grown too fast combined with the state of the economy.

Gagnon read the response to concerns in the FY08 audit management letter that pertained to the Collector's office. Clifford noted that collections hadn't changed much since FY07. Paicos noted that there showed a great collection ratio. Dennehy noted that the Collector Carla Clifford and the Treasurer Anne Cervantes had really done a great job over the past 5 years. Paicos mentioned that the Accountant had added information in his monthly report which would be a way to track the amount collected and he added that at this time it shows \$47k has been collected so far.

Bill Johnson stated that the Advisory Board had not received the October report from the Accountant. Paicos noted that the report would be out shortly.

Dennehy noted that they would have the new Accountant get these reports out on time and attend meetings, as well as reporting directly to the Board of Selectmen.

A discussion followed on revenues and collections.

Johnson stated that they need to do quarterly meetings on the financial reports and Gagnon agreed that they did need to meet and that these meetings needed to be clearly marked on their calendar. Paicos suggested that they meet in December and it was decided that at their scheduled meeting of December 15<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. they would review the financial reports.

Gagnon then read the highlights in the response to concerns from the Treasurer noting that there were good steps taken regarding cash receipts. The Light Plant accounts were discussed but it was decided that this concern was low on the priority list right now.

A discussion followed regarding the Special Town Meeting of November 15, 2007 and the free cash not being certified.

Gagnon asked for a consensus from the Board members that all Department Heads could go to them at any time without any repercussions. Both Dennehy and Whitney agreed.

Paicos noted that the Board of Selectmen should make it perfectly clear that they will oversee the Town Accountant when he or she is hired. He also noted that the Board should set a policy on seeking or requesting information. Gagnon agreed.

There was some discussion on the tracking of overlay by the Assessors along with the Accountant and Paicos noted that it would now be listed on the monthly report as a line item so that the status can be monitored and he noted his concern that the abatements are high for a town this size.

It was noted that a copy of the town payroll warrant was being received and reviewed by the Board of Selectmen on a regular basis and that the Advisory Board was requesting a copy of the warrant as well.

Fraher wanted to close by stating that they should not over-react about the management comments and that he feels the Town has made a lot of progress through the years. The Board thanked Fraher for his attendance and his report.

There was some discussion on the former Interim Town Administrator and what had occurred in the past year while Paicos was serving in Afghanistan. There was also some discussion on concerns that maybe some Town employees did not feel comfortable communicating with the Selectmen.

The discussion turned to the Town Accountant position and Gagnon stated that they had received 10 applications for this position and that they should set up a committee for the interview process. He stated that this should include the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Treasurer, Collector, the present Town Accountant and a member of the Advisory Board. He noted that everyone should review the applications and rate them with #1 as the best and #10 as the worst and that they would interview the 4 best candidates. He noted that everyone should turn their choices in to him and that they would set the interviews either on December 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>. Paicos noted that they should pick one date and schedule each interview one right after another, such as 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m. 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. It was decided on Monday December 8<sup>th</sup>.

A discussion followed on the agreement to be signed by the Board of Selectmen for Shanahan as Interim Town Accountant from December 1<sup>st</sup> thru December 31<sup>st</sup> as a consultant. Dennehy suggested that before they sign this agreement they should discuss it with Deb Phillips, Town Counsel and Gagnon agreed he would check with her and advice.

Gagnon then touched on the unemployment issue for Boushell and noted that he wrote a letter to the unemployment office and hopefully this would be resolved.

Gagnon read a letter sent by Jim Tracy, Headmaster of Cushing Academy thanking the Board for the plaque presented to them at their last meeting.

Gagnon announced that the next meeting would be on Monday, November 24<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. and that it would be a joint meeting with the Advisory Board. He noted that presentations would be made regarding possible cuts if the override failed. Paicos stated that he would give an overview and then each Department Head would give a five minute presentation. He stated that he would have an agenda set before this meeting on Monday.

With no further business to discuss, at 9:25 p.m. Whitney motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,  
Sylvia Turcotte  
Assistant to the Town Administrator