

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING - MINUTES
DECEMBER 15, 2008
AUDITORIUM – FAIRBANKS MEMORIAL TOWN HALL**

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

PRESENT: Chris Gagnon, Chair, Jonathan Dennehy, Member, Maggie Whitney, Clerk and Kevin Paicos, Town Administrator. Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator, was not in attendance.

- I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA: At 7:00 p.m., Gagnon stated that due to the ice emergency the agenda would be changed as follows:
1. Emergency Update from the Municipal Light Department, DPW, Police, Fire and School
 2. Vote on Town Accountant
 3. Renewing Auditor Contract
 4. Distribution of Revenue/Expense Report
 5. Town Administrator Report

Gagnon added that they would have a meeting on Monday, December 22, 2008.

He noted that in attendance for this special meeting were Stan Herriott, Don Ouellette, Sergeant Robbie Brennan, Fire Chief Paul Zbikowski, Dave Uminski and Mike Zapantis, all to give updates on the emergency situation.

Stan Herriott came forward and gave an update on the restoration process. He noted that Ashburnham has over 100 miles of lines to put back up and that they had started with the primary lines and then the remainder would fall into place.

Dennehy noted how proud he was of the Municipal Light and of Stan's leadership. He added that it has been incredible and Ashburnham is very lucky to have them.

Herriott warned residents on the use of generators and how they should be properly connected and installed in order to avoid any injuries. He stated that they should consult an electrician to install them correctly. Whitney cautioned residents that generators had been stolen in Fitchburg so they should lock them up to avoid this from happening.

Herriott reviewed the list of streets that they would be working on that night and the next day. He noted the cooperation of all the departments and how the emergency plan set in place worked well.

Gagnon thanked Herriott for the update and stated that he did an excellent job.

DPW Director, Don Ouellette gave an update stating that they were working to clear the roads. He stated that the Transfer Station was open for brush only at this time, no trash would be accepted until Saturday. He also stated that residents could leave brush at the side of the road.

Sergeant Robbie Brennan gave his update on Police and Dispatch. He stated that they had been keeping two officers and two dispatchers on for 24 hours at a time, as well as maintaining regular coverage. He stated that they had been doing well checks all over Town. He noted that the new PSB facility had been great to work out of and that this was a great advantage with dual operations.

Dennehy thanked Brennan for keeping things running while the Chief was away on vacation. He noted that there was a lot going on behind the scenes with mutual aid in Ashby. Brennan stated that they were happy to help other communities.

Gagnon thanked Brennan and asked that Chief Zbikowski, who was the emergency coordinator, to give his update. Before the Chief came up Paicos stated that in Ashburnham, the Emergency Coordinator is the one who has put this all together and that person is Zibby. He stated that he had never seen a more efficient operation and that he was enormously impressed. He stated that Zibby put this all together and he did a wonderful job.

Chief Zbikowski thanked everyone for their praise and proceeded to note that they all worked together so well. He stated that the number one priority was that the people have access to the shelter and he added that they were at 99% access at this time. He stated that everything is going extremely well and that the school did a tremendous job. He praised Dave Uminski and his wife who worked 16 hours a day. He noted that the National Guard was present at the school/shelter as a security precaution.

Zbikowski stated that they had daily 4:00 p.m. meetings with the Department Heads to go over updates on the roads that were done. He noted that anyone with questions on generators, etc. should call 978-827-4021 extension 804.

He also noted that they have had 30 or 40 calls on fires, etc. and that they are working many hours clearing brush for the Light Department. He also stated that hot meals and showers were available at the Public Safety Building.

He discussed putting the report together to apply for disaster reimbursement, adding that it had to all be coordinated with 75% from the federal and up to 25% from the state as reimbursement. He noted the cost of this storm could reach at least \$500k.

The Chief thanked all the departments for working so well through this and added that he was proud to be in Ashburnham. He also noted that they have used the MART van to transport many residents to the shelter.

Gagnon thanked the Chief for the great job he had done. Dennehy reiterated his pride in the Fire, Police and DPW as well as the Light Department.

Gagnon noted that Dave Uminski and Mike Zapantis were present to give an update on the conditions at the school/shelter as well as the closing of schools in the district.

Mike Zapantis gave an update noting that on Sunday they made the decision along with Public Safety personnel to close the schools for the entire week in the community. He noted that in Westminster the Elementary School right now was sheltering 50 residents and feeding 150 people a day.

Zapantis gave credit to both Dave and Carolyn Uminski for their hard work setting up the shelter. He stated that there was no one hero and that it's a group effort. He also credited the custodial and cafeteria staff at Oakmont. He also mentioned that there were many human interest stories as a result of this storm.

Gagnon stated that schools were closed until Friday and at that time they would decide if they should be closed for a longer period of time. Zapantis agreed and added that they would discuss a waiver of days missed with the Commissioner of Education who would decide.

Dave Uminski stated that he wanted to acknowledge the leadership of Chief Zbikowski, Zibby, as well as Stan Herriott and his crew along with the DPW.

He also acknowledged the cafeteria crew and gave an update on the number of people using the shelter for showers, meals and for sleeping. He noted that there were extended day services available between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. He stated that there was a tremendous response for volunteers and that even some students came forward. He also stated that the National Guard was on duty for security at the shelter and that this included two medics.

A discussion followed on the school opening as well as alternate smaller shelters to transition to for the residents.

Dennehy stated that the school system has provided a critical roll in this crisis and the community owes a debt of gratitude for opening the shelter. Uminski stated that Oakmont was a community building and they were happy to be of service in the time of crisis.

Gagnon thanked everyone for the updates and for their service. He also thanked the many residents for all that they had done to help clear their neighborhoods. He stated that "the world got a lot smaller this past weekend" and it was great to see everyone pull together.

Gagnon stated that they next agenda item was a vote to appoint the new Town Accountant. The Board Members all agreed that Nancy Haines was their choice. Whitney motioned to appoint Nancy Haines as Town Accountant, subject to negotiations, and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried. Gagnon stated that he would call Haines to set up an appointment for negotiations in an Executive Session.

Gagnon noted that the next item of business was the renewal of the Auditor's contract. Paicos stated that Bill Fraher had been serving the Town for the past three years and with Jim Shanahan leaving they would need to keep him on for at least one more year. He suggested that the Board appoint Fraher, as Auditor for at least one year at a cost of \$15,500. Dennehy noted that a one year appointment would be good as there is a need for some continuity, especially with the departure of Jim Shanahan. He noted that he was very happy with Fraher and that he has been very thorough although, down the road, they could benefit from a new auditor.

Whitney motioned to renew the contract for Bill Fraher as auditor for one year and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Paicos noted that Verizon had provided a number for people to call for emergency assistance and that number was 1-978-555-1611.

Paicos noted that despite the glitches and the recent emergency situation the tax rate would be set on time. He also added that the Mass. Taxpayers Association had reported that they are predicting a decline for the next two years.

Dennehy stated that they should congratulate the full financial team for getting this done on time. Paicos agreed and said that they should recognize them at a future meeting. He stated that the team worked very hard and got this done despite the fact that it was a reval year.

Paicos stated that he wanted it known that there is a state requirement on approved emergency service plans and that he was proud to see that Ashburnham does have one. He added that not many communities have this plan and this is significant for our Town.

He noted that he received the memo from the Advisory Board on the FY09 budget with their suggestions and that he was still reviewing them. He added that he had imposed a hiring freeze.

Paicos reviewed the Revenue/Expense forecast report stating that so far this year they had collected 44% of taxes which was not a concern at this time as almost 100% was collected for the first two quarters of the year. He noted that they had collected 80% of motor vehicle excise taxes.

He stated that permits were off and that historically they collect most fees in the spring so this should rebound. He added that this was forecasted very conservatively.

Paicos went on to say that State Revenue is off by the exact margin it is supposed to be and that Bank Interest is off dramatically, with the rates way down and that he did not think that it would rebound. As far as the Enterprise Funds, the new rates were not reflected but would be in the next two quarters.

Paicos stated that on the expense side, the deficit shown in the Town Administrator's account was due to the termination expenses for the Interim Town Administrator. The Town Accountant account deficit was due to the severance pay for Jim Shanahan and the Non-Departmental deficit was due to Legal and Computer expenses. He did note that he had asked Town Counsel to bill the Town more frequently, not just yearly.

Paicos noted that the huge deficit in Snow & Ice was due to the ice storm emergency. He added that the deficits shown for the Library, Employee Benefits, Town Hall & VMS should not occur.

Gagnon noted his concerns on the use of the Auditorium at Town Hall for meetings noting that any use should be approved by the Board of Selectmen or the Town Administrator as there was no need to heat this room due to the cost. Paicos agreed stating that there are other areas to use for meetings and that he would send out a memo on this issue. He also noted that the Selectmen should make a decision as well on the use of this room during the winter months for their meetings.

Whitney stated that she would be fine with meeting at the school and a discussion followed on where their meetings would be held. Gagnon stated that they would look into other alternative places.

Paicos noted that he would not be available to attend the next meeting scheduled for Monday, December 22nd. Gagnon stated that they would go ahead with this meeting anyway without him present and that it would be posted for the school.

Gagnon stated that the Board needed to vote to authorize Jonathan Dennehy to represent Ashburnham at the MMA Annual Meeting. Whitney made the motion and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

With no further business to discuss, at 9:00 p.m. Dennehy motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte
Assistant to the Town Administrator