

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
JOINT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN
AND ADVISORY BOARD – MINUTES
MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2009 – 7:00 PM
UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM – TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: Chris Gagnon, Chair, Jonathan Dennehy, Member, Maggie Whitney, Clerk, Norm Thidemann, Interim Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Advisory Board members in attendance were Dottie Munroe, Bill Johnson, and Leo Janssens II, Jaime Piedrafite and Ron Reed. Members of the Capital Planning Committee were also present for this meeting and they included Anne Cervantes, Gail Dumont, Ed Vitone, Bruce Whitney and Jonathan Dennehy, Leo Janssens and Jamie Piedrafite.

The Chairman of the Capital Planning Committee, Ed Vitone, introduced the Committee and proceeded to summarize the responsibilities. He noted that the committee has no input on the School Capital plans per an inquiry to the DOR. He stated that the Committee had four capital requests that they considered to present to the two Boards at this meeting. (A copy of the handout from this committee is attached)

He noted the four requests as follows:

1. Library for repair of walls and baseboards - \$15,000
2. DPW for dump truck
3. Police for two cruisers
4. DPW for road rehab

He stated that a fifth request was for the relocation of the DPW but that was taken off for now as it wasn't ready.

Vitone stated that the Library request was below the threshold as a Capital item for the Committee's consideration. He noted that the second request for a dump truck for the DPW was referred to the next fiscal year. He stated that the third request for 2 cruisers was endorsed as one cruiser per year.

He stated that the fourth request for the road rehab from the DPW was discussed by the Committee and he handed out and reviewed charts on how the Committee's recommendation was determined.

Vitone stated that the Committee determined that this was an ongoing project to be funded each year. He also noted that the cost of asphalt was down by about 40% at this time so the cost for the first year would be about \$1.8m. He added that the Committee basically calculated the most advantageous time for the repairs and that it would be funded through debt exclusion. He did note that the road program would be basically done in phases and he asked the Department Head if this was feasible.

Gagnon stated that the Board wants to take the Capital Planning Committee's recommendation and go to the Department Head, and this way it has a better chance of passing.

Vitone stated that this is a directional tool with the first year program covering about 30 miles. He added that it would be safeguarding the best roads in Town and the tax impact would be about \$52 per household.

Johnson thanked the Capital Planning Committee for their report and added that it was a really encouraging report.

Gagnon inquired about the Police cruiser and Vitone stated that because it would be a yearly thing it should be in the operating budget not as free cash.

Reed inquired about the balance of funds in the Capital Improvement Fund and the Chapter 90 funds balance. Dennehy noted a balance of about \$100k in the Capital Improvement Fund and Thidemann stated that there was about \$263k in Chapter 90 money. Reed stated that they needed to convince the voters to get the Road Improvement plan approved. Thidemann agreed stating that this would be a good capital investment and could save in alignments alone.

At 7:30 p.m. Johnson turned the meeting over to the Board of Selectmen.

Gagnon stated that they would review the money list first. Thidemann stated that they would fund the Police cruiser in the FY10 Budget and he would talk to the Chief about this. He also noted that the \$1.8m for the roads should be done strategically and if it is approved by the voters and implemented it would show results.

Dennehy stated that as an “individual” over time they should get the Committee in shape to expend money yearly on the roads probably for the rest of time. He noted that they need to spend money every year.

Whitney made the motion to approve the article on road improvement for a one year period in the amount of \$1.8m as amended. Dennehy seconded and the motion carried.

Dennehy stated that they should advise the voters what roads will be in this plan and added that they should have the DPW Director formulate a plan with the right to make minor changes. Vitone stated that for credence this would address 30 miles of road and they should establish priorities. Gagnon stated that they had seen some progress in the incremental program through the years and it was a step in the right direction. Piedrafite noted that they needed to inform the voters that this was a first step in the plan. Dennehy stated that they could address this in the presentation of the article at Town Meeting.

There was some discussion on the road chosen for the STRAP Grant.

There was a short discussion on Article 4 of the STM Warrant and it was voted to postpone this article until the fall STM.

Thidemann noted that the purchase of a chipper by the DPW would go to the Capital Planning Committee but may go on the warrant anyway. Whitney stated that she was not in favor of this, adding that they should follow procedure.

Gagnon noted that Articles 1 and 2 were customary. He then read Article 3 which was for the tuition of a student to attend the Norfolk County Agricultural High School in the amount of \$20k. Thidemann stated that this was the same as last year and that the funding was in the plan for FY10. Dennehy motioned to approve this article and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Article #10 was then discussed and Dennehy motioned to remove this article because of the \$1.8m road improvement article being added. Whitney seconded and the motion carried.

Article #15 the newly finalized Water & Sewer Rules and Regulations was discussed. Thidemann stated that no information was available on this yet. Whitney stated that they needed more information and it was determined to take this article off the warrant for possible placement in the fall.

Article #16, which involved the inspection and emergency action plan for the four Town-owned dams was next in the discussion. Gagnon noted that he had spoken with Ariana Johnson, legal for DCR and he gave her the story and asked for engineering representative on two private-owned dams. He added that Bill Solomon of the Department of Dam Safety would be scheduling a meeting with Thidemann and would include the Board of Selectmen to see how the level of hazard is determined but that they should have a warrant article just in case. Thidemann did state that he sent a letter to them for an extension but that they should leave the article in for now as a place holder.

Thidemann then touched on Article #17 which was for the Light Department and the transfer of funds for FEMA and MEMA due to the ice storm. Dennehy motioned to include this article and was seconded by Whitney. All were in favor.

Gagnon noted that Article #18 was next for discussion and he inquired as to what funds were available from the interest on the Cushing Trust and Anne Cervantes responded that there was \$156k in the fund with interest and that \$115k of that was the principal. Much discussion followed on this article as to whether it should be left on the warrant. It was decided to leave it on as written for the time being and to check with Town Counsel.

Article #19 was discussed next. Dennehy motioned to approve this article and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Article #20 was for the borrowing of \$490k due to the ice storm expenses. Thidemann stated that he was scheduled to meet with the financial team on this the following Friday to talk about the borrowing as they need the approval of the Emergency Board before Town Meeting. He also stated that no ballot would result from this article. Dennehy stated that this was not exempt debt and Thidemann stated that it would be for a total of two years. Cervantes also added that we would only finance borrowing cost on this and Thidemann stated that it would be for an amount up to \$490k for the deficit incurred from the ice storm.

Dennehy motioned to accept Article 20 and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Thidemann stated that Article 21 was on the warrant due to the fact that between 2006 and 2008 too much was taken out for Medicare from the employees as well as from the Town so we

needed to refund \$9,600, half to the Town and half to employees. He also stated that it would cost the Town about \$4,800 to pay the employees the \$4,800 and that it affected 50 employees.

Dennehy motioned to approve Article 21 and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Thidemann then asked the Board if they would accept Article 23 which was to rescind a previous TM vote on Chapter 90 funds which was voted on twice. Dennehy motioned to accept this article and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Article 24 was next and this was the Citizens Petition which Thidemann stated had to be included on the warrant and no motion was required.

Gagnon noted Article 25 was the Zoning By-Law change. Dennehy motioned to accept this article and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Article 29 was rescinded per the instructions from Nancy Haines who stated that this was not a revolving fund and she added that Article 11 was inaccurate as well. She added that this could be done but it's a whole different chapter. She stated that this should be fixed going forward and that she would re-write Article 11. She also stated that she would check with Town Counsel on this to be sure.

Gagnon noted that Article 27 was on hold due to a possible change in the road being paved through the STRAP grant.

Thidemann then reviewed his latest updates to the FY10 budget which conforms to the way it had been done in past years. He noted that the bulk of the Town's income is from property taxes and he added that the motor vehicle excise taxes are close to collected and had gone up. Reed inquired why the real estate taxes went up by 5% as he thought this may be overly aggressive and Thidemann stated that the values are down but the rates went up which was a pleasant surprise. He also stated that he had met with his financial team to verify this revenue projection amount.

Gagnon inquired about the SAFER grant and what the cost would be to the Town for the 5 years. Thidemann stated that he would look into this and noted that the Board of Selectmen had to vote to accept the money. Gagnon stated that the Board's vote is no as it's too risky. Thidemann stated that he would need to go back and work the budget numbers for Fire and the Revenue estimate from ambulance collections. Whitney inquired about any increase in the Chief's salary in the FY10 budget and Thidemann responded that there were no increases reflected.

Janssens stated that in his opinion this should go out for a vote at Town Meeting. There was some discussion on how this would affect Article 2. Whitney also inquired about the hiring freeze and how they would need to replace an employee who had left the Fire Department and Thidemann noted that the hiring freeze would be lifted.

Dennehy noted that the Police grant is a strong one with no cost to the Town while the Fire Department grant has the potential for penalty with a cost to the Town. He added that we should be building our reserves at this time.

Gail Dumont stated that the citizens of Ashburnham should have the right to vote on this issue.

Thidemann stated that he would draft a special article and would have to adjust the budget as well as the ambulance income amount.

Thidemann noted that under the Revenue column the licenses and permits were down and that he removed the meals and rooms tax increase which was almost \$99k for both. He added that we could see further state aid cuts in the fall as well as reducing the Quinn bill. He noted that internments were reduced, bank interests were reduced by \$20k and the miscellaneous was reduced by \$19k.

Thidemann noted that under Other Revenue he had spent a lot of time on the Water/Sewer numbers and reduced the Water to \$677k and the Sewer to \$1m. He added that he still needs to do a lot of work on this and that they may not know until the fall on the exact numbers, noting that the Water number was down while the Sewer number was up. He did state that he may pull out all the enterprise funds and do a separate spreadsheet as this has been the way he has always done it in the past. Gagnon stated that he thought this was a good idea and a smart way to do this. Thidemann added that he was not comfortable with this as he didn't understand because the numbers should be higher. Haines agreed that there was a lot of work to do on indirect costs.

Thidemann stated that he hopes that the numbers will be pluses by the fall town meeting as he was not comfortable with the numbers that were used before. He noted that his numbers were based on collections. He also stated that he needed Mark Abraham's spreadsheet for a clearer picture and a basis for indirect costs. He added that the indirect costs were the same as Paicos' and that he would remove the SAFER grant money from his budget report.

Thidemann noted that on the spending side he made some modest adjustments. He stated that he rounded to the nearest \$100, his goal was not to fill the vacant positions, and he cut the TA's budget. He stated that his biggest increase was in the Reserve Fund line and his goal was to find another \$10k to make it an even \$100k. He also noted that he increased the Town Accountant's budget line.

There was some discussion on the School Budget line and it was determined that there would need to be an adjustment to account for the increased Debt Service amount of \$481,993 and Thidemann said that he would adjust this.

There was also some discussion on the Police budget and why the Public Safety Building budget was combined. Gagnon noted that the PSB budget should be taken out and be set up as a separate line item in the same way that the Town Hall and the VMS was split.

Thidemann noted that Paicos had already made some cuts and the overlay deficit went up by \$20k and added \$25k for stabilization.

There was some discussion on the meeting that had been scheduled for Wednesday, April 1st and it was decided to keep this meeting on the schedule at 7:00 p.m. in the upstairs meeting room at Town Hall.

Gagnon noted that at the Selectmen's meeting on Monday April 6th they would be close to having the ATM warrant finalized.

With no further business to discuss a motion was made by Whitney to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 p.m. Dennehy seconded and the motion carried.