

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
JOINT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN
AND ADVISORY BOARD – MINUTES
MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2009 – 6:30 PM
VON DECK ROOM – OAKMONT REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL**

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, Leo Janssens II, and Ron Reed.

Gagnon noted a moment of silence to remember Fred Sweeney who was very active in the community.

- 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.
- II. CORRESPONDENCE: Gagnon stated that Alan Small, a resident had asked to serve as a member of the Historical Commission and Dennehy added that he would highly endorse this person. It was noted unanimously that they would appoint Small as long as there was no limit on the members at this time.

Gagnon then introduced Norm Thidemann as the Interim Town Administrator and stated that they were happy to welcome him back to Ashburnham.

Gagnon noted another letter of interest from Matt Christiansen to serve on the committee to review the Town Charter.

Whitney noted a letter from Richard Egan to serve on the Affordable Housing Committee and that they also would approve this as long as they don't exceed the limit of members on this committee.

Whitney stated that at the STM on November 13th Article 13, the Affordable Housing Committee asked to have an Affordable Housing Trust Fund set up as well as a Trust committee or board. She stated that they need letters of interest to serve.

Gagnon stated that they want to invite the Focus Committee and the Affordable Housing Committee to their next meeting on March 23rd.

Whitney noted that residents should be aware that the Registry of Motor Vehicles does not send notices anymore when your license needs to be renewed.

Whitney also stated that she attended the Delocalization Seminar at MRPC and that it was very informative.

Dennehy stated that Gary Howland, who works for Mt. Grace Land Trust had submitted an article for the ATM to set up an Agricultural Committee which would promote agricultural

uses in Ashburnham. He stated that Howland should come to the next meeting to speak on this.

Whitney noted that she attended the Senior Wholehealth Seminar in Gardner recently and she brought a packet of information for the COA Director which included information on additional insurance for seniors.

Dennehy stated that he and Whitney attended the GFA Grand Opening recently. He stated that it was a long time coming and the building is beautiful. He noted that GFA is an example of what not to do with permits and that the Village Center Zoning District Committee has submitted a revised By-Law for the ATM to make the process a little easier for future projects. He announced that there would be a Public Hearing on Thursday, March 26th at 7:00 p.m. in the upstairs meeting room at Town Hall and that the Committee needs feedback and commentary from the public and that this is the time to speak up. He added that the Committee has finalized the by-law and rezoning map and it's all ready to go. It was noted by Bill Johnson that the Public Hearing conflicts with an Advisory Board meeting and Dennehy stated that it has already been published in the paper so the hearing couldn't be changed.

Gagnon stated that on Thursday, March 12th, there was also a conflict with an Advisory Board meeting and the Employee of the Year Award dinner, but that Dennehy would attend the dinner to present the award to Stan Herriott, the Ashburnham award recipient.

Johnson noted that some department heads scheduled would be going to the award dinner and that if needed, the Advisory Board would change their schedule to accommodate this.

- a. **Letter from Department of Conservation and Recreation re: conservation restriction:** Gagnon read the letter and noted that the Selectmen need to sign the two waivers, the certificate of announcement and the waiver of the 120 day notice. Dennehy stated that this land is already under Chapter 61 so there would be no loss of taxes, so it's a win/win situation for the Town. The Board signed the waivers.
- b. **Memo from Don Ouellette, DPW Director re: brush removal costs and alternatives:** Gagnon noted that there was conflicting information regarding brush removal costs. (see memo attached) Gagnon noted that Ouellette's suggestion would be to allow the DPW to do it for cheaper. Norm Thidemann stated that he wanted to review this and come back with his recommendation at the next meeting as he needed more time. Gagnon stated that residents could take their brush to the transfer station if they don't want to wait.

Gagnon noted a memo from Battalion Chief Salo regarding the appointment of Chief Zbikowski to the Town's Emergency Management Committee when they already have a regional committee. Gagnon explained that they needed to appoint a committee for the Town locally.

Dennehy stated that he attended a meeting of the "Bye Greater Gardner Now" put on for lenders which CDC is heading up to put together incentive packages for homebuyers. He noted that Gardner and the surrounding towns along with MRPC are working to promote buying properties.

- B. **Town Administrator's Report:** Thidemann advised the Selectmen that GFA had asked permission to hang a banner across Main Street regarding their official Grand Opening to

the public on Saturday, March 28th. Dennehy motioned to approve the hanging of a banner by GFA and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Thidemann thanked the Board for the warm welcome.

C. Public Safety Building Committee update: Gagnon stated that he really had nothing to report at this time except that at their next meeting they would look at sewer hook-up fees totally \$12k.

D. Chairman's Report: Gagnon noted that the answering machine message at Town Hall had to be changed. He suggested Scot Bingham as a great person to re-tape this message. Whitney also stated that she could suggest someone as well. Thidemann stated that he would take care of this.

Gagnon touched on the ongoing dam situation in Ashburnham and the fact that DCR is upset with the Town's lack of action. Dennehy discussed his recent meeting with dam officials and that they discussed all the dams in Town. He noted that the Director of Dam Safety was present and expected the Town to have a plan to take care of this problem. Dennehy explained the Town's financial circumstances and stated that this was an "unfunded mandate". He added that they plan on responding and that he would also speak with local legislators.

Gagnon gave a very informative history of the dams in Ashburnham.

Gagnon stated that the Briggs Building Committee had submitted the Intermunicipal Agreement to the Board and also to Town Counsel who had points of concern. These were sent to Dr. Zapantis and Sherry Kersey, noting that the changes were very minor. He stated that the agreement was done according to MSBA rules and that they are basically relying on Zapantis and Kersey to have this approved with the MSBA. He noted that the Committee needed this agreement approved before they could hire a Project Manager.

Dennehy stated that they would sign after changes were made and everyone is satisfied although he had no issues with it and Whitney agreed. Gagnon stated that he would forward it back to have the agreement restructured.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Discussion on FY09 Budget shortfall: Thidemann stated that he would be vague at this time and that he had met with the financial team and looked at the numbers. He stated that he was still unclear on some issues but did identify some opportunities, noting that they could use non-recurring funds but be conservative and not use all the funds.

He stated that Snow & Ice was the main issue along with the State Aid cut. He stated that the financial team is calm, gathering data and looking at alternatives. He added that there is a problem but that they are looking at an approach to manage the problem and that there will be some tough decisions but hopefully they would avoid major issues.

Whitney stated that a taxpayer approached her and asked why even with the override that recently was approved, there is this situation. Thidemann noted the reasons as follows;

state aid cut, anticipated shortfall in tax collections and the ice storm along with the snow & ice budget. Dennehy added that no one could have predicted this.

Thidemann stated that they would need to re-visit the budget every six months for the next 18 months.

Whitney asked about possible adjustments in FY10 and Thidemann stated that they may need to change the FY10 budget and have more town meetings as well. He stated that he planned on looking at the draft FY10 budget but only after FY09 is balanced.

Bill Johnson inquired about a timeline for a plan and Thidemann stated that he would do so as quickly as possible but he had no definite date, but that he was hoping to have things pinned down by the next meeting.

B. Signing of the Intermunicipal Agreement for Briggs: This was discussed under the Chairman's report.

C. Appointment of TA Search Committee as well as discussion of "charge" of committee and possible consultant: Gagnon stated that 15 people had sent in letters of interest to serve on this committee. Whitney stated that she made packets for whoever was chosen to serve and that the packet included the MA Recruitment Guidelines Handbook. There was some discussion on the number of members that should be appointed.

It was noted by Gagnon that the committee would work under the rules of Executive Session. He also stated that copies of all resumes should be given to the Board of Selectmen.

There was a unanimous decision to appoint 9 members with 2 alternates to serve on this committee. Dennehy motioned to appoint Jeff Lawrence as Chairman, Ron Reed, Dottie Munroe, Jim Kreidler, Joe Daigle, Pixie Brennan, Sylvia Turcotte, Barbara Brown and John MacMillan as members, along with Gail Dumont and Dave Sargent as alternates. Whitney seconded and the motion carried.

Dennehy noted that the Board of Selectmen could attend meetings of this committee even though they are not appointed members. Gagnon stated that the committee should present the Selectmen with 3 candidates shortly after Town Meeting on Monday, May 4th for final interviews.

There was some discussion on professional services for background search and it was determined that they would send out an RFP to see what type of response they would get. Thidemann noted that if it was below a certain threshold there was no need for an RFP but that they could call and inquire. Dennehy stated that they should consider this.

It was noted that the appointment slips for the individuals chosen would be kept along with a packet of information for each member and that they would be notified to pick up their packets from Sylvia.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Review of DOR Financial Management Report: Gagnon proceeded to go over each point in the report. Dennehy made one point that the Board needed to do regular evaluations of the Town Administrator.

Another point brought up was that the Selectmen should hold shorter meetings.

It was noted by Johnson that copies of this report should be available at the Library as well as Town Hall and that it should also be scanned and placed on the Town's website.

Gagnon did state that the report noted that a lot was being done well by the Town.

Gagnon did state that an important point was made regarding the tax rate being set timely and that audit issues should be addressed.

Gagnon noted that under computers and technology they suggested setting up a committee to evaluate the Town's computer issues. Dennehy asked for anyone interested to serve on such a committee to let them know.

More discussion followed on the report.

Gagnon inquired as to whether the 5-day work week would be reinstated at Town Hall now that the warmer weather was approaching. He also suggested that maybe they could set aside one of the five days where they would be closed to the public.

Gagnon noted that this report was basically a management review and that the DOR "says a lot of nice things about us in this report". He added that it shows our strengths and weaknesses and is a good report.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. January 20, 2009 – Special Meeting
- B. January 26, 2009 – Regular Meeting
- C. February 2, 2009 – Regular Meeting
- D. February 17, 2009 – Joint Meeting with Advisory Board
- E. February 23, 2009 – Joint Meeting with Advisory Board

Gagnon stated that the minutes under A, B and C were amended with changes that both he and Whitney suggested. Whitney stated that she wanted to be sure that all the motions were included as she made them. Dennehy motioned to approve the minutes as amended for January 20, January 26 and February 2 and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

It was noted that Whitney was absent for the February 17th meeting.

Dennehy motioned to approve the minutes for the February 17th meeting and was seconded by Gagnon. Motion carried.

Whitney motioned to approve the minutes for the February 23rd meeting and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

VI. SCHEDULE OF COMING EVENTS

Dennehy read the reminders from the Town Clerk's office as listed below.

- Census Forms have been mailed to each household. Please complete and return these forms to the Town Clerk's office at Town Hall. Failure to return these forms may result in removal from the active voters list.
- Rabies Clinic, Saturday, March 21st from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Highway Garage on Central Street. The charge is \$10.00. Please bring current rabies certificate.
- March 1st – Dog licenses are now available at the Town Clerk's office at Town Hall.

Dennehy also announced the following:

- Public Hearing – Village Center District Zoning Committee – Thursday, March 26th at 7:00 p.m. upstairs at Town Hall.
- The next meeting of the Board of Selectmen – Monday, March 23rd at 6:30 p.m.
- Joint Meeting of Advisory Bd. and BOS on Thursday, March 12th at 7:00 p.m. in the Lower Level Meeting Room at Town Hall.
- Award dinner for Employee of the Year – Thursday, March 12th at 6:00 p.m. for Stan Herriott.
- School Committee Meeting on Tuesday, March 10th at 7:00 p.m. at Overlook

VII. OTHER MATTERS: None

VIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

IX. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:10 p.m. Whitney motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte
Executive Assistant to the Town Administrator