

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM**  
**JOINT MEETING W/ ADVISORY BOARD AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES**  
**APRIL 6, 2009**  
**FAIRBANKS MEMORIAL TOWN HALL – UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM**

This meeting was aired live on local cable television.

PRESENT: Chris Gagnon, Chair, Jonathan Dennehy, Member, Maggie Whitney, Clerk, Norm Thidemann, Interim Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Also Advisory Board members present were Bill Johnson, Dottie Munroe, Leo Janssens and Ron Reed.

- I. APPROVAL OF AGENDA: At 6:30 p.m., Gagnon read the agenda noting a few additions, under Old Business the TA Search Committee and under New Business the website award. Dennehy moved to accept the agenda as amended and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.
- II. PRESENTATIONS & REPORTS
- III. OLD BUSINESS

- A. **Town Administrator Search Committee:** Jeff Lawrence, the Chair of the TA Search Committee noted that the Committee had chosen three candidates, but that one had withdrawn. He stated that initially there were 45 resumes, they saw 7 semi-finalists which resulted in the three chosen candidates. He stated that the two candidates were Douglas C. Briggs from Rutland, MA who is a Selectmen there and Christopher E. Ryan of Warwick, MA who is the Town Administrator in Putney, VT. He asked the Board for instructions as to what their next step should be. Gagnon stated that they would set up interviews. Whitney thanked the Committee for all their due diligence in choosing these two candidates so quickly. She stated that she would be happy to do the background checks and to go to the communities herself and Gagnon stated that this could be done after the interviews. It was noted by Lawrence that the Committee had already done some reference checks and that both candidates were good people.

Dennehy noted his concerns about maybe looking at some of the other applicants that weren't chosen and that he had questions that needed to be answered. Gagnon stated that they would schedule the two candidates for interviews and then set up a meeting with the Committee for a debriefing. Pixie Brennan, who was a member of the Committee noted that they needed to interview these two candidates immediately as the Committee had done a lot of investigating themselves. Dennehy agreed that they needed to interview these candidates as soon as possible but that he needed to know as much as possible about the process.

Lawrence stated that the Committee followed the charge that was given them and that's how they proceeded. Gail Dumont, also a Committee member, stated that they followed the same process as done in the past and Ed Vitone added that the Board of Selectmen selected the Committee and that they needed to trust their judgment and they are not compelled to hire either one.

Gagnon again noted that they should schedule the interviews as soon as possible and then set up a debriefing with the Committee. It was noted that the interviews would be scheduled for Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, with one at 6:00 p.m. and the other at 7:00 p.m. in the upstairs meeting room at Town Hall.

At this time Gagnon noted that the Town had received a website award from the Senate, MASS Common Cause, and proceeded to read the document. Dennehy noted that only about 30 towns and cities in the state had received this award. Gagnon added that Ken Dolder does a great job as the Town's webmaster.

**B. Further discussion on the Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles and the Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles:** Thidemann took a moment to apologize to Dennehy on failing to schedule a debriefing meeting with the TA Search Committee.

There was some discussion on Article 15, which was the inspection and emergency action plan for the four Town-owned dams as mandated by the State. Gagnon stated that this may or may not be necessary but they should leave it on just in case. Dennehy noted that in his discussions, the figure was four \$10k amounts for the inspection of each dam. Whitney noted that Rep. Rice had mentioned that \$100k might be available last year and Dennehy stated that they should follow-up on this. Dennehy motioned to include Article 15 on the warrant and Whitney seconded. Motion carried.

Thidemann noted that on Article 17, which was for the transfer of Cushing Trust Fund income, he would check with the Treasurer on the amount and added that it would only be the interest income not the principle. Dennehy motioned to approve Article 17 and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

It was noted by Thidemann that they would wait for Deb Phillips on the wording for Article 16, the FEMA and MEMA transfer of funds. Dennehy motioned to include Article 16 in anticipation of the final wording from Town Counsel and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Thidemann noted that Article 22, which was the School Override, did not have an amount yet as this would be the difference between what we were giving them and what they certify. Dennehy motioned to include this article, adding in the sum later. Whitney seconded and the motion carried.

Thidemann noted that on Article 24, Don Ouellette called the State regarding the STRAP Grant and if Rindge Turnpike Road was eligible. They stated that it was not on the Federal listing but that it was eligible. Dennehy motioned to include Article 24 as written and Whitney seconded. Motion carried.

At this time Jeff Lawrence returned to report that he had left messages for the two candidates and that once he heard back he would advise the Board. He also thanked the Committee for doing a great job and thanked Norm Thidemann for his assistance. He added that the Committee is open for a debriefing. Munroe noted that Lawrence did a great job as Chair of this Committee.

Thidemann then reviewed the STM warrant. He stated that Article 1 was approved by the State Emergency Board for up to \$490k re: the December Ice Storm expenses. He noted that Article 2 would be crossed out as it was no longer required at this time but may be needed in September.

Thidemann noted that Article 3 was the purchase of a flail mower out of Chapter 90 funds and Article 4 would transfer funds into the Reserve Fund to help balance the FY09 Budget which included a transfer for the legal account.

Thidemann noted a few changes in the FY10 budget. He stated that he added the cruiser in the Police operating budget which brought the total to \$1,225k. He also stated that the Fire budget should be a total of \$523k, ConCom should be \$27k, and in the Employee Insurance Benefits account he added \$15k.

There was a short discussion on the possibility of a part-time Planner position which had not been funded. Thidemann noted that some funds were there, and that \$20k should cover the clerical and some consulting and if there isn't enough they would go to the Reserve Fund.

Dennehy stated that his hope would be that by FY11 they could bookmark some funds in this account for a part-time planner. Reed stated that with zero state aid coming, we may not even consider this in FY11. Johnson agreed that if funds are needed, they could fall back to the Reserve fund.

Thidemann noted that in addition to revisiting the Water/Sewer situation they should have someone come in and look at Land Use and ConCom and how it should be set up as this is what's needed. He added that the next Town Administrator could look at this and revisit it in September.

There was more discussion on the ConCom position with members of the Conservation Commission and the Building Commissioner. Gagnon stated that on April 1, 2009 a vote was taken to cut this position to part-time. He added that it is under the Town Administrator's control at this point and the numbers are set. At this time Dennehy proposed a motion to move \$15k out of unemployment and to move these funds to the Land Use account to fund a part-time Land Use person. There was no second. Dennehy also noted that one person to do both jobs is working fine and it should be kept that way.

More discussion followed with Thidemann suggesting that they give him a week to come up with a plan which would require some compromise. He also noted that they should keep in mind that in September they would be back to reshape the budget. Pixie Brennan stated that every position is justified so they needed to decide what positions they can do without.

#### IV. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Discussion on the Special Act Study Committee:** Gagnon stated that they would appoint the list of names to this committee as follows: Ed Vitone, Mark Carlisle, Mike Catlin, Pixie Brennan, Dottie Munroe and Matthew Christiansen. He noted that they also needed to develop a charge for this Committee, as well as for other By-Laws. Whitney motioned to approve the list of names and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried. Dennehy noted that they should leave the committee options open for other members. At this time Leo Janssens asked to also be appointed to this Committee and was added to the motion. Whitney stated that she nominated Ed Vitone as the Chair of this Committee and was seconded by Dennehy.
- B. Discussion on IT Study Committee:** It was noted by Gagnon that only one person had sent in a letter of interest to serve on this Committee and his name was Greg Fagan. He stated that they would keep this open as more members were needed.
- C. Discussion on appointments to the Affordable Housing Trust Committee:** Gagnon stated that they needed more residents to serve on this committee.
- D. Future of South Station:** Gagnon noted that the main problem with keeping South Station open was the cost of heat and electricity. He also noted that they might consider that the DPW does need storage space. Thidemann suggested that the Capital Planning Committee should look into this with the Fire Chief and the DPW Director.
- E. Discussion on changing Town Hall hours:** Whitney stated that she thought the hours should be brought back to the original times to accommodate all the employees. Thidemann noted that this discussion should be postponed at least until the end of May due to the fact that tax bills went out with the present hours listed on them.

Dennehy stated that he would like to hear from the employees and get a recommendation from Thidemann based on the consensus of the employees.

- F. Discussion and approval of Silver Star Banner Day Proclamation:** Gagnon read the proclamation which recognized veterans that had been hurt or ill due to their service to our country to be celebrated on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Gagnon motioned to approve and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

V. CONSENT AGENDA

**A. Approval of minutes of:**

March 9, 2009 Minutes – Joint Meeting w/Advisory Board  
March 16, 2009 Minutes – Joint Meeting w/Advisory Board  
March 19, 2009 Minutes – Joint Meeting w/Advisory Board

**B. Selectmen’s Meetings at Town Hall in the Great Room**

Whitney noted a correction in the minutes of March 19<sup>th</sup>. Dennehy motioned to approve all minutes listed above with the amendment and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

VI. CHAIR’S REPORT AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Gagnon noted the following Town Clerk Reminders:

- April 8, Wednesday, Final Registration for the Town Election – 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. in Clerk’s office.
- April 13, Monday, Final Registration for Annual Town Meeting – 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. in Clerk’s office.
- April 27, Monday, 12 noon, last day for filing applications for absentee ballots re: Town Election.
- April 28, Tuesday, Town Election at Briggs, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- May 2, Saturday, Annual Town Meeting 10:00 a.m. in Auditorium at Town Hall.
- Dog licenses are now available at the Town Clerk’s office. The 2008 licenses expired on March 31<sup>st</sup>.
- Absentee ballots for the April 28<sup>th</sup> election are available at the Town Clerk’s office.

He also noted the Chairs Meeting with Dr. Zapantis on Thursday, April 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. to be hosted in the conference room, Superintendent’s Office at Oakmont.

Gagnon noted the next meeting of the Board of Selectmen would be on April 21<sup>st</sup> at 6:30 p.m. in the Upstairs Meeting room at Town Hall. He added that the meeting was being held on Tuesday due to the Patriots Day Holiday on Monday April 20<sup>th</sup>.

Gagnon announced Candidates Night sponsored by the Ashburnham Business Council would be held on Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup> from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in the Von Deck Meeting Room at Oakmont Regional High School.

He also noted the Memorial Day Ceremonies would be held on Monday, May 25<sup>th</sup> on the lawn in front of Town Hall and that more details would be forthcoming.

## VII. BOS REPORT AND CORRESPONDENCE

Whitney noted her attendance at a number of meetings, and that she had also attended the opening of the new MART Building in Gardner.

## VIII. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Thidemann noted that he was working on a draft Vehicle Use Policy and that he would have the final draft in 2 or 3 weeks. He noted that he was working on other policies as well.

The FMLA Policy was then discussed and Whitney motioned to approve it as written and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Thidemann noted that he would be meeting with the Water/Sewer Commissioners on April 14<sup>th</sup> stating that they would be working on drafting an MOU to determine the role of the Commissioners and also a job description. He noted the intent would be to have them more involved. He stated that the new Town Administrator would get a packet on this for the September Town Meeting. He also stated that one current member had noted that he would be going out of town and would like to be considered as an alternate member while another letter was received from Val Daigle asking to be appointed in his slot. Dennehy stated that if anyone is interested to serve they should advise the Board.

Whitney asked Thidemann to explain how the Executive Session minutes are read. Thidemann stated that traditionally there is one copy in the office and the members come in and read and sign off on each. He added that it depends on the subject matter and how confidential the subject matter is. She also asked about making any corrections to these minutes and he stated that they would need to be done in Executive Session.

Johnson suggested that they move the ambulance service from the Town Administrator account to the Fire account.

At this time a discussion followed on the SAFER Grant with many present from the Fire Department as well as supporters of this grant.

Paul Rekos, of the Fire Department talked about the SAFER Grant and how it was obtained and what it would accomplish. He stated that they want the residents of Ashburnham to have the opportunity to put this on the warrant to allow them to decide if it's something they want. He also noted that the union is in full agreement.

Gagnon explained that it was taken off the warrant due to long range financial concerns.

Zbikowski stated that they started the grant application a year before and it was approved in January, with their budget being set as level-funded. He noted that training and equipment is all included in the grant and the cost would only be about \$18k a year. He noted that they were finally successful after three years of applying for this grant.

There was discussion on the salaries for the three potential paramedics. Also some discussion followed on the possibility of ambulance calls slowing down with a lower collection rate.

Janssens noted that they should allow those in Town that need these services to decide. Reed noted his concerns regarding state aid cuts coming up.

Pixie Brennan stated that this should go on a ballot but added that where the funds would come from was a concern especially with the Snow & Ice deficit and the ice storm clean up costs.

It was noted by Gerry Descoteaux of the Fire Department that it was required to have one paramedic on duty at all times or they would lose their ALS standing.

Johnson voiced his concern that the problem was that no one knew about this grant before two weeks ago and that because of the concessions that the Fire Department made, would Article 2 need to be amended at Town Meeting. Thidemann stated that the quick answer is to just leave it alone or prepare ahead of time as an option. He added that they could come back in September to change it as well.

Dennehy stated that there would be no impact this year but this was a big picture question and he was not comfortable making this decision. He stated that he was not in favor of this personally due to the liability in five years, as local aid was a big issue even this year. He did add that he was willing to keep this on the warrant if the other Board members were in agreement. Gagnon noted that this should be decided by ballot. Ed Vitone stated that this should be funded through an override for the full amount. Dennehy stated that he would support this if they didn't have state budget cuts looming.

Zbikowski noted that if they gave back the grant they might have trouble getting grants in the future. He stated that they want to go to Town Meeting with this and let them decide. Dennehy stated that he realized the union and the employees had made sacrifices and he noted that it was commendable, but it's an issue with funding. Johnson noted that they should look at revenue implications as well.

Dennehy made the motion to put the article back on the warrant. Both Whitney and Gagnon voted against, stating that they needed more facts and to put it off until the fall special meeting.

Gagnon ended the discussion by stating that "the threat is too enormous to me".

#### IX. EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### X. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:33 p.m., Dennehy motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator