

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN – SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 9, 2010 – 1:00 P.M.
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE – TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: Ed Vitone, Chair, Maggie Whitney, Clerk, Doug Briggs, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

Vitone called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and stated that the purpose of this meeting was to review the Town Administrator's proposed budget for FY11 and to agree/or modify and then forward the budget over to the Advisory Board.

Whitney motioned to approve the agenda as stated and was seconded by Vitone. Motion carried.

Whitney noted that she wanted to add a discussion on the COA issue to this agenda and Vitone added that they would adjourn and enter into Executive Session after the open session.

Whitney asked Briggs if the budget he was presenting was a balanced budget and he stated that it was. Vitone stated that it was understood that there would be no change in state revenues, with Proposition 2 ½ plus growth as the only added revenue. Briggs stated that half of this would potentially go to the school. Vitone also noted that they had set aside funds for Capital Planning which had not been done before.

There was some discussion on expenses and Briggs noted that the Quinn Bill Escrow account of \$22,295 represented the balance of the unpaid State portion for the Quinn Bill. He also noted that he set aside \$85,000 under expenses for the anticipated Town Hall flood damage balance and that he didn't add these two expenses in the departmental line item budget.

Vitone brought up the proposed non-union pay raises and he noted that he thought that the non-union employees should not be treated any differently from the other employees. Briggs noted that there would be no movement within the steps, only the matrix would change to reflect the 3% increase. Whitney noted that he should change the title on this line item to Employee Wage Increase as the present title of Merit Increases is misleading. Briggs stated that the unions were getting a 2% plus a step increase so he thought this was only fair. Whitney voiced her concern that the taxpayers would comment on this due to the economic times and the bad job market. Vitone stated that he was okay with the non-union pay raises and Whitney stated hesitantly that she was okay with this as well.

Whitney then touched on each budget beginning with the Moderator which they agreed was okay. She had a question on the Board of Selectmen budget, regarding Professional Development and Travel which Briggs clarified. Under the Town Administrator budget Briggs noted that the salary line included all his contractual benefits and Whitney noted that she commended him for cutting his Professional Development line item, adding that he was leading by example.

The Advisory Board budget was okayed. Under the Accountant's budget, Briggs stated that per the request of the Board of Selectmen, he increased the hours by 5 per week and that he placed

her in the wage matrix at \$32.01 per hour and that she would get the 3% raise. He added that she would receive benefits.

They all agreed the Board of Assessors budget was okay. Briggs noted that in the Treasurer's budget he added 5 hours a week for Anne Cervantes which everyone approved. Briggs noted that the Collector's new fee schedule had a rate increase of \$.04 cents per bill and she sends out 9,000 bills and that this reflects an increase in her budget of \$360. He also noted that there was an increase in the Town Clerk's budget as well due to state elections.

Both Whitney and Vitone stated that they had no issues with the Land Use, Town Hall and VMS Building budgets. Under Non-Departmental, Briggs stated that he added \$31,150 for sewer assessment which the Town should have been paying and hadn't for some time.

Vitone noted that the Police total budget was down due to the cruiser which was taken out and would be funded as a Capital item. It was noted that the Public Safety Building budget went down by \$11,000 due to the new photovoltaic panels that would be installed there by the Light Department which would conserve energy.

Vitone noted that Briggs should change the wording in his cover letter on the Fire Department budget. Under the Dispatch budget, Briggs noted that we were still actively pursuing regionalization in Dispatch. There was a short discussion under the Inspections budget regarding the fact that Mike Gallant was no longer employed in Fitchburg so Ashburnham may have to cover his certification this year.

The Animal Control Officer budget was next up for discussion. Whitney questioned the Assistant position added this year. Briggs stated that they needed to be sure there was backup if the Animal Control Officer was on vacation or out for some other reason and not available. Briggs added that Ashburnham covers supplies, Westminster covers benefits and both towns split the wages. Whitney stated that she understood that this position was only to cover as backup and Briggs noted that they were only budgeting for five hours between the two towns.

Briggs stated that they had not received the budget from Monty Tech yet and that they were looking at things now for the AWRSD budget. Vitone stated that they were talking about philosophy and that they were after criteria. Briggs stated that the Town's growth is approximately \$389,000 so \$188,000 would go for the school, rough numbers, with \$200,000 for the Town. Whitney added that this wasn't set in stone. Vitone noted that they need to recommend something to the Advisory Board on this. Further discussion followed on the school assessment.

The Board had no issues with the DPW and Snow & Ice budgets or the Board of Health budget.

With the ConCom budget, Whitney stated that she didn't understand why we had an agent as most towns have contracted or volunteer agents and Briggs stated that going that route could be more expensive than the way we are now. He noted that they needed to look at regionalization with 3 or 4 towns. Whitney asked how long this would take and Vitone noted that both the DOR and MRPC are working on this now but we should send letters to surrounding towns to do this ourselves, inviting them to see if there's any interest.

The COA budget was next up for discussion. Whitney stated that she questioned why the programs budget went down and Briggs stated that under Professional Development they

included Meals on Wheels at \$3,000, as well as dues and mileage. Whitney asked about the salary line and Briggs stated that right now they had an Outreach worker who was volunteering and that Donna Burton would be the office support/coordinator. He stated that he budgeted this line to include 20 hours for Donna and 3 to 5 hours for an outreach worker and that there was a woman from Ashby who was interested in this position. He noted that a \$3,000 grant would cover some of this expense. Whitney then brought up the use of the van. Vitone stated that they needed to encourage things for the seniors that benefits all seniors. Briggs stated that the van wasn't being used correctly and now that has been resolved. He added that he had an issue with using the van and paying themselves. He stated that at 5 years or 100k miles, the van would belong to the Town. He stated that he would entertain the use of the van with guidelines and the use of a certified driver. Vitone noted that the largest cost would be the driver and he thought it would be okay as long as the seniors pay the correct cost. Whitney stated that the van is okay but needs to be paid appropriately and okayed by the Council.

The Veterans' Agent budget was okay. The Library budget was next and Briggs stated that it had been level funded from last year. He added that the wages went up and books went down. Whitney stated that they should look into regionalizing Library Directors and Briggs stated that it could be feasible.

There were no issues with the Historical Commission, Debt or Insurance budgets.

The Board had no issues with the Capital Planning Budget and Briggs noted that a portion of this had been set aside for some school items. He also noted that the Capital Planning Committee voted for: turn-out gear over a 5 year period, a truck for the DPW, a truck for Municipal Grounds, a van for the school (1/2 of the cost), and a cruiser.

Briggs stated that he proposed the Water and Sewer budgets as separate items/budgets. He also noted that he would be looking at analyzing the rates. He stated that they are setting up neighborhood informational meetings to inform residents on the proposed new water tank on High Street/Meeting House Hill. He also stated that he is working on a meeting with the Historical Commission on this and how it would impact them. He stated that they should get a grant answer by next week and could get a 45% grant. And, Cushing will potentially pay some of their assessment out front. He added that they are accountable for 10-12% of water usage in Town.

At 2:35 p.m., Vitone motioned to enter into Executive Session to deliberate upon matters which, if done in open meeting could detrimentally affect the position of the Town regarding collective bargaining (pending or ongoing) and the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property and to reconvene only to adjourn.

At 3:33 p.m. Vitone motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator