

TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
JOINT MEETING – BOARD OF SELECTMEN AND ADVISORY BOARD
MONDAY – MARCH 7, 2011 – 6:30 p.m.
TRAINING ROOM – PUBLIC SAFETY COMPLEX

This meeting was aired live on local cable television.

PRESENT: Ed Vitone, Chair, Maggie Whitney, Clerk, Ron Reed, Member, Doug Briggs, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Advisory Board members – Bill Johnson, Meredith Fagan, Joseph Oliveira, and Duncan Phyfe.

Also present: Dave Christiansen and Michelle Gianino of the School Committee.

I. SALUTE THE FLAG

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Maggie Whitney. Vitone called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m.

II. SOLICIT PUBLIC INPUT

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Vitone noted that they would amend the agenda by adding Bill Webber, Chair of the Caucus Committee, who will discuss a possible nomination for the Planning Board. ***Reed motioned to approve the agenda as amended and was seconded by Vitone. Motion carried.***

Vitone stated that they would ask Bill Webber to discuss this nomination as the first item on the agenda. Webber stated that the Caucus Committee did not have a nomination for the open Planning Board position until today. Webber noted that David Wojnas has signed as the nominee for the Planning Board position. ***Reed motioned to accept Wojnas as the nominee for the Planning Board and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.***

IV. PRESENTATIONS & REPORTS

A. Review and discussion of Town Administrator's proposed FY12 Budget

Briggs began the discussion by stating that the FY12 total budget was \$12,239,896 which was down from the present FY11 budget. He also noted that all IT and building expenses were now in separate accounts and were taken out of the individual department budgets. He stated that there were no increases for the non-union personnel in the FY12 budget.

Briggs then proceeded to review each department budget beginning with the Moderator's budget which had no changes. He stated that he changed the salary line in the Board of Selectmen budget to include the third Selectmen's salary, which wasn't included in FY11. He noted that under the Town Administrator's budget he added \$450 for copier maintenance and took out the ambulance billing from the professional and tech services account and moved it to the Fire budget.

Briggs stated that with the cost of fuel fluctuating he added \$25,000 to the Reserve Fund as a buffer. He noted that the Accountant's budget was level funded except for the salary line where there was a slight increase. The Board of Assessors budget changed due to the new assessors firm and also Donna Burton's salary.

Briggs stated that the Treasurer's budget had a slight change due to the longevity for Anne Cervantes. He stated that the Collector's budget was level funded and also the Town Clerk's. He noted that the IT Expense budget included all IT related expenses from each department and that he was working with the IT Advisory Board on this. He added that this will allow more visibility of these expenses. He noted that the Land Use and Town Hall accounts were both level funded and noted the new Town Buildings account which also included all building expenses and maintenance taken from each individual department budgets.

He stated that the computer expenses were taken out of the Non-Departmental account and moved to the new IT Expense account.

Briggs stated that the Police budget increased due to contractual increases and that ammunition was included under supplies. He also noted that gas was included under Vehicular Supplies.

He stated that under the Fire budget the increase again was due to contractual wage increases and also under Professional and Tech the Coastal Ambulance billing was added. Under Emergency Dispatch the increase was due to contractual increases and longevity. He noted that the Inspection account was level funded. He stated that the Dog Officer account included an increase under the salary line to cover for an alternate when she was off.

Briggs noted that Monty Tech would probably go up around \$9,000 but that they had not received their official certification. Vitone asked that they skip over the AWRSD budget for discussion at the end of the budget review.

Briggs stated that under the DPW budget, Mary Ellen Kelly was now included under the Salary line and the transfer station expenses were now a part of this budget as well.

He noted that under Snow & Ice, he did not increase the amount because this was the only account that we could over-spend. He added that as of today this account was about \$30,000 over.

Briggs stated that the Board of Health and Conservation Commission budgets were level funded as well as the Council on Aging budget.

He stated that two additional veterans had been added to the Veterans Services budget which was a substantial increase.

Briggs noted that both the Library and the Historical Commission were level funded. He stated that the Debt Service account went down because we paid off the fire truck and the Employee Insurance Benefits account went up due to Worcester County Retirement. He also noted that he cut the Unemployment benefits line from \$30,000 to \$10,000, but that because the Town is self insured we are going to be hit with unemployment benefits for some former employees who are still out of work. Vitone noted that Briggs should look into what it would save the Town if we weren't self insured. Briggs stated that under the Capital Planning Allocation line the actual total should be \$448,500.

Vitone also stated that the FY12 Budget should be placed on the website as well as the list of roads to be done in FY12. Briggs stated that he would work with Steve Nims on the list.

Bill Johnson had a question on whether Briggs had worked on pooling all pagers and cell phones for the Town and Briggs stated that he would look at getting this done.

Johnson asked about fuel costs and Briggs stated that they would be looking into going out to bid at the beginning of April along with a consortium which included Gardner, Winchendon, Westminster and Leominster.

Johnson also noted that under the Library, the cost for fuel oil was listed at \$2.29 and it should be changed to \$2.75 a gallon. Briggs stated that he would change this.

Meredith Fagan inquired about the uniforms for Dispatchers and Briggs stated that this was in their contract.

Reed noted that if we get approximately \$300,000 from Chapter 90 and add in the \$125,000 in the Capital Plan for roads, it still won't be enough to repair all the Town roads and we may have to look at an override next year to get more roads done.

Vitone stated that the action items from this discussion were as follows:

- Increase Library budget for fuel
- Inventory pagers and cell phones

Johnson asked about the percent of increase for the unions. Briggs responded that it was 3½% for the unions, 4% for the managers with contracts and at least one manager's education incentive increased from 20% to 25% due to moving from Bachelors to Masters degree. He did

add that he met with both the Police and Dispatch unions and asked if they would negotiate no increase but they said no.

Fagan inquired if there was any progress with the Pilot Program and Briggs stated that there was nothing further. Vitone noted that the Light Department had done many things for the Town including the underground wiring downtown, working on solar cells at the landfill, and the possible wind turbines. Briggs added the solar panels at Oakmont and the Public Safety Building. He noted that the panels at the PSB have saved the Town \$12,000 in energy costs.

Johnson complimented Briggs on the budget adding that they know they have good data.

Vitone then began discussion on the AWRSD budget. He stated that they were unclear on the transportation line. Reed stated that the transportation amount should be treated separately as the reimbursement rate is different and there's a reason that the State does it separately and it is not a part of the foundation budget. Christiansen stated that he would check into this.

Briggs handed out a report to all present and a discussion followed on the transportation issue as well as the operating budget. There was also a short discussion on the School Choice Charter and the process.

Briggs stated that using the Statutory Method the decrease didn't go into the budget but went into the Capital Plan for roads, etc. He added that if we used the District Method we would see cuts in the Capital Plan which would include a portion of the School Capital requests and roads.

Vitone stated that the Capital Plan with set priorities at \$450,000 meant that there would be no borrowing for items such as roads, school capital needs, DPW equipment or to make the Public Safety Building the IT hub for the Town with fiber running from Town Hall. Vitone noted that if they went with the District plan they would have to delete planned items from the Capital Plan to make up the difference.

Briggs also noted that they were still waiting for costs on the issue with Overlook Middle School.

Briggs explained the contribution over net minimum and how it was shared with both towns. Reed noted that this was "raw cash" and that layoff of Town employees was the only alternative which would result in closing some Town departments.

Christiansen asked if the allocation method could be amended for FY12 and noted that the School Committee might be willing to amend the regional agreement. A discussion followed on the possibility of amending the agreement and how the process would work.

Discussion followed on the transportation numbers and how this would impact the Towns' contributions. Whitney noted that "you can't spend what you don't have". Joseph Oliveira, new Advisory Board member, stated that the vote on the new Briggs school will result in higher taxes for Ashburnham and "it is difficult to go back to the well". Fagan added that Ashburnham cares about the children and that everyone had been informed about the plan to go with the Statutory Method. Vitone stated that if last February someone had come forward about the letter that was sent on this, it could have been discussed and possibly resolved at that time.

Bill Johnson noted that he had heard nothing to change his mind on the allocation method and that the model is unsustainable. He noted that a lot of one time funds had been spent last year by the school. He stated that the Town had reduced their budget by a couple of hundred thousand dollars and that the Schools could look at collective bargaining as a place to reduce their number. Christiansen stated that it was important to recognize that they have managed a consistent set of concessions with the union since 2003 and that they had cut many people.

Christiansen stated that they would not go for an override but would suggest that Ashburnham make up a difference of \$60,000 to \$80,000. At this point, there was much discussion on this suggestion. Vitone stated that they had three scenarios:

- 1) District Method for one more year

- 2) Statutory Method
- 3) Statutory Method with Ashburnham giving \$60,000 to Westminster (with the Regional Agreement change in FY12 to go to Statutory Method FY13 going forward.)

Both Whitney and Johnson noted that in FY11 Ashburnham gave Westminster a break so it would only be fair that Westminster do the same for Ashburnham this year. Vitone stated that the \$60,000 would come out of the Capital Plan, and would include some from the school requests and some from the town.

Oliveira asked what guarantee the Town would have if we went with option 3 and Vitone stated that the motion would have to be contingent on a Westminster vote. Christiansen also noted that the Commissioner of Education would also need to approve.

Vitone stated that he came prepared to go with the Statutory Method but that he now felt comfortable with an amended regional agreement with FY13 and beyond as Statutory Method.

Fagan stated that in her opinion we should stay with the Statutory Method. Reed stated that we have to compromise. Johnson noted that it was important to see what Westminster comes back with as this is a decision based on economics and we don't have the means, while Westminster does. Duncan Phyfe stated that we would need this in writing from the School District and that the biggest thing was to solve this issue. Johnson added that the Advisory Board and the Selectmen may not have a consensus on this issue.

Vitone asked the other Board members if he should talk about this compromise at the Tri-Board meeting the following day. He stated that there were three options on the table – the District Method in FY12 which no one was in favor of, and that it was narrowed down to two options. He added that it would mean three town meetings for the Statutory Method which the compromise option would prevent.

Whitney stated that they should stay with the Statutory Method.

Vitone asked if he could bring the option to the Tri-Board and no vote of the Board of Selectmen at this meeting, with the compromise option and the regional agreement modified from FY13 and beyond. Both Johnson and Whitney stated that they were not in favor. Briggs stated that they should not vote at this meeting as the transportation funds issue could change this with Westminster paying \$199,000 and that they should wait and see what Westminster does. ***Vitone made the motion to broach the alternative options at the Tri-Board meeting with no commitment and Reed seconded. Whitney voted not in favor.***

Vitone added that he was swayed by the fact that the School Committee would entertain modifying the agreement for the Statutory Method as of FY13 and beyond which he stated was a “huge move by the School Committee”.

Reed stated that they should move on with the agenda.

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. Review of BOS Initiatives and Task List

Vitone stated that regionalization was still the main initiative and they should add Ashby, as they would be meeting on Wednesday to consider Ashburnham's offer. He added that they could hear by the end of the week.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Discussion and vote to accept the fee schedule for safety inspections per the eighth edition of the Massachusetts State Building Code Book.

Briggs stated that he was approached by Dick Reynolds, the new Building Commissioner asking to accept the 8th edition and fees associated with it. Reed noted that they not only changed some fees but also changed frequencies. ***Whitney motioned to accept the 8th edition of the Massachusetts State Building Code and was seconded by Reed. Motion carried.***

B. Vote on appointment to the Agricultural Commission

Briggs stated that per recommendation of the Agricultural Commission they are asking to appoint Chris Picone as a full member. ***Reed motioned to appoint and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.***

C. Vote on appointment to the Capital Planning Committee

Briggs stated that the Board needs to appoint Bill Johnson as the Advisory Board representative on this Committee. ***Whitney motioned to appoint and was seconded by Reed. Motion carried.***

VII. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT (His report is attached to these minutes.)

Briggs stated that they may have one or two new members for the Council on Aging Board. He stated that the water tank bids went very well.

Briggs stated that he represented the Board of Selectmen and traveled with the Briggs Building Committee to review three separate schools that use wood pellets as their heating source and noted that it was very interesting. He added that the Committee had already voted on pellets as the heating source for Briggs. There was some discussion on other types of heating sources that should be considered. Vitone asked Briggs to get the data from the Committee and then have them come to a meeting to review.

Briggs stated that he met with a group of South Ashburnham residents who were concerned about the upkeep of their neighborhood. He stated that they planned on three courses of action for the spring, which included cleaning at the playground and looking at repairing roads and sidewalks in that area.

He stated that Kevin Blanchette the CEO of the Worcester Regional Retirement System was scheduled to talk to the Board at their meeting on March 21st. He would be discussing the Town's assessment calculation and how the system works. Vitone asked Briggs to prepare for this by compiling a list of all retirees for the Town beforehand.

Briggs also touched on the discussions on whether to keep the financial model currently in place for the Light Department and their objections to changing how it has been done. He noted that they would be scheduling another meeting within the next week to work on the pros and cons of changing.

VIII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 22, 2011 – Regular Meeting

Reed motioned to approve the minutes of the February 22, 2011 meeting and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried.

IX. BOS CORRESPONDENCE

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Whitney read the announcements as follows:

Town Clerk reminders:

- January 1st and throughout the year – Open registration of voters in the Town Clerk's office at Town Hall – Monday from 7:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Tuesday thru Thursday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Town Hall is closed on Friday)
- Thursday, March 10th – Until 5:00 p.m. – last day for filing or withdrawal of nomination papers for the Town Election.
- Town Election – Tuesday, April 26th
- Please return your Census forms to the Town Clerk's office. Failure to respond may result in removal from the active voting list.
- Dog licenses are now available at the Town Clerk's office during regular business hours of Town Hall. The fees are \$10.00 for spayed/neutered dogs and \$15.00 for unsprayed/unneutered dogs. Please bring the dog's current rabies certificate. You may register by mail by sending in the paperwork along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Town Clerk's office, 32 Main Street.

A Rabies Clinic will be held on Saturday, March 19, 2011 from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Municipal Grounds building at 8 Williams Road. Cats must be brought in cages or closed boxes during the last half of the clinic. The tag for 2011 will be a green bell. The charge per immunization is \$10.00. All pet owners must present proof of current vaccination to receive a three (3) year rabies vaccination. Failure to do so will result in your pet receiving a one (1) year vaccination.

The next meeting will be held on Monday, March 21, 2011.

XI. SOLICIT PUBLIC INPUT

XII. ADJOURNMENT

At 9:05 p.m. Whitney motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Reed. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Turcotte,
Assistant to the Town Administrator