

TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
JOINT MEETING - BOARD OF SELECTMEN AND ADVISORY BOARD
TUESDAY – FEBRUARY 19, 2013 – 6:30 p.m.
TRAINING ROOM – PUBLIC SAFETY COMPLEX

This meeting was aired live on local cable television.

PRESENT – Board of Selectmen: Ed Vitone, Chair, Leo Janssens, Clerk, and Duncan Phyfe, Member.
Advisory Board – Bill Johnson, Chair, Gail Dumont, Secretary, Belden Divito, Member, Nick Davis,
Member and Jaime Piedrafite, Member (came in at 7:05 p.m.).

Also in attendance: Doug Briggs, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

I. SALUTE THE FLAG

Ed Vitone called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. SOLICIT PUBLIC INPUT None

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Vitone asked if there were any changes or additions to the agenda and Doug Briggs stated that he would like to add under New Business, Item C – Report on Cable Feasibility at PSB. ***Leo Janssens motioned to approve the agenda as amended and was seconded by Duncan Phyfe. Motion carried.***

At this time Mr. Vitone stated that Duncan Phyfe wanted to give a tribute to Al Hart, who passed away on February 8th. Mr. Phyfe stated that Al Hart was a Korean War Veteran, who served the Town as a Council on Aging Board member for 20 years, an Election Officer for 22 years and also served on the Democratic Town Committee for many years. Mr. Phyfe also noted that Mr. Hart was always in attendance at every veterans event in Town and will be missed.

Leo Janssens stated that he knew him for most of his life and that Mr. Hart was a fixture in the Memorial Day Parade each year with the VFW and that now there would be a big void in the next parade. Mr. Vitone added that Mr. Hart was the only one who used to call him “Eddie” and that the Town has lost a great asset.

IV. PRESENTATIONS & REPORTS

V. OLD BUSINESS

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Review of FY14 Budget

Mr. Vitone stated that Mr. Briggs would present the FY14 Budget to both the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Board members.

Mr. Briggs began by reviewing the Summary/Highlights of the FY14 Budget. He noted that the wages represent a 2% increase for the non-union personnel which matches the Police and Dispatch union increase.

He then touched on the Information Technology budget which reflected an increase for FY14 due to contractual services increase with Guardian Information Technologies to cover 50 work stations, 3 servers, 3 firewalls, the Shoretel system, emails and email archival,(which is required by law). He added that all emails for the Town will be uniform, the same as those at Town Hall. He also noted that they would be trying to interconnect all Town buildings. He stated that Munis also increased and would be expanded to the DPW, Public Safety and the

Library with the interconnection of the buildings and would help minimize activity and input times.

Mr. Briggs stated that under Town Buildings, he listed the cost of heating fuel at \$3.50 a gallon and \$3.75 per gallon for gas and diesel, which is consistent with all departments. He also noted that Mayor Hawke of Gardner may want to do a similar heating oil bid with surrounding towns again as it was quite successful.

Under Police, Mr. Briggs noted that they now have a full-time officer funded totally by Cushing Academy. He stated that there was a request from Supt. Hicks for two in-house officers for the schools, one for Ashburnham and one for Westminster which would be funded by the Towns. He noted that this was not in the budget.

Mr. Briggs stated that there would not be any discussion on the Fire Budget at this time as they are waiting for the Ambulance Study report results. Mr. Vitone stated that this was only a place holder.

Mr. Briggs stated that under the DPW, they added \$10,000 for the Transfer Station to offset the revenue. He noted that he has also increased the Snow & Ice Budget by \$20,000. Mr. Briggs stated that the Fire Chief was coordinating information to apply for funds on the Blizzard for the 48 hour period and that we should get some dollars back on this.

He then touched on the AWRSD (Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School District) budget, noting that the Town's required new school spending went down by \$33,000. He added that the Town's new minimum contribution increased by \$19,000 due to a shift in student percentage from 44.83% to 45.88% and that Transportation went down by \$108,000 as well as Debt Service in the amount of \$6,000. He also noted that they have a new Stabilization Fund account in the amount of \$45,000 which is similar to a Capital Improvement Fund and could eliminate the School's capital request each year. Much discussion followed on the School Budget.

It was noted by Mr. Briggs that the Monty Tech budget went up by \$63,000 due to the net minimum increase by the State and an additional 8 students.

Mr. Briggs stated that under Debt Service, there was an increase of \$155,000 which was for the J.R. Briggs School temporary borrowing, but that in 2015 Debt Service will increase to \$1,000,000 a year.

Mr. Briggs stated that under Employee Benefits, Worcester County Retirement has increased by \$57,000 due to the change in the funding formula from salary based to actuarial with another increase in FY15 of \$45,000. Some discussion followed on why this has occurred.

He then noted that he had heard from someone at the MMA that there is legislation in the works that would require all towns to offer retiree health care at a minimum 50% or more. He stated that he has already contacted Senator Brewer about this and also Edd Byrnes for the cost to the Town if enacted. Mr. Vitone added that the Board should also send letters to our legislators and perhaps even the Advisory Board could send a letter.

Mr. Briggs went over the Revenue and Expense report stating that the total Revenues would be \$14,138,892 while the Expenditures total of \$14,042,521 which is a positive difference of \$45,000. He did state that he was guessing on the new growth, State Aid is always a "flip of the coin" and the "other revenues" are guesstimates.

He then reviewed the Expenses. The most extensive discussion occurred on the IT Expense budget line and the increase of \$35,000. He stated that we have expanded our services,

expanded the IMC system for the Public Safety, and Guardian and that there was an increase in the Munis accounting software.

He explained that last year the Public Safety Building had their own system but had no backup and that now they were under Guardian. He also noted that Munis is increasing their services. Mr. Vitone asked Mr. Briggs to look into why the Munis cost went up and what it was for.

Bill Johnson inquired if everyone was utilizing all systems and Mr. Briggs stated that he believed so. Mr. Johnson noted that he heard the IMC was being under-utilized by the Fire Department. Mr. Vitone stated that Mr. Briggs would look into this and provide an answer at the next meeting with a plan in the Fire Department to fully utilize IMC.

Mr. Vitone stated that we needed a clear explanation of the \$35,000 increase in the IT Budget for the Town Meeting; what is the driver and compelling reason to do it.

Mr. Briggs noted an increase in the Police Budget of \$12,000 in minor equipment for handguns and holsters. Mr. Vitone stated that the guns shouldn't be in the budget and should be an article for Town Meeting. Leo Janssens questioned the overtime numbers and Mr. Briggs explained after which a discussion followed on the Lieutenant position. Mr. Johnson questioned with the Lieutenant position why is there overtime for court and Mr. Janssens explained how an officer must also go.

Mr. Vitone suggested a change in the columns in the report in order to make it easier to comprehend and they should show revenue offset, with a focus on net numbers.

He stated that the true increases from last year were in the IT Budget, the Police, and Monty Tech with decreases in Inspections (due to Briggs Project being completed) and a possible change/decrease in the Dog Officer budget.

The Ashburnham-Westminster Regional School District budget was discussed in length. Mr. Briggs reviewed the numbers stating that the foundation budget went down by \$33,000, the Transportation went down by \$82,000 and the Debt Assessment also went down by \$3,000. He added that the number of students went down in Ashburnham by 15 as well as in Westminster. He also noted that if Westminster decides to pay the same as last year we would have to pay an additional \$46,000 to get to level funding. Mr. Vitone stated that they had to decide what is level funding.

Much discussion followed on the Transportation line item. Mr. Vitone stated that we needed to send a letter of agreement along with Westminster on the transportation issue.

Mr. Vitone stated that he was inclined to give the School the \$33,000 savings from the foundation budget and Mr. Johnson stated that it must be in the confines of our levy limit and we should go for level dollars. Nick Davis agreed stating that it should be consistent. Leo Janssens stated that he would agree with Mr. Vitone but he does not want an override. Mr. Briggs stated that it can be done and still stay under the levy limit. Mr. Vitone added that it must be in proportion with Westminster.

Bill Johnson noted that he was not in favor of hiring police officers for the schools. And a discussion followed on school safety and surveillance cameras. Mr. Vitone noted that a letter should be sent stating that Mr. Briggs should be included in all discussions on school safety.

Mr. Briggs noted that the negative numbers in the Veterans Services Budget would be covered by revenues in the following year.

Mr. Briggs also noted that with the possibility of \$125,000 in the Capital Plan for IT, the Town would be pretty close to interconnecting the Town Hall, Public Safety Building and the DPW, with the Library possibly included.

Mr. Vitone stated that \$100,000 under the Capital Plan would be for the removal of the oil tank and asbestos at the VMS Building. He added that this should be done quickly and that they would be discussing this at the Capital Planning Committee meeting on Monday, February 25th.

Mr. Vitone stated that Mr. Briggs should change his presentation format for the budget and that this was a good first step.

B. Annual Town Meeting Article Submission

Mr. Briggs stated that the Board needs to open the Annual Town Meeting Warrant and set a date to close the warrant. He noted that his suggested date would be Monday, March 18th. ***Mr. Vitone made the motion to set Monday, March 18th as the closing date to accept articles for the Annual Town Meeting of May 4th. Mr. Janssens seconded and the motion carried.***

Mr. Vitone asked for an update on the Historical Commission's input on the Center Village building codes and Mr. Briggs stated that he would follow up.

C. Report on Cable Feasibility at Public Safety Building

Mr. Briggs stated that he was asked to look at a permanent location for the Board of Selectmen meetings similar to how Westminster is set up. He stated that he met with Matt Bourgault, Chief Zbikowski and Paul Rekos to look at different locations in the PSB. It was determined that the closet in the Training Room at the far end could be cleaned out and used for this purpose. Mr. Bourgault stated that they had the funds to get this done if the Board of Selectmen would be willing to go forward. The three members agreed that this is the place they wanted to hold their meetings as the Town Hall was not an option, especially with the Senior Center located there now. ***Mr. Vitone made the motion to set up this location for meetings as was suggested by Mr. Briggs. Mr. Phyfe seconded and the motion carried.***

VII. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Mr. Briggs began by stating that there were still openings on Boards and Committees. He noted the openings as follows: (1) Conservation Commission; (2) Council on Aging Board; (1) Capital Planning Committee; (1) Advisory Board and (1) Board of Assessors. He also noted volunteers were needed to serve on the Cable Advisory Board.

Mr. Briggs stated that as of February 7, 2013 the Town is the owner of the 41 acres on Williams and Platts Roads as the site for our new DPW facility. He also noted that he has been working with Weston & Sampson to start the process of developing an RFP for the new building. Mr. Briggs also stated that he talked to Gary Howland regarding the harvesting of trees on the property and spoke with Marshall Dennis about concerns with the salt and sand location on the site.

Mr. Briggs stated that he met with Chief Barrett and MRPC about a traffic improvement project at the intersection of Center, Central, Williams and Corey Hill Roads, as MA DOT has available funding for a traffic safety flow improvement in a rural town and they have selected Ashburnham due to the many accidents at this site in the past. He added that it should be done quickly.

He also noted that Dick Reynolds, our Building Commissioner is in the process of reviewing permit fees for gas, plumbing, electrical and building permits in order to put things in line with other communities and to be consistent in what we charge.

Mr. Briggs also noted the successful 2nd Annual WinterFest which was held on February 10th despite two scheduling delays due to lack of snow. He extended his thanks to the Committee and to

the DPW and others for their assistance. He added that these events bring the Town together as a community.

VIII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. February 4, 2013 – Regular Meeting

Mr. Phyfe motioned to approve the minutes, as presented, from the February 4, 2013 Regular Meeting and was seconded by Mr. Janssens. Motion carried.

XI. BOS CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Vitone stated that he received an email from Maggie Whitney asking that he read it at the meeting. It read as follows: “My sincere thanks to Highway Superintendent Steve Nims and the Ashburnham Highway Department for the hard work they performed during the Blizzard of 2013. Plowing over two feet of snow in cold and blustery conditions was no easy task. Then the Department went into removal mode and a few days later three more inches of snow arrived for another long day of plowing. It has been a hectic week for the Highway Department. I commend their constant hard work to keep the roads of Ashburnham safe. The Town is fortunate to have such a dedicated department. Sincerely, Maggie Whitney”

Mr. Vitone stated that he seconded her comment and would hold us up as a role model. Mr. Phyfe stated that in other states the roads were not done well and Mr. Janssens added that he always feels good about how the roads in Ashburnham are kept.

Mr. Vitone stated that he received an article from Charlie Packard regarding sprucing up cemeteries and gave this to Mr. Briggs to follow up.

X. FEBRUARY/MARCH MEETINGS and EVENTS

Mr. Janssens read the list of meetings and events as follows:

Thurs., February 21	7:00 p.m.	250 th Celebration Committee	Library - upstairs
Mon., February 25	7:00 p.m.	TOWN CAUCUS	Library – upstairs
Mon., March 4	6:30 p.m.	Board of Health	Lower Level – Town Hall

XI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Janssens read the announcements as follows:

Town Clerk Reminders:

- **Tuesday, March 12th** – Last day for filing nomination papers for Town Election with the Board of Registrars – until 5:00 p.m. at Town Hall.
- Rabies Clinic to be held on Saturday, March 16th from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Municipal Grounds Building, 8 Williams Road. The cost will be \$15.00 and owners should bring the current rabies certificate.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board of Selectmen will be held on Monday, March 4, 2013, at 6:30 p.m. in the Training Room at the Public Safety Building.

XII. SOLICIT PUBLIC INPUT

Bill Johnson stated that he had two questions, the first being, do you have a rough timeline on going to the voters to get the DPW building approved? Mr. Briggs stated that it is crucial to get this done and to clear out the center of Town. His second question was is there any way to move the elections to consolidate them? Mr. Briggs stated that the Town Election and the State Primary are both on April 30th and the actual election is set in June.

Gail Dumont asked for an update on Briggs at the next Board of Selectmen meeting. Mr. Vitone stated that they would have an update.

At this time the Advisory Board reviewed a Reserve Fund Transfer for the Veterans Services Benefits Account. Jamie Piedrafite made the motion to approve the transfer of \$26,800 to the Veterans Benefits account and was seconded by Nick Davis. The vote was unanimous.

XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:35 p.m. Mr. Janssens motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Mr. Phyfe. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Sylvia Turcotte
Assistant to the Town Administrator