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Advisory Board
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April 29, 2013

Present: Joe Dean, Kevin Welch, Harold Simmons, Christine Muir
Absent: Ron Mikol, Dana Metzler

Meeting opened at 7:15PM

Public Hearing on Annual Town Meeting Warrant

In Ron's absence, Vice-Chair Harold Simmons led the public hearing to review the articles on this year's town meeting warrant. Members of the public in attendance included: Lt. James Dow, Karl Huber, Jim Frey, Lou DeLoureiro, Brett Rock, Kim Fales, Joan Simmons, MaryBeth Pallis, Walter Alterisio, Dan Devlin, and Ken Leva. Unless noted below, most articles were not discussed or questioned.

Karl Huber provided clarification on articles 3 and 7, which set aside money from the Water Dept.'s retained earnings to be used towards new equipment or to repair existing equipment. This is money the department already has and does not require any funds from the municipal budget.

We noted that article 8 exists because of the transfer station's transition to a fiscal year (July – June) instead of a calendar year (January – December).

In reviewing the budget presented in article 9, Brett Rock questioned the Advisory Board's decision not to use the full amount of the town's tax levy. (We have budgeted for an increase of 1.1% instead of the full 2.5% allowed by law.) Brett is concerned that creating too much gap between the actual budget and the levy limit will eventually catch up with the town in the form of a significant tax increase, instead of gradual and consistent increases. Joe Dean noted that the town's expenses are currently so close to the levy limit that we are in danger of having our bond rating degraded. Harold also noted that the gap allows for any additional expenses, such as a Town Administrator or an unexpected expense, to be covered.

During the budget discussion, Brett also questioned how Dunstable compares to other towns in terms of the percentage of total budget that is allotted to schools/education. Dunstable currently contributed 59% of its total municipal budget to educational expenses, which includes expenses and debt for Groton Dunstable Regional School District and Greater Lowell Regional Vocational Technical School.

Jim Frey asked about the small stream of commercial revenue, and Joe responded that there is only one tax rate for both residents and businesses in Dunstable.

Harold noted that articles 12 and 13 allow for the Tax Collector and Treasurer positions to be appointed rather than elected, after 2014.

When reviewing article 16, concerning the Advisory Board by-law revision, Brett Rock asked how many members currently sit on the board. There are six of us; two were absent tonight.

Article 17 provides for the funding of the GDRSD technology upgrade. Brett asked why this is an article separate from the school budget. Harold answered that it's because we are borrowing the money (via a three-year statehouse note). Kim Fales noted that the motion on this article will need to be for the full amount we are borrowing. We need to define that number exactly, as well as determine how the town will be assessed for the money.

When reviewing article 19, Dan Devlin asked if the specific budget numbers ever get into the articles. Kevin replied that the motions contain the exact figures.

Selectman Walter Alterisio said there will be no action taken on article 25, as the state has passed legislation that gives Select Boards the authority to enter into agreements as needed. The article is no longer necessary and will be removed from future town warrants.

Article 27 provides for a revolving fund for the Council on Aging. The COA has proposed collecting a small co-pay for use of the bus transportation, giving them revenue to save in a revolving fund.

Harold stated that the motion for article 28 will be to take no action; the board has recommended not putting any money into Stabilization this year. When asked about the balance, Kim said the account has \$382,000.

Article 29 provides for the use of free cash to balance the FY14 budget.

Article 30 corrects a typographical error.

Article 31 provides specific details concerning the installation of large-scale photovoltaic solar panels. The Board of Selectmen felt it was important to put this in place now; the text was pulled almost verbatim from the state's website, with some increases in setback numbers. The regulations can be amended at future meetings if the town desires to do so.

Finally, Harold noted that there are two ballot questions this year. The questions ask voters to approve or disapprove changing the Tax Collector and Treasurer positions to appointments rather than elected positions.

We adjourned at 8:15 p.m.







