

Minutes: Selectmen's Meeting: Monday, March 10, 2014

Present: Chairman Daniel F. Devlin and Kenneth J. Leva, Clerk; Walter F. Alterisio, Procurement Officer and Member

The meeting was called to order at 7:00PM with all members present.

James and Susan Prescott residents of 10 Dogwood Lane, Dunstable appeared and addressed the board relative to [their earlier e-mail](#) to Selectmen and Advisory Board. Mrs. Prescott, as a resident wanted to make it known that the town officers should support the schools and to make sure the Board was aware, should it come to an override, she would support. She indicated over the years there have been many cuts made and any more would be detrimental to the school district and the children. She advised that even if she didn't have children in the school system, even if they'd moved here for open space priority, if this override were to fail would have a drop in our home values. Not only would our home values drop, but the people whose priority is open space, would they be able to vote funding for open space. Feel that it's very important to support. Selectman Leva noted we have a very low crime rate, volunteer fire department and best roads around. While schools are ultimate importance, there are other important items that come into play, of the 351 communities in Massachusetts, Dunstable is ranked at 175TH in tax rate.

She asked what would happen if the override were to fail, school committee will be part of the presentation. Chairman Devlin indicated he felt that the amount per parcel would be somewhere around \$400 - \$700 beginning in fiscal year 2015. Selectman Alterisio then explained the process for certifying the school budget(s) and the realities & impact of proposition 2½ on the towns. When you come to a town or community, one of the things that is difficult to identify is that it's not about you, it's about the community and the impact on residents and taxpayers and how to best approach. Must approach from a community basis to be successful; he indicated that reality is school department has to recover the amount - question is whether has to be recovered in the 1st year or spread out over a period of years. Union negotiations will play a role in the process as well. He advised now that we have some real numbers will work in the appropriate direction. Selectman Alterisio advised he's pro proposition 2½, reason being there are times when the budget must exceed 2½; this is the time for the town to step up and agree to move forward to address. Often people hide behind not going along with the override until government is cleaned up - need to get out of that mode. Discussion continued on the importance and appropriate approach and need for assistance from legislature to address unfunded mandates and the negative affect on

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cities and towns. He noted that even though Groton may be able to creatively come up with the funds to support, Dunstable doesn't have that capacity. Once all agree on the basis – will have to go out and sell it. He thinks that with all overrides – sometimes it's worked out, sometimes hasn't, have to have a plan for addressing this situation, now and moving forward.

Mrs. Prescott indicated she hopes that as Selectmen of the Town, they'll bring this forward and explain so that voters understand that it is vital to the town. Her fear is that people won't be educated enough until the override vote is over – way too late. Discussion continued on how best to address the shortage, the cause and the impact, as well as all the advantages afforded through the school district and devastating effects of cuts in general and special education, as well.

The board continued to discuss with the parents and residents who joined the meeting how votes at Town Meeting and the vote at the ballot box – and the education and community support needed for getting the information out to the voters – at Town Meeting an article can pass with total unanimous vote but later fail terribly at the ballot – as the voters may/may not have the needed background to make the decision. Selectman Alterisio referenced the very important essential vote last year for changing the Tax Collector and Town Treasurer's positions to appointed positions for the protection of the community and its residents. Discussion continued on all of the reasons people move to Dunstable and the importance of all the services provided to the community and recent presentations and discussions relative to the override, the background of the school budget deficit and how to best address, strategies for moving forward, etc. One of the residents questioned whether the Town has taken a look at the Swallow Union School – indicating, in his opinion it was in terrible condition and possibly Town should consider it being taken down. The board noted the structure was under GDRSD and were comfortable that the district has confirmed its' structural capacity. Another indicated, according to the list released, closing the Swallow Union was one of the options for covering the funding the GDRSD budget shortage.

Selectman Alterisio indicated that Dunstable is the fastest growing community in the district. He noted the number of housing units that have been approved within subdivisions which haven't yet been built and others in the process of approval. Basically looking at a volunteer town government – are now in the process of bringing in some professional resources – one of the arguments against having a town administrator and naysayers interpretation of what will come next –

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traffic light in town center, etc. One of the individuals present questioned why Dunstable doesn't have an impact fee – like other towns do and the Board advised that's another item that will possibly be addressed by the Town Administrator once in place. Certified budget for GDRSD FY2015 is available on [their website](#).

Selectman Alterisio expressed concern that Chief might respond back to Advisory that needed 24/7 coverage, if we were to defer this appointment how would the Chief structure coverage – overtime, etc. Would like Advisory to have comparison – he had a little discussion with the Chief and he felt that probably one or two months could provide coverage via overtime, etc. but not sustainable. Board agreed in their discussions with the Chief – doesn't make sense to handle other than through regular appointment. Selectman Alterisio willing to concur with the Chief and move to appoint Shawn Drinkwine as full time officer, 2nd Chairman Devlin and voted with all in favor. Walter indicated the learning curve should be somewhat easier as Shawn has some experience with the town.

On GDRSD certified budget, once receive notification have # of days to respond. On the municipal side, budget doesn't necessarily have to exceed 2½ but if override is required on the municipal side, would like to have the town's budget stand by itself. Selectman Alterisio and Chairman Devlin provided Selectman Leva with update on the recent presentations and discussions with the school committee and how best to move forward with school committee and towns for decisions on how to address moving forward. Selectman Alterisio indicated that he's convinced that there needs to be not only a Plan A or Plan B to choose from to eliminate coming back to scratch the next year, but a complete picture of the effect of each vote. Board looks forward to meeting the new school district superintendent and moving forward – has to be on an upcoming agenda and meet with Town Counsel and Finance. Selectman Alterisio advised it's pretty obvious that it's in the best interest of the Town for the town to pursue the initiative for an appointed Town Treasurer and Tax Collector – need to follow up with Town Counsel to determine how and whether we can move forward. Chairman Devlin will call Rich in the morning and see about setting things up. Selectman Alterisio will be following up with Bob Mercier and Madonna.

Selectman Alterisio and Chairman Devlin reported on their attendance at the Lowell YMCA Legislative Breakfast on the 7th and referenced the support and advantages provided at Camp Massapoag. The Board also noted upcoming meetings planned by Roads.

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Selectman Alterisio noted he felt that need to get together with the Dog Officer and follow up – bylaw amendments, etc. and how to move forward. Sue advised that it would probably take a year to move it through Town Meeting.

Selectman Alterisio referenced meeting with Karl and his indication the information is available – need to research further and Advisory Board will need to get a little creative in order to put a package together – need to begin moving in the right direction in order to make it happen. With Karl gone, it's going to be incumbent upon the members remaining and it's been previously indicated the other current members have precious time available.

Treasurer's warrants were reviewed and signed, and meeting adjourned at 8:20PM after appropriate motion by Selectman Alterisio, 2nd and vote

Respectfully submitted,



Danice N. Palumbo,
Board Secretary