

Minutes: Selectmen's Meeting: Monday, March 31, 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. The Board began review of the adjustments that they'd agreed upon in earlier review of proposed FY2015 budget reductions in preparation for presenting to Fincom for their use in addressing the budget reductions needed toward funding the increase in the school budget.

The Board then heard from a town resident as to the school budget, requesting information on itemized special education budget. He suggested before considering closing schools, they might look at how to make the special education budget more reasonable. He suggested there might be other ways to address, and control the costs in the future. The board agreed and advised the committees are in the process of looking more closely on ways to address. Selectman Alterisio explained the process and how the towns and school district will address the now certified budget has been declared – now all are looking on what options might be available to bring the over \$500K number for Dunstable's assessment overage down.

Selectman Alterisio noted the boards are working on cuts that can be made on the municipal side to address the shortage and contribute to meet the budget request from GDRSD. The board is willing to move into a dialogue with the school committee to come up with an approach. Selectman Alterisio referenced an article in the Lowell Sun about 2 weeks ago and the headline that the Groton Town Clerk was frustrated with the lack of information available – frustration from parents who can't understand why the Selectmen don't simply accept the number and find a way to fund. Selectman Alterisio continued to explain the caution and process necessary to move forward respecting the concerns of residents and financial responsibility of the communities. He advised that while it sometimes appears may be dancing around and not answering question are moving forward with the necessary steps...right up until the time of town meeting the school committee has the opportunity to lower the number – can't go higher, but request has been submitted through our School Committee members. Selectman Alterisio continued to explain the process being followed, as done in the past with like situations, and in the meantime, the town boards are working diligently to see what adjustments can be made from within the town's budget to provide additional funding for the school budget needs.

The board continued to explain the process for vote through town meeting, vote contingent upon passage of a 2 ½ override at the ballot box. They noted can often get anything passed on town meeting floor, but often fails at the ballot box. Discussion continued on considerations

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for presentation and plan for moving forward into the coming years...so that everyone understands how to support in the future.

Discussion continued into how we ended up in the current dilemma, how it might have been avoided – Selectman Leva suggested message going back to APEC – Dunstable isn't necessarily not supporting it – just the numbers may not fly as the Town isn't in the position to support the request. BOS are basically doing their homework so that they can present accurate data that will allow the townspeople to make the appropriate decision. The board advised that there are multiple positions on each side of the question. Decisions as to what reductions can be made, is basically left with the School District and School Committee who has more expertise in their budget and the town is working to look at areas on the municipal side to come up with options for funding the school budget. Selectman Alterisio advised on the municipal side have been able to hypothetically economize some \$250K – reducing the school deficit number by \$250K. BOS and town are asking is there a way that the number could be adjusted to \$250K. Selectman Alterisio advised he's heard from another source as a town we could increase by \$257K and school budget would be \$214K of that number. Big part of it is, all need to understand, once you approve to go over 2½%, it's forever. The board continued to explain the budget and tax increases in the past; ratios, etc. between Dunstable and others, noting that Dunstable is not a Westford, a Pepperell or Billerica, it's Dunstable.

Selectman Alterisio explained the 2½ limitations for municipalities – while communities have to play by 2½ unions, utilities, etc. don't. Everything of finality happens at the ballot box – have to make sure voters understand. Discussion continued with residents providing their recommendations on how to best get the message out to voters...and positions supported by APEX and others, presenting their handouts being distributed throughout. The board continued to try to explain the process and the responsible steps that the town has to take to try to address the shortage and the possible discussions to move forward for funding. Say we take \$250K out of the salt budget and make it available to the school, still have a \$250K gap; example that they picked is the wrong one as town doesn't have the option of lowering the snow budget. Towns are limited to 2½% where schools, utilities and others aren't; to Town of Dunstable the number equates to an 11% increase over what it was last year. Discussion continued on past mistakes and how to best address moving forward, options available or not available.

Selectman Leva indicated now is the time, that school district has to use due diligence to address the issues and correct them. The board supported the group's initiatives and encouraged the continued support. Selectmen Alterisio thanked her for hers and her daughter's email,

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advising he'll research some of the items reported. Based on the budgets BOS are in control of, are hopeful for a number that will be recovered by economizing are reducing across the board – number goes to the Advisory Board for them to work with other departments to move forward, and then collectively go to the School Committee to advise what Dunstable is able to cover on our side.

The board reviewed the reductions they were able to come up with for the proposed budget and some areas that can still be adjusted.

Minutes held until full board as Selectman Leva has gone to meet with Fincom to present the adjustments BOS has come up with. 4/1 Election – 4/4 meeting with GDRSD – BOS should probably try to go over with some idea of where we are on the town side. School committee is looking for some sort of workshop on the 4th; Chairman Devlin reported that Fincom is working on whittling the numbers down in preparation for meeting on the 4th.

The board voted to appoint Amy Schembechler to a term recommended by Town Clerk. Selectman Alterisio provided motion to concur with town clerk's recommendation and appoint Amy Schembechler to the Board of Registrars from April 1st 2014 thru March 31st 2017.

The board approved the facilities use request from Massapoag Rod & Gun Club's use of the Grange Room for their annual meeting in September-the 17th.

Treasurer's warrants were reviewed and signed, and meeting adjourned at 8:30PM so the board could join the Advisory Board's discussion, after appropriate motion by Selectman Alterisio, 2nd and vote.

Respectfully submitted,



Danice N. Palumbo,
Board Secretary