

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
SELECTMEN'S MEETING
MINUTES
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2011
6:00 P.M. – TOWN HALL**

PRESENT: STEPHEN BANNON
 ANDREW BLECHMAN
 ALANA CHERNILA
 DEB PHILLIPS
 SEAN STANTON
 KEVIN O'DONNELL, TOWN MANAGER

Finance Committee

BUD ATWOOD
TOM BLAUVELT – CHAIRMAN
MARK LEFENFELD – not present
ALICE REILLY -- not present
JIM STARK

LAUREN SARTORI – Town Accountant/ Financial Coordinator

1. CALL TO ORDER

Sean Stanton called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

2. JOINT MEETING FINANCE COMMITTEE & BOARD OF SELECTMEN

A. FINANCE COMMITTEE AUTHORIZE TRANSFER OF \$6,500 FROM RESERVE FUND

MOTION: Bud Atwood to authorize transfer

SECOND: Jim Stark

VOTE: 3-0

B. REVIEW FY'11 AUDIT.

Auditor, Pat Squillante, reviewed the FY 2011 Town audit. She presented a packet to the Board with a Financial Statement and Management Letter.

Pat stated that there were very few audit adjustments made. She said that the information that Lauren Sartori has been giving to the Board is accurate.

Pat said that there is \$3.1 million in undesignated funds (in the general fund) which is 14% of the budget for the year. More revenue is being brought in than anticipated and less is being spent. There is \$1.7 million in sewer retained earnings and \$450,000 is the stabilization fund.

Pat Squillante reviewed the numbers of the OPEB liability. She explained that the number indicated what a hired actuary says the future cost of providing health insurance to retirees will be based on certain assumptions. Pat said that ours is comparable to how others are calculating their OPEB liability. The ARC (annual required contribution) is what will have to be paid every year in order to fund what it costs currently plus, over a 30 year period, what they project our health cost will be. This will cost us \$750 - \$780 a year. We currently pay \$400 a year on a pay-as-you go basis.

There was discussion about funding this and Kevin O'Donnell said that the Berkshire Health Group is looking at revising the health care plan design effective July 1 and he will brief the Board about this in January. He said that he does not recommend creating a trust fund above the \$100,000 that we currently put in.

Pat also reviewed the management letter.

In regards to the management letter, prior issues were either resolved or an action plan was made. Pat said that the library was the focus this year. She said that security needs to be improved over cash donations to

'Friends' and cash on hand needs to be reduced. Pat added that Mason Library was not keeping a receipt log and needs to do so. 'Friends' monetary collections need to be kept separate from town collections. Pat said that another issue is creating a formal process to determine that people are up to date with their tax bills before being granted a permit or license. Kevin O'Donnell said that action has been taken on all of these items.

C. REVIEW GASB 45 POST EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS REPORT.

Pat Squillante reviewed the GASB 45 Post Employment Benefits Report. She said that GASB has changed the rules so that the numbers for the general fund (on the financial statement) is not just that, but also includes the stabilization fund.

D. SELECTBOARD SIGN BANS.

Kevin O'Donnell said that the interest rate on the BANS is .75%. The Board of Selectmen sign BANS as presented.

E. ADJOURNMENT OF FINANCE COMMITTEE On a motion by Bud Atwood, seconded by Jim Stark, the Finance Committee adjourned its meeting at 6:30 p.m.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

November 14, 2011 Regular Meeting.

MOTION: Deb Phillips to approve minutes of the November 14, 2011 meeting

SECOND: Steve Bannon

VOTE: 5-0

4. SELECTMEN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS:

Alana Chernila said that there have been inquiries about the process concerning the Main Street Project. Alana said that there has been a survey of merchants regarding the reconstruction and the Board has been given ideas about how the Town can be pro-active with merchants. She said that some public relations projects may need lead time so she wanted to bring it up and see where they are in this process.

Steve Bannon said that there will be a dry run when the Fire District rips up part of Main Street for an earlier project. He also suggested continued communication and helping merchants with public relations during the construction. He said that there needs to be a 2 year plan.

Kevin O'Donnell responded that they have started this process with the Chamber of Commerce. He has also directed Town Planner, Chris Rembold, to look at economic development funding. Grants will also be pursued.

Sean Stanton asked Kevin O'Donnell to add this topic to a future agenda.

Steve Bannon said that the 250th anniversary books have come out. He has received many compliments about it and said that they should recognize those who put it together.

5. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT:

Kevin O'Donnell gave an update about the Seekonk Rd. project. He reported that FEMA estimated that the project would cost \$441,000 with our responsibility being \$110,000. He said that we will be responsible for less than we anticipated. Kevin said that we may be able to go to bid in January and begin construction in April or May. It should be a 30-45 day construction. We will be reimbursed for all costs above the \$110,000.

6. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME:

A. LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Tom Blauvelt requested that the Library Board of Trustees remain as a standing item until the next BOS meeting. (The Library Board of Trustees will discuss this in their next meeting in December.) He said that they are all looking forward to meeting the new Director.

Craig Okerstrom-Lang made suggestions about the Main Street Reconstruction project and said that the Board should consider adding more trees at the North end of Main Street. He also said that the design, number and location of the handicapped spaces should be reviewed. He feels that the design detail is un-maintainable.

Jenny Clark – asked how the meeting in January will compress the design process. She is concerned that decisions will be made under duress. She said that the Board needs to think about media design and work as quickly as possible to get a plan in place. Jenny also said that they may be forced to use bright white cement, however, the textured or died cement may be a better option.

7. OLD BUSINESS:

A. FEE UPDATE FROM VARIOUS BOARDS. (DISCUSSION)

The Board of Selectmen has been given a list of fee updates from various boards. Kevin O'Donnell said that there have been minor changes and the Board will be updated as he receives the remaining Departments' fees.

Steve Bannon asked what fees the Town Manager implements versus the Selectmen.

Kevin O'Donnell said that he will continue his research on this for an answer.

B. TRANSFER STATION OPERATIONS UPDATE. (DISCUSSION/VOTE)

Jonathan Williams presented information about the transfer station and some options going forward. He suggested an alternate payment system such as a municipal flat rate or a sticker system. Jonathan said that staff will have to be expanded if the hours are extended. A volunteer staff would be fiscally neutral.

Sean Stanton asked why it costs \$29,000 to recycle and Joe Sokul responded that this is the hauling cost.

Deb Phillips asked if there are other dumps that don't lose money and asked what their secret is.

Joe Sokul responded that there are none locally.

Jonathan said that prices can increase to \$2.90 for a 33 gallon bag = \$1.16 more

And \$1.25 for a 13 gallon bag = \$.50 more.

Sean Stanton said that a credit card system should be set up at the transfer station if cash isn't accepted.

This will increase revenues due to customer ease.

Steve Bannon agreed that it needs to be user friendly.

It was suggested to charge by the pound.

Joe Sokul responded that this is a slower process that would require a weather-proof certified scale. He said that more investigation is needed.

Alana Chernila spoke about the need for a swap shack and how it will draw people in.

Deb Phillips suggested that they use a volunteer base to run the swap shack.

Joe Sokul said that there is a plan to make a swap shack area at no additional cost.

MOTION: Steve Bannon to implement a system to accept debit/credit cards at the Transfer station.

SECOND: Alana Chernila

VOTE: 5-0

Kevin O'Donnell said that he would like to get a group of core volunteers for the swap shack.

MOTION: Alana Chernila to get the swap shack up and running ASAP and to direct Kevin O'Donnell to assemble the core volunteers needed to do this.

SECOND: Deb Phillips

VOTE: 5-0

This topic will be re-visited in January

C. HOUSATONIC SCHOOL COST RENOVATION UPDATE. (DISCUSSION)

Kevin O'Donnell said that the DRT looked into this and Jim Clark gave a pro-bono estimate of \$3.5 million to renovate the Housatonic School. Kevin suggested a task force be created to 'drill down' on the costs and needs for this project.

Steve Bannon said that the next step is to see if there is 'outside' money available to renovate.

He said that they should find options for grants.

ALL MEMBERS OF THE BOARD AGREE TO TAKE RAZING THE BUILDING OFF THE TABLE
Andrew Blechman said, unless there is a Master Plan from a private developer to include this, forward momentum or an economic development coordinator to work with it to bring in business, the situation will be the same in 3 years.

Alana Chernila said that in a past meeting, Deb Phillips suggested that they take over the research and inquiry offered to the Board by Mr. Muss. She said in order to do this; the Board needs to be committed to keeping the building.

The Board asked Kevin O'Donnell to include the school when he talks to the state about what funds are available.

Kevin O'Donnell said that he has pulled together a list of potential grants that could be ear-marked for the campus site.

D. MASTER PLAN UPDATE FROM TOWN PLANNER. (DISCUSSION)

Chris Rembold said that he would like to give a comprehensive update at the next meeting.

He said that he is still analyzing the results of the neighborhood meetings that have taken place.

Chris said that he is half way through the timeline and he plans to have topical (open space recreation and historic preservation) forums for the public as he goes.

E. FIVE TOWN EPA RIVER CLEANUP UPDATE. (DISCUSSION)

Kevin O'Donnell said that we and other towns are working with BRPC to have GE, through the work of EPA, fund an economic impact study for the particular area to see what the overall cleanup and remediation results would be for us.

He provided a letter from the BRPC Director and he said there are some concerns about where the state is and their suggestions for remedy.

Kevin will continue to attend the meetings.

Deb Phillips said that the letter spoke about remediation and the loss of the quarry business in Lee. She asked why this would be.

Kevin O'Donnell said that he will find out.

8. NEW BUSINESS:

A. UPDATE SOLAR PANEL LEGISLATION. (DISCUSSION)

Kevin O'Donnell said that nothing formal has been submitted to date. The next step would be to enact a solar panel by-law. He said that they could work with the Planning Board on this in conjunction with their zoning updates. Kevin said that the owner can't get a permit without going through hoops at this point.

Andrew Blechman suggested that the Board look at wind power at the same time.

Chris Rembold said it is not when a Special Town Meeting can be held, but when a by-law is ready to be advertised for public hearing; so the quicker the Boards action the better.

Alana Chernila asked if there are safety concerns with this project and Chris Rembold responded that he didn't know.

Steve Bannon said that the Board needs to look at the fact that agriculture land is being taken away from the area and a power plant is being put into a residential area; they need to see what can be done about it.

Frederica Siegal- 27 Round Hill Rd.-said that the area in question feels like a public park with people always hiking, etc.. She said that the solar firm is opportunistic and asked the Selectboard to research this company. She suggested that these solar panels may become smaller in years to come just as the computer has and said by then, the land will be lost. Ms. Siegal said that the goal and responsibility of Great Barrington is to take command of the process.

David Greer said that he is behind governing initiatives to have renewable energy; however, this is meant to be a personal use issue and said that there are places that would be more appropriate.

Mr. Greer gave informational packets to the Board and said that this was never intended to be put in a residential area.

Tom Warner- 19 Seekonk Rd- said that there is a need for solar, however, no where in the document does it address health affects or the welfare of the community. He said that this project will take away tourism and therefore, direct dollars. Tom said that we set zoning for this reason.

Jonathan Shapiro said that his house will be in the center of the project if it gets approved. He asked if the Planning Board puts into action a question of changing the by-law, does that supersede this company's right to come in and be grandfathered.

Jonathan Hankin responded that there are many vehicles available to them to freeze zoning. The Planning Board would have had to advertise for a public hearing first to avoid this.

Phil Timpane- Bridle Path Rd- asked Jonathan Hankin if there was a method where a citizen petition requesting an amendment to be placed at the Town Meeting could cause moratorium when it is placed. Chris Rembold responded that citizens can petition the BOS to put an article on the warrant. It does not matter when it is in; the clock stops when the proposal of the by-law is advertised for a public hearing.

Gene Salby asked how long it would take to get a by-law voted on at a Town meeting and how long will it take to be publicized.

Sean Stanton responded that residents can force a Town meeting. There are a certain number of signatures required and a specific amount of time needed to advertise.

Jonathan Hankin said what they are hearing is very one-sided. We have not heard from the Shaws. He said that they have provided a visual amenity to the Town for no charge. Jonathan said that Mr. Shaw can't make as much money as a farmer as he can by this lease. He said that the energy company chooses farm land because it is cleared and gently sloping. Jonathan feels that this is not the best nor the worst use of the land.

MOTION: Deb Philips to direct the Town Manager to work with the Planning Board in drafting the appropriate zoning by-law(s).

SECOND: Steve Bannon

VOTE: 5-0

Alana Chernila said that this is an opportunity to take this and put it in the positive. This is not about being a pro-solar community but a community intent on making its own power.

She said that anything that can be done as this by-law is being drafted to move forward should be done. The focus should be on how the community relates to the use of power and the creation of power.

Andrew Blechman said that this should be done concurrently with other sources of power such as wind power.

Chris Rembold said that wind power is allowed by special permit.

MOTION: Deb Phillips to instruct the Town Manager to get appropriate legal counsel with expertise in the area on 61A issue and the interpretation of the state regulation as to what is and is not allowed so the Planning Board can move forward with the correct answers.

SECOND: Steve Bannon

VOTE: 5-0

9. SELECTMEN'S TIME:

Alana Chernila announced that there will be a benefit at Castle Street Restaurant on Sunday from 5-7. The cost for dinner is \$25 and all of the proceeds will go to support covering the costs that BCAC lost. She encouraged all to attend.

10. MEDIA TIME:

Trevor Jones asked how the Town Manager felt about spending \$3.5 million on the Housatonic school. Kevin O'Donnell responded that it was not appropriate to answer since grants will affect this cost.

11. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion by Steve Bannon, at 8:40pm, the Board adjourned to Executive session not to return to Public session.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS RE: SALE OF OLD FIRE STATION

(M.G.L. c.30A, sec.21(a)6.)

MOTION: Steve Bannon to adjourn to Executive session as stated above

SECOND: Alana Chernila

ROLL CALL VOTE:

STEPHEN BANNON – yes

ANDREW BLECHMAN – yes

ALANA CHERNILA – yes

DEB PHILLIPS - yes

SEAN STANTON - yes

VOTE: 5-0

Respectfully submitted,



Cara Becker
Recording Secretary