



**Board of Selectmen  
Minutes  
Tuesday, December 21, 2010, 7:00pm  
Town Hall Meeting Room**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00PM by Chair, Peter Warren in the Town Hall Meeting Room. Selectmen Peter Warren, Marie Sobalvarro, Ron Ricci, Bill Johnson and Tim Clark were all in attendance as well as the Town Administrator Tim Bragan and Executive Assistant Julie Doucet.

**Tax Classification Hearing – Fiscal Year 2011**

Regional Tax Assessor Harold Scheid, Associate Assessor Linda Couture, Assistant Assessor Celia Jornet and Board of Assessors member Joe Theriault were all present. Scheid explained each year Massachusetts law requires the Board of Selectmen to annually adopt either a uniform property tax rate across all classes of property, or select a set of tax factors that have the affect of shifting a greater share of the tax burden to the commercial, industrial, and personal property taxpayer. He said historically Harvard has always had a single tax rate because there are no compelling reasons to shift the tax burden onto commercial class. He explained Harvard's commercial/industrial tax base represents less than 5% of the town's total assessment. In order to reduce residential taxes by 1%, CIP taxes would have to increase approximately 19%. He provided a tax rate options sheet as a reference. Scheid said the BOS need to decide on two other items; adoption of a residential exemption and a small commercial exemption. The Harvard Board of Assessors does not recommend the adoption of either exemption. Marie Sobalvarro asked at what point it would make sense to consider exemptions or split tax rates. He said the CIP would need to be at least 20% of the tax base.

On a Johnson/Ricci motion, the board voted unanimously to adopt a uniform tax rate.

On a Sobalvarro/Clark motion, the board voted unanimously to not adopt the residential exemption.

On a Sobalvarro/Ricci motion, the board voted unanimously to not adopt the small commercial exemption.

Tim Clark commented on the small commercial exemption being an important piece for the Economic Development Committee to investigate. Bill Johnson agreed considering balanced taxation strategies are within the committee's scope. He also said TIF agreements will be of interest. Tim Clark asked if a vote was needed to recommend the tax rate. Scheid said no vote is needed. He said the average tax bill will see a \$156.00 increase this year which is about 2%. Sobalvarro asked if Harvard housing is maintaining its value. Scheid explained Central Mass has seen a larger decline and expects values in the west to drop further. He anticipates another 8-10% decrease in values. He said values have gone down about 11% since 2006 and 6% just this year. Tim Clark asked about land values opposed to structure values. Scheid said land values are down significantly due to new requirements from Department of Revenue (DOR).

**MINUTES** – On a Ricci/Johnson motion, the board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of 12/7, as presented.

**PLANNING BOARD APPOINTMENT** – Planning Board Chairman Kara Minar and members Wayne McFarland and Craig Bardenheur were present to recommend Michelle Catalina be appointed as a full member from an associate member. She will fill the vacancy with a term expiring at the next election in 2011.

By a roll call vote, Minar – Aye, Bardenheur - Aye, McFarland - Aye, Johnson – Aye, Sobalvarro – Aye, Warren – Aye, Clark – Aye, Ricci – Aye, the boards voted to appoint Michelle Catalina as full member of the Planning Board with term expiring in 2011. Minar said they are working toward filling the other vacancy as soon as possible.

On a separate note, Minar expressed her concern regarding the letter given by Building Inspector Gabe Vellante regarding the property at 285 Ayer Road. She said essentially the site is out of compliance and does not understand why Vellante referenced a site plan review considering this is under the jurisdiction of the Planning Board. She stated the Planning Board feels the Building Inspector may have over stepped his authority. She said he indicated in the letter the sign was in compliance with the original construction plan. The Planning Board will submit an official letter stating their concerns.

**PUBLIC COMMUNICATION** – Energy Advisory Committee members Brian Smith and Eric Broadbent were present to announce Harvard has been officially designated a Green Community along with 17 other communities. Broadbent stated Harvard will be eligible for grant funds up to \$141,000. They thanked all involved with helping the community achieve this goal. They specifically thanked the Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Planning Board, Finance Committee as well as citizens Sydney Blackwell and Rick Wood. They also recognized the League of Women voters along with Marie Sobalvarro for their assistance with the public forum. Brian Smith said Harvard has also won a Big Belly trash compactor and a location needs to be determined. Smith and Broadbent said the committee looks forward to continuing the reduction of energy consumption and volunteers are always welcome. Smith explained the deadline to file for funding is January 21<sup>st</sup> with applications opening on December 17<sup>th</sup>. The committee plans to meet with the Municipal Buildings Committee in early January to discuss long term projects and come back to the BOS. Ron Ricci asked if funds granted could be placed in a reserve fund to be utilized at a later date. Smith said projects must be completed in fiscal year 2011. Bill Johnson wondered if we have enough insight now to prioritize efficiently. Smith believes the committee has a fairly good idea of potential projects. Ricci asked if funds can be combined with funds from another grant. Smith and Broadbent seemed to think so but again specified funds must be expended in fiscal year 2011. Broadbent said the committee will provide a list of projects including the estimated return on the investment by the first week of January. The Board of Selectmen thanked the gentlemen and other committee members for their efforts.

**SUBURBAN COALITION UPDATE** - Harvard's representative Stu Sklar attended the meeting to provide a brief update. He said the coalition met on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. The meeting was well attended and speaker Michael Widmer was present. His presentation included a round robin discussion where issues such as the state budget, pension and health care reform were discussed. Sklar felt the pension reform will be addressed first

with health care reform after. One idea discussed is the use of home rule petitions to push Beacon Hill for changes. It was apparent many felt this is a good avenue to get “grass root” support. The coalition plans to meet again in early February either the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup>. He thought it may be nice for a BOS member to attend. A legislative breakfast will also be held on Tuesday, April 26<sup>th</sup>. Sklar said currently the coalition is redoing their position paper and he asked for input from the BOS members. He indicated the items included are issues the coalition feels will not be costly to implement. Tim Clark encouraged further investigation into the low interest road program. Peter Warren thanked Sklar for the update.

## **SELECTMEN REPORTS**

**Municipal Building Committee** – Marie Sobalvarro said the committee is working toward a recommendation for the Annual Town Meeting and plan to have a draft accessible on the town website. She expects a preview in February.

**Montachusett Regional Planning Commission** - Tim Clark reported he attended their presentation of the Disaster Mitigation Plan which came about after the 2008 ice storm. He said DPW Director Rich Nota attended along with many other Police and Fire officials from the area. He said the plan includes a great deal of useful data with some recommendations on how communities could allocate funds for readiness. He suggests the DPW Director along with the new Emergency Director review and work on this further. He will provide copies of the plan to all the board members and asks to place this on the town website.

**Transfer Station Committee** – Tim Clark said he received an email from Ron Ricci regarding the condition of dumpsters at the Transfer Station. He said the complaint has been forwarded to the appropriate party.

On a separate note, Clark said he had the opportunity to meet the Planner from Lancaster while at Evergreen Solar. He had a brief discussion with her regarding her duties in Lancaster. He felt she would be a great resource for the Economic Development Committee.

**JBOS** - Ron Ricci requested the BOS discuss the Devens Reuse Plan five year review. He anticipates appointment of a Five Year Review Committee at their next meeting.

Peter Warren reported there is a link on the town website to a survey provided by the Town of Boxborough to determine a commuter train shuttle service from the Holiday Inn. He encouraged residents to take the survey if they are interested.

Warren said he met with Economic Development Representative Stacie Hargis from Congresswoman Niki Tsonga’s office to discuss grant funding sources. He explained a meeting will be held on January 4<sup>th</sup> in the morning to meet with her and grant writer Ann Pierce.

## **TOWN ADMINISTRATOR REPORT**

1. Senior Work Off Program – Tim Bragan said each year the board votes to continue the program. On a Clark/Johnson motion, the board voted unanimously to continue the Senior Work off Tax Abatement Program for the next year.
2. Devens resident Eric Stoltzfus is refinancing an affordable unit and needs approval from the Town. On a Clark/Johnson motion, the board voted unanimously to approve the Town Administrator to sign appropriate paperwork.
3. Bragan informed the board all Liquor License renewals have been approved by the ABCC. All licenses were signed.
4. Bragan said Bruce Ringwall from GPR has requested the Town grant a Release of Right of First Refusal for his clients. This is regarding property owned by Foxglove Housing and abutting property owned by Pleasant Properties. The board agreed to invite Mr. Ringwall to their January 4<sup>th</sup> meeting to further explain the request.
5. Bragan reminded everyone the Annual Town Report submissions are due January 14<sup>th</sup>.

## **ANNUAL LICENSING**

On a Clark/Johnson motion, the board voted unanimously to grant license renewal checklist as presented.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30PM.

Documents referenced:

**Tax Classification Hearing – Fiscal Year 2011** – letter from Assessing department dated 12.21.2010, Fiscal 2010 Mass. Communities Split Tax Rate spreadsheet

**ANNUAL LICENSING** – 2011 License renewal checklist