

**Stow Finance Committee**  
***Public Hearing***  
**December 6, 2005**

**Call to Order**

Jason Robart called the open meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Present were members Patricia Heron, Pam Glauner, Charles Kern, Gary Bernklow, Stephen Piotte and Elizabeth Tobey, Secretary.

Jason Robart explained that objective of the Public Hearing is to hear from the town people. There will be a walk through of all of the articles, and discussion from the Towns People. The Finance committee is not here to express our opinion, but to hear from you and your thoughts.

Patricia Heron recused herself from the meeting at 7:15pm

**Presentations**

*The School Building Committee* – Anne Draudt made a presentation regarding the School Building Committees task and what they feel the town needs. She explained the Mission, and findings of the school committee. Chris Way presented the Plan layout as Ann explained the plans.

After the presentation was complete Jason asked if anyone had any questions for the Stow Building Committee. With no response he moved on to the Citizens Petition presentation.

*Citizens Petition* – Debbie Woods and Tom Ryan made a presentation regarding the Citizens Petition to renovate Pompositicut and Center Schools as apposed to a new build. She stated that many citizens feel they are not being heard. The presentation contained information stating that the 2 school could both be renovated at a cost of \$10mil.

After the presentation Jason asked if there were any questions for the Citizens Petition.

Chris Way, Chairperson of the School Building Committee - Explained how they went about the process of getting the numbers to the town for a school construction project and why they opted to not put a number on the cost now.

George Dargaty, Barton Road – Do you have any contingent plans? You are counting on the mixed plan to bring back some money, but you may not be able to even get that money. Do you have a plan?

Chris Way – Currently we are attempting to go to town meeting to ask for the purchase of the property for the building of the school. If that happens then we will be allowed on the property to see about septic and water for that property.

Carol Makary, Board of Selectmen – When the Minuteman property passes and the \$2mil article passes; it is the Selectmen’s responsibility to make the due diligence to follow through on whatever options are available on active recreation.

Jason Robart asked Chris Way if the motion will state that the land is being bought for schools.

Chris Way stated that she thinks the motions are still a work in progress and she has not seen the latest distribution of the motion.

Steve Dungan, Selectmen Liaison of the School Building Committee – Currently the motion to acquire the minuteman property does not reference the school. The modification made this morning did make an adjustment for the so called mixed used modification. To address the fact that we’ve not been able to do enough do diligence to justify the change at this time for development outside the school area.

Jean Lynch, Capitol Planning – It’s my understanding that the selectmen voted to support a new school on a new site. Have they voted to purchase the Minuteman property.

Carol Makary – No, we have not as of yet

Jean Lynch asked if they will do so.

Janet Wheeler, Board of Selectmen – Article 2 in the warrant does say, Maps of Stow will pick up Boxboro Road known as so called Minuteman property for one or more of the following uses; Sighting a School, Affordable housing, Open space, Active and passive recreation, so on and so forth. It was deliberately open wording so that whatever usage we could maintain off of that property we could.

Jason stated that his point is that the current version of that article does not have the school listed, it talks about affordable housing. As of 12/6 at bond counsel it does not have that language in it.

Ellen Sturgis, Canterbury Road –A question on the purchase and sale, given that we are stepping into the 61A, when George asked about contingencies, what I was hearing was, are there contingencies on the current purchase and sale that would allow the current developer to opt out if he didn't perk the property? Also, the other question for Debbie Woods and Tom Ryan, are in terms of the current square footage that your proposing adding on center, I was wondering if that is beyond or close to how much you can expand that space. When you talk about meeting school projections does that mean that you will meet the long term projection limit?

Debbie Woods stated that when she talked about meeting the projected the 722 students is the projection that is in the report from the design firm as well as the school building committee. That's the number that we were taking as fact and that's what we are using. As far as the square footage in the 2002 report from TPC you will see there are some very large additions they put off the back of center. If you look at the tennis courts over to the right they have some of the previous plans had a very large addition there. There is room to site that kind of square footage.

Chris Way – Regarding the Purchase and Sale, it is currently there. The way we read it, and we are waiting for Town Counsel, he does have contingencies in there he has up to 2 years to do his due diligence and get his permitting. Once that happens he has another 60 days to close, so he has 2 years and 60 days which he can still get out of if he can't perk the land and find a well location.

Anne Droudt - Your quoted number was \$200 per square foot, in all the comparisons I have been doing it has been running close to \$300 per square foot. That could have a big impact on the plans. The other major concern I have is that you said that it would be \$9mil for center which included \$6mil for the new build and \$3mil for the refurbishment. When you add that kind of square footage to a building you are required to bring it up to code. The cost that we have is about 5.5mil just to bring the rest of the building up to code. I was just wondering if you had considered that issue at all. I also wanted to make it clear that you cannot put walls in Pompositticut for 1mil. I think it should be clear that this is a refurbishment of the existing classroom structure.

Tom Ryan – Regarding bring the schools up to code. My understanding is that, a building that met code when it was built still meets code today because many of the things are grandfathered in. There are ADA issues, there are many number of issues. The main thing is we are talking about almost doubling the size of the school. There are many numbers of issues we can deal with to try to work with that. One of the things is that Ann is correct. The numbers that were put forward in 2002 relating to bringing it up to code were \$4.9mil for center at the time and \$4.7 for the other. However, those ended up containing a number of things that may not need to be done. As far as the square footage and adding new construction, we ended up taking the 2004 department of education number of \$171.00 per square foot and rounding it up to \$200 per sq ft. If the costs to do it increase a little bit maybe we will only get 25000 square feet. We are looking at a mandate.

Nancy Arsenault, Red Acre Road –The costs, would they also include all of the furniture, materials, and things to go into the new classroom or is it strictly construction cost.

Tom Ryan – The DOE numbers where \$171 limit for reimbursable expenses includes; furnishings, fittings, construction cost, the total project cost. Walk away, done.

Jason questioned just to be clear, under you \$10mil that includes furnishings for the addition etc.

Tom Ryan stated that the remainder of the building would not include that.

Eve Donahue, West Acton Road – I am looking at the hand out and I am curious about how the SBA reimbursement works. For example, we get the 50% reimbursement and we are currently paying the 1460 on the average house for taxes. When that reimbursement comes back in does that mean that my taxes will go down that I have or does it come into the town.

Jason stated that it does not mean that your taxes necessarily will go down by half. It would be revenue that comes back into the town and then each year when the town sets its tax rate, that revenue would be used to off set the tax. From the revenue that is needed, to be generated from personal property.

Chris Way added a clarification to that comment. Stating that when the new School Building Authority comes back on line and they give out grants, when they give them under the new program it is if you have a project currently under construction. you receive monthly payments. Once the construction is completed you get a lump sum payment for the total amount that you will receive.

In example: If we went forward with this project and the construction is completed, we get the grant at 50% of the cost of the building construction, approximately a \$17mil grant. That would come to the town in a lump sum payment, which would do a great deal to pay down the debt in one year.

Jason asked for other questions or comments.

Bill Byron, Gleasondale Road – My question is in regard to the purchase of the Minuteman property, and mitigating the cost of purchasing that land. Any monies that come from the CPC, I don't think should be called mitigating the cost of purchasing the land because those are the taxes that we are paying now in our tax bill, although some of it is coming from the state. Are you calling that money a mitigating factor in the cost of purchasing the land or is it proposed for other property. Would it be the one that actually reduces the cost of the land to the town?

Chris Way – I think that we were probably referring to both of them. You are correct. That money from CPC is taken off the tax bill. You are taxed for them and they are matched at 100% by the state. For every \$50 in there another \$50 comes from the state. If we are using CPC money it would be furthering goals that that committee has set out for the town which is affordable housing. It is that committee's top priority, as well as possible open space or active open space. In addition we would hope to have a housing proposal that would more than support it self and return money to the town through that.

Jason commented that one way to think about the answer to the question is that the use of the CPC monies will mitigate the incremental tax increase. It is not necessarily mitigating the cost it is mitigating the demand for incremental tax dollars or more tax burden on the tax payers.

Jason then asked for other questions or comments.

Kathleen Farrell, Sudbury Road – I just want to comment on the form that we should expect state assistance. We finished the Hale Building Project in 1996. It was only until 2005 that we finally received full reimbursement that was before the program became defunct. What we really need to think about is that while we waited for that assistance we needed over the past several years to pass overrides just to fund our operations. We are training the wrong way. In order to balance our operational budget at town meeting we are spending more money then we are bringing in, in revenue. If and when we finally get some state assistance for a building project hopefully it would offset the increases we have had to make above and beyond proposition 2 ½.

Ellen Sturgis – I think we all like only spending \$10mil to get a good school. My concern is that the School Building Committee in various forms has been meeting for 3 ½ years and gone through lots of different innervations and came to a conclusion of a new school. My concern is that we could approve \$10mil now and find out that it's not going to be enough. Then 5 or 10 years from now we will have to do something radical like build a new school. To come up with at the last minute a \$10mil number, when it's not really based on as much information as we like. It feels like we could be wasting 10mil. At some level I would say don't spend anything if you don't think the new building is going to work because we might just be flushing \$10mil down the toilet, essentially.

Anne Droudt – You mentioned that you started with a \$7.5mil from the previous and added some areas of square feet that were not included. Does that mean that you are basing your overall scheme on that number, because that number was based on a misreading of the feasibility project cost?

Debbie Wood – As I mentioned the main focus was to come up with an affordable outcome. What we did was, when we all sat down to determine what the number would be, that was our starting point. \$7.5mil was the number that we felt the town had already committed to being able to afford and able to spend. That was the value of that number. From there we knew there were some things i.e.: Hallways that we needed to add. We knew that we needed to potentially add some additional money. The bottom line is we tried very hard to put some intelligence into a number that would work. Is it going to be flushing it down the toilet? I sincerely don't think so. I think if you look at some of the projects have been done, and we have some very hard cases with true project costs not just construction costs. That \$200 per square foot is absolutely doable. We can get a very substantial change to the \$10mil. The \$10mil was done for affordability and the fact that the town had already said they will support \$7.5mil.

Jason announced that it was time to move onto the other articles and thanked the SBC and the Citizens Petition Group. We have 2 different approaches to address at the same meeting. While we may disagree on what is the best approach I applaud everyone for their hard work to bring these options to the floor.

At this time we will go through the warrants.

#### **Review of Stow Town Meeting Warrant Articles:**

##### **Article 1 – *Purchase of Two-Classroom Modular Unit***

Jason described Article 1 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience

The impact on the average tax bill will be roughly \$50.00 for a 2 year period?

Carol Makary – I have some brief information regarding Article 1. An on going question about that article has been; what is the comparison to a lease option? Should we consider a lease compared to a purchase. At our last Capitol planning meeting last week, Bill Sprat who is the facilities manager for the school district came and he actually been in contact with the vendor and worked up some lease number. Essentially if you need the modular for 8 years you are pretty close to breaking even in terms of cost with the purchase. The question in my mind, what is going to be our need? How many years are we going to need these modules going out? Given the uncertainty of where we stand now with the School Building Project, the thought was to leave that article at purchase, for this particular modular. After this town meeting we will have better sense of the time line of the school or not. So therefore anticipating another modular at the next town meeting for center and at that point we will know what will be happening with the school building project and be better to be able to estimate how many years we will need them and then decide whether to lease or purchase.

Pam added that Superintendent Wood mentioned at the joint board's last meeting that there was a need at Center and going up the hill to Hale for a number of years. You could easily get to 8.

Jason asked for other comments or questions in regards to Article 1

**Article 2 – Purchase of Minute Man Property**

Jason described Article 2 and stated that this Article had already been discussed.

The impact on the average tax bill will be roughly \$155.00 for a 20 year period.

**Article 3 – Purchase of a Prek-5 Elementary School Design Plan**

Jason described Article 3 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

The impact on the average tax bill will be roughly \$74.00 for a 20 year period?

George Dargaty – Payment on the school design was what time? When do we need to pay the \$2mil?

Anne Droudt – Typically you pay design fees as you go through various phases of the services. As you go through surveys you pay a certain percentage, when you go through the conceptual plans you pay a certain percentage and so on. Typically it is set out on a contract in the beginning. The first phase you go through would be an RFP for an architect and a contract would be written. The contract would state the figures and the amounts that we would pay at each date.

Jason asked if the number of \$2mil is completely based on the current design firm that is in place now.

Anne stated that yes that is an estimate of what they thought will get us to town Meeting next fall. At that point they will come back with the actual construction cost.

Jason asked if it is next fall or in spring.

Anne stated that yes it is next fall.

Jason questioned that we would not be looking at voting construction costs at next weeks meeting.

Anne stated, no there is actually a whole schedule. The RFP was to take a certain amount of time to be able to do the site surveys. That would take until about March, because they have to get onto the land at some point. Then the plan would be to start going through schematic design and the design development. To define how it's built and how it goes together. We would have to be well into development to put a specific price on it, to be sure we are not running into cost overrun.

George Dargaty - If we buy the property (Minuteman Land) is the school a definite?

Jason stated that we will vote on Article 2 first and if it fails there will be no need to vote on Article 3. If Article 2 doesn't get passed it would eliminate Article 3.

Anne Droudt – Yes there is a specific amount of risk there. We are going to bring that back to another Town Meeting because we don't have a very specific number. We would like to encourage anyone that is going to vote for the \$2mil to consider that a vote in support of a full PreK-5 project, because we do not want the town to spend the \$2mil and then not get the school built.

Penny Cushing – At Town Meeting will you be able to tell the voters exactly what is bonded now with a chart as to where things are going to be paid out. Because with just this one thing you have \$50.00 for 2 years, \$154.00 for 20 years, \$74.00 for 20 years, \$53.65 for the refurbished and another \$50.00 for 2 years. We are going to have things like these for year after year after year. I think we need to keep in mind that it adds up and it's not going to go away.

Jason – Yes, we will have something like that for Town Meeting. These figures are based on something that the Treasurer put together for me.

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 3.

**Article 4 – Improvements and Construction at Existing School Sites**

Jason described Article 4 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

The increase on the average tax bill will be roughly \$365.00 for a 20 year period.

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 4.

**Article 5 – Purchase of Crescent Street Property**

Jason described Article 5 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

The increase on the average tax bill will be roughly \$50.00 for a 2 year period.

Penny Cushing – Should really think about whether it is fair or morally right to purchase this land. Think about a house burning down between you and a neighbor and then the town coming in and putting a parking lot there. I don't think it is fair and it will detract from the center of our town. I don't think it is necessary and it is a horrendous amount of money for 20 parking spaces that we assume we are going to get. There is still a safety issue on Route 117/Great Rd, there are no sidewalks.

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 5

**Article 6 – Adoption of a Right-to-Farm Bylaw**

Jason described Article 6 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

Tom French (Barton Road) – This was proposed by the selectmen. I am not associated with them and I am against the Article. This is based on the State by-law and its whole purpose is to educate residents on the town and that the town supports farming. The way it is written is it does not grant addition rights other than the laws that are already contained in the state laws and state constitution. That being the case, I think it is unnecessary and an expensive way to educate people about the fact that we support farms. Other than that it is written so broadly that I think it could result in legal challenges or arguments. Especially the notification provision, that arises when you sell your house. You have to tell the buyer that they are subject to noise odors and other nuisances that may be caused by farms. Your house may be no where near and you are required to do this, no matter where you live in the Town of Stow. I think it is subject to legal challenges, even though it is proposed by the state department. I hope that some of the residents and the Finance Committee can recommend against this article

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 6.

Patricia Heron returned to the meeting at 8:37pm

**Article 7 – Establishment of an Agricultural Commission**

Jason described Article 7 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 7.

**Article 8 – Zoning Bylaw Amendment – Erosion Control**

Jason described Article 8 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 8.

**Article 9 – Zoning Bylaw Amendment – Common Drives**

Jason described Article 9 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 9.

**Article 10** – *Zoning Bylaw Amendment – Non-Conforming Uses and Structures*

Jason described Article 10 and asked for any questions or comments from the audience.

Jason asked for other questions or comments on Article 10.

**Article 11** – *Town Election*

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted

Elizabeth A. Tobey  
Secretary