

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee  
Minutes of Meeting No. 7, FY2012  
September 29, 2011

Approved  
October 6, 2011

Members Present: John E. Arnold, Chair, Ed Behn, Peter Allen, Bill Linnane, Jo Lown, Jim Tepper (8:35 p.m.), J. J. Malone, Lisa Blazejewski. Absent: Kathy Rosenblum Senie.

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Arnold called the meeting to order in the Selectmen's Meeting Room.

### **Call to Order/Open Forum**

There were no requests to address the Committee.

### **Approval of Minutes**

#### **Meeting No. 04, September 19, 2011**

Mr. Allen had emailed corrections to the minutes. Mr. Linnane moved to accept the minutes as amended. The vote to approve the minutes is 6 in favor, 1 abstention (Lown), with 7 being present.

#### **Meeting No. 05, September 22, 2011**

Mr. Allen had emailed corrections to the minutes. Mr. Malone and Ms. Lown also suggested some additional amendments. Mr. Behn moved to accept the minutes as amended. The vote to approve the minutes is 6 in favor, 1 abstention (Blazejewski), with 7 being present.

### **AFC Preparations for Special Town Meeting**

#### **Discussion/Deliberation/Voting of STM Warrant Article Recommendations**

Mr. Arnold had emailed a draft of the Committee's Report & Recommendations, which includes the updated warrant. School Department and DPW representatives will hopefully attend next Monday's meeting to answer questions. The Committee reviewed the warrant articles for which there were as yet no votes.

**Article 2. Building & Grounds Transfer.** Mr. Arnold noted that after corrections to the numbers, the motion is now to reduce the Building & Grounds appropriation to \$144,585. Mr. Behn moved to recommend the Town transfer from Building & Grounds Salaries/Wages to Building & Grounds Expenses the sum of \$8,020, and further to reduce the overall appropriation of Building & Grounds Salaries/Wages account to \$144,585. The vote to approve the article recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

**Article 3. Central Purchasing Expenses.** Ms. Lown would like to look into this in more detail. No vote taken.

**Article 5. Fuel Management System.** Mr. Behn moved to recommend the Town so vote. The vote to approve the article recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

**Article 6. DPW Plow Truck.** Mr. Arnold felt this article could wait until Monday's meeting, when the DPW will be present to answer questions. Mr. Linnane will get more information on the 5% increase in the price.

**Article 7. Building Department Vehicle.** Mr. Arnold will request an updated Town vehicle list from Town Manager Jim Malloy, or Assistant Town Manager Kristi Williams. Mr. Allen noted that the Building Department has two other vehicles, which Mr. Malloy eventually intends to replace with Toyota Priuses. The previous vote stands.

**Article 8. Building Department Stipend.** There had been an issue of how these funds would be accounted for. Ms. Lown noted that this amount would be appropriated to the Salaries/Wages account for the purpose of funding the stipend, which settles the question satisfactorily. Mr. Malone was comfortable with the idea of the stipend, feeling it might encourage other Town employees to enter into other roles. Mr. Malone moved to recommend the Town so vote. The vote to approve the article recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

**Article 9. National Citizen Survey.** Mr. Allen, who had viewed the Board of Selectmen discussion of this article, noted that both Ms. Goldblatt and Mr. Thompson had expressed concern over spending \$10,000 in these economic times on a survey which they felt was not actionable. The three Selectmen in support of the survey recognized the importance of gaining feedback from residents and felt the pros outweighed the cons. Mr. Allen noted that, in fact, 1200 randomly selected households would be surveyed. He added that Mr. Malloy had found three questions which could be tailored by the School Committee for the survey. Mr. Arnold noted that Mr. Malloy had provided the Committee with a report on a similar survey done for the town of Needham. Based on her initial review of the Needham report, Ms. Lown was impressed with the survey's general approach, and noted the 4% margin of error. Mr. Allen noted that, as only four towns in Massachusetts have utilized the survey, the usefulness of comparisons with other towns would be limited. Though skeptical about committing to its long-term use, he felt the survey had value for establishing a baseline and would support it as a one-time expense. Ms. Lown noted the change from Raise and Appropriate to Transfer from Free Cash, which could suggest this would not be an ongoing expenditure. Mr. Behn reminded the Committee that the initial cost of \$10,000 would be followed by more costs as the survey is reviewed and its results implemented. Ms. Lown pointed out that, on the other hand, the survey could save the Town money by providing a clearer overall picture of what residents really want. Mr. Linnane felt there was value in having a professional, independent look at the Town and its departments. No vote taken.

**Article 11. Library HVAC System.** Mr. Arnold noted that the Board of Selectmen intended to vote on Town Meeting floor for this article, as the data was not available yet—nor would it be available for the Committee's booklet. No vote taken.

**Article 12. School Department Vehicle.** Mr. Arnold noted there would be more discussion on Monday, when School Building & Grounds Manager Brian Schlegel would be present. No vote taken.

**Article 15. Town Sewer System.** Mr. Arnold noted that Town Treasurer Joanne Savignac had provided spreadsheets showing interest rates of both 2% and 3% over 20 years with equal principal payments and a 2% projection with equal annual payments. Mr. Behn added that the 2% rate was with the state revolving fund; the 3% rate was if the Town went to market on its own. The Committee will wait to hear from Town Engineer Carl Balduf on Monday. No vote taken.

The Committee reviewed and discussed the remainder of the draft report. Mr. Arnold asked members to make notes of any additional terms which should be included in the glossary.

Mr. Behn explained that data from the Department of Revenue Web site was used to create the "Average Single Family Tax Bill" spreadsheet which he has prepared for the report. Mr. Arnold noted that the narrative was based on this data, showing how the increase in spending may be correlated to increases in home tax bills, affecting homes and businesses. Mr. Malone felt the report should make the point that the growth rate in taxes is unsustainable. Mr. Allen felt graphs were helpful, especially when explaining how 6.2% per year increases are possible under Proposition 2½. The Committee discussed how best to present its view of the Town's current financial situation in the report.

Ms. Lown noted that the use of Free Cash at the last Town Meeting did give taxpayers some relief. There was some discussion about whether setting a specific limit to tax bill increases (3.5%, for example) was appropriate. Mr. Behn noted that the advantage of setting a limit was so everyone in town would understand what we feel is a reasonable goal or target. Mr. Arnold felt that addressing the overall spending level, rather than the individual merits of each article, was perhaps more productive, noting that though each article may be worthwhile, the Town can't necessarily afford to approve them all at the requested levels. Mr. Allen noted that if a target number is agreed on, some services will need to be cut. Mr. Tepper doubted the assumption that the entire budget was required to provide all services—he felt the Town could cut back and still provide the same services though perhaps at different levels. Ms. Lown pointed out that when cuts are made across the board, some departments have nothing left while others still have adequate funding, which is unfair. She felt the public needed to make responsible choices about which services to keep, and which to give up.

Mr. Arnold thanked the Committee for the candid discussion and will provide an updated draft for the next meeting. He noted that once approved, the Committee's message should be made available not just at Town Meeting but throughout the town. Mr. Malone suggested sending it to public notice subscribers.

#### **Other STM Topics including upcoming meeting schedule**

Mr. Arnold noted that meetings are planned for Monday and Thursday of next week. He noted that Special Town Meeting will be on Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m., and reminded residents that the meeting will begin promptly due to the 0 quorum. A Committee meeting will be posted for 6 p.m. that same evening.

#### **Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports**

Mr. Arnold announced that the new 2011 Street Lists are available. Town Accountant Leah Talbot has also provided the end of September Appropriations Report.

#### **Comments and Concerns of Committee Members**

Mr. Arnold reminded residents of the Arts in Common event to be held this Saturday.

Ms. Lown noted the special Voter Registration on Friday, October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Ms. Blazejewski mentioned that the Hazardous Waste Collection Day is also this Saturday.

#### **Adjournment**

Mr. Behn moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:25 p.m. Vote to adjourn was 8 in favor, with 8 being present.

#### **Document List**

*Draft Special Town Meeting AFC Report & Recommendation*, 9-29-11, prepared by John Arnold.

*Estimated Interest for STM FY2011 spreadsheet*, prepared by Joanne Savignac.

*Fall 2011 Town Meeting Final Warrant*, 9-27-11, prepared by Jim Malloy.

*September 2011 Appropriations Report*, prepared by Leah Talbot.

*STM Articles spreadsheet*, prepared by John Arnold and Ed Behn.

*Town of Needham Report of Results* (survey), provided by Jim Malloy.