

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting No. 35, FY2012
April 2, 2012

Approved
May 7, 2012

Members Present: John E. Arnold, Chair, Ed Behn, Peter Allen, Bill Linnane, Jim Tepper, Kathy Rosenblum Senie, J. J. Malone, Lisa Blazejewski. Absent: None (one Committee position is now vacant).

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. 33, March 15, 2012

Mr. Malone and Ms. Rosenblum Senie had requested corrections to the minutes. Mr. Behn moved to accept the minutes as amended. The vote to approve the minutes is 7 in favor, 1 abstention (Allen), with 8 being present.

Meeting No. 34, March 17, 2012

Mr. Malone, Ms. Rosenblum Senie and Ms. Blazejewski requested corrections to the minutes. Mr. Behn moved to accept the minutes. The vote to approve the minutes is 7 in favor, 1 abstention (Allen), with 8 being present.

The Committee thanked Jo Lown for her contributions and years of service to the Committee and to the Town.

Request for Transfer from Finance Committee Reserve Fund

Veterans Agent

George Perry appeared before the Committee to explain this request. Mr. Perry explained that there is currently a negative balance in the department's Cash Grants account due to an increased number of claims, as well as increases to co-payments. Mr. Behn moved to transfer from the AFC Reserve Fund the amount of \$18,094 to the Veterans' Services Cash Grants account. The vote to approve the transfer is unanimous, 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Review of FY2013 Annual Town Meeting and March 17 Special Town Meeting

Discussion with Town Moderator

Joe Harrington, Town Moderator, was present to discuss the recent Town Meetings. There was some discussion of the length of the meetings. Mr. Tepper pointed out that major issues and a separate Special Town Meeting had been contributing factors, and felt too much had been addressed with insufficient time to prepare for it. Regarding Mr. Harrington's proposal to set time limits on discussions, Mr. Arnold pointed out that some residents who haven't attended all the meetings may require (and should be allowed) the extra time to understand the issues. He noted that footnotes and explanations could be featured more prominently in the booklet, and added that presentations for large budget items would understandably take more time. Mr. Harrington noted that the time needed for such presentations could be negotiated in advance. Mr. Behn noted that Town Manager Jim Malloy had done an outstanding job with the presentations but felt others could perhaps share that responsibility to avoid residents' focusing their frustration on him. Ms. Rosenblum Senie felt a more detailed presentation of the Capital Expenditures Plan would help residents to see the big picture. Mr. Behn noted that a summary could be included in the booklet showing year-by-year which items on the Capital Expenditures Plan are being

addressed, and where the priorities are. Ms. Rosenblum Senie felt that the impact of these items on taxes would also be helpful.

Mr. Behn pointed out that residents had largely voted in agreement with the Committee's recommendations, which he felt showed the Committee had successfully represented the community's interests. Mr. Linnane felt Mr. Malloy's summary of the Capital Expenditures Committee was good and could perhaps be included in the booklet. However, he felt more information was needed to help residents understand the budgeting process. To this end, departments should clearly explain the cost/benefit of their requests, and also provide a list of the mandates which put pressures on their budgets. Mr. Harrington noted that fewer people are attending Town Meeting, but those few are asking more detailed questions (albeit without adequately preparing themselves beforehand).

Mr. Behn wondered if a short handout could be provided at the election outlining the issues so that budget numbers are before the public earlier in the process. Mr. Linnane noted that people would need to hand them out in that case. Mr. Malone felt the town has perhaps outgrown the open Town Meeting format as the issues have become more complex, and wondered whether a Town Council would perhaps be more appropriate. As to providing extra information on the Capital Expenditures Committee, he thought the Committee's booklet was already too lengthy and suggested it be a separate handout. He felt Town Meeting went fairly well considering the large building projects being brought forward. He liked the general budget discussion at the beginning of Mr. Harrington's proposal but was not in favor of setting a time limit on Town Meeting discussions. Mr. Allen was unable to attend Town Meeting, but felt it went well considering the \$33 million building project, which he and many residents felt there was not enough time to prepare for.

Mr. Harrington outlined some strategies for keeping discussions shorter (thereby reducing the overall length of Town Meeting). One was to limit proponents to a certain amount of time. He explained that other towns limit individual speech to 3-4 minutes after the initial presentation, some using a timer. Other town moderators have asked voters if they needed to hear more from a certain individual. An automatic call of the question after a certain period of time would also deal with the issue. Mr. Tepper was not in favor of time limits on debates, but wondered if the time spent waiting for a microphone should also be addressed. There was some discussion of closing the balcony area to reduce the area the scouts have to cover when bringing the microphone to residents, and it was suggested that those sitting in the balcony areas could be asked to use the standing microphones. Mr. Tepper also felt it was important that the entire Capital Expenditures plan should be publicized. He added that as much information as possible should be pushed out to residents early on, to provide more time for them to process and prepare for Town Meeting (and also be encouraged to attend). Mr. Harrington pointed out that proponents also shared the responsibility to educate residents on the issues. Ms. Rosenblum Senie noted that the meeting felt unwieldy, and was not sure an open Town Meeting was the most efficient way to conduct business for a town the size of Westborough. She recognized the importance of hearing every point of view and opinion, but felt it was reasonable for Mr. Harrington to set some parameters at the outset of Town Meeting.

Committee Follow-up from Town Meeting Preparation/Discussions **Gibbons School Building Committee Representative**

Mr. Arnold noted that an AFC representative was needed by next Monday (April 9). Mr. Tepper expressed willingness to take on this responsibility. Mr. Behn moved to appoint Mr. Tepper as the AFC representative to the Gibbons School Building Committee. The vote to approve the appointment is 7 in favor, 1 abstention (Tepper), with 8 being present.

Advisory Finance Committee Bylaw follow-up

Mr. Arnold noted Mr. Malloy had suggested some possible changes to this bylaw and that he will begin working on a plan to work on this with Mr. Malloy as the Committee had discussed at earlier meetings.

Capital Expenditures Planning Committee Charter follow-up

Mr. Arnold felt a sub-committee would be helpful to meet with Town Manager Jim Malloy on this issue. He and Mr. Behn will follow up.

Personnel Board 'steps/lanes' schedule follow-up

Mr. Arnold felt it would be useful to hear from the Personnel Board regarding their process on this issue.

Mr. Behn felt that departments should be encouraged to bring issues not part of the budget process before the Committee much earlier on. Mr. Arnold added that if the Committee could receive any draft articles before the actual warrant is fully prepared, it would allow them more time to consider and give input on policy items. Mr. Behn noted that significant issues, such as charter amendments, should not be brought forward at the last minute, and questioned the wisdom of posting the Special Town Meeting, as he felt the Committee did not have time to vet the articles thoroughly. Mr. Linnane felt that if every committee had a specific scope and schedule, these last-minute proposals could be avoided.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Arnold had received an invitation from the Chairman of the Shrewsbury Board of Selectmen to attend a regional discussion of the impact of the loss of state aid, unfunded mandates, and pension obligations, to be held Wednesday, April 18th, at 7:00 p.m. He will follow up and see if this was meant as an invitation to all Committee members. Also, the Suburban Coalition is hosting a legislative breakfast on Wednesday, April 25th, from 9-11:30 a.m., to discuss legislative issues. Officials and community advocates from all across the Commonwealth are welcome to attend. Finally, the Association of Town Finance Committees March 2012 newsletter is now available.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

Mr. Linnane noted that tonight is his last meeting, and thanked the Committee for their invaluable assistance. Mr. Arnold thanked Mr. Linnane for his contributions and years of service to the Committee and to the Town.

Mr. Behn went on March 27th to the State House and met with Roger Hatch, who oversees the process of providing Chapter 70 state aid for schools, to understand that process and find out why Westborough receives disproportionately little state aid. According to Mr. Behn's analysis, if Westborough received the same aid Shrewsbury does, the tax rate would drop by 12%. He explained that Westborough's new growth and relatively high income, as well as personal property, seem to contribute to its low state aid. Mr. Behn also plans to attend the OPEB meeting in April, in Boston. He felt the Committee should produce a white paper on unfunded liabilities (which would also include the town's debt).

Adjournment

Mr. Behn moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:15 p.m. The vote to adjourn was 8 in favor, with 8 being present.

Document List

JH Suggestions for Fall STM Warrant.
March 2012 Appropriations Report.