

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting No. 8, FY2013
October 1, 2012

Approved
October 15, 2012

Members Present: Ed Behn, Chair, John E. Arnold, Lisa Blazejewski, Sharon Kaiser, J. J. Malone, Kathy Rosenblum Senie, Jim Tepper, Gary Wells. Absent: Peter Allen.

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Behn 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. 6, September 24, 2012

Deferred to next meeting.

Review of 2012 Fall STM Warrant Articles

Article 29. Explorer Post Lease. Mr. Behn explained that since this lease involves land, this article will require a Town Meeting vote rather than just a Board of Selectmen vote as previously thought. Robert Lane, Advisor to the Explorer Post, and Bob Rand, Post Advisor and Westborough Fire Captain, appeared before the Committee to provide clarification. Mr. Lane explained that Explorer Post 85 is a youth group affiliated with Boy Scouts and the auxiliary Fire Department here in town, providing emergency services, rehab facilities, and other community service activities. Their facility is located behind the Forbes Municipal Building. The land (the buildings belong to the Explorer Post) originally had a 25-year lease which expired in 2008. The Post intended to arrange another long-term lease in 2007, but the town was then in the midst of its facilities planning process. A short-term lease was agreed to with the hope that a long-term lease would at some point become possible. The Post would now like a new short-term lease under the same terms as the old one, a 3 year minimum plus two one-year auto-renewals. Mr. Lane and Mr. Rand indicated that the Post's goal is to remain at their present location. Mr. Lane noted that a consideration of \$1/year was in effect at this location. Mr. Arnold moved to recommend the Town so vote. The vote to approve the article recommendation is unanimous, 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Article 19. Photovoltaic Installations. Jim Robbins, Westborough Planning Director, appeared before the Committee to provide clarification. He explained that the purpose of this article is to provide standards for solar panel placement, including mitigation for protecting residential areas and scenic, natural and historic resources. He noted that the town does not oppose solar power but needs reasonable restrictions for these large-scale installations (defined as more than 250 kilowatt hours or 1000 sq ft, including associated equipment). Mr. Robbins added that some residents had expressed concern that installations near residential neighborhoods could affect property values. A public hearing was held on September 18th. Mr. Robbins distributed a map highlighting potential locations for solar panels, which showed 242 lots of three acres or more, and 79 lots of ten acres or more; if all these locations were utilized for solar panels it would have a significant impact. He explained that these restrictions did not apply to solar panel installations on roofs or attached to a dwelling.

Ms. Rosenblum Senie thought it made sense to establish these zoning regulations. Mr. Malone felt residents had over-reacted to the Fisher Street location, and that solar power should be encouraged. He pointed out that the Board of Selectmen had discussed whether these regulations should come forward now in rough form, or deferred to spring Town Meeting as a more complete package. Mr. Robbins explained that the article was being brought forward now because the Planning Board anticipated a rush to take advantage of increased tax credits before December 31, 2012. Mr. Behn noted that zoning bylaws could always be amended as necessary by 2/3 vote and felt it was prudent to act quickly. Ms. Rosenblum Senie

moved to recommend the Town so vote. The vote to approve the article recommendation is 7 in favor, 1 opposed (Malone), with 8 being present.

Regarding the Veterans' Freedom Park article, Mr. Robbins explained that the article did not lift restrictions, merely established dimensional regulations for items which the town may add in the future. He noted that once this envelope is established, nothing could be built outside of it. There will be a presentation on this at Town Meeting. Mr. Robbins added that the special permit allowing this property to be accepted as Open Space was granted by the Planning Board, so it was important to hear its view.

Article 2. Fire Station. Mr. Behn noted that the Board of Selectmen had made a motion to Appropriate \$1.2 million from Free Cash and Borrow \$10,008,000, for a total of \$11,208,000 for this article. Assuming a 3.5% borrow rate over 20 years, he calculated the town would save \$441,000 in interest using partial Free Cash in this way. Mr. Wells had done some analysis on using Free Cash to offset the town's annual debt service, feeling it would be more cost-effective than using Free Cash up front. He would like more time to look into the numbers. Mr. Malone noted that Mr. Wells' suggested use of Free Cash might cost more overall due to a greater Borrow, but could smooth the way for other projects to proceed more quickly. Mr. Arnold felt the motion should include the demolition of the old fire station, to agree with the article. He did not want to micro-manage the budget, and noted that if the town borrows less, it pays less in interest. He was in favor of fronting the \$1.2 million in Free Cash to allow the Building Committee to get started on this project. He added that this article authorized the maximum amount the town could borrow for this project, but did not specify how the borrowing is to be done. Ms. Rosenblum Senie wanted to know the state of the town's Free Cash reserves after these articles. Mr. Behn is waiting for clarification on this from Town Manager Jim Malloy. Ms. Blazejewski pointed out that towns are bound by different restrictions, and was inclined to go along with the broad concept of borrowing less and paying less interest. Mr. Tepper was in favor of getting the project done without spending more than necessary. Mr. Behn was concerned about the AFC trying to drive borrowing policy. He asked Mr. Wells to provide specific numbers to the Committee so members could fully understand his proposal.

Mr. Arnold moved that the Committee recommend that \$11,208,000 is appropriated for the purpose of financing the costs of construction of a new Fire Station, including all costs incidental or related thereto, and including the demolition of the existing fire station; that to meet this appropriation \$1,200,000 shall be transferred from Free Cash and the Treasurer with the approval of the Board of Selectmen is authorized to Borrow \$10,008,000 under G.L.c.44, §7(3) or any other enabling authority; and that the Board of Selectmen is authorized to take any other action to carry out this project. The vote to approve this article recommendation is 6 in favor, 2 abstentions (Malone, Wells), with 8 being present.

Article 9. Homeless Transportation. Mr. Behn noted that the motions from the Town Manager did not specify whether this Article is a Raise and Appropriate or a use of Free Cash, and added that the School Committee will vote on this tomorrow night. In Town Accountant Leah Talbot's Recap spreadsheet this \$120,000 is theoretically a Raise and Appropriate, but as it will be offset by increased revenue receipts of \$120,000 there will be no effect on taxes. No vote taken.

Article 11. Flanders Road Sewer. Mr. Behn noted that this is a Borrow of \$800,000, and that 52% of this will eventually be reimbursed by Hopkinton. Mr. Arnold moved to recommend the Town approve the draft motion as received from the Town Manager. The vote to approve the article recommendation is unanimous, 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Article 12. Crownridge Sewer. Mr. Behn noted that this Borrow of \$500,000 was in addition to the \$2.2 million previously approved for this project as Article 15 at the October 2011 Special Town Meeting. Mr. Arnold moved to recommend the motion as received from the Town Manager. The vote to approve the article recommendation is unanimous, 8 in favor with 8 being present.

Article 14. Senior Center Parking Lot Lighting. The Committee will hear from Municipal Building Committee member George Barrette at Thursday's meeting. No vote taken.

Mr. Behn noted Police Chief Alan Gordon's presentation regarding the Bow Hunting article. There was some discussion of whether the Chief should come before the Committee to answer questions. Members are to forward their questions to Mr. Malone, who will request clarification via email.

AFC Report & Recommendation

Mr. Behn had prepared an initial draft of the report. He noted that it would need to be accepted at Thursday's meeting for delivery to the printer by Sunday noon. The Committee reviewed the report, particularly the AFC message to voters on page 6. Mr. Malone felt it was too early in the budget process for this message. Ms. Rosenblum Senie appreciated the discussion but did not want to cross the line between presenting the facts, and telling others how they should look at the budget process. She felt it was difficult to craft a message which summarized the perspective of the entire Committee, and that editorial messages and opinions should be left out. Mr. Tepper pointed out that as an Advisory Committee members were to provide advice to residents, even if their opinions were not unanimous. He felt even diverse opinions should be available to voters, adding that the average town resident is unable to investigate issues as thoroughly as the Finance Committee does. Ms. Rosenblum Senie responded that the Committee provides its recommendations through its votes and deliberations which are all open to the public. She felt the report should not present the "opinion of the Committee" when everyone on the Committee did not agree with it. Mr. Malone felt the message was more appropriate for the ATM report, while Ms. Blazejewski felt the comments were a good springboard for the process to come. Mr. Behn felt the ATM was too late to provide direction for the budget process. Mr. Arnold felt the report should make a distinction between what is unanimously agreed by the Committee and individual members' opinions, and that STM was an avenue for the Committee to communicate its approach to the budget cycle.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Behn noted that according to Town Assessor Linda Swadel, the current proposed valuation is \$3,288,146,500, an increase in proposed total value. The good news is that the average single-family home value will increase from \$405,500 to \$420,250 and the tax rate will go down to \$19.03. The bad news is that the average single-family tax bill will still go up approximately \$200. Mr. Behn also commended the Cultural Council on Arts in Common. It was a wonderful day, with outstanding music; a tremendous event for the town.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

Mr. Malone expressed concerned with the length of the Warrant; last year there were 15 articles, this year there are 29. He felt that STM was meant to be for special items which couldn't wait for the regular town meeting, and that it was better for voters to see everything at once to get an overall view.

Mr. Behn reminded Ms. Blazejewski to get sworn in as the AFC member of Capital Expenditure.

Adjournment

Mr. Arnold moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 p.m. Vote to adjourn was 8 in favor, with 8 being present.

Document List

Draft STM 2012 Report & Recommendations.
Selected Lots with Residential Zoning, prepared by Jim Robbins.