

Members Present: Gary Wells, Chair, Sharon Kaiser, Hank Rauch, Peter Allen, Tara Howard, Lisa Blazejewski, Beth Blumberg. Absent: Ed Behn, Jim Tepper.

At 7:05 p.m. Mr. Wells called the meeting to order in Room 23 of the Forbes Municipal Building.

Call to Order/Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

Approval of Past Minutes

Meeting No. 3, September 25, 2014

Mr. Wells decided to wait on a vote from the Committee until all members had a chance to review the minutes.

School Department/Committee – Review of Fall Special Town Meeting (STM) Articles 17 through 20

School Superintendent, Amber Bock, Director of Finance and Administration, Irene Oliver, and School Committee Chair, Steve Doret met with the AFC to review Articles 17 through 20 in the warrant for the STM.

Article 17, School Budget Appropriation. Mr. Wells asked if there was an approved contract yet – and if so, is there a budgetary request (number). Mr. Doret said the amount of money they are looking at is \$89,500, which is a combination of a settlement of 4 of the 6 units (teachers, secretaries, custodians, and food service), plus a tentative agreement with the other 2 units (paraprofessionals and tutors). Mr. Doret mentioned that he is pleased with the results. The agreement provides security for union members, as well as an understanding of the dynamics to the increase and what it means toward their employment. Ms. Bock pointed out that the paraprofessionals and tutors are voting October 15th and 16th. Ms. Oliver mentioned that she will send updated numbers to Mr. Wells on October 17th. Mr. Doret stated that the number that was given of \$89,500 should be the maximum. If a vote is taken and the offer is declined, then they would reduce that figure of \$89,500. The contract would be ratified, after taking out what wasn't voted on, and then they would come back in the spring with something else. Ms. Bock said that the contract would be retroactive to 7/1/14, so there's incentive to resolve it now.

Article 18, Mill Pond Test Drilling and Well Installation. Mr. Wells provided a handout with some questions regarding the irrigation system that was installed and the well installation, along with a map of the Mill Pond area. Ms. Bock also passed out folders to Committee members containing handouts with the Superintendent's FY 15 Operating Budget Request and a Capital Improvement Plan prepared by Irene Oliver. Ms. Bock said that the irrigation system was proposed originally when the Mill Pond School was being built but then deferred it so the school could open on time. She pointed out that over 850 students utilize the field on a yearly basis. Ms. Bock said that the field was done with a shallow topsoil base so irrigation has always been an issue. She mentioned that the cost for the irrigation system was put through the Mill Pond maintenance budget since the current watering system of using hoses and a tank put a strain on the maintenance staff. It was originally thought that they would use Town water since that's what they had been doing, but the DPW suggested seeking a well. Mr. Wells asked if they had an estimate as to how much water the irrigation system would use. Mr. Doret said they could get that information. Mr. Wells wanted to get an idea of the impact if using Town water. Mr. Doret did a quick calculation and guessed that the Mill Pond field might take about 100,000 gallons of water per day. He pointed out that well water is not treated so it would cost less. Mr. Rauch asked if \$50,000 was enough to cover the cost of the well, pipes, connections, and controls. Mr. Doret said that they have asked the new Director of Buildings and Grounds, Gordon Richardson, for a detailed analysis to present to the various committees and Town itself if questioned. Mr. Doret mentioned that they have struggled with moisture problems with the gym floor and have a good idea where to locate the well. Mr. Doret also mentioned that the high school utilizes a well to water their fields, and that The Willows has a well which helped in lowering the water table in that area.

Mr. Wells asked when the irrigation system was installed and what it cost. Ms. Oliver said it was installed over this past summer and cost about \$22,000. The cost was incurred in FY '14 and taken out of the Mill Pond Maintenance Account. Ms. Oliver explained the reason why the request wasn't sent through the capital planning process was that the cost was

part of the original budget for the school but was deferred. Mr. Doret said they are taking this vote to Town Meeting because of the cost savings if they install a well right away and not use the treated water from the Town. When Mr. Wells asked about the type of well, Mr. Doret said it would be a shallow well with pipes installed under the surface of the soil so kids don't get hurt. Mr. Allen asked, if they received approval, when would the work be done. Mr. Doret said that they'd look to complete the work in April/May, which is why they don't want to wait until the Annual Town Meeting. Ms. Blumberg asked if installing the well would impact the students. Ms. Oliver pointed out that they usually like to perform projects over vacations when students aren't around. Mr. Doret said that he thinks the well will be installed behind the gymnasium which wouldn't impact students. He thought the whole project should take about 3 weeks. Mr. Allen asked if any work will be completed by the Town and Mr. Doret said that all work will be done by outside vendors. They are currently gathering vendor quotes – and if approved at Town Meeting – will go with the low bidder.

Article 19, Web-Based Interfaced Direct Digital Control System at the High School and Mill Pond School. Ms. Bock referred to the handout in the folder she passed out from the Director of Buildings and Grounds, Gordon Richardson, regarding cost savings for installing web based digital control systems at the High School and Mill Pond School. She said that they went with a more conservative cost savings of 5-10% on utilities and labor overtime costs. Because Mill Pond is a newer school, she didn't think the savings would be as high as 20%. Ms. Bock also pointed out that Mr. Richardson said that parts will expire for the current system and that will be the same for the other elementary schools as well. Mr. Wells said that if it proves to be a good system then certainly they may want to consider doing this upgrade with the other schools. Mr. Doret mentioned that the High School and Mill Pond are newer schools so it is easier to install this type of upgrade, with the older schools it will be more difficult. Mr. Doret said they will keep this system in mind during the Gibbons renovation. It was mentioned that the new Buildings and Grounds Director is looking at cost savings measures for utilities and that is his strength. Ms. Oliver also mentioned that they are looking to the utility companies to provide ways to save. Ms. Oliver pointed out that it has been a progression to get to this point. Mr. Doret said that the High School has had some recent issues that Mr. Richardson is investigating so there could be more of these types of articles.

Article 20, Wireless Access Points. Ms. Bock explained that they made bandwidth upgrades last year across all of the schools but now they need more wireless access points. She explained that the high school really needed help. PARCC, MCAS, and state level testing all need to be taken seriously – especially since MCAS testing is part of receiving a high school diploma. Currently the state is working toward a PARCC system where students will be tested on a computer. Ms. Bock deferred the computerized testing this year while working toward upgrading Mill Pond and Gibbons so computerized testing can be done. Ms. Bock was asked what the deadline was for having to take these state mandated tests on a computer, and she said that this year is a test pilot and then they will vote if moving forward. Ms. Bock guessed that it would be about 2 years to give schools time to catch up. Ms. Bock said that grades 3 through 10 will be computerized, but 10th grade has 2 years so they will start with the 8th grade to get them familiar by 10th grade. Ms. Bock will defer computerized testing for the 10th graders to give them time to upgrade. Ms. Bock mentioned that we are currently not providing the right technology and they were cited for that during the last accreditation. They have been slow in moving teachers to lap tops because of the lack of wireless access points. Mr. Rauch asked with this increase in technology will there be a request for a major investment coming for computers and Ms. Bock said "yes". She said that the schools are presenting these articles and want to let the Finance Committee know about their planning process. Ms. Bock mentioned that they will collaborate with the Finance Committee when the time comes. Mr. Doret said that they have three goals – the first is to perform according to the state mandate. The second would be to maintain our standard of education, which has been nationally recognized and is the best we can do with the money supplied. Mr. Doret recognized that technology isn't cheap and Town Meeting has been helpful, but if the quality of education goes down so could home prices. The third goal would be the success of the kids. Ms. Bock said there are a range of models and approaches being put in place for electronic devices and that some towns require students to bring their own device. Her goal is to maintain the cost for students and the Town, and she mentioned the best model she has seen has been a shared cost. Mr. Allen asked if they would be collaborating with the MIS/GIS staff with the Town and if that would help as part of their investigation. Ms. Bock mentioned that the two school systems she was previously a part of – Weston and Wellesley – had strong joint projects between the Town and schools. She pointed out that Mr. Richardson has been collaborating with the DPW on the well project. Ms. Howard asked if there would be an opportunity for cost

savings by offering textbooks online. Ms. Bock said “yes” but that it takes about 3 years to see those savings since there are initial costs.

General School Department Comments and Concerns

Mr. Wells asked if the School Committee/Department had any comments or concerns that they wished to discuss. Mr. Doret said he is concerned with the population of the school system and trends going forward. He mentioned that the Town needs to be careful with future planning and the impact on the Town’s budget. With new multifamily units opening, the schools are seeing an increasing growth of students in the younger grades. Mr. Doret mentioned the cost to educate a student in Westborough versus what apartment dwellers are paying in taxes. He said that maintaining a quality school system is difficult if they’re always playing catch up and spoke about the possibility of building a new school. He pointed out the State’s new school planning mandates that they have to follow, and if they have to build a new school that it could take years before construction starts. Mr. Doret felt that the Town needs to work together with the School Department/Committee to understand future trends. Mr. Wells asked if they will be presenting some demographic outlines at the Town Meeting. Ms. Bock said she has been working with Town Planner, Jim Robbins, over the past few weeks to get him demographic numbers. Ms. Bock mentioned that the missing population is preschool since many of these students aren’t enrolled in the public schools yet. She said she was asked for a density impact number from the Planning Board so she is working on assembling a list of the number of students from the new complexes. She said that they need to figure out the growth capacity so they can consistently offer the same level of quality education that brought people to town – it is not just the number of kids, but the number of spaces. There was a discussion of having to build a new school and possibly using some of the land at the former State Hospital property. Ms. Bock emphasized the need to partner with the Town and share information so that future plans for the Town and schools are in sync. Ms. Bock is working on having a better study done indicating space available in the schools. Mr. Rauch asked if the Planning Board has ever gone back and looked at assumptions they made versus reality and if those assumptions were close. If not, Mr. Rauch suggested that different assumptions need to be made. Ms. Kaiser asked if there were any grades in particular that are larger than others. Ms. Bock said she thought the second and fourth grades were big classes. She will send a print out to Mr. Wells since she just compiled this data for the School Committee. Ms. Bock pointed out that families are moving in to Westborough during the school year as Westborough Woods is being completed, so this can sometimes have a financial impact. Mr. Doret thinks the younger grades will get bigger and then there will be a pyramid effect toward high school. Ms. Blazejewski mentioned class sizes and possibly having 26 students in one classroom. Mr. Doret said that this is one of the challenges they face. As student enrollment increases, if they need to build a new school then they have to compile data, do preliminary work, talk to an architect and engineer to design a new building – and that can all take years.

Ms. Blumberg asked Ms. Bock if they have looked at having high school student’s start later in the day. Ms. Bock said she is waiting to see how it goes with some other districts that are implementing a later start time. She mentioned the cost potential to busing, but also pointed out that Weston opted not to start later but made some other changes instead. Ms. Bock will continue to monitor these studies and other districts. Mr. Wells brought up classroom size and thought it could increase in size as students enter their later years in high school as a way of preparing them for going off to larger classrooms and lecture halls in college. Mr. Doret would like to see better training in high school so students are not distracted when they are in college. Ms. Bock pointed out that teachers need to be trained on how to handle larger classrooms, while also being innovating. Ms. Bock wants to figure out how kids learn - and make it fun - so kids want to go to school. There was continued discussion about the schools collaborating more with the Town departments. For instance, Ms. Howard mentioned that it would be difficult to partner with the MIS/GIS department in town since there is a privacy issue with kids learning online. Mr. Doret pointed out that there are things the schools do that are different than what the Town does - but some areas may benefit. Mr. Wells suggested looking to build a new school ourselves through the Municipal Building Committee and leave the State out of it. Mr. Doret said we may be able to build a school cheaper without State involvement - and quicker.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Wells asked Committee members to review the Report & Recommendation (R&R) book and let him know if they see any errors. He mentioned he is still waiting for some updated numbers that he should have later this week.

Westborough Advisory Finance Committee minutes
September 29, 2014

Mr. Allen informed the Committee that the next Municipal Building Committee meeting will be October 8th. He also said that they are still firming up the move in date from the old fire station to the new one.

Ms. Blazejewski said that the Capital Expenditure Planning meetings won't start until around the end of the year, so she had nothing to report. Regarding the Charter Review Committee, she informed AFC members that they have an attorney attending their next Charter Review meeting on 10/2 to provide legal ramifications and advice on changing Charter bylaws. Once that information is summarized, they will present to the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Blazejewski extended an invitation to the AFC to come in again and meet with the Charter Review Committee.

Adjournment

Ms. Blazejewski made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:46 p.m. The vote to adjourn was 7-0-0 in favor, with 7 being present.

Document List

Capital Improvement Plan – Irene Oliver

Superintendent's FY 15 Operating Budget Request

Article 18 – Mill Pond Test Drilling and Well Installation handout (questions and map) - Gary Wells

Old DDC Control System vs. Web Based DDC Control System - Gordon Richardson, Dir. Of Buildings & Grounds

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Thomas

AFC Administrative Assistant