

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

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Wells called the meeting to order in Room 23 of the Forbes Municipal Building.

Open Forum

There were no requests to address the Committee.

Approval of Past Minutes:

Meeting No. 9, November 3, 2014

Mr. Behn requested a correction to the minutes. Mr. Rauch made a motion to approve the amended minutes from 11-3-14. VOTED: 8-0-1 (abstention: Kaiser).

School Committee/Department – Steve Doret, Amber Bock, and Jody Hensley

Reserve Fund Request

School Superintendent, Amber Bock, School Committee Chair, Steve Doret, and School Committee members, Jody Hensley and Ilyse Levine-Kanji, met with the AFC regarding a Reserve Fund Transfer Request. Mr. Doret explained that the schools would like to have a demographic and needs study done to determine growth potential within the schools and how quickly they may need more space. Mr. Doret pointed to the recent joint meeting held on November 24th between the School Committee, Board of Selectmen, and Planning Board to discuss school enrollment predictions. The need for a study was an outcome from that meeting and they are requesting approximately \$25,000 to get that done. Mr. Doret mentioned that other Town departments would also benefit from this study and they'd like to get it started as soon as possible. The study will look at current growth, along with future enrollment, as well as space capacity within the schools. Mr. Rauch suggested that departments who would benefit from this study, like the Planning Board, coordinate with the School Committee so they have similar requirements for the study. Mr. Doret said that once they have a draft of their requirements for the study, they will run it by Town Planner, Jim Robbins, and the Board of Selectmen to make sure everyone is on board. Mr. Wells felt parameters should be set so the next Committee could take the appropriate steps going forward – whether it's to build a new school or to perform renovations. Ms. Bock said that one of the positive outcomes of the joint meeting was the agreement by all concerned that information should be pooled across different resources so the Town and schools could come to a shared consensus. Mr. Allen agreed with the priority value of the study but asked why they were coming to the AFC now when they have a large school budget. He asked if they could find the \$25,000 needed for the study within their current budget. Mr. Doret was concerned that at the end of the year they may not have the \$25,000 in their budget and may have to shortfall on something else. He mentioned that they saved about \$10,000 through labor negotiations so they only need \$25,000 for the study, which will actually cost \$35,000. School Committee member, Ilyse Levine-Kanji pointed out that the study is related to the schools but also part of Town planning. Mr. Doret said they could go to Town Meeting in March and request the funds if the AFC doesn't agree with the transfer. There was concern by AFC members that the Reserve Fund may be needed for snow and ice removal, however, if the Reserve Fund is overspent members pointed out that a request for additional funds could be made at Town Meeting by the AFC. Mr. Tepper asked if the cost of the study was kept to an amount not to exceed \$35,000 since that's the maximum amount a Town department can spend without doing a full Request for Proposal (RFP). Ms. Bock mentioned that if they didn't have to go through the RFP process then they could move the study along a little more quickly. They went to the company that they had used on a previous study and they tailored the information requested to the amount they could spend. Ms. Bock said that they have other studies and reports related to this subject, along with information from the Planning Board, and they plan on pooling all of these resources together. Mr. Behn also pointed out the study done by DRA Architects and Ms. Bock said they'll use that data as well to make a strong decision. She said

they'll need input from the architects on whether additions can be built and where on school property as a consideration. Ms. Kaiser asked about a time frame for the study and Ms. Bock hopes to have the study completed in 3 months but doesn't want it rushed. Mr. Doret said they hope to have the results of the study by the Annual Town Meeting in March since ideally they should have had the study done two years ago when they started building the Toll Brothers development. The increasing population growth in Westborough was discussed as compared to some other towns in Eastern Massachusetts that are experiencing a decline in growth. Ms. Hensley and Mr. Doret pointed out the number of companies in this area and the easy access to public transportation. They felt that people want to live close to where they work and also want their children to have a good education, which is why Westborough is experiencing an increase in their population of young families with school age children. Ms. Bock thought that a build out could result in a population of up to 22,000 in Westborough. She felt that a study would help to figure out what the quality of life might look like at that population level. Mr. Behn made a motion to transfer \$25,000 from the AFC Reserve Fund to the School Department for the purpose of a study to determine capacity and population needs in the schools. VOTED: 9-0-0, with 9 being present.

Mr. Wells mentioned that the AFC would like to begin early preparations for the Annual Town Meeting (ATM). He pointed out that the School Department has the biggest budget and the AFC would like to meet in January since they may have a lot of questions. Ms. Levine-Kanji reminded the AFC that the School Committee is having their public meeting on December 10th for those who would like to attend. Mr. Behn said, as liaison, he would coordinate a meeting between the AFC and School Department/Committee.

John Arnold, Town Moderator

Mr. Arnold met with the AFC. He wanted to thank everyone on the Committee for their hard work in preparing for the Special Town Meeting in October. There was discussion about how large the warrant was and the difficulty the AFC encountered in advising voters since there was not a lot of time to fully research the articles due to the short amount of time between the approval of the warrant and the Special Town Meeting. Committee members felt there were some financial articles that could have waited until the Annual Town Meeting in March and that the Selectmen could have limited the number of articles on the warrant. Mr. Arnold mentioned the Report & Recommendation (R&R) books that the AFC prints up for voters and how he appreciates that these are provided to the voters. Regarding printing the glossary separately, he thought that was a good idea. Mr. Arnold said that, as Moderator, he plans to update the notes regarding how the Town Meetings work and that these, too, could be considered for inclusion in a separate document that could re-used from Town Meeting to Town Meeting. There was discussion about the cost of printing based on the number of pages in the book and also suggestions about changing the size of the booklet.

At Mr. Wells' suggestion, Mr. Arnold also reviewed the comments that he sent to the Charter Review Committee in September. He said that he has been quite involved with Town government for the past 40 years and wanted to provide his personal observations and recommendations, though as Town Moderator he isn't taking any specific position. He reviewed what he felt has worked over the years during his tenure when interacting with existing boards. Mr. Arnold said that he hasn't heard of many problems with the current Charter, so he didn't feel there was much to fix. He pointed out that the organizational chart that has been recently developed and shown at various meetings may look complicated to some but that the Government Study Committee I (to which Mr. Arnold served as AFC liaison and member) worked with a similar chart and that there were specific discussions and reasons for why the chart - especially with regard to the appointing authorities - is set up the way it is. Mr. Arnold felt that currently elected officials should remain elected, and that a lack of competition in elections does not necessarily mean that things need changing. It just as likely means voters are satisfied with their representation. He also felt that elected officials are more responsive to the voters. Mr. Arnold discussed that the Board of Selectmen leads the Executive Branch of town government and, as a Board, act in an analogous capacity to the Governor and President at the State and Federal levels, respectively. Though the Selectmen are more part-time executives than the Governor or President, they have the ability to delegate day-to-day management to others in the Executive Branch (such as the Town Manager) but that the Selectmen retain the responsibility and authority for overseeing the Executive Branch. He also pointed out that there has been some discussion about a possible

shift in appointing authority with regard to department heads who answer to town committees (e.g., Recreation Committee, Youth Committee).

Regarding the subject of term limits (a topic that was brought up at a meeting of the current Charter Review Committee) for individuals on boards, committees, or commissions, Mr. Arnold noted that the Government Study Committee I also discussed this and decided not to propose any term limit changes. Those discussions noted that getting new people involved in town government is beneficial. However, term limits don't guarantee that new volunteers will step forward. They also felt that each appointing authority of committees could already enact their own term limits by not re-appointing an individual.

Mr. Arnold said he would try to write up a follow up to his comments from September based on comments to the Charter Review Committee made after his appearance at the Committee. Mr. Arnold mentioned that he takes the power of the voter very seriously and felt that having elected officials (who are directly selected by the voters) appoint key personnel provides the greatest accountability and transparency.

Ms. Howard asked about items in the Charter where the process that occurs isn't what is currently written. Mr. Arnold thought that rather than changing the wording in the Charter to reflect what's happening now, that the problem should be identified, hypothesize what would happen in the best and worst cases, and then write up what seems to be the best or right process. This would allow a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of what is currently written and what is currently in practice rather than presuming that the current practice is necessarily better than what is currently prescribed in the Charter.

There was discussion about parts of the Charter that seem to be in conflict with Massachusetts General Law (MGL) and changing the Charter because we need to follow MGL. Ms. Blazejewski pointed out that there have been attorneys involved in the Charter Review process. Mr. Arnold mentioned it has been confusing in the past since he's heard that the Charter should be changed to match MGL, but has also heard from attorneys that, in some cases, the Charter can supersede MGL, so he's not sure which statement is correct. Mr. Doret pointed out that MGL may not be specific, so if we clarify in the Charter, then that should stand. Mr. Arnold mentioned that changes to the Charter can only be done by the voters by approving changes at a Town Meeting. Ms. Blazejewski said that she didn't think they'll have any changes by the Annual Town Meeting in March or, if they do, that there will be many of them. Any changes to the Charter will come in the form of warrant articles. AFC members mentioned that they want a clear understanding of what is being proposed as a change, and why, so they can make their recommendations. Mr. Arnold also encouraged residents to read the Charter so they are aware of the current Charter and can assess the reasoning for any changes that may be proposed.

AFC FY2016 Budget

Mr. Wells wanted to review his proposed budget for the AFC for FY2016 with the Committee. He mentioned that some highlights included increasing the "Dues and Memberships" line item so AFC members can be reimbursed for attending the Association of Town Finance Committees Annual Meeting in Franklin, MA. Mr. Wells also mentioned that "Printing and Copying" costs decreased. There was discussion on how the AFC could reduce their budget further in order to come in at a 2% increase since that's what is being requested from other departments. It was noted that "Wages-Clerical" is dictated by step and cost of living increases and it is difficult to cut that part of the budget since there's only one employee. In looking at the other two line items, the Committee agreed that "Printing and Copying" could be reduced by \$150 to come in at a 2% increase. Committee members pointed out that if there's a third Town Meeting and another R&R Book needs to be printed, we could request a transfer. With "Printing and Copying" costs reduced from \$1,650 to \$1,500, Mr. Allen made a motion to approve the AFC budget for FY2016 as amended. VOTED: 8-0-0 (Ms. Blumberg was not present for this vote).

Mr. Wells referred to the handout that was provided to Committee members for the 2014 Annual Report. Mr. Wells asked members to review what he wrote and provide any changes. He mentioned that Mr. Allen sent him

his suggestion for an amendment that Mr. Wells provided in bold print and underlined. Mr. Wells noted that the 2014 Annual Report needs to be in by January 7th.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Behn reported that he and Ms. Howard have been attending the School Committee budget meetings. Mr. Behn mentioned that the school budget for FY2016 is at about a 2.56% increase, which is mostly due to reductions in out of district education (special needs). He said that the schools are using more circuit breaker reimbursement for special needs and this reimbursement is deposited in to the revolving fund. Mr. Behn said that the revolving fund is always in arrears since the schools are reimbursed next year for this year and wondered if the schools were leaving enough money in that account to cover what's needed. Mr. Behn has asked the Director of Finance and Administration, Irene Oliver, for her revolving fund estimates. Mr. Behn referred to a binder he had from DRA Architects who were hired to perform a study on each school and provided prioritized recommendations on what should be done (with the exception of the Gibbons school). DRA Architects categorized each recommendation, with the high priority recommendations coming in at a cost of about \$5.5 - 6 million. Mr. Behn pointed out that the schools are going to have significant capital need requests coming up over the next few years.

Mr. Allen reported on the Municipal Building Committee. He said that the Fire Department has been fully operational in the new station for over three weeks now. The next phase will be to demolish the old station so it can be turned in to a parking lot for Fire Department personnel. Mr. Allen mentioned that an Open House is planned for the spring. He received a tour of the new station after the November 5th MBC meeting and he felt the MBC did a wonderful job in getting everything done that was necessary and needed. Mr. Wells said he was impressed as well. Mr. Allen said that they are still aiming for a May 2015 move in date for the Town Hall.

Mr. Tepper informed the Committee about the Gibbons renovation project. He said that a vote was taken at the last meeting on submitting a final plan to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA). Mr. Tepper reviewed the history of this project and mentioned that he pulled up an article published in 2010 where the cost for these renovations was estimated at \$6.3 million. After this article was published, the project was discussed at Town Meeting and the cost projected was \$9.5 million. About 7-8 weeks ago the cost for the renovations was at \$18 million. Currently the cost is around \$27 million after three plus years of working on this project. Mr. Tepper pointed out that about 52% of the \$27 million is soft costs with the actual construction coming in at about \$12.9 million, and the remaining funds being used for architects, insurance, bonds, contingency, over runs, etc. He also pointed out that the \$27 million didn't include air conditioning and they deleted some other items like new desks and chairs. Mr. Tepper reported that there was quite a bit of debate and discussion at their last meeting and some members felt that money should be taken out of the budget since MSBA won't cover costs not associated directly with the building. Mr. Tepper mentioned that the vote to go ahead with this project came in at 7-2, with Mr. Tepper and Town Manager, Jim Malloy, voting against the renovation plan. Mr. Tepper said he couldn't vote for this project knowing the cost and that they wouldn't get everything they wanted. He felt it might make more sense to tear down the current school and build a new one. Mr. Rauch asked if the renovation project would increase the capacity for students at the school and Mr. Tepper didn't feel it would by much. Mr. Rauch thought that it didn't make sense to spend that kind of money and not get a lot more room in the school. It was pointed out that the building needs to be made safe while updating the infrastructure and wiring. Mr. Tepper mentioned that Mr. Malloy asked for a list of what was originally proposed for this project, what was added, and then what was dropped, and said that the MSBA will reimburse around 44% of construction costs with their decision announced in January. However, there are other projects that need to be done in Town such as renovating the Forbes Building and possibly the Senior Center. Mr. Tepper didn't think the Town would back a \$27 million dollar renovation project at the Gibbons school and may only approve a partial amount. Mr. Behn mentioned the study done by DRA Architects where there's \$2 million in Priority 1 recommendations that should be taken care of immediately at the schools and another \$4.3 million in Priority 2 recommendations, which are mostly maintenance projects, becoming compliant with ADA and other regulations, and updates. Ms. Blazejewski pointed out that any project with a cost over \$25,000 should be coming through the Capital Expenditures Committee.

Comments and Concerns – Committee Members

None

Public Reminders for Viewers

None

Adjournment

Mr. Behn made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:35 p.m. The vote to adjourn was 8-0-0; with 8 being present (Ms. Blumberg was not present for this vote).

Document List

Comments to Charter Review Committee dated 9-4-14 – John E. Arnold, Town Moderator
Town of Westborough – Fiscal Year 2016 Advisory Finance Committee Budget
Advisory Finance Committee Annual Report – Gary Wells

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Thomas
AFC Administrative Assistant