

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

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

Fall Special Town Meeting – Warrant Articles

Spurr House Committee – Article 1 – Spurr House Committee Report & Article 2 – Spurr House Demolition – Bob Petrucelli, Chairman, Marjorie Peairs, Dan Messervey, and Phyllis Jaffee

The Chairman of the Spurr House Committee, Bob Petrucelli, provided a handout to AFC members with a summary of their meetings that have been held since last April. He also sent this summary to the Board of Selectmen. He explained that they have had 13 meetings so far and that over 30 people attended their Open House on September 12th. There were another 12-15 residents that attended their public meeting at the Library as well, where they discussed the current value of the house, along with zoning restrictions and other factors. He informed the Committee that they are looking at a number of options which include renovating the Spurr House and using it for municipal purposes, selling the Spurr House and having the buyer move it so the land can be used for municipal purposes, and demolishing the Spurr House for additional municipal parking, along with other options. Mr. Petrucelli mentioned that one of the options was to put the Spurr House up for sale at market value for an 18 month period of time. If it does not sell within that time period, then the Town can dispose of it as it sees fit. The Spurr House Committee felt an 18 month period of time was reasonable to attract buyers. Mr. Messervey, who is on the Spurr House Committee and also a realtor, said that it generally takes 2-3 visits for interested buyers to come back if they are looking at preserving the property, which can end up being about a 4-6 month process.

The Spurr House Committee said that their recommendation will likely be that the Town put the house up for sale for 18 months. Mr. Messervey mentioned that the house does need a lot of work. Mr. Rauch asked about the structural condition and Mr. Messervey said that Building Commissioner, Tin Htway went through the building and there aren't many structural issues, but rather it contains asbestos. Mr. Tepper mentioned that one of the recommendations of the Spurr House Committee was to sell the Spurr House and purchase 12 Grove Street. He pointed out that the 12 Grove Street property has lots of land but doesn't solve the Town problem since they'd still own another property. Ms. Howard asked about the current value of the Spurr House since she didn't feel it was realistic. Mr. Messervey pointed out that it is valued at \$220,000-\$250,000 as is. He mentioned that there are different values for homes in the downtown area and if someone purchased the home for a business, it would be a different value as if purchasing for residential use. Mr. Messervey noted the M-1 zoning and said that it is downtown zoned which includes using the property for a business. Mr. Petrucelli mentioned that a suggestion was made to put the house up for auction to the highest bidder. Ms. Blumberg asked what would happen if someone purchases the Spurr House and then turns it in to something that doesn't match the rest of the neighborhood. There was discussion about that possibility and the Spurr House Committee noted that it does have to go before the Zoning Board for approval. The Spurr House Committee was asked if they had a cost for removing lead and asbestos and they said they did not have an idea on those figures. They mentioned that they have been told there is a minimal amount of asbestos and that they are more concerned with the lead paint. The Spurr House Committee pointed out that the asbestos is mostly contained to the basement area near the heating system. Mr. Rauch noted the selling price of around \$250,000 and asked if the Town could buy a property within a 5 minute walk to the Library for that amount. Mr. Messervey didn't think so. Mr. Rauch was concerned with the Spurr House Committee's proposal since it helps with protecting that neighborhood but doesn't necessarily help the Town. Mr. Petrucelli replied that the goal of the Spurr House Committee wasn't to solve the downtown parking issue. Mr. Tepper verified that the address of the Spurr House was 7 Parkman Street and noted that the current value is \$442,000 per the Assessor's office. He pointed out that it is the most expensive house on the street. Ms. Jaffee mentioned that it is a large house but needs a lot of work. Mr. Tepper said that it is part of the process for

preparing for Town Meeting that the numbers are justified for the voters. Mr. Wells asked if the Spurr House Committee will have a Power Point presentation at Town Meeting and Mr. Petrucelli said they will. It was also suggested that the Spurr House Committee show both properties – Parkman Street, and the alternative of purchasing the property on Grove Street. Mr. Rauch asked if the Spurr House Committee will be making their motion on Town Meeting floor and Town Moderator, John Arnold, said that is the intention and he will be helping them with the correct wording of their motion. Mr. Wells asked if the Spurr House Committee's recommendation is to sell the house, why they couldn't make an offer of a one dollar selling price with the stipulation that the buyer is responsible for moving the house. Mr. Petrucelli noted that their recommendation is to have someone buy the house and renovate it at the current site.

Mr. Petrucelli was asked about Article 2 for demolishing the Spurr House and he said he was surprised when he saw that article. He indicated that the logical conclusion for having Article 2 was as a placeholder in the event that the Spurr House Committee recommended that the house be demolished. Ms. Howard hoped that, if the house was demolished, that part of the demolition funds would be used for fences and bushes if that site was turned in to a parking lot so the historic attraction of the neighborhood was preserved. Ms. Peairs mentioned that they heard from the neighbors on Parkman Street and part of the problem was that cars parked on both sides of the street, even though parking was only allowed on one side. This created difficulty for residents backing out of their own driveways, yet they looked at a new municipal lot where the Spurr House was located as attracting more traffic and not as a solution to the parking problem. Ms. Peairs noted that choices will have to be made. Mr. Rauch wondered if the motion for the Spurr House in Article 1 would make the second article for demolition moot. Mr. Behn pointed out that the argument could be made that we may have to wait a couple of years for the demolition if the property isn't sold. There was a discussion about the demolition delay clause. Mr. Blois noted that once you apply for the demolition permit, it triggers the demolition delay. He gave the old Fire Station as an example where they applied for the demolition permit but didn't have to go through the delay process since they had already met with the Historical Commission and saved the items they wanted to keep.

Municipal Building Committee – Article 2 – Spurr House Demolition – John Arnold & Dexter Blois

The Chairman of the Municipal Building Committee (MBC), John Arnold, along with MBC member, Dexter Blois, met with the AFC to provide their recommendation on what should happen with the Spurr House. Mr. Wells noted that it is understood that the Spurr House comes under the control of the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager, and not the MBC. It was also pointed out that the MBC supports demolition of the Spurr House for additional parking for the Library and for municipal use. Mr. Arnold and Mr. Blois were asked why funds for demolition were being requested now when they would still have to go through the permitting process. Mr. Blois pointed out that the MBC didn't recommend asking for money now for the demolition. He explained that he, along with Mr. Arnold, are helping with the Library renovation. They have assisted the Library with selecting an Owner's Project Manager (OPM), and also recommended that they put off the window replacement project at this time and roll it in to the grant they are seeking. Mr. Blois also wanted to point out that when the Town offices move out of the Forbes Building that it won't free up parking since the Library uses the Church parking lot located next door for Library patrons and he's not sure how long that will continue. Mr. Blois mentioned that both the Library and the MBC felt use of the Spurr House property for additional parking would be the right thing to do, and 50% of the cost for the demolition would be picked up by the State grant. Mr. Blois pointed out that the grant has to come first before the authorization to spend money. Mr. Wells asked why we need to appropriate this money now when we need to wait for the Library grant, which would be a minimum of 6 months, and the situation could change. Mr. Rauch felt that \$50,000 wasn't enough for demolition work. Mr. Wells noted that the \$50,000 being requested for demolition is only to knock the building down. Mr. Rauch asked if the Spurr House property was needed for additional parking in order to get the grant for the Library renovations. Mr. Blois said the additional parking was not needed in order to get the grant but it would be helpful. The AFC asked how many parking spots could be added if the Spurr House was demolished. Mr. Arnold said he has those figures and will email out to the AFC. Mr. Behn asked if those parking spots would need to be reserved for the Library and Mr. Blois said it would be nice but hard to enforce. Mr. Behn asked if the Town purchased the Grove Street property if that would be acceptable for Library parking and Mr. Blois felt it would be too far away. Mr. Blois thought that

Library parking should be adjacent to the Library but pointed out that Library Director, Maureen Ambrosino, may have a better answer. Mr. Tepper asked if the Spurr House was sold would part of the grant for the Library cover making that area in to a parking lot. Mr. Blois' recollection was that it wouldn't cover making that area in to a parking lot but rather getting it ready for a parking lot. Mr. Rauch asked if the MBC only needs a letter of authorization from the Town Manager in order to file for a demo permit. Mr. Blois said that was correct and then they would go in to demo delay for 6 months. It was noted that if the Spurr House is designated for demolition then it wouldn't need to be heated and maintained over the winter months. There was a discussion about the lead paint and that it would need to be removed if the buyer had children under the age of 7. Mr. Tepper asked if an incentive could be given for the purchaser to remove the house from the lot. For example, could \$50,000 be given to remove the house rather than pay \$100,000 to demolish? Mr. Wells noted that the AFC can only recommend that the Town hear and approve the report from the Spurr House Committee. Mr. Behn felt that the AFC could support the recommendation from the Spurr House Committee to put the house up for sale for 18 months. Mr. Wells thought that the AFC had to wait for the motion before giving their recommendation. Town Moderator, John Arnold, said that he will work with the Spurr House Committee on their motion and that it will be a recommendation that we expect, and then we can go from there. Mr. Rauch asked if the voters at fall Town Meeting decide to wait until the spring Town Meeting could the MBC come back with better costs for demolition. There was a discussion about coming to the Annual Town Meeting in March with a request for funds needed to renovate the Forbes Building. Mr. Blois noted that the MBC has designs and a plan, but would need documents that could take up to a year. Mr. Wells asked if the MBC would have a cost for a parking lot and Mr. Blois said they would, which would include regrading and resurfacing.

Open Forum

There was no one here to address the Committee.

Approval of Past Minutes

Meeting No. 2, September 10, 2015

Mr. Rauch made a motion to approve the amended minutes from 9-10-15. Voted: 6-0-1 (abstention: Howard).

Fall Special Town Meeting – Warrant Articles, Committee Discussion

Mr. Behn noted that MBC Chairman, John Arnold, needs to get back to the AFC with the number of parking spaces currently in the Forbes parking lot. Mr. Rauch felt it would be appropriate for the AFC to ask the Town Moderator to get us the motion that will be drafted as soon as possible, since it is difficult to have an intelligent conversation without knowing the motion. Mr. Wells reminded AFC members that we vote articles and not motions, and that the only recommendation the AFC is able to make is to hear the Spurr House Committee's report. AFC member's felt that money for the demolition of the Spurr House did not need to be voted now and could wait until the spring. Mr. Rauch felt Article 2 was premature since the Spurr House Committee's report is not complete and actual costs for demolition are not known.

Chairman, Committee Liaison, and Department Liaison Reports

Mr. Behn mentioned his email that was sent out to AFC members. He attached a page showing actual figures versus budget figures for FY15. Mr. Behn pointed out the total amount for out of district tuitions and noted it was the largest fluctuation between what was budgeted and the actual cost. Mr. Wells liked the summarized report and felt that the AFC could show residents that the Town did well with budgeting and didn't overspend.

Mr. Wells mentioned that he is working on a draft for the AFC's message to the voters. He said that he talks about good local receipts, continued austerity, the School Department coming in under budget, along with other factors as contributing to money going back to Free Cash. Mr. Wells noted that \$435,000 was voted for snow and ice removal, yet not all of that was needed, so \$16,000 went back to Free Cash. He also mentioned that the AFC Reserve Fund had \$250,000 in it and only \$40,000 was spent so \$210,000 was turned back. Mr. Wells felt it was helpful to show residents how we did last year. Mr. Behn added that sometimes we need to budget for the worst and then find savings along the way. Mr. Tepper noted that about \$837,000 was paid for private school tuitions yet that amount was never budgeted. He asked where this money came from. Committee members pointed out

that it came from other line items. Mr. Wells mentioned that he, along with Mr. Behn and Ms. Howard, have tried to improve the school budgeting process and what is reported to us. They are getting closer all the time but there are still areas for improvement. Mr. Wells noted that they have no control over the school budget and their process, and can only observe and point out discrepancies. He said that the total amount for the school budget is presented to the Town as a bottom line and that is what the Town votes. Mr. Rauch noted that we don't know how they found the money for private school tuitions but we know how it was spent. He mentioned that the schools could use extra funds to pre-pay tuitions for the next fiscal year. Mr. Behn said that he had asked the School Department last year to break out the pre-paid tuition in their expenses. Mr. Tepper felt that savings on line items should be picked up in the next year's budget. Mr. Behn gave the budgeted amount for phone services as an example. Every year the School Department budgeted for \$7,000 yet only spent \$2,000. Mr. Behn noted that they kept underspending on the telephone line item and overspending elsewhere. Mr. Tepper felt that the School Department should take what was spent last year and work off of that when projecting their budget for the following year. Mr. Behn mentioned that budgeted expenses for the Town departments are flat. Mr. Tepper pointed out that in a prior meeting it was noted that electrical costs will be consolidated and asked if there were any other line items where that may happen. Mr. Behn said that right now there are about 45 departments that could be consolidated to approximately 40, since some only have expenses. Mr. Rauch mentioned that electric costs could be consolidated because of net metering credits from the solar arrays. Mr. Wells would still like to see sub-accounts so we could tell what each department is spending on electric. Mr. Behn felt that tracking kilowatts was a better way to trace usage and cost. The Committee was in agreement to incorporate Mr. Behn's report in to the R&R book. Ms. Howard asked if next year's private school tuitions would be net \$837,000 that was prepaid. Mr. Wells didn't know what fiscal year that amount nets out in. Mr. Behn noted that private school tuitions are all part of the circuit breaker funds we receive a year later and that it needs to all be viewed together. Mr. Driscoll felt that part of the analysis that goes in to the budget should be taking in to account actual figures.

Comments and Concerns – Committee Members

Mr. Wells informed AFC members that he received the notification for the Annual Association of Town Finance Committee's meeting. It will be held on Saturday, October 17th, in Sturbridge for those AFC members that would like to attend. Mr. Wells mentioned that money has been budgeted for attendance by AFC members, however it is not mandatory. He will email the details out to the Committee.

Mr. Behn noted that he felt the Town Manager's statement for Article 17 – Rescinding the Strong Fire Chief Statute – was more of a proponent statement rather than a Town Manager statement. Mr. Behn thought that parts of the statement were unsubstantiated. He is going on record now that we should drop the Town Manager's statement for this article in the R&R book if it is not changed and add our own statement.

Public Reminders for Viewers

Mr. Behn wanted to remind viewers that Hazardous Waste Day is this Saturday, 9/26, at the DPW. Details can be found on the Town website.

Adjournment

Mr. Rauch made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 p.m. The vote to adjourn was 8-0-0 in favor, with 8 being present.

Document List

Spurr House Committee Options & Recommendations – Bob Petrucelli
Spurr House Committee Background Summary & Options – Bob Petrucelli
FY 2015 Actual vs. Budget – Ed Behn

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Thomas
AFC Administrative Assistant