

Members Present: Jo Lown, Chair, Bill Linnane, Cliff Watts, Ian Johnson, John E. Arnold, Brigitte Casemyr, Michael Meachen. Absent: Christine Hirsch, Judy Lucas.

At 7:03 p.m. Ms. Lown called the meeting to order in the Selectmen's Meeting Room.

### **Open Forum**

There were no requests to address the Committee.

### **Approval of minutes – Meeting No. 11, January 5, 2009.**

Mr. Arnold noted one typographical error in the draft minutes. Mr. Johnson moved to approve the minutes of meeting No. 12, February 2, 2009 as amended. The vote to approve the minutes was 7 in favor, with 7 being present.

### **Legislative Liaison Sub-Committee, AFC Representative(s)**

Ms. Lown has spoken with George Thompson about the role of the AFC representative to the Legislative Liaison Sub-Committee. Mr. Thompson does not anticipate any voting on this sub-committee and so that should not be an issue for the representatives. Mr. Thompson also did not believe there would be a problem with two AFC members serving on a rotating or alternate basis.

Ms. Lown nominated Cliff Watts and Ian Johnson to serve as rotating, alternate, or co-representatives to the Legislative Liaison Sub-Committee. The vote to approve Mr. Watts and Mr. Johnson as representatives was 7 in favor, with 7 being present.

### **Fiscal Year 2010 – Reports & Discussion**

#### **• Joint Meeting**

Ms. Lown thought the Joint Meeting was very interesting and provided an opportunity for more dialogue in several areas, including the numbers that go into the FY2010 Revenues and Expenditures Estimate. Questions raised at the meeting included the basis for the new growth estimates, overlay figures, absence of warrant articles, yet, and the local receipts estimates.

#### **• Capital expenditures**

Ms. Casemyr reported on the Wastewater Treatment Plant warrant article which has been submitted in the amount of \$56,000,000, in addition to funds previously approved by ATM. They will have firm bids by the next ATM, although the funding source will not likely be known at that time. The 2% interest rate is firm, but any federal stimulus funding for both general construction and energy conservation components is uncertain. The WWTP may make two presentations to the AFC, one earlier and another closer to the ATM. The Municipal Building Committee will be presenting a plan for the Public Safety Building to the Board of Selectmen on 2/24/09.

#### **• Town Manager's budget**

Ms. Lown commented favorably on the spreadsheet included in the town budget book, which shows level-funded, level-service, and Town Manager's recommended budgets for each department. The budget listed for the School Committee has been increased by \$500,000, to \$38,255,528 in the Town Manager's recommendations, an increase of approximately 1.3% over last year's budget. Ms. Lown requested Liaisons ask Department heads for any possible transfers of available funds from Warrant Articles approved in prior years. Leah Talbot, Town Accountant, will also review prior articles for any unused funds.

Ms. Lown noted that there are two FY2010 Revenues and Expenditures Estimates and that an updated version, dated February 10, 2009, was provided at the Joint Meeting. The new growth estimate used in calculating the previous Excess levy estimate was \$500,000. The most recent new growth estimate is \$700,000. The most recent Excess levy estimate is \$ 116,870.

The new growth and overlay figures are produced by Linda Swadel, Town Assessor. Other numbers are taken from the FY09 budget and/or the House I proposed state budget. All numbers are very fluid at this time. The actual collected revenue is only as of 12/31/08 so the amounts and percentages collected will change.

Mr. Meachen has compiled the actual new growth figures for the last ten years (2000 to 2009) using information available at [www.mass.gov/dor](http://www.mass.gov/dor) and confirmed by Ms. Swadel. He provided a summary of the historic trend: The three-year average is \$1,256,216 (2.63%), five-year average is \$1,537,702 (3.51%), and ten-year average is \$1,499,416 (4.02%). The lowest year was 2008 at \$764,435 (1.57%) and the highest was 2005 at \$2,754,084 (6.96%).

Ms. Casemyr noted that while 700,000 is conservative it may be wise to use this figure this year given the current economic climate. New growth is made up of new residential development plus new commercial development/redevelopment plus increases in inventory. The percentage of inventory in the new growth figure is very high, accounting for 60% of the total. This may not happen this year as an empty store brings in much less than a full/open store.

Mr. Arnold has learned that the Library will have a Warrant Article to have the bricks on a section of the building re-pointed, to repair damage from an earlier drainage problem. The early estimate for this work is \$45,000, but this may be able to be pooled with similar work needed at the Forbes Municipal Building in order to take advantage of economies of scale.

Mr. Johnson was pleased with Mr. Danis's presentation. He found the meeting to be helpful and collaborative. He was very pleased to have a budget that does not require a Proposition 2½ override, which other towns have not been able to do.

Ms. Lown stated that most towns are facing choices and evaluating priorities for this budget cycle. She requested that liaisons obtain Budget Impact statements from Department Heads and provide copies to the Committee in order to better understand the effects of budget cuts and level-funding.

### **Town Meeting Booklet**

- **Excess levy estimate**

Ms. Lown noted the Cherry sheet numbers are not finalized. School Aid number is not final, and Charter School and School Choice numbers may change significantly after spring enrollments are totaled. The excess levy estimate will be updated as new information is received and the estimate for the Town Meeting Booklet will reflect the information available at that time.

- **Historical budget trend analysis**

The Committee's historical budget trend analysis has been included with the Budget Article of the Booklet for several years. Mr. Johnson will enter the information for the upcoming Booklet. Mr. Johnson is also reviewing the prior figures for accuracy. He will update the spreadsheet as needed and then provide a copy to Mr. Meachen who is compiling data for the long-term planning project. .

The Committee discussed a timeline and work plan for the next few months. The Committee will aim to have the Town Meeting Booklet ready to post on its Web page and sent to the printer so it will be available in advance of Town Meeting.

**Liaison Updates**

Mr. Linnane reported that Youth & Family Services is ready to make their presentation to the AFC. The Council on Aging will be ready after the second week in March. The Recreation Department has requested an early presentation as Mr. DeSiata will have other commitments beginning the first week of March. The Historical Commission would also like to come in early in the month.

Mr. Watts reported that he and Ms. Lucas are following the School Committee deliberations, but they are not ready to make a presentation. Mr. Watts and Ms. Lucas will meet with Assabet Valley Regional Technical School District before any presentation is scheduled.

Ms. Lown has met with Ms. Talbot, and will ask her if she would like to make a presentation. Ms. Lown will meet with Maryanne Bilodeau and Greg Franks soon.

Mr. Johnson, Ms. Casemyr and Mr. Linnane have met with the DPW. They could present their budget soon. Mr. Johnson reported that Chief Perron, Fire Department, is ready to make his presentation.

Mr. Arnold reported that the Library is ready to present, although they may not have estimates on the work needed. He will meet with Chief Gordon, Police Department, and with Joanne Savignac, Treasurer, in the next week. He would like to meet with the Country Club again before they are scheduled.

Ms. Casemyr reported that the WWTP is wrestling with an issue from contaminated soil from the Mass Turnpike and the Exxon Mobile station at the rest area. This contaminated soil was cleaned up once but further contamination has since been found in the groundwater, and contaminated seepage is flowing into an abutter's yard. There has been a request for a five-year hook-up to the town sewer for the rest area, but the WWTP is waiting to meet with representatives of all parties before any decision will be made. Ms. Casemyr met with the new MIS/GIS Director last week. His budget is level-funded and he is ready to make his first presentation to the AFC.

Ms. Lown noted that the WWTP will also have the issue of a large increase for FY09 budget, due to a contractual increase in September 2008. The AFC might consider a transfer of funds from reserve to pay the portion of the charge that is reimbursed from other towns but there may be a need for this money elsewhere as well. The WWTP is advised to bring a Warrant Article to ATM to cover the shortfall. The Committee will wait until closer to Town Meeting when it has actual numbers before deciding on a course of action.

Mr. Meachen has contacted Nancy Yendriga, Town Clerk, and George Perry, Veterans Services, but has not yet met with them.

Mr. Arnold reported that the Government Study Committee II may have Warrant Articles, but they will not involve funding.

Ms. Lown noted that since no presentations are scheduled for next Thursday, February, 26, the AFC meeting scheduled for that evening will be cancelled.

**Snow & Ice Budget Deficit Spending Requests**

Committee reviewed a request from John Walden, Manager, DPW, to allow deficit spending on the Snow Budget, Wages of \$50,000, and to allow deficit spending on the Snow Budget, Expenses of \$100,000. Mr. Johnson moved acceptance of this request. The vote to approve the deficit spending request was 7 in favor, with 7 members being present.

**Comments and Concerns of Committee Members**

Mr. Watts reported on the Cultural Council grant awards ceremony held last night at Tatnuck Bookseller. Grants were given to 15 local arts groups. The event was well attended and well received.

Mr. Linnanne noted that there have been no fuel efficiency gains due to the recent purchases of fuel efficient vehicles, as reported on the chart of town fuel consumption by department. He feels that all departments should look at their policy on use of town cars to commute, as well as the town-wide policy on private use of town vehicles. Ms. Lown was asked to inquire as to whether the Town has a town-wide policy.

Ms. Lown will be setting up Public Service Announcements on local cable channels, and will send press releases of meeting schedules to local newspapers.

**Adjournment**

At 8:20 p.m. Mr. Watts moved to adjourn the meeting. The vote to adjourn was unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.