

Members Present: Jo Lown, Chair, Bill Linnane, Cliff Watts, Ian Johnson, John E. Arnold, Brigitte Casemyr, Michael Meachen (arrived 7:10 p.m.). Absent: Christine Hirsch, Judy Lucas.

At 7:00 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.

Discussion of Warrant Articles

Henry Danis, Town Coordinator, and Linda Swadel, Chief Assessor, appeared before the committee.

Mr. Danis briefly noted that Article 1 in the Town Warrant was the same as always, Article 2 pertains to late bills, and that he had no further information about Article 11. The issues are still punch list items and deed restrictions.

Mr. Danis also reported no news on current funding from the Commonwealth. He noted that there have in the past been shortfalls in the state budget at this time of the year but they have not continued through spring, so have not been a problem for the town.

Mr. Arnold asked about the motion for the School Department to move money into a specific line item in the budget. Mr. Danis replied that this was done to clarify to voters what the money is for. It does not obligate the School Committee to spend it as such. The motion will be made as written. The funding required for the 2007-08 school year is not considered a prior year bill as it was incurred this year.

Mr. Arnold noted that the additional funding would make a total 6.2% increase in funding to the School Department, and asked Mr. Danis if he would have recommended the 6% increase in school funding if the contract had been settled in May. Mr. Danis replied that he would have done so unequivocally.

Mr. Arnold asked for the rationale for spending the entire overlay surplus at this time. Mr. Danis replied that this is a special circumstance, and that this particular contract is not the driver of the town's financial situation. This contract was negotiated fairly and done well. Mr. Danis supports funding it wholeheartedly. Mr. Danis said that philosophically, he would like to save some of the surplus, but it is not possible at this time.

Ms. Lown asked how the overlay surplus is evaluated. Is the transfer automatic, and what is the abatement procedure? Ms. Swadel replied that the surplus is not the total balance of the overlay account – there are funds remaining in the account to cover any possible abatement due to reductions in assessments. The town's financial team is confident that the surplus is now available to the town.

Mr. Danis warned of the potential for a \$1.9 Million deficit next spring. This amount is calculated using the most conservative estimates. New growth figures are only preliminarily certified now and are normally finalized in the fall. At Annual Town Meeting decisions are made based on estimates only because certified numbers are not available. The financial team has historically used conservative estimates for revenue, which accounts for the difference between the excess levy capacity number used for ATM and the number used for the Fall Special Town Meeting.

Ms. Lown noted that the Westborough Teachers Association contract is different than other contracts in town since it is contingent on approval at town meeting. Mr. Danis agreed that in this particular case the contract is different.

Mr. Johnson noted the need to explain the overlay account to the town, and emphasize that this is not a windfall. Mr. Danis reiterated that the assessed values are being challenged in court but that the overlay account still has funds to cover the possible changes in values. Ms. Swadel added that \$600,000 is in dispute. Ms. Swadel also reported that this year, for the first time ever, the Department of Revenue is requiring towns to deposit funds to an overlay account before the DOR will certify the tax rate. Westborough has been making these deposits when it is determined to be prudent.

Liaison Updates

Mr. Arnold passed out a New York Times article on the bond market. He has asked Joanne Savignac to send any comment she may have on what affect this will have on the town. Mr. Johnson has spoken with Mr. Danis about the Wastewater Treatment Plant funding, and at this time the 0% funding should still be available. Westborough's credit rating is very good. Mr. Meachen noted that state revenues may be down, and so local aid may be down for next year. Mr. Arnold will ask Ms. Savignac to come to an AFC meeting in November or December to give an update on the credit situation for the town.

Mr. Johnson reported that the \$60,000 estimate for Article 14 is probably a conservative (higher) estimate. They will be looking at all upstream culverts on Jack Straw Brook. One possible expense is new maps – the current maps are ten years old and do not include much of the newer development. This study will also benefit the Conservation Commission needs for information. The deliverables are not yet determined, but will most likely include a consultant's report with topographical maps to be used in a Master Plan for Jack Straw Brook.

Mr. Johnson also reported that the DPW has been going through a new budgeting process with Leah Talbot, Town Accountant and Mr. Danis, which will change the budget presentation and put it in line with other town departments. All agree that currently there are too many lines / subcategories and too much detail which makes analysis difficult.

Mr. Meachen has confirmed that Kathy Wilfert, Personnel Board, will attend the AFC meeting on Monday.

Discussion and votes on various Warrant Articles

Ms. Lucas has requested Ms. Lown and the committee to put off voting on any issues involving funding until Monday when she will be in attendance. A table of votes taken is attached to these minutes.

ARTICLE 12. Non-Zoning Wetlands Protection Bylaw (Conservation Commission). Mr. Watts reminded committee members of a change to the Bylaw requested by Derek Saari, to remove the parenthetical (see note 8) in section IX. Mr. Meachen commented that this is the best thing he has seen so far in the warrant. Ms. Lown commented that the Bylaw was very well done and she is glad to see it.

ARTICLE 13. Noncriminal Disposition of Certain Violations (Conservation Commission). Mr. Watts noted another amendment requested by Mr. Saari, to make the third sentence read "third and all subsequent violations shall be \$300 per day."

Message to Town Meeting

Committee members reviewed the draft letter to appear in the Report and Recommendations of the Advisory Finance Committee. Members discussed what language to use that best conveys the reasons for changed estimates of revenue from the May ATM, explains the School Committee request for additional funding, and the current sources of funding including the overlay surplus.

Comments and Concerns of Committee Members

Ms. Casemyr told committee members about a vendor fair about procurement occurring in two weeks. Ms. Casemyr has spoken with Marianne Bilodeau about the town's procurement process and will follow up.

Adjournment

At 8:40 p.m. Mr. Watts moved to adjourn the meeting. The vote to adjourn was unanimous, 7 in favor and 7 present.

Votes taken at the Finance Committee meeting on October 2, 2008

Warrant article votes:

Article 1. Rule of the Meeting (Town Coordinator)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 2. Prior Year's Bills (Town Coordinator)

Transfer \$ 650.00

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 3. Amend Town Bylaws (Historical Commission)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 5. Amend Zoning Bylaw/Dimension Standards (Municipal Building Committee)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 7. Ballfields Contract (DPW Manager)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 8. Primrose Lane (DPW Manage)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 9 A-D. Accept Various Roads (DPW Manager)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article for each street mentioned.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 10. Parcel "C" (Town Counsel)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 12. Non-Zoning Wetland Protection (Conservation Commission)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article as amended by striking the parenthetical (see note 8) in Section IX.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.

Article 13. Noncriminal Disposition of Certain Violations (Conservation Commission)

Mr. Watts moved to recommend town vote to support this article as amended so that the third sentence reads "Third *and all subsequent* violations shall be \$300 per day"

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 7 in favor with 7 being present.