

Members Present: Jo Lown, Chair, Bill Linnane, Christine Hirsch, Judy Lucas, Cliff Watts, Ian Johnson, John E. Arnold, Brigitte Casemyr, Michael Meachen. Absent: None.

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.

### **Amend Salary Administration Plan (Personnel Board)**

Kathy Wilfert, Chair, Personnel Board, and Sue Abladian presented Warrant Article 6.

This Article will give the Council on Aging a way to use substitute bus drivers when one of the current drivers is out sick. At this time, when a driver is not able to work their scheduled shift the route is cancelled, causing problems for those relying on the bus to get to doctor appointments. Current drivers work part-time and so do not receive paid sick time. Adding a temporary substitute bus driver will not add to the budget because their wages will be at a lower step. The position will not add staff as the drivers will always be temporary and not town employees. There are some potential drivers interested in the temporary position. All substitutes will need appropriate licenses, and most likely will need a CORI check. This position will be similar to the substitute teacher position in the School Department.

Mr. Arnold noted that the position calls for 0 personnel, and asked how the position could be authorized to be paid if it is not authorized to be filled. Ms. Wilfert replied that this was the only way the Personnel Board could make this position with the current employment regulations of the town. No employee will be hired to fill the position as all the substitute drivers will be temporary and so not town employees. The Director of the Senior Center would be responsible for monitoring the budget and costs of this position.

### **Approval of minutes – Meeting No. 5, September 29, 2008.**

Committee deferred voting on the minutes until the next meeting.

### **School Committee Article 15 Funding**

Dr. Anne Towle, Superintendent, Craig Harris, School Committee Chair, and Dan Hendricks, Director of Business and Administration presented additional information about their request for funding. Numerous other School Committee and School Department representatives were also in attendance.

Ms. Lucas apologized for not asking for additional information from the School Department on two specific questions prior to the first presentation on September 29. As liaison, she feels it is her role to make sure there is communication between the AFC and the School Department.

Mr. Harris read a prepared statement in support of the request for additional funding. The School Committee has worked hard over the last 22 months and two rounds of negotiations to come to agreement on a contract that is in the best interests of the town. They have worked with the Town Coordinator to determine goals and affordability, and to keep within the Proposition 2½ limits. All contracts recently negotiated include an increase in the healthcare contribution from employees (120 Fallon Community Health Plan members) to 25%, which will provide continuing savings to the town. The salary increases average 2.5% over the life of the contract. Westborough maintains a good school system, with hard-working teachers who are deserving of recognition. Prior budgeting for this year does not include funding for a contract settlement. This settlement is contingent upon town meeting funding. Salary is a large percentage of the budget, and so without additional

funding the only options would be to re-open negotiations or to make drastic cuts to staff mid-year. The town has shown much support throughout the negotiations. The School Committee hope the town will continue to show support.

Dr. Towle reiterated that the 19 months of negotiation with the WTA were difficult. The School Committee took very seriously their responsibility to the town to keep costs affordable. The School Committee negotiated with each of the six unions a percentage increase to the employee contribution for the Fallon Health Insurance Plan (from 10% to 25%.) The teachers' contract calls for a 1% increase for 2007-08 to be paid retroactively, 0.5% increase on the last day of the 2007-2008 teacher work year, 3% increase for 2008-2009, and 3% for 2009-2010. The increased contribution to FCHP health insurance is retroactive to July 1, 2008. Mitigation funds of \$2000 for family plan members and \$700 for individual members will be paid be transfer from the town's insurance budget.

The wording of the Article is acceptable within M.G.L. Chapter 71, Section 34, Support of Public Schools, which states "In acting on appropriation for educational costs, the city or town appropriating body shall vote on the total amount of the appropriations requested and shall not allocate appropriations among accounts or place any restriction on such appropriate ..." and "The city or town appropriating body may make nonbinding monetary recommendations to increase or decrease certain items allocating such appropriations."

If the Article does not pass, the contract calls for the WTA and school committee to return to the bargaining table. The School Administrators have met as a team to go over the current budget for any areas where savings may be found. Because the School Department does most of the supply and technology purchasing and building repairs over the summer and the fiscal year is almost 1/3 over the only funds remaining to be spent are salary and transportation costs and utilities. A mid-year reduction in the budget could result in the loss of 22 positions. Hardest hit would be the support programs such as library, guidance, fine arts, and athletics.

Mr. Arnold said his main questions have been answered. The key thing for him is that Mr. Danis would have recommended the full budget even if the overlay funds had not become available. He does think that the way the contract is worded is problematic as Town Meeting does not fund contracts, it appropriates money.

Steve Doret, School Committee member, stated that this language has historically been included in town contracts. The language is there to allow Town Meeting to have the choice of how they want to have the schools function. This gives Town Meeting the opportunity to see what will happen if funding is not voted.

Mr. Johnson asked if the mitigation funds are included in the contract, and if the retroactive salary payment would be made to teachers who were employed last year but are no longer employed by Westborough. Dr. Towle answered yes to both questions.

Ms. Lown thanked the School Committee and Dr. Towle for providing more information to the AFC. Ms. Lown noted that the economic situation at the state and national level has changed dramatically over the past month and that many people in Town are facing difficult financial choices. Ms. Lown asked, in light of the economic uncertainties ahead, whether there was any possible way to delay improvements or make any other non-personnel cuts to allow some of the increases to be absorbed into the current funding.

Dr. Towle said the only things that could have been delayed were the repairs, maintenance and computer purchases that were made over the summer. She noted that during the budget cycle last spring, the School Committee made several cuts in their budget request to bring it in line with the Town Coordinator's recommendation, and they re-allocated other resources to make up for these cuts. Dr. Towle noted that they are now well into their budget cycle and children are already in their classrooms so any cuts at this time would have an even greater impact.

Mr. Watts asked about the Internet upgrade. Dr. Towle reported difficulties, and said that the department is negotiating with National Grid and Verizon about the use of their poles.

The AFC thanked the School Committee for appearing and providing additional information.

### **Liaison Updates**

Mr. Arnold spoke with Joanne Savignac, Town Treasurer, and so far she has not heard of any community borrows that were not able to be done. She does not feel this should be as difficult for the town as it has become for states. The town's rating is good. She is keeping her eyes open and is cognizant of possible problems with borrowing.

Ms. Lown will ask Leah Talbot, Town Accountant, for updated revenue and expense numbers to put in the AFC Booklet for Fall Town Meeting.

Mr. Linnane has scheduled a meeting with Alma Demanche to discuss the Senior Center needs for the next year. He has also scheduled a meeting with John Badenhause at Youth and Family Services for next week.

Ms. Lown reported that Derek Saari has contacted Joe Harrington about the amendment to Warrant Article 13 and was advised that the proposed amendment would not be allowed at this Town Meeting.

### **Discussion and votes on various Warrant Articles**

A table of votes taken is attached to these minutes.

#### **ARTICLE 4. Creation of an Economic Development Committee (Board of Selectmen).**

Mr. Arnold would like to have discussion of this article be separated into three parts – formation of the committee, designees, and funding. He has issues with appointing members who can then appoint their own designees who are not appointed by and sworn in by the Board of Selectmen. Town Bylaws state that a member of a committee must be a town resident. As this is a permanent committee the current membership rules could be a problem. He feels this would be bad governance, and would set a bad precedent.

Mr. Meachen thinks the committee is a good idea, but points out that it may not be fully thought out. Questions about designating replacements mean maybe the idea needs more work. The tasks assigned to the committee are being done and could continue to be done in the same way until the idea for the committee is fully formed.

Ms. Casemyr questions the composition of the committee as using town employees, but does feel that we need to be doing this work now.

Mr. Johnson understands all the comments. He agrees with Mr. Arnold on designees. He agrees with Mr. Danis on composition of the committee, and notes that he is often asked to participate in committees as part of his work. He does feel that asking for money now may be a bit of a stretch, but this may not be worth arguing about as the amount is not large.

Ms. Lown is firmly in favor of the idea of forming a committee but has concerns about the composition and especially about designees. She agrees with Mr. Johnson that funding would be a third phase of the formation.

Mr. Watts would be comfortable with an amendment to delete the sentence "The designee shall have full voting rights." He would rather give them money now so they can proceed before July 1, 2009.

Ms. Lucas thinks this is an excellent idea. These tasks have always been done informally. She has no issue with the designee clause for committee members who are town employees (i.e., if Mr. Danis wishes to send Ms. Bilodeau in his place this would be acceptable.) She has no problem with appropriating money for this purpose. It is important for the town to do this work now.

Ms. Hirsch prefers to comment only on the finance segment of this, and feels it is important to do this now and if the committee needs seed money to get going that is OK.

Mr. Linnane is in favor of the Article and is comfortable letting the committee decide how it should be formed. It is important for the town to do this now.

#### **ARTICLE 11. Accept Gift of Land (Board of Selectmen)**

There has been no progress on this article, so the AFC will make its recommendation on Town Meeting floor.

#### **ARTICLE 13. Noncriminal Disposition of Certain Violations (Conservation Commission).**

Ms. Lown has noted the comments of Mr. Harrington regarding the amendment to this article and so the committee must vote on this again.

#### **Town Meeting Message and Booklet**

Committee members reviewed the Report and Recommendations of the Advisory Finance Committee booklet. The Committee reached general consensus on including tax rate information on the recap sheet only if it is accurate. Ms. Lown will speak with Linda Swadel in the Assessor's office. The Committee also discussed adding language to its recommendation of Article 15 to explain that the motion is different from what is usually done, and that a vote to approve funding for salaries and wages at Town Meeting would be a non-binding recommendation. It was also noted that Article 2 requires an appropriation of funds and so the prior motion made and voted on October 2 was incorrect. The Article recommendation was voted again. The committee will proofread the booklet over the next week in order to have it ready to be printed on Monday October 13.

#### **Comments and Concerns of Committee Members**

Ms. Casemyr will attend the Wastewater Treatment Plant meeting on Wednesday.

#### **Adjournment**

At 9:20 p.m. Ms. Lucas moved to adjourn the meeting. The vote to adjourn was unanimous, 9 in favor and 9 present.

## **Votes taken at the Finance Committee meeting on October 6, 2008**

### **Warrant article votes:**

#### **Article 4. Creation of an Economic Development Committee (Board of Selectmen).**

##### **Raise and Appropriate \$10,000**

Mr. Arnold moved to recommend town vote to support this article as amended by the deletion of the third and fourth sentences, and to Raise and Appropriate the sum of \$10,000 for the purposes of this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is 7 in favor and 2 opposed (Lucas, Linnane) with 9 being present.

*Ms. Lucas and Mr. Linnane voiced opposition to the amendment and not to the Article itself.*

#### **Article 6. Amend Salary Administration Plan (Personnel Board)**

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

Vote to approve the recommendation is 8 in favor and 1 opposed (Arnold) with 9 being present.

*Mr. Arnold supports the ability of the town to hire substitute bus drivers but feels there must be a better way than this article.*

#### **Article 14. Drainage Study (DPW MANAGER)**

Ms. Lown moved to recommend the town vote to Raise and Appropriate the sum of \$60,000 for the purposes of this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is 8 in favor and 1 abstention (Hirsch), with 9 being present.

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

Mr. Johnson moved to recommend the town vote to support this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 9 in favor with 9 being present.

#### **Article 15. Fund Contract Settlements (School Committee)**

##### **\$1,489,485, with \$184,136 Raise and Appropriate and \$1,305,349 Transfers**

Ms. Lown moved to recommend the town vote to Transfer the sum of \$216,957 from the fiscal year 2009 insurance budget for fiscal year 2008 school department salaries and wages, and Transfer the sum of \$88,392 from the fiscal year 2009 insurance budget, Raise and Appropriate the sum of \$184,136 and Transfer the sum of \$1,000,000 from the overlay surplus for the fiscal year 2009 school department salaries and wages.

The vote to approve the recommendation is 8 in favor and 1 recusal (Meachen), with 9 being present.

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

##### **Raise and Appropriate \$ 650.00**

Mr. Arnold moved to recommend town vote to Raise and Appropriate \$650 for the purposes of this article.

Vote to approve the recommendation is unanimous, 9 in favor with 9 being present.