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Present: Wayne R. Walker, Heather M. Billings, and John F. Fairbanks

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Walker called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Selectmen’s Office at Town Hall. He announced that the meeting was being broadcast live and recorded by Ashburnham Westminster Community Access TV. He also noted that the Gardner News was audio recording.

APPROVAL OF WARRANTS/MINUTES

Mr. Fairbanks moved that the Board approve the minutes of December 16, 2013 as printed. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Board members reviewed and approved the following warrants:

January 15, 2014	Deduction #43D	\$185,412.91
January 20, 2014	Accounts Payable #44	\$478,435.35
January 27, 2014	Payroll #45	\$166,538.71
	Accounts Payable #46	\$763,499.54

LETTER OF SUPPORT – HISTORICAL COMMISSION GRANT APPLICATION

Historical Commissioner Bill Waight was on hand to request the Board’s approval to endorse the Historical Commissions’ request that a warrant article in the amount of \$5,000 be placed on the May 2014 Annual Town Meeting for the restoration work on the Soldiers’ Monument (Civil War) located in front of the First Congregational Church. He also mentioned that funding of this article is contingent on the town receiving a matching grant of \$5,000 from the Massachusetts Sesquicentennial Commission.

Mr. Fairbanks moved that the Board authorize the Chairman to sign the letter of support for the grant. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

APPOINTMENT ~ HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Ms. Billings moved that the Board appoint Tom Connell, Sr. to the Historical Commission. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

PAYROLL CHANGE AUTHORIZATION ~ BUILDING DEPARTMENT ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Mr. Fairbanks moved that the Board vote to approve the permanent appointment of Brenda Bodanza as Administrative Assistant to the Building Department. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

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BORROWING – SENIOR CENTER DESIGN ~ BAN RENEWAL

Treasurer/Collector Melody Gallant was on hand to request the Board’s approval of a Bond Anticipation Note in the amount of \$1,106,800 (\$106,800 BAN Renewal and \$1,000,000 Construction) for the Senior Center Project.

Mr. Fairbanks moved to authorize the issuance of a BAN in the amount of \$1,106,800 with Eastern Bank with an interest rate of .50%. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

BORROWING – WATER MAIN BAN RENEWAL

Treasurer/Collector Melody Gallant was on hand to request the Board’s approval for a BAN Renewal in the amount of \$600,000 for a water main replacement on Bacon, Pleasant and Elliot Streets.

Mr. Fairbanks moved to authorize the issuance of a BAN Renewal in the amount of \$600,000 with Eastern Bank with an interest rate of .55%. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

REFER RESERVE FUND REQUEST TO ADVISORY BOARD

Interim Fire Chief Kevin Nivala was on hand to request a Reserve Fund Transfer for \$9,897 for the unanticipated replacement of the generator on Engine 1. He explained that due to the age of the generator, they are unable to find replacement parts. This generator powers as back up for the Jaws of Life and also provides lighting at the scenes of accidents.

Mr. Fairbanks moved that the Board refer this request to the Advisory Board. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

PERSONNEL BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS RE: TREASURER/COLLECTOR OFFICE POSITIONS

Mr. Walker explained that the Personnel Board reviewed and evaluated the job descriptions for each of the positions involved and voted unanimously to offer the following recommendations; upgrade the full-time Treasurer/Collector Clerk from Grade 4 to Grade 5 and change title of position to “Administrative Assistant to the Treasurer/Collector” effective March 1, 2014, change the title of the current part-time Treasurer/Collector Clerk to Treasurer/Collector Principal Clerk and increase hours from 15 to 19 per week, approve the job description and establish a new part-time (15 hour) position of Treasurer/Collector Clerk at Grade 2.

Mr. Fairbanks moved that the Board approve the recommendations of the Personnel Board as presented. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

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WORKING ADVANTAGE PROGRAM

Mrs. Murphy explained to the Board that Julie Belliveau, Personnel Administrator brought this program to her attention and they thought it would be nice to offer it to the employees. She further explained that this program is offered to any business and there is no cost to the Town. The program offers employee discounts for a variety of products and services.

She also mentioned that employees would be reminded that this must be done on their own time, using their personal email.

The Board asked Mrs. Murphy to pose this possibility to the Ethics Commission and confirm there is no ethical question regarding employees participating.

Mr. Walker moved that the Board approve this program to be offered to the Town's employees pending a favorable response from the Ethics Commission. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

6:20 P.M. Recess

6:30 P.M. Reconvene

DPW COMMISSION – WASTEWATER SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

DPW Director Joshua Hall was on hand to explain that the Commission would like to pursue a more permanent solution of upgrading the system with a gravity fed line and funding the project through a Rural Development loan.

He presented the following recommendations of the Commission:

- Continue disposal to Fitchburg
- Eliminate Whitman River Pumping Station and Force Main
- New Siphon & Gravity Sewers ~ to Fitchburg and into Fitchburg
 - Allows for all phases of the CWMP
 - Estimated cost is \$4.9M
 - Apply for USDA RD Loan/Grant
 - Apply for MassWorks Grant
 - Savings eliminating pumping station
 - Continue 50/50 funding ratio (50=rate payer/50=tax payer)

With this proposal, the capacity of users would increase from 700 to 1200 users which can include residents, commercial and industrial users. He further explained that in order to apply for the USDA RD Loan/Grant Process would require two votes; a town meeting vote for the application to USDA then once the Town receives an offer from USDA, the Town must vote to accept the offer and the loan. It was his understanding that the USDA has \$11 M which would fund four to five applicants. The only way the Town could get the USDA grant is if it accepted the loan as well.

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He further explained that the sooner the Town votes in favor of the application to the USDA, (Fall) this would put the Town in a better pool of money thus getting a better offer from the USDA.

He also explained that the loan can be financed up to forty years, making the payments small and there is no prepayment penalty. The grants for this year have given up to 30% of the project costs.

He presented the following recommendations of the Commission regarding sewer priorities:

- Continue identifying and removing Inflow and Infiltration
- Start negotiating a new IMA with Fitchburg
- Annual review of water and sewer rates to fund the Capital Improvement Plan

Mr. Walker asked what the total increase in capacity would be. Mr. Hall indicated that this would add another 500 users to the system. The user base could go from about 700 to 1,200 users which would include commercial and industrial users as well.

Engineer Kevin Olson from Wright Pierce stated that the Town's average flow is about 200,000 gallons per day.

Mr. Walker asked what the estimated cost to the Town would be if the project cost is \$4.9M including loans and grants.

Mr. Olson stated that he could do some estimates based on a 30% grant scenario from the \$4.9M.

Mr. Walker asked from a planning prospective, if the Commission was recommending holding a special town meeting prior to the annual town meeting. Commissioner Lorraine Emerson stated that it should take place as soon as possible because they cannot submit the application without the Town meeting vote.

Ms. Emerson explained that the first vote should be as soon as possible and the second vote would be eight months later due to the timing of the application process.

Mr. Fairbanks asked if the USDA loan rate was similar to the interest rate the Town was able to secure for its borrowing tonight and if not, could the Town secure its own loan. Mr. Hall indicated that the Town has to take the two together; the USDA loan and grant. The loan has no prepayment penalties so the Town could in the future refinance with a borrower at a lower interest rate.

Treasurer/Collector Melody Gallant stated she was concerned about the length of financing (40 Years) and interest rate. She also indicated that if there is no prepayment penalty, then the Town could refinance when convenient with a lower interest rate as well as a shorter term on the loan.

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Ms. Billings asked if taking this \$4.9M figure at 40 years with a 50/50 split between users and the Town is refinanced along the way or prepaid how this will affect the users. Mr. Fairbanks stated that the rates would be adjusted along the way according to how many users, interest rates, etc. Mr. Hall said he envisioned 50% on the Enterprise Fund and 50% on rates.

Ms. Emerson explained that this was not a betterment tax and only when the phases come on would there be a betterment tax.

Ms. Emerson stated that Mr. Olson had pointed out that Central Massachusetts has not been granted any Mass Works grants. She suggested bringing this point up to some of the people who represent the Town.

Town Planner Steve Wallace stated that there have been three Mass Works grant rounds, the Town has applied for two and he believed that Ayer received a grant in 2012. It is a concern of the Towns and Regional Chamber of Commerce and Legislators that Central Mass has fared rather poorly in obtaining grants through Mass Works.

Mr. Walker confirmed that we should be looking for assistance from the Regional Planning Commission and Local and state legislators for their support in obtaining a Mass Works grant.

Laila Michaud inquired as to how much money the USDA has for funding. Mr. Hall indicated that it was his understanding that the USDA has \$11 M which would fund four to five applications. Mr. Olson also stated that this funding runs from October 1 to October 1.

Burt Gendron asked for an explanation of how this was going to work with the people who are presently paying a betterment tax. Mr. Walker explained that a betterment is not currently being considered under this project and that various funding scenarios will be explored.

Peter Normandin inquired as to what are we doing about the infiltration to save money. Consulting Engineer Kevin Olson from Wright Pierce indicated that Westminster’s collection system compared to other communities does not have a significant infiltration inflow problem, but there is some. The Town’s average flow is approximately 200,000 gallons per day. It is his understanding that the Commission is seeking additional funds at the Town Meeting to pursue the tracing of the infiltration inflow to save money. The average cost of infiltration inflow is only part of the problem. Ms. Emerson stated that it is not just I/I but capacity as well.

Town Planner Steve Wallace stated there are several companies; Westminster Business Park, Senior Housing and Ranor looking to tie in. He also stated that this is number one on the Master Plan. There will be no economic development in town if we do not address this problem.

Mr. Gendron asked if the town rejects this request is there a backup plan. Ms. Emerson stated that there is no backup plan and that the reason the Commission is asking for the 50/50 split is that the Town is going to benefit from this expansion, get more businesses and jobs in town.

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DPW Commissioner Lorraine Emerson suggested that the Board consider scheduling a Special Town Meeting as soon as possible due to the time constraints in applying for this grant.

The Board asked Town Administrator Karen Murphy to start the process of scheduling a Special Town Meeting the week of March 10. The Board agreed to set the date at their next meeting scheduled for February 10, 2014.

7:20 P.M. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Walker moved that the Board enter into executive session to discuss strategy with respect to litigation; further that the Chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the body; and that the Board reconvene into regular session. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

7:37 P. M. RECONVENE

7:38 P.M. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Walker moved that the Board enter into executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining; further that the Chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining and litigating position of the body; and that the Board adjourn directly from executive session. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board adjourned from executive session at 7:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John F. Fairbanks, Clerk
(Prepared by B. Kazan)