

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

**CALL TO ORDER**

H. Billings called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. in the Selectmen’s Office at Town Hall. She announced that the meeting was being recorded by Ashburnham/Westminster Community Access TV.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

H. Billings indicated that there is a vacancy on the Monty Tech School Committee; all applicants should submit their resume and letter of interest to Karen Murphy, Town Administrator. She also noted that there is a vacancy on the Economic Development Committee.

**APPROVALS**

MINUTES

H. Billings and W. Walker indicated there should be clarification added to the minutes in the sections regarding the Council on Aging and Parks and Recreation Articles. W. Walker moved that the Board approve the minutes of March 16, 2015 as amended. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

WARRANTS

Board members reviewed and approved the following warrants:

March 25, 2015	Accounts Payable 40A	\$ 124,200.14
March 25, 2015	Payroll #40B	\$ 164,614.10
March 30, 2015	Deduction #40C	\$ 144,015.16
March 30, 2015	Accounts Payable #41A	\$969,540.90

**HEARINGS/OTHER SCHEDULED MATTERS**

ASSESSORS RECOMMENDATIONS RE SOLAR TAX AGREEMENTS

The Board of Assessors, a negotiating team consisting of Joe Flanagan, representing Advisory member, Karen Murphy, Town Administrator, and Selectman Heather Billings have completed reviewing proposals and negotiating agreements for three solar projects in Westminster. Each agreement is for a 20-year term/payment schedule. It was noted that it was desirable to enter into a tax payment agreement, rather than issuing a regular annual tax bill in order to avoid the costs of defending inevitable abatement applications.

The terms of the agreement follows:

- Nexamp Inc. (Theodore Drive Solar), Theodore Drive (Lot 1-4C) – 1.9MW array, \$15K/MW with 2% escalation
- Nexamp Inc. (Westminster Solar), S. Ashburnham Road (Whitmanville Farm) – 1.3MW array, \$15k/MW with 2% escalation
- Housatonic Solar, S. Ashburnham Road - .55MW array, \$16.5k/MW with 1% escalation

Joe Flanagan indicated that the Board of Assessors negotiated a very lucrative agreement with these solar companies, and the returns the town will be receiving will be at a steady rate of increase over the course of the 20 year agreement.

J. Fairbanks moved to accept the recommendation of the Board of Assessors in regards to the solar agreements. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

VETERANS' SERVICES OFFICER

· *Discuss Budget/Services*

Tom Maeder, Veteran's Service Officer, indicated that his part time associate Phil Buso gave up his position as the part time VSO in Westminster to better serve the city of Gardner.

Mr. Maeder met with the Advisory Board to propose an adjustment his hours and salary for the upcoming year. Mr. Maeder indicated that he wanted to move from 4 hours/week to 8 hours/week and also add an additional 72 hours annually to account for necessary training. Mr. Maeder indicated that the Advisory Board was willing to meet him halfway on his requests.

Mr. Maeder also indicated that he would be assisting the towns of Ashburnham and Hubbardston with their Veterans' Services.

The Board indicated that the town of Westminster would like the other towns to make proportionate contribution of funds to ensure the cost of training the VSO is equally split between them.

· *Pending Legislation*

Mr. Maeder advised the Board of the following pending legislation, which he believes would negatively impact Veterans' Service statewide:

- CMR Revision - Concerns VSOs have, elimination of definitions:
  - "Continuous unwholesome habits mean repetitive behavior which is self-destructive or destructive to others and for which a person fails to seek necessary help to prevent its recurrence." - stricken from regulation
  - "Voluntary Unemployment means unemployment brought about by one's own acts or failure to act." - stricken from regulation
  - "Discharges Under Other Than Honorable Conditions, Uncharacterized Discharge or Dismissal." - changed to allow the Commonwealth's Secretary of Veterans Services to hold a Board to make a determination on eligibility
- HD1590 - An Act relative to Veteran's Agents: this would replace community based VSO's with 25 State District offices, VSO's would become state employees

PLANNING BOARD/PLANNER – PROPOSED ZONING AMENDMENTS

Steve Wallace presented potential zoning changes for off street parking and loading requirements.

FY2014 AUDIT REVIEW

Tony Roselli from Roselli, Clark and Associates reviewed the FY2014 Audit Report with the Board. He indicated that the town has AA+ bond rating which is a nearly perfect rating. The town is in very good standing financially and by putting more accounting policies in place and creating a five year financial forecast it would most likely be able to achieve a AAA bond rating in the coming years.

J. Fairbanks asked if the town should create an OPEB trust account.

The auditor indicated that it would be beneficial to the town to do so, and in time after committing a steady payment schedule to the trust account, it could help achieve the AAA rating.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### REQUEST ESTIMATE FROM MART FOR BUS STOP/ADDITIONAL VAN SERVICE

H. Billings indicated that she and Karen Murphy met with MART this week to discuss and evaluate the options available to the town. The items that were discussed were either the addition of a bus stop in town or another van to service the elderly and disabled population of Westminster. Staff was also informed by MART that the \$19k/annual assessment funds that Westminster pays for the MBTA can be used towards this purpose.

W. Walker indicated that the town needs cost estimates from MART regarding these services and would prefer for there to be an actual bus stop in town rather than a flag down service.

### PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING NEEDS COMMITTEE CHARGE

J. Fairbanks presented a draft charge for the committee, indicating that clarification was needed to direct the committee on how to proceed.

Following discussion and a couple revisions, J. Fairbanks made a motion to adopt the Public Safety Building Committee Charge. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

### SCHEDULE OPEN DISCUSSION RE: SENIOR/COMMUNITY CENTER BUILDING USE

The Board indicated that there is a need for an open discussion regarding different ideas and strategies on how to fully utilize the new Senior/Community Center.

This item will be on the meeting agenda for May 11, 2015.

### DISCUSS STATE FUNDING FOR SCHOOL BUDGET

District Superintendent Ralph Hicks discussed the current status of the school budget with the Board. He indicated that lack of anticipated funding from the state in multiple areas has led to a major deficit in the budget for this year. Mr. Hicks requested that the Board write a letter to the local and state legislation in support of funding for the schools.

J. Fairbanks made a motion to write a letter in support of the school and advocate for the state to allocate more funding. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

## **ONGOING BUSINESS**

### FINALIZE MAY 2, 2015 TOWN MEETING WARRANTS

The Board reviewed a draft of the May 2, 2015 Special and Annual Town Meeting warrants.

Noting that an override would not necessarily be required to fund the Town's share of the requested FY2016 school budget, it was agreed that the language would not include a Proposition 2 ½ override contingency for Article #11.

The Board discussed the Parks and Recreation Article #18 in regards to the purchase of bleachers for the new lacrosse field. The Board indicated that it does not support the article at this time, and suggested that alternative funding sources be considered.

The Board discussed the options available for Article #24, it was agreed that the article will instruct the town to raise and appropriate a sum of money for the OPEB stabilization account.

The Board agreed to schedule a meeting on Monday April 6, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. in order to finalize the warrant articles.

DISCUSS OPEB TRUST FUND

J. Fairbanks indicated that based on the auditors recommendations, he would like to create an OPEB trust, and move \$100,000 into it from the OPEB Stabilization Account in order to fund this liability.

J. Delisle indicated that he is not comfortable with that decision at this time. Mr. Delisle stated that it would be in the town's best interest to wait and seek out other opinions and options so that the town does not tie up its funding in an account that cannot be accessed or utilized.

Discussion continued on this topic, it was agreed that funding the OPEB liability should begin but more information is needed on where the money should be kept. This issue should be revisited at the fall town meeting.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

W. Walker moved that the board enter Executive Session at 7:35 p.m. to conduct contract negotiations with non-union personnel, J. Fairbanks seconded the motion. Mr. Walker indicated that the meeting would adjourn directly following Executive Session. The motion was passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Board adjourned at 8:00 p.m.



Wayne R. Walker  
Clerk

(Prepared by S. Lahtinen)

**March 30, 2015 BoS Meeting Exhibits:**

3/30/15 Meeting Agenda

3/16/15 Meeting Minutes

3/30/15 Town Administrators Report

Assessors' Recommendations for Solar Tax Agreement

VSO Contract and Budget

Correspondence re: MART services in Westminster

Proposed Zoning Amendments from Town Planner

Town Warrant Articles

FY14 Audit Management Letter

Public Safety Building Needs Committee Charge

Handouts re: School Budget