

Finance Committee

Meeting minutes – October 6, 2009

Present: **Committee Members:** Chris DeSimone (Chair), Michael Landino, Alan Leao Jr, Holly Seiferth, Melissa Tzanoudakis, George Zacharakis

Absent: Chris Johnson (Vice Chair)

Guests: Joseph Hallisey (BOS), Robert Lambert (BOH Chair), Alfred Buckley (BOH Member), John Marriner (BOH Member), Sandra Grogan (BOH Secretary), Kalene Garbarz (Nashoba BOH), Robin Hebert (Animal Inspector), Ellen Fisher (Conservation Administrator)

Also present: Town Accountant Theresa Walsh

Chris DeSimone called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

Acceptance of Minutes: On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Michael Landino, the minutes from September 29 meeting was approved by a vote 5(Aye) - 0(No), 0 abstained.

New Business: Chris DeSimone turned the meeting to the Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles. The committee discussed Article 1 Acceptance of Property. Chris DeSimone noted that the value of the land is less than \$5000, and that the land was about 500 feet near property that the town already owned. George Zacharakis thought that the taxes owed were around \$22,000. Alan Leao Jr questioned if a lien could be put on the house. Chris DeSimone noted that it could not due to laws. Theresa Walsh pointed out that the land was close to the Nissitissit, which is the most pristine river in New England. Chris DeSimone added that 80% of the land in the property is considered wetlands. The committee discussed that the court route is not a good route for the town because of legal costs, and many felt the land was good for the town. On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Michael Landino, Article 1 Acceptance of Property of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was not approved by a vote 2(Aye)-2(No) and 1 abstained.

Melissa Tzanoudakis came to the meeting at 7:07 pm.

The committee decided to revisit Article 1 Acceptance of Property later in the meeting.

The committee discussed Article 4 Supplemental Appropriation for a sum of \$22,000. Theresa Walsh pointed out that Joseph Mazzola had indicated that some clients may drop off, which he would know the following day, but he felt they could get some more. George Zacharakis questioned if this was reimbursed by the state. Joseph Hallisey acknowledged that it was reimbursed at 75% by the state. Theresa Walsh pointed out that if the number could be reduced, that could be done at the town meeting. Alan Leao Jr questioned if Joseph Mazzola would be presenting information at the special town meeting. Chris DeSimone answered that Joseph Mazzola would be presenting generic information for voters. Chris DeSimone added that there were 15 people on the books at this time according to Joseph Mazzola. On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Melissa Tzanoudakis, Article 4 Supplemental Appropriation of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained.

The committee moved on to discuss Article 8 Transfer of Funds – Police Department. Chris DeSimone mentioned this had something to do with someone in the department resigning therefore the employee who originally was thought to be the subject of a reduction in force, remained on staff. That employee's educational incentive needed to be restored. On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Melissa Tzanoudakis, Article 8 Transfer of Funds – Police Department of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in

the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained.

The committee discussed Article 11 Supplemental Appropriation in the amount of \$22,363. The amount of \$22,363 is the unused sick and vacation days that the town owes the town accountant due to her impending retirement. The difference of \$6,000 is the amount that the town meeting voted as a lower wages amount based on that the town would be hiring a new town accountant. Chris DeSimone felt it was not appropriate to put the \$6,000 back into the budget. If it turns out the money is needed in order to get a candidate, then that could be done via a transfer from the reserve account. On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Melissa Tzanoudakis, Article 11 Supplemental Appropriation in the amount of \$22,363 of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list with the amended amount. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained.

On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Michael Landino, Article 12 Street Numbering By-law of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained.

The committee discussed Article 13 Budget Adjustments. Chris DeSimone said that he went through the remainder of the budget between the last meeting and this meeting, and did not come up with anything other than a few questions which Theresa Walsh answered for him. The only significant finding in the budget was what was found in last meeting – the Assessors budget. Chris DeSimone noted that he had to talk to Sue Smith about this finding. Chris DeSimone added that Theresa Walsh had found something. Theresa Walsh explained that the County Retirement Assessment (100-91100-51172) had a budget of \$570,611, and the actual was \$549,480. The savings of \$21,131 was due to the town making the payment upfront.

The committee discussed Article 14 Peter Fitzpatrick School Costs. There was a brief discussion about the school district keeping Peter Fitzpatrick School until May 2010. The school district was giving the town about \$30,000 to close the school, whereas they were originally going to give the town about \$40,000. Joseph Hallisey mentioned that the selectmen were requesting a meeting with the school committee. Joseph Hallisey noted that the selectmen would really like to have Dr. Marshall at the meeting since she initially set up the closing of the school.

Theresa Walsh noted that there was a Town Administrator Article similar to the Article 11 Supplemental Appropriation. The Town Administrator Article was again for unused sick and vacation time for the town administrator. In this case, since Peggy Mazzola was taking over the Town Administrator position temporarily, there would be a transfer between line items. It depended on the amount of time that Peggy Mazzola would be working as temporary Town Administrator. The longer she worked in the position, the better for the town. For example, it could actually be a positive transfer if she worked 5 months. If she worked 4 months, \$1,200 would be needed and if she worked 3 months, \$3,000 would be needed.

The committee briefly discussed the Board of Health warrant article. Michael Landino noted that the town meeting had voted for reduced hours and he was concerned how much of an attempt had been done at reduced hours. He noted that certainly a transition could take more hours, but now the selectmen could demand an immediate reduction in hours. Chris DeSimone agreed about the reduction in extra hours now, and a transfer could be done when they run out of money. Alan Leao Jr noted that 20 hours is where the benefits start. Theresa Walsh pointed out that the Board of Health had the option of bringing the full 30 hours to the Special Town Meeting. George Zacharakis had questions about the differences in the 2007 budget to the current budget. Theresa Walsh commented that there was a loss of an employee and a new hire during that time period. George Zacharakis pointed out that there has been quite an increase in the salary in that time period.

The committee moved on to discuss Article 3 Supplemental Appropriate in the sum of \$14,691 to provide 30 hours per week for secretarial coverage for Board of Health. This discussion included the Board of Health members. Chris DeSimone noted to the Board of Health members the discussion about the Town Meeting had voted on 15 hours and that if we now immediately move to that number of hours because the transition is over, when the Board of Health runs out of

money, a transfer could be done. John Marriner spoke about the memorandum and how part of the Board of Health's duty is to keep the cost from increasing. Melissa Tzanoudakis agreed that was a good point, but noted that if the difference in salary is \$20,000, then the increase in the Nashoba costs would have to be more than \$20,000. Alan Leao Jr wondered if Nashoba could provide what other towns Board of Health secretaries' commitments are. Kalene Garbarz replied that they range in the different towns. George Zacharakis had information he had pulled from 8 town web sites with their posted hours. It was noted that these were posted hours, not necessarily all working hours. Robert Lambert commented that you cannot compare towns as not all towns are the same, and he pointed out that Pepperell also lost the Lipton Mental Health budget which other towns have. Robert Lambert noted that they were working on pulling an extra \$7,800 from their budget due to hazard waste costs. He explained that by collecting a fee that would help offset the costs - \$48/full carload and \$28/half carload. They could charge \$24/full carload and \$12/half carload. They typically get 100 full carloads and 100 half carloads, which gives an estimated \$3,600 gross. There were still concerns, but they were looking at it to see what they could do.

Robert Lambert spoke of concerns of liabilities if they cut hours and calls came in. George Zacharakis pointed out that they would not be anymore liable then they are now on days or times that there is no coverage, such as on Fridays. Sandra Grogan spoke of her concerns of the amount of time that she feels could not get done in 15 hours per week.

Robert Lambert asked how Sandra Grogan felt about 20 hours per week. Michael Landino questioned what the ramifications would be if the hours changed. Robert Lambert replied that it would impact the incoming calls as well as the people coming in. Michael Landino suggested that the office hours should be 15 hours, but that there would be 20 hours per week. Chris DeSimone questioned the benefits, since the original Town Meeting had voted for 15 hours. Theresa Walsh pointed out that the benefits were already included since technically they were part of a separate budget and they were never subtracted. Melissa Tzanoudakis questioned that the only thing in question is the extra 5 hours now, that the benefits are already accounted for. Theresa Walsh replied that was correct. There was discussion about when the new 20 hour week should start – immediate or two weeks. It was decided that the Monday of town meeting.

On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Holly Seifert, Article 3 Supplemental Appropriation Board of Health of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was not approved by a vote 0(Aye)-6(No) and 0 abstained.

On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Michael Landino, Article 3 Supplemental Appropriation Board of Health of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on with reduced hours to 20 hours in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained.

The committee discussed Article 1 Acceptance of Property again with Ellen Fisher, Conservation Administrator. Ellen Fisher explained that the property offers protection since the wetlands run into the river, and the property gets the town closer to the piece of property on the Nissitissit which they already own. This purchase would provide closer access the that property. On a motion from Michael Landino, seconded by Alan Leao Jr, Article 1 Acceptance of Property of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be reconsidered. It was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained. On a motion from Melissa Tzanoudakis, seconded by Michael Landino, Article 1 Acceptance of Property of the Special Town Meeting warrant list was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted on as printed in the warrant list. There was no additional discussion on this article and it was not approved by a vote 5(Aye)-1(No) and 0 abstained.

Business: Chris DeSimone brought the meeting to discuss the budget. Holly Seifert mentioned that she was interested in learning more about the school sub-committee so she could understand it better and make recommendations. There is a meeting on October 10th, more information on the website. Chris DeSimone added that he would call the school and get information and email it to everyone. Michael Landino noted that Townsend Finance Committee was interested in talking

to Pepperell Finance Committee over the summer. Holly Seiferth thought it was worthwhile to have a joint meeting. Chris DeSimone confirmed that three towns should get together and he would look into setting something up.

Michael Landino questioned the Other Town Building budget of \$10,000 for 2010 with an actual of \$3,253 for 2009. There was discussion about the repairs of \$4,520 budget. The septic had been pumped and the water tank fixed. In 2009 the money had been pulled back out of the budget since it was not needed. Michael Landino questioned if that could be done again, or as many were wondering, was it time to close the building. George Zacharakis questioned at what point would it be discussed whether or not to close the building. Joseph Hallisey pointed out that it was supposed to be the new Town Administrator project. Holly Seiferth pointed out that there were many possibilities such as digitizing everything, as well as handicap access issues. The committee discussed reducing Building & Grounds from \$4,520 to \$130, Communications Equipment from \$1200 to zero, and Custodial from \$1,307 to \$450. Chris DeSimone said it made most sense to just do a bottom line reduction of 100-19600-52000 Other Town Building from \$10,625 to \$5,625 for a savings of \$5,000. On a motion from Michael Landino, seconded by George Zacharakis, 100-19600-52000 Other Town Building from \$10,625 to \$5,625 for a savings of \$5,000 was put into motion to be recommended to be discussed and voted There was no additional discussion and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained.

George Zacharakis questioned why the jump in IS-Data Processing. It went from \$1,500 to \$20,000. Theresa Walsh explained it was an upgrade.

Michael Landino asked Joseph Hallisey about the outsourcing of ambulance. Joseph Hallisey replied that the presentation was good. At this point, the selectmen did not see a reason not to go with it. Alan Leao Jr pointed out that legacy costs would have a big impact.

Michael Landino questioned the jump in gas and plumbing inspector budgets Joseph Hallisey explained that there was a lot of new building expected with the project behind the VFW.

Theresa Walsh questioned the committee's intent if they found additional of money in the budget. She wondered if they would reduce the tax levy. She felt it would be wise to save any money for 2011. Alan Leao Jr wondered how many people worked in each department – could the committee find more money. Chris DeSimone pointed out that the committee did not micro manage departments. Chris DeSimone felt that Theresa Walsh brought up a good point – the better time to do this digging was in the spring. The items they were finding could be earmarked for that time. Chris DeSimone closed the budget discussion with a note that they have found two major cuts, and the rest can be earmarked for spring.

The committee moved on to discuss the outsourcing/regionalizing subcommittees. Holly Seiferth questioned if the Regionalization Dispatch was for 2011 or 2010. Joseph Hallisey noted that it would be for 2011, not 2010. Michael Landino thought that it would be great to learn more about the communications center. Chris DeSimone replied that he thought communications center was a prime target for regionalization. Holly Seiferth noted that at a seminar communication centers were the least popular for regionalization.

Chris DeSimone noted that the regionalizing subcommittee had a meeting in Lowell on October 8th from 12pm – 2 pm, which Holly Seiferth, Alan Leao Jr, and Melissa Tzanoudakis would be attending. He asked for both sub-committees to let Theresa Walsh know what their meeting times would be so Theresa Walsh could get the times posted.

Michael Landino questioned communication with department heads. Chris DeSimone thought that communication with department heads was a great idea. Let them know up front this was going to be a very difficult budget year. He also felt we have terrific department heads.

Holly Seiferth questioned if Theresa Walsh had found out who had attended the Regionalizing meeting from DPW. Theresa Walsh answered Bob Lee had attended one in Groton.

Upcoming Meetings: Thursday, October 15th, 7:00pm
Thursday, October 22nd, 7:00pm

Adjournment: On a motion from George Zacharakis, seconded by Alan Leao Jr, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 pm and it was approved by a vote 6(Aye)-0(No) and 0 abstained.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynne Henderson