

08-09

Meeting opened at 7:00 PM in the Upstairs Meeting Room. Present were Selectpersons Patricia Allen, Patricia Pruitt, Allen, Ross. Town Administrator Frank Abbondanzio, John Reynolds, Lynn Reynolds, Jean Golrick, Marge Levenson

Allen: We had a meeting at 4:00 PM with the Massachusetts Aeronautical Commission and that meeting went quite well. We had a lot of people here and it lasted about an hour and a quarter. We were all able to listen to the answers all at once from Mass Aeronautics, which is kind of nice. I think if we can send them a note thanking them very much for coming out here, that would be great. They are also going to be sending in a little more information on that access road issue.

Minutes

We do not have the minutes from the February 19, 2008 meeting.

Town Administrator's Report

- Transfer request for a GIC Insurance Study

Abbondanzio: To transfer \$4,400 to fund a study for the Insurance Advisory Committee. We would be hiring the Boston Benefits Partners to analyze the GIC insurance option and compare it with all of the other options that are available including staying with the insurance carrier that we have right now. It would be a side by side comparison and analysis of all the plans. We'll be looking at employee out of pocket cost. Basically it is to see whether it makes sense for the Town to proceed with it and whether the savings are significant enough to warrant getting it. I am requesting that the Board to approve the reserve fund transfer and send it onto the Finance Committee.

*Motion made by Ross to approve a transfer from our reserve fund of \$4,400. to fund a consultation on GIC findings by the Boston Benefit Partners, LLC. Seconded by Pruitt.
Approved unanimously. Pruitt – Aye, Ross – Aye, Allen – Aye.*

Sign Population Estimates for Seasonal Licenses in 2008 from ABCC

Abbondanzio: This is for a Seasonal Alcoholic Beverage License that we grant to Thomas Memorial Golf & Country, Inc. for summer purpose. We have to establish under Chapter 138 of the ABCC Law what we anticipate the population will be in the summer. That is something that the Town Clerk comes up with, and this year that number is 8,621.

*Ross made a motion to submit the summer population number of 8,621 to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission as requested by them in November 2007.
Seconded by Pruitt. Approved Unanimously. Pruitt – Aye, Ross – Aye, Allen – Aye.*

Abbondanzio: The Thomas Memorial has a seasonal license and it has a regular license. It is necessary that we go through this process of establishing population because we do have the Seasonal License at that one particular establishment.

Budget Forum – March 17th

Abbondanzio: It is basically our Selectmen's Meeting and I am anticipating that we will probably fill up most of the evening with that discussion, as it will be pretty involved. It is something that the Finance Committee, the Select Board, the Capital Improvement Committee and School Committee are all going to be participating in. We are looking at a sizeable deficit at this point, somewhere around one and a half million dollars, so the purpose of the forum is going to be several fold: 1) How did we get to where we are now, the situation that we are in, what are the factors that contributed to it on the revenue side and on the expenditure side; 2) What are the options that are available to address the deficit? This is looking at budget cuts, identifying other sources of revenue, including the possibility of overrides and what the consequences would be of all of these possible options, including the fact of cutting staff and level of service to be provided.

This is something that we want to get the word out over the next couple of weeks to make sure that we get a good turnout or at least have people aware that it is going to be televised. So we can educate people as to why we are where we are and how we are hoping to get out of the woods in this situation.

Discussion regarding how it is important that townspeople come and tell us what services they feel are important that we provide in this Town; discussion whether there will be a telephone so people can call in with questions or they could also write letters by e-mail or mail in prior to the meeting with their questions.

Ross: I'd like to emphasize discussions that we have had at every forum, whether it be the Town/School Collaborations Forums, almost every Finance Committee Meeting and when appropriate in the Select Board Meetings. This years' budget crunch is probably going to be more intensively painful than the previous years which have not been a lot of fun for those folks who have had to level service everything and subtract stuff when possible. We have had a serious winter. We are talking about maybe less people in various departments, if we can't come up with the money to finance this stuff. We are talking about more snow on the roads, less patrolmen on the beats, less secretarial help, and delayed minutes. We have lost a nurse. We are considering those things because the reserve fund has a time limited factor to it that we might be able to get away with a defined amount of time, but not more than a year. The schools are going to come with a very strong request, some of which is mandated by state; in fact, significantly. So this direction that we need at this Forum is going to be helpful to us so that when things do come down to Town Meetings and approving stuff, it won't be new turf for people. People have to feel how tight it is going to be. Maybe this is an attempt for us to share with the Finance Committee the discomfort that we are all starting to feel, but in fact, it is going to affect all of us. Hopefully, I think these Forums have to be well attended getting the previous questions in will certainly help guide it, but I just want to emphasize this is not going to be your average budget tightening year.

Letter from Lake Hitchcock Development

Abbondanzio: A letter from Lake Hitchcock Development was received. They have been working with Denise DiPaolo on putting together the tax credit package for the Ristorante DiPaolo and they were able to secure the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits for that project. We all need to remember that it wasn't too long ago when that building was dilapidated and the roof was falling in. We had a number of people going through it and very few expressed interest in proceeding with the project under our Commercial Homesteading Program where we basically give away the building for a dollar. In return someone makes a leap of faith and makes a big investment. I think Denise, based upon all her energy, and her stick-to-it-ness, that project happened. It was mainly her personal energy and commitment that made that work. I think she needs to be recognized for that, and every chance we get, we should realize that these projects only happen because a lot of things are going on in a lot of different areas, and this is just one of them. We know that the Historic Tax Credit, for example, can be very important in the Strathmore Building, those and new market credits and everything else. It is a very complicated thing with economic development and it is a good idea to recognize her efforts.

Allen: Not only that, but her presence, her restaurant, puts us on the map and brings in even more people and more businesses. The thing is that she has done such a great job that it is hard to remember what it looked like before.

Ross: This Lake Hitchcock Development with Mr. Jutres. Denise did a phenomenal job, but who pays him?

Abbondanzio: He is paid by the person who is applying for the tax credits. In this case, it was Denise, she actually hired him. His letters came before this Board for support on the tax credit applications. So he certainly is no stranger, although his name may not have appeared on the letters, they were largely crafted through his efforts. He is also working with the individual who is working on the Strathmore as well.

Pruitt: So, are they making a nomination for Denise for an award?

Abbondanzio: No. It is basically saying that it has been approved and these things are a competitive process, so the good news is that they succeeded in getting the kind of financial assistance that was really necessary to make these projects happen.

Economic Development Award 2008 Nomination

Abbondanzio: The Economic Development Administration has a program that is kind of appropriate for Turners Falls. It is a request for nominations for Excellence in Economic Development Award Program. It is for economic development projects that are exemplary and ones that they could advertise on their national website, to show other communities in the United States how it has been done successfully. I have to point out that it is not a grant. It is not something that gets monies, but I think it is something that recognizes the achievements that have taken place. There are eight different criteria or categories that you can nominate under. I was thinking in terms of nominating under the Historic Preservation category. Our Historic Preservation has led to the historic tourism and basic ties for River Culture. It is something that is going to require a time commitment on my part. I would just ask that you give your blessing to allow me the discretion in deciding if I should proceed with this. If I can put it in, I would like to do that, depending on how our budgeting stuff goes and everything else. I think it is an opportunity for us.

Allen: I would think that if you feel you can find the time, obviously, as you have stated the budget is big issue right now, and we are working on a bunch of others things. There have been some wonderful advances that have happened in the Town that I think would be great to have recognized.

Pruitt: I think you have picked the right area.

Abbondanzio: Yes and it ties in to the River Culture and that are a lot of ways to tie it in with the River Culture programs.

Ross made a motion that we support Frank Abbondanzio, in using his discretion in terms of prioritizing his time with other things on his busy plate, but that he potentially submit an application for an Excellence in Economic Development Award-2008, from the Economic Development Administration. Seconded by Pruitt. Approved unanimously. Pruitt – Aye, Ross – Aye, Allen – Aye.

Update on Strathmore

Abbondanzio: Note from Dave Jensen stated that the electrician and alarm system programmer will be at Strathmore tomorrow to activate the alarm component of the dry sprinkler system. At that point the sprinkler contractor can do their final test and turn on the system. They recommend at least a week of close monitoring of the valves and system in general plus general observation of the maintenance of the valves. The initial alarm goes to the Fire Department, and there is someone on call to respond to any trouble that is non-fire alarms. So we are closing the first part of the work over there, coming to the end on that, with the sprinkler system. The roof is progressing fairly nicely. We are also looking to get some quotes, we already have a couple of quotes, on moving some of the paper that is stacked on the upper floor, try to get some of the weight dispersed rather than all concentrated in one location. Take down the multiple layers so that it would be more easily lowered to the lower level.. We did have the eighth truck go out at the end of last week.

Discussion followed regarding the routes that we are taking to clear the building out as well as getting some quotes on putting transparent plastic on the openings, the windows that were blown out during the fire. We don't want to board it up as the cost factor would be great.

Other

John Reynolds: The issue of closing the warrant. I am concerned as I think that we are premature. I know we have done it this way for years, but it doesn't make it necessary. I think if we are trying to get people involved in Town Government, then you need to let them feel if they have something to say about it, and closing the warrant makes it harder, in a sense to add issues through the general population, other than financial. In the past few years we have had maybe one or two a year, and they don't get in the way. It does demonstrate that the Town is open to citizen input. I think that is something that we want to work at. We have done pretty well by broadcasting the meetings and so on, that is a good start. I think it would be great if you would re-consider opening that up. I know, at least from everybody that I talked to, there are no problems on the horizon at the moment, but if it can be opened up. We would mention 45 days before

Town Meeting; at one point that puts it in the middle of March, which doesn't present a problem at this point.

Discussion

Ross made a motion to approve allowing non-financial warrant articles to be added to the process for getting warrant articles on Town Meeting no later than the deadline date of March 14th for the up-coming Town Meeting. Seconded by Pruitt. Motion approved unanimously. Pruitt – Aye, Ross – Aye, Allen – Aye.

5-Year Plan Contract Award

Pruitt: Last Wednesday evening we conducted an interview of Jeff Singleton who made the sole proposal that we received after sending out ten or twelve RFP notices to various organizations around the state as far as the Cape, Amherst, the Berkshires and other places. He is the person who came through with a proposal. Frank did a survey to find out why more people didn't respond to the RFP. He found out various things. One for the group on the Cape it was just too far and would cost too much, for us to actually pay their travel, lodging, whatever, and the amount they would be earning was not significant. Some of the people thought what we were asking for was an enormous amount of work for a small amount of money. Others were in Florida and not available for a couple of months, and others were too busy with work that they had already signed up to take on anything new and might be available at some later date. So we had the interview with Jeff Singleton and the Committee asked a lot of questions for about fifty minutes. The interview included a phone conversation with Mark Abrahams who was going to do Chapter 70 explication so that we would understand the mysteries of that. In the discussion that followed, Ken Rock was very clear that he thought we would be spending \$3,800 for Mark Abrahams' portion unnecessarily because he thought he himself could probably give us the better part of what he might have given us and he felt that it wasn't the most significant thing we needed in this Five-Year Study Plan. There are other factors that needed to be included, all along with Chapter 70, and so he counseled against including Abrahams' work in the final RFP. After much discussion, the vote was taken about 10 o'clock or so, and there were five yeases and two abstentions. Jeff Singleton and Michael Bosworth will essentially do sort of an editing function on the numbers.

L. Reynolds: Is it appropriate to say that the \$3,800 we want to put in reserves and we wanted to have some consultation between Ken Rock, Jeff Singleton and perhaps Mr. Abrahams to go further with getting more of what we really need. There are a couple of factors that came to light, and that is that there is information that was provided after the RFP was put out that filled in a great amount of the gaps and as a committee felt there were things we wanted to add to it but it is information we did not have at the time we issued the RFP. I think we are at a stage where we can take it to the next step.

Allen: So are you saying that it is still \$10,000?

L. Reynolds: No, we are going to commit Jeff's portion, but setting aside the other and then with further consultation may or may not use the \$3,800 that we allocated for Mr. Abrahams.

Pruitt: That isn't my understanding of it. That may have been a stage in our discussions, but in talking with Ken Rock, after the meeting he seems very clear on what he can offer and how much time he has to spend and it seemed to me that he will present a charge for whatever is done, and I don't know if it will include the \$3,800.

L. Reynolds: OK, so we may save some money on this. One thing that was important is that in Ken Rock's turn-around plan he does talk about this work that we are proposing here tonight and that is an important piece of his presentation to the State or to the Department of Education.

Jean Golrick: When will this study be published and the raw data that supports it?

Pruitt: It will be coming out when it is completed, maybe Jeff can answer that.

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Jeff Singleton: First of all I hope that the Committee still thinks that this is a good idea, and that they are enthusiastic about it. I had a meeting with the Committee with my proposal in which I went over what data would be presented, so we are all on the same page as to what we are going to look at. Then a draft that was circulated not only with the Committee, but people should look at it. This is community research, and there is suppose to be community input. Obviously there will be disagreements, and that is fine, but if there isn't some community views expressed, and if people with different ideas don't feel they own it, then it won't work. What I proposed was in the timeline for the end of March, getting a good draft that people could look at and everybody could talk about, and I could take input on it. Things that people weren't comfortable could be fixed.

Golrick: How will the public see it?

Singleton: I think the draft should be a public document and we should disseminate it.

Pruitt: I don't think we have made a specific plan on disseminating it, but it certainly could be in the Town Hall, in the libraries, could be handed out at our annual Town Meeting.

Allen: Maybe it depends if it is five pages or four hundred – right?

Levenson: When we had Town Meeting, at least my feeling about that discussion, I still believe that the document which Jeff Singleton did in response to the RFP did satisfied the requirements of the RFP. As a member of the Committee and also a member of the Finance Committee, it has always been my feeling that one of the initial points of the document is we initially thought it would be great if it was ready for the spring Town Meeting. On our part, it was unfortunately unrealistic, as it just can't be done that quickly. The idea to have it for Town Meeting was that hopefully that as we look at budgets, whether it is this year or next fall or frankly as we go along the next several years. This plan hopefully will have the schools sort of working together as a team, and that we will see that in terms of budget spending. Hopefully it will give us a better understanding that the budgets are intertwined. Finances and resources are limited, It is my hope that this report will play along these lines and will end the strife of school vs. Town, and that as we do budgets in the next several years, we will work better together.

Abbondanzio: I think that is important to know that this is really a collaborative process and it is a plan that is in the state of evolving. I think the other nights' discussion with the Five Year Plan Committee is really a good indication of just how this process is already taking shape, because the Superintendent has some issues with the focus on one particular type of education data. We now know what went into the turn-around plan and it is now available, and this is only recent information that has come out that can now be incorporated into the Five Year Plan on the education side. There is other stuff too coming down the pike. I see the Committee as having an inter-active process with the consultant that the first meeting was probably more like a scoping session, and I think that we have already started to have a little bit of that with the Superintendent telling us what he feels is useful data and not useful data. It is part of that collaboration process that I think is important. The Town has already done some of its' own research on the Town side. The Town of Gill has done some for their long-term financial future, and the school has done some. It is important that we all start to work to pull it all together. That is what is the most valuable part of this process, bringing it together, validating the assumption, getting everybody to buy into the assumptions and putting forth the options and scenarios that people could at least have as guidelines.

Allen and Ross: Expressed concerns that the original intent of Town Meeting was for an outside consultant and that the project would be too late to help this year. It was agreed, however, that Town Meeting had agreed to the plan and the Committee, having that authority, chose the bidder. Therefore, the role of the Board of Selectmen was to sign the Contract with the chosen bidder.

Discussion

Ross made the motion to accept the recommendation of the 5 Year Plan Committee, the committee that reviewed the request for proposals, be accepted and that we accept the submission by Jeff Singleton and Mike Bosworth. Seconded by Pruitt. Approved by: Ross – Aye, Pruitt – Aye, Allen – Aye.

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Montague Center Town Common

Allen: Application received from the Montague First Church to hold a Sunrise Easter Service on Sunday, March 23rd, 2008 from 6:00 AM to 8:00 AM. The application has been signed by the Police Chief.

Ross: I make a motion that we sign the application to use the Montague Center Town Common as described on the application submitted by Mark Fisk for March 23rd, 2008 from 6:00 AM to 8:00 AM. Seconded by Pruitt. Approved unanimously. Ross – Aye, Pruitt – Aye, Allen – Aye.

Announcements

Montague Parks and Recreation Department

Allen: The Montague Parks and Recreation Department is holding a public meeting, in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 138, General Laws as amended, the inhabitants of the Town of Montague are hereby notified that the Montague Parks and Recreation Department will be sponsoring a meeting regarding Norma's Park in the Village of Lake Pleasant. The meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 12th at 7:00 PM in the Spiritualist Hall on Montague Avenue in Lake Pleasant. Public participation is welcomed. They are obviously interested in whatever they can do to make Norma's Park a better park, and they are focusing on both Unity Park this year and Normas. They have already had one forum on Unity Park and this is the first one they will have on Norma's Park.

Town of Montague – Tax Collector

Allen: The Sewer Bills are due. Reminder to all Town of Montague sewer users that the second half of the fiscal year 2008 Sewer Use Bills are due by Friday, February 29, 2008.

To obtain a receipted bill, enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope and both copies of your bill with your payment. Tax Office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM.

Meetings

Allen: Next Selectmen's Meeting will be held next Monday and then the annual Town Meeting is Saturday, May 3rd, 2008.

Ross made a motion that we go into Executive Session for collective bargaining. Seconded by Pruitt. Approved unanimously. Pruitt – Aye, Ross – Aye, Allen – Aye.

ROSS made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Pruitt. Approved unanimously. Pruitt – Aye, Ross – Aye, Allen – Aye.