

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES

November 24, 2009

Library Basement Meeting Room

Members present: Matt Castriotta, Chair
Kristie Casey, Vice Chair
Ernest Newcomb, Clerk

Staff present: Debra Roussel, Town Administrator

Others present: Finance Committee members Ed Blanchard and Gardner News Reporter Jean-Paul Salamanca

Meeting commenced at 6:05 pm

Ms. Roussel presented an application from Chief of Police Dennis Perron for an \$8,400.00 Governors Highway Safety Bureau (GHSB) grant from the Executive Office of Public Safety for traffic mobilizations and enforcement equipment.

Motion: E. Newcomb **2nd: K. Casey**
To authorize Matt Castriotta to sign the GHSB grant application on behalf of the Board of Selectmen. **Vote: All In favor**

Board to review Department of Revenue Financial Management Report. Agreed to review and vote on each recommendation, as motioned.

Recommendation One – Cultivate Team Approach to Financial Management. Board members felt that the ground work had been laid for this process, by scheduling joint meetings for discussion and review of policies and processes.

Motion: E. Newcomb **2nd: K. Casey**
To approve by striving to improve relations between the different parties involved in the financial management of the Town. **Vote: All In Favor**

Recommendation Two – Establish a Town Administrator Bylaw. Ms. Casey indicated there was a need to formalize the role of the town administrator position. Mr. Newcomb noted belief for need to review recommendations as a whole and then return to discussion, may want to review different forms of government. In agreement with recommendation to formalize, but not at this time.

Motion: K. Casey **2nd: M. Castriotta**
To sponsor a town bylaw that established the power and duties of the town administrator position. **Vote: Two In Favor; One Against**

Recommendation Three – Secure Funding for Capital Improvements. Mr. Newcomb noted sees benefit of establishing source, but again, need to move slowly. Ms. Casey noted agreement on surface of recommendation, but reality of fiscal situation may force departure from plan. Ms. Roussel noted Board needs to commit as strong priority. Mr. Newcomb noted discussion at capital planning meeting to override three percent of levy to commit to capital purchases. Mr.

Castriotta noted belief that capital should be funded outside of 2 ½ to ensure support of services. Capital is in fairly good condition at present; have worked hard at securing a financial plan through to implementation. All agreed with need to secure funding for capital improvements, but unsure of method for funding source. Mr. Castriotta requested opinion from Mr. Blanchard as Finance Committee. Mr. Blanchard declined to comment. Ms. Roussel suggested deferring action until tri-board meeting in January 2010. Board members agreed.

Recommendation Four –Modify Budget Process to be more inclusive. Members agreed with need to formalize budget process, however need to remove redundancy of reporting requirements for department heads. Ms. Roussel noted belief that this corresponds with first proposal, need for open communication and inclusion.

Motion: E. Newcomb

To approve the recommendation to modify the budget process and adopt formal budget guidelines.

2nd: M. Castriotta

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Five – Develop Multi-Year Revenue and Expenditure Forecasts. Mr. Newcomb noted agree in principal, but need to ensure value to expenditure of time. Ms. Casey noted need to evaluate feasibility with current staffing levels. Ms. Roussel agreed, noting could provide if clerical tasks performed assigned elsewhere, making better use of her time. Mr. Newcomb suggested Finance Committee to take on task. Board noted in interest of inclusiveness, talk to staff to see if interest in assisting with task. Agreed to defer further discussion on recommendation until have tri-board meeting.

Recommendation Six – Plan to Set Tax Rate Timely. Board members noted full agreement, absolutely necessary.

Motion: E. Newcomb

To approve the recommendation to have selectmen and finance officers agree on a calendar and deadlines for setting the annual tax rate.

2nd: K. Casey

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Seven - Develop Corrective Action Plan for Annual Audit. Ms. Roussel noted she does follow up with audit recommendations, sending notice of management letter recommendation to departments involved, but admits is unable to follow up further; noting a lack of time. Mr. Castriotta believed this was part of strengthening the chain of command and committing to the position of the Town Administrator and authority necessary to carry out responsibilities. Mr. Newcomb believed in elective process and town meeting process. Ms. Casey agreed, but believed ties in with Recommendation Two; need to develop corrective action plan; accountability lacking.

Motion: K. Casey

To approve the formulation of a corrective action plan to address any weaknesses identified by its private auditor and this management review.

2nd: M. Castriotta

Vote: Two In Favor; One Against

Recommendation Eight – Consider Combining Treasurer and Tax Collector. Mr. Castriotta noted in favor of this for some time. Ms. Roussel noted Town Meeting already voted in support in 1980s. Ms. Casey noted at minimum, until attrition, cross training needed.

Motion: K. Casey

2nd: E. Newcomb

To direct the Treasurer and Tax Collector to cross train and assume the role as assistant to the other.

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Nine – Appoint the Board of Assessors. Mr. Newcomb noted he was not in favor at this time; responsive to elective process. Noted problem was accountability of elected officials. Mr. Castriotta and Ms. Casey spoke to current situation where elected officials failure to earn certification as required by State Law leaves the Town unprotected, unable to certify information to Department of Revenue. With one position grandfathered and the other uncertified, if one of the three chooses not to run or be unable to fulfill their term it creates a dire situation for the Town. Lack of accountability an issue also; Deputy Assessor's control, fiefdom. Mr. Newcomb indicated rather have Town Meeting make requirement of certification. Ms. Roussel indicated belief that had been looked into previously and Town Meeting cannot mandate requirements of elected officials. Ms. Roussel suggested deferring further deliberation until tri-board meeting. Ms. Roussel also asked if intent to meet with Department of Revenue (DOR), to allow further explanation. Board agreed intent to meet with DOR, but unsure of timeline, prior to tri-board or after. Board directed Ms. Roussel to invite DOR technical assistance team to future meeting date, preferably prior to tri-board meeting.

Motion: K. Casey

2nd: E. Newcomb

To defer further discussion on Recommendation Nine until meeting with Department of Revenue representatives.

Vote: Two in Favor; One Against.

Recommendation Ten – Evaluate Installing a Computer Network in Town Hall. Ms.

Roussel noted strong support, which would allow all users to link to copier, utilize scanning to desktop, and eliminate desktop printers for cost savings. Ms. Casey noted agreement with the recommendation, believing that it will simplify operations, once users become accustomed to change.

Motion: E. Newcomb

2nd: K. Casey

To support the recommendation and direct the Computer Oversight Committee to investigate options for networking all town computers.

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Eleven – Review IT Disaster Recovery Procedures. Ms. Roussel indicated strong support of this recommendation, reminding Board members of the time when numerous Town offices were broken into and computer equipment was stolen and or destroyed, putting critical data at risk.

Motion: K. Casey

2nd: E. Newcomb

To support the recommendation that officials commit to a written information technology (IT) recovery plan.

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Twelve – Establish Secure Location for all Monies. Ms. Roussel reported this has been an issue and she has requested the Treasurer address establishing a more secure location, available to boards and committees at all times, not just when offices are open.

Motion: E. Newcomb

2nd: K. Casey

recommend the Treasurer establish security procedures for departments that take in money.

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Thirteen –Pursue Tailings. Board agreed with need to pursue collection of returned or unclaimed checks; requiring no further discussion.

Motion: E. Newcomb

2nd: K. Casey

To recommend the Treasurer research and pursue all returned or unclaimed checks and take whatever action legally available for collection.

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Fourteen - Bring Reconciliations Up-to-date. Board members acknowledged concern that this has not transpired regularly, despite staffing levels, agreeing as salaried positions they are required to get the job done.

Motion: E. Newcomb

2nd: K. Casey

To direct the Town Accountant to take the lead role in bringing reconciliations of cash and receivable balances with the Treasurer and Collector up to date and to provide monthly reports at the close of each month for both cash and receivables for all funds. **Vote: All In Favor**

Recommendation Fifteen – Report on Accrued Sick and Vacation Time. Mr. Castriotta questioned why recommendation reflects Accountant perform the accrual and not the Treasurer, as we have been trying to establish. Ms. Roussel reported conversation with Town Accountant, noting that this recommendation is a requirement under general accounting principles (GASB), but since we do not offer health insurance to our retirees that she felt this recommendation did not apply. Board members felt strongly that the recommendation in regard to standardization of forms and reporting to financial offices and tracking of same and reporting to employees on payroll software should be easily accomplished.

Motion: E. Newcomb

2nd. K. Casey

To approve the recommendation requiring the finance officers centralize record keeping for accrued employee sick leave and vacation time.

Vote: All in Favor

Recommendation Sixteen – Plan to Submit Schedule A on time. Board members agreed wholeheartedly with recommendation sixteen, that closing the town books' is a fundamental role of the Town Accountant.

Motion: K. Casey

2nd : E. Newcomb

To accept the recommendation to submit Schedule A in a timely manner, requiring the Town Accountant to begin preparing the Town's Schedule A.

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Seventeen – Make Deposits to Treasurer's Account. Board members felt merging positions of collector and treasurer will aid in task. Ms. Roussel reported that this has come up in other towns in which she has worked and believes it to be very practical.

Motion: E. Newcomb

2nd: K. Casey

To approve the recommendation that the Collector deposit all payments into an account maintained by the Town Treasurer.

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Eighteen – Scan Motor Vehicle Excise Bills. Need to determine costs.

Motion: E. Newcomb

To request the Collector determine cost of implementation, perform cost benefit analysis, at which time Board will reconsider recommendation.

2nd: M. Castriotta

Vote: All In Favor

Recommendation Nineteen – Raise Fees for Municipal Lien Certificates Ms. Roussel reported Collector had put forth the local option for the Special Town Meeting scheduled in December of 2009.

Motion: E. Newcomb

To support the Collector's recommendation and adopt MGL c. 60, §23B. **Vote: All in Favor**

2nd: M. Castriotta

Recommendation Twenty – Place Property Records on Line – Ms. Casey indicated while supportive of premise, believed a cost benefit analysis is warranted. Mr. Blanchard indicated that Finance Committee had supported restoration of Deputy Assessor's hours to 27 ¾ and provided clerk for 5 hours, but office is only open for approximately ten hours; not great customer service. Believed cost of so many hours is disproportionate to service received. Mr. Newcomb believed Town Meeting should be asked for opinion and mandate if in support. Ms. Roussel noted unsure if Town Meeting has authority to mandate elected officials.

Motion K. Casey

To solicit cost benefit analysis prior to further review of recommendation. **Vote: All in Favor**

2nd. E. Newcomb

Recommendation Twenty - One Inspect All Sale Properties. Mr. Newcomb suggested request Assessors implement or provide explanation.

Motion E. Newcomb

To support DOR recommendation that Assessors inspect interior and exterior of all sale properties, or provide explanation why not feasible.

2nd. K. Casey

Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Roussel requested clarification on meeting date with Department of Revenue. Board agreed with need to discuss prior to tri-board meeting in January.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debra A. Roussel,
Town Administrator

Approved: Dec. 7, 2009.