

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
APRIL 28, 2014
SLADE BUILDING**

Members present: Matthew Castriotta, Chairman
Daniel Galante
Jeffrey Williams

Member not present: Michael Stauder

Staff present: Anita Scheipers, Town Administrator; Elaine Peterson, Town Secretary, Jeannette Elsevier; Assessors Clerk

Others present: Harald Scheid, Tom Bratko, Cathy Hansgate, John Nason, Paul Hale

Meeting called to order at 6:38 p.m.

Farm Excise Tax Ballot Question & Warrant Question

Mr. Scheid of Regional Resource Group and Assessor's Clerk Elsevier came in to report on the upcoming farm excise tax ballot question. Mr. Scheid stated the farm animal and equipment excise tax has been around for many years. Many Assessors' offices throughout the Commonwealth have largely abandoned the farm animal and equipment excise tax and are allowed to do so under the law. It is a local option. Hubbardston is one of the few remaining communities that still use it. Mr. Scheid stated Ms. Elsevier did some research and there may be three or four individuals that may qualify for the farm excise tax. This would yield about \$180 of an annual loss of tax revenue. The Assessors have levied a personal property tax against farm assets (equipment). Currently the only farmers who are eligible to file for exemption are those that file Form F with their tax return. Anything under \$5000 in value is taxed beginning with the first dollar only if it goes over \$5000 in value. The warrant article would raise the threshold from \$5000 to \$10,000. The Board of Assessors takes no position with respect to exempting of farm animals and equipment. They believe the town residents should vote on the issue.

Mr. Scheid stated the town can take a local option to raise the ceiling for all personal property tax to \$10,000. The town would lose about \$2500 in revenue if approved, but the town would see an incremental increase of about one cent in the tax rate to compensate. Depreciation is also a factor in property assessment. Mr. Scheid stated the public utilities pay around 95% of personal property taxes for the town. Statute requires the farm animal/machinery excise tax be removed by a ballot question. The Board thanked Mr. Scheid and Ms. Elsevier for the information. Mr. Scheid and Ms. Elsevier exited the meeting.

FY'15 Budget Presentation

Ms. Scheipers presented a PowerPoint of the revised budget. She reported she had received good news from QRSD earlier in the day and the assessment number has been reduced to a 6% increase. It is being voted on at tomorrow night's school committee meeting. She went over each

section with comments. Legislative accounts have been moved to "Other." Executive accounts include a 1% Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) for the Selectboard stipends and Town Clerk and Town Secretary wages. An Assistant Town Clerk position has been added to cover during Town Clerk's absences and during elections.

\$1275 has been budgeted contingent on Town Administrator's spring performance evaluation. Elections and Registration costs are increased due to the increase in elections. Assessors include a 1% COLA increase to their stipends and the Assessor's Clerk wages. Assessors' expenses have increased due to Assessors Maps funding being moved into the expense line. Treasurer's salary and Municipal Finance Clerk wages include the same 1% COLA. Tax title expense has been reduced on recommendation of the Treasurer as well as the Tax Collector's Tax Title expense line. Legal Services budget has been increased from \$40,000 to \$45,000 due to anticipated legal issues in FY 15. Slade Building Utilities have been increased by an additional \$6000 as the contract for electricity has ended and an increase in the new rate is anticipated.

IT Maintenance has had all software licensing fees, website maintenance and funding to replace three computers combined into the account. The Finance Committee Reserve Fund has been increased by \$5000.

Public Safety was then reviewed. Police Department wages has been increased due to a 2% contracted increase and the possible retirement of a senior officer. Training costs have been increased by \$1271.81. The 1% COLA has been applied to the department clerk and the Police Chief's wages. Fire Department wage increases have been added due to the newly formed Fire Union. There are also slight increases to vehicle and equipment maintenance.

Ms. Scheipers reported she placed the highest budget scenario number in the regional Dispatch line item until she hears from Rutland. Their dispatch contract is up for renewal and a new Director will be hired. She did decrease the maintenance equipment line to compensate. Building and Planning Board line items show the 1% COLA increase. The wage line is reduced to a new hire and reduced hourly wage.

Landfill monitoring finding has been reduced as the Department of Environmental Protection has reduced the testing requirements.

Under Education, the QRSD assessment is down to \$3,961,061 showing an increase of \$226,843. There is a 4% increase in the Montachusett Regional Technical Vocation School District assessment.

For the Department of Public Works, several line items have been combined due to reorganization. Wages include the Cemetery Clerk wages and extra pay for "out of grade pay" for special equipment operation and a Foreman position for hiring later in FY 15. \$15,000 has been added for the regional bucket truck payment according to the agreement.

Ms. Scheipers reported she had received a citizen's petition to remove Cemetery Commission wages/expenses from under the umbrella of DPW budget so changes may need to be made depending on annual town meeting.

Ms. Scheipers reported the MART Van Wages has been zeroed out and the program is now self-supporting due to a revolving account being established in a previous year. Veterans Benefits have been increased due to increased participation of local Veterans. The town is reimbursed at 75% by the federal government but there is a year delay in reimbursement time. No changes to the Library program other than increased budget according to mandate.

Town Clock maintenance has been increased according to need.

Capital budget items have been moved out of the operating budget into a stabilization fund and will be listed under a separate warrant article requiring a 2/3rds vote. More on this account will

be covered at the next Board meeting. Insurance has been amended to reflect decreased health insurance benefits due to attrition and possible deductibles on future claims. Total for the FY'15 Operating budget is now \$7,479,578, reflecting an increase of \$160,957.

Ms. Scheipers moved on to the Ambulance Enterprise Fund. This funding shows increases due to contract related expenses such as wages and professional services. The budget reflects the percentage of calls the department gets; currently 60% percent of calls are ambulance and 40% are fire-related.

Revenue sources are property taxes, the allowed increase under Proposition 2 1/2, new growth projections, debt exclusion minus snow and ice deficit and reserve funding for overlay totaling \$5,907,021. Local aid receipts total \$471,931 minus offsets of \$4008 and assessments of \$12,497. Also included is \$1,169,540 in local receipts (including solar PILOT monies) bringing the local receipt amount up to \$7,531,987. The draft budget number of \$7,479,578 plus the municipal capital stabilization account article totaling \$40,000 totals \$7,519,578 leaving a balance of \$12,409 of available funds for additional appropriation during the fiscal year. Free cash is estimated to be \$250,000 which is used for possible warrant articles.

Possible warrant articles include increasing the Senior Tax Work Off Program amount to \$15,000 which was previously \$11,500; adding \$15,000 to the general stabilization fund; \$170,000 for municipal capital stabilization account; \$5,000 for a pilot bylaw enforcement program for the Building Commissioner; \$7,000 for SoftRight software (for tax title and payroll modules); \$33,000 for Center School fire alarm panel and smoke detectors, and \$3,000 for fire pond maintenance. These total \$248,000 leaving \$2,000 if free cash is certified at \$250,000. Ms. Scheipers stated overall the town is in pretty good shape due to the QRSD assessment number being reduced. She will confirm the school number on Wednesday morning following the Tuesday night vote. The Board thanked Ms. Scheipers.

Motion: D. Galante

2nd: J. Williams

To approve the FY15 budget as presented conditional on the presented school budget numbers

Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Peterson stated according to the Town Charter, "the annual town meeting shall be held in March, April, May or June on a date to be determined by the town bylaws or as designated by the Selectboard."

Motion: J. Williams

2nd: D. Galante

To designate the date of the Special and Annual Town Meeting as Tuesday, June 3, 2014

Vote: All in Favor

Budget Review Calendar

Ms. Scheipers presented the budget calendar for review according to the town charter. The STM/ATM warrants will be signed on May 5th by the Selectboard and the Finance Committee will then review and make their recommendations prior to it being sent to the printer on the 13th. She stated she has already sent it to town counsel for review. Three citizen petitions have been submitted and Ms. Scheipers is required to present them as written but she is unsure of the wording being adequate for a meeting vote. She has forwarded them to town counsel for some suggested alternative wording to be presented on the floor for town meeting in order to amend.

One is take Cemetery out from under the umbrella of the DPW. The second is to place a beaver deceiver in front of the privately owned dam on Mt. Jefferson Road and replace the culvert there. The third is to remove the Tiger Mower from DPW service if it breaks down one more time.

Ms. Scheipers asked the Board to determine who would be the authority to sanction use of the \$100,000 funding approved at June 5, 2013 ATM (*to purchase, accept by gift, or take by eminent domain a parcel of land on which the town would develop a Senior Center/Community Center, affordable housing or other legal municipal purpose and to further the design of said municipal facilities or take any action relative thereto*). She recommended the Selectboard to be that authority.

Motion: D. Galante

2nd: J. Williams

To designate the Selectboard as the authority to approve use of the warrant article funding

Vote: All in

Favor

Mr. Hale requested the Board authorize conducting a perc test on DCR land located on the corner of New Templeton Road and Gardner Road involved in the land swap with the town. There appears to be a disparity with DCR on the value of the town owned-Mile Road property and the DCR property. He also requested the DPW provide the use of the backhoe. A letter from the Board is needed to request access on the DCR property to conduct a perc test. A normal site inspection fee is \$200 and he is requesting the Board waive the permit fee.

Motion: D. Galante

2nd: J. Williams

To authorize up to \$3000 for a perc test on the DCR land

Vote: All in Favor

The Board of Health sets its own fees and Mr. Hale should contact the Board of Health. Mr. Galante suggested putting all arrangements in writing with the DCR.

Mr. Hale also requested additional funding (\$2400) for the architect to do a redesign of the original to remove square footage to reduce construction cost. The Senior Center Building Committee has reviewed the design and removed approximately 1000 square feet to a total of 5500 square feet. The Board will review this request at the May 5th meeting.

Ms. Scheipers stated because the town is getting push back from DCR on the value of both lots involved in the swap, she would like to place an article on the town meeting warrant to propose swapping additional landlocked land totaling 22 acres, located near Natty Pond Drive.

New Hire of Full-time Patrolman

Ms. Scheipers reported Police Chief Perron is recommending hiring Michael Amann as a full-time patrolman.

Motion: J. Williams

2nd: D. Galante

To confirm the appointment of Michael Amman as full-time patrolman

Vote: All in Favor

Resignation

Motion: J. Williams

2nd: D. Galante

To accept the resignation of Ken Green from the 250th Anniversary Committee effective May 1st.

Vote: All in Favor

Ms. Peterson provided an update on the Class II auto dealer licensees. Building Commissioner Brandt is satisfied with Second Shift Garage owner, Ray LaJoie Jr.'s cleanup and will work with him on completing his parking plan.

Mr. Brandt has requested an additional thirty days to work out details with Jon Jonsson specifically cleaning up the ground and around the garage, checking on a town easement near the road that has tractor trailer parked there, wetlands near the property and the parking plan.

Mr. Bratko asked to speak as an abutter and complained about Mr. Jonsson's property condition. Mr. Castriotta stated he would pass Mr. Bratko's concerns on to the Building Commissioner.

Motion: D. Galante

To authorize the class II auto dealer license for Second Shift Garage to be extended to December 31, 2014

2nd: J. Williams

Vote: All in Favor

Motion: J. Williams

To extend the conditional Class II auto dealer license for AAA Today, LLC for an additional thirty days

2nd: D. Galante

Vote: All in Favor

Motion: D. Galante

To adjourn the meeting at 7:46 pm

2nd: J. Williams

Vote: All in Favor

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine M. Peterson

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Town Secretary

Approved: May 5, 2014.