

**MINUTES  
SELECTMEN'S MEETING  
JULY 29, 2013**

Chairman Wilson called the meeting to order at 6:30pm. Members present were Sandra Wilson, Thomas Buckley, Dianna Provencher, Matthew Dennison and Douglas Belanger. Also present was Town Administrator Robert Reed.

**Executive Session**

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to go into Executive Session under MGL Chapter 30A, Sections 21(a)3 and 21(a)6 to discuss strategy with respect to contract negotiations and real property matters; a public announcement is anticipated and the Board will reconvene in Open Session. Mr. Belanger seconded.

Mr. Belanger asked if we were anticipating an announcement. The Board stated yes.

The Board was polled: ALL AYES

The Board went into Executive Session at 6:31pm.  
The Board came out of Executive Session at 7:00pm.

**Interim Town Administrator – Contract for Services**

Ms. Wilson announced an Employment Agreement between the Town and Mr. Reed for Interim Town Administrator services, beginning August 19<sup>th</sup> and running until we have hired a new administrator.

**Proposition 2½ Override**

Approve Ballot Question – language for ballot question before the Board was prepared by Town Counsel. Mr. Belanger felt the wording could be better suited, as he was uncomfortable with the words “municipal budget”. We have always understood a municipal budget to mean the general government portion as opposed to the school budget, and doesn’t want to confuse anyone. TA noted that he had asked Atty. Cove for the broadest language allowable, it is very strict, but could try to contact him now to see if it could be changed. (Mr. Reed left the meeting to make a phone call.) Mr. Reed reported that he left a voicemail message for Atty. Cove and hopes to hear back from him before the meeting ends. Ms. Wilson agreed that we should try to drop the word “municipal” from the draft language; others supported that change.

Set Public Forums – August 22<sup>nd</sup> in Town Hall, September 4<sup>th</sup> at Middle School, and September 19<sup>th</sup> at Senior Center have been confirmed. Another intended for September 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Housing Authority has not yet been confirmed.

Town Administrator’s FY’14 Budget recommendations - Chairman Wilson stated that TA has developed his recommendations on how an “Override Budget” and “Non-Override Budget” would affect some of the major departments. Some of the recommendations may happen, some may not; some may occur with or without an Override. Mr. Dennison asked if dept heads were involved in the process. TA stated yes, he met with each; he would be happy to meet with Mr. Dennison to review the specifics. Ms. Wilson read aloud from the report (attached), with comments as follows:

**Police Department:**

- Belanger – “with an override” we should add “eliminate current consideration of regional dispatching”
- Dennison – short one more officer with recent retiree not being replaced, asking how many part-timers we would be calling back. TA replied that we may be able to recall some of the eight (8) officers on lay-off.

**Fire Department:**

- Dennison – our volunteers must be trained, so we should not be eliminating those costs.
- Wilson – firefighters are paid when they respond to calls – stipend system vs. salaries.

Library:

- Dennison – would children's librarian be full or part-time. TA replied, full-time.

Highway Department:

- Dennison – they are short four (4) workers, but we're only considering replacing one (1).

Ms. Provencher asked if the plan was for a 3-year Override. Ms. Wilson explained, no, it is a one-year Override for FY'14 and will be in place permanently, unless an "underride" was implemented in the future. Mr. Belanger further explained that we have in the past approved the Town not "taxing to the max" and that option could be available to us again and at that point we would not have to tax the maximum amount allowed by law. In this case we have developed a 5-year plan with 2% increase in budgets each year.

Mr. Belanger noted there are always hidden cost factors that may not be so apparent. For instance, if we don't hire snow removal contractors, process will take much longer and could affect school openings, lost work time for commuters, with seniors stuck at home.

Mr. Buckley felt that public safety concerns are major. Employee moral is low. And staff are ill equipped with age old computer equipment. He felt we are between a rock and a hard place.

Ms. Provencher asked, is the Override intended to hire back personnel and not intended for capital equipment purchases. Ms. Wilson explained that within our 5-year plan we may have surpluses in some years, which could go to Capital projects or the Stabilization Account to support the last two lean years within this 5-year plan.

Mr. Reed noted that larger departments need more funding, when those are the ones you could usually cut from. Many of the shortfalls are operating costs and we continue to supplement them each year with Free Cash reserves. We need to present an honest budget to the townspeople.

Ms. Provencher asked if the Override includes any raises for personnel. Ms. Wilson explained that a 2% increase per year is included in projections. Departments must live within that allotment, so wage increases could be included in that bottom line.

Ms. Provencher asked if the 5-year plan will show where all \$1.5 Million is going to. And the biggest department, Schools, is missing from TA's recommendations. Ms. Wilson explained that the particulars on exact costs cannot be done at this point. Those items are up for discussion. We are looking to adopt a basic plan at this time per TA's recommendations. We are trying to show the public what is at risk.

Ms. Provencher reported that former member Tom Brennan had approached her with an idea to petition the legislature to allow debt exclusion for salaries to bring back staffing levels to Police Dept. This method would create a restricted number of years that taxes are increased, not infinitely as with an Override. Mr. Reed had also spoken with Mr. Brennan in the same regard, with Mr. Belanger having been sent a document outlining proposal. Ms. Wilson felt she could support that concept but we do not have time to wait for action by the State. And she did not feel they would provide special legislation for one community. Maybe in the future this could be something to pursue, but not to change our path now. Ms. Provencher asked that we at least investigate the possibilities.

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to support concept to pursue special legislation to allow debt exclusion process for salaries. Mr. Belanger seconded.

Mr. Buckley had not read this proposal, but he did not think it would address our needs long term. Mr. Dennison asked that we hold off on this until our next meeting so we could have time to consider. Mr. Belanger noted Mr. Brennan's fix is geared toward police personnel only.

VOTE: 3-1-1, Mr. Buckley opposed and Mr. Dennison abstained.

Mr. Buckley noted that a Proposition Override may not affect all the same; he does not want to pay more taxes either, but understands the need to move this Town forward. Every year we have been supplementing operational

budgets in the fall with our certified Free Cash. Our current deficit is \$460,000. And we cannot build back our reserves without an Override being implemented. He felt we are all in this together, not just public safety, or we will derail this Override.

Ms. Wilson explained that the estimated \$460,000 deficit in FY'14 Budget is already taking into consideration whatever Free Cash may be available.

Mr. Buckley repeated what he had learned while speaking with Mr. Reed earlier. That the \$1.5 Million Override will be split in three, essentially: 1/3 to Operating Budget, 1/3 to Deficit, 1/3 to Reserves. Mr. Reed confirmed that is the basis.

Chairman Wilson asked if there were any other concerns or changes to TA's recommendations, or are we ready to vote now. Mr. Dennison wanted to revisit these departmental issues before crunch time; for instance, perhaps we could afford a part-time librarian. Ms. Wilson felt we may make changes on some or all issues, after listening at public forums.

MOTION: Mr. Dennison moved to utilize list of TA's recommendations on departmental funding before us this evening, as amended. Mr. Belanger seconded.

Discussion – Mr. Belanger explained further that our choices will be one thing or another, we cannot just drop these discussions; this will be a very difficult time with tough choices to be made.

VOTE: UNANIMOUS

Set Special Town Meeting Date – Mr. Reed recommended October 29<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Wilson asked if Town Clerk was okay with that date. Mr. Reed said he didn't have a chance to ask her. Ms. Wilson noted that the Moderator is okay with that date and his preference would be to hold it at the High School. The seating capacity is better there if we expect a controversial crowd, but it's much easier for Town Clerk to hold it here in Town Hall.

Requests for articles will be accepted through September 5<sup>th</sup>. TA noted this date is only for others to forward information; the Selectmen can adjust the Warrant in any way they decide.

Reappointments – Ms. Wilson noted there was nothing in the Agenda book, but we did receive an email from Chairman requesting reappointment of Council on Aging members Jane Todd and Jacqueline Johnson.

MOTION: Mr. Belanger moved to reappoint members Jane Todd and Jacqueline Johnson to COA board, term to expire 6/30/16. Mr. Dennison seconded. UNANIMOUS

### **Correspondence**

1. Updated vacancy list for Town Boards and Committees. FILE

2. Letter from local constable reporting on expenses and services he provides. Mr. Belanger explained that the law changed and requires constables to provide 25% of their service fees to the municipality appointing them. Mr. Wilson saw another news item that mentioned a minimum \$500 earnings before the constable pays that portion to the towns. The Board asked TA to research this matter.

MOTION: Mr. Belanger moved to require annual report from constables on services provided, prior to reappointment to office each year. Mr. Dennison seconded. UNANIMOUS

3. Alert from Dept of Revenue regarding State owned land values. Mr. Reed felt this was meant for Assessors to utilize for pilot payments. Mr. Dennison asked that we begin again to discuss with Becker College these so-called PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) agreements. Ms. Wilson noted that she and Mr. Belanger will work on this as the liaisons. Mr. Belanger felt we might want to wait until the dust settles, as there are staff changes occurring at this time and we will have a new rep soon.

**Signatures**

CMRPC has put together another grant program that Town Planner Michelle Buck has been working on as our lead contact. This ePermitting Grant will be supported in the first year by funds from CMRPC's CIC grant. Mr. Buckley noted we will be allowed up to \$3000 this first year so we must be aware of our spending limit. He noted a 3% user fee per permit and wondered if that is paid starting in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the contract. Mr. Reed will be honest with CMRPC and tell them we are leery of free programs that run out of grant funds with the towns being left to pay for contract services entered into when grant funds were available. Ms. Wilson noted that she will need to provide a link on our Website.

Mr. Reed noted that some departments are not interested in this permitting program as they need applicants to come in person to fill out forms and provide proof of identity.

MOTION: Mr. Belanger moved for Chairman to sign contract of ePermitting services program.  
Mr. Buckley seconded. 4-0, Ms. Provencher abstained.

**Town Administrator's Report/New Business**

- Meeting to discuss Waite Pond issues will be held tomorrow evening with liaisons and local rep Dick Johnston and himself.
- We were not funded in this CDBG grant round. We were in a 3-way tie for 2<sup>nd</sup> place standing. He will work on variables of scoring, DHCD having used community needs score as tie breaker. We may have to use our legislative reps to pursue reserve funds that usually remain available.

**Board Reports/New Business****Selectman Provencher:**

- Downloaded the DOR's Cherry Sheet manual and asked that copies be made for members and Advisory Board.

**Selectman Dennison:**

- August 10<sup>th</sup> concert from 12-6pm at Club Kasbar in Worcester as fundraiser for Project New Hope.
- August 10<sup>th</sup> shotgun golf tournament for Leicester Firefighters fundraiser at Leicester Country Club.

**Selectman Belanger:**

- Will not be here for 8/12 meeting of the Board. He read aloud a portion from the DOR report noting the reduction in both State and Local receipts. He felt we had worked hard over the last few years hoping things will get better and put off any Override discussions. We have survived to this point, but it sure is taking forever it seems, yet the economy is not back and we're still facing these drastic reductions in revenues.

**Selectman Buckley:**

- WIFF-ALS softball tournament was a great success, thanking the youngsters and all volunteers for spearheading this fundraiser.

**Selectman Wilson:**

- Invitation from Becker College to join Mass DiGi Summer Innovation Program open house at Weller Academic Center in Worcester campus on August 8<sup>th</sup> from 1:30-4:30pm. Students interested in pursuing games career would find it interesting.
- Send her your questions for TA interviews. It is too late to finalize them now but she will do so for our August 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. Doug wants to handle follow-up questions, which is his strong point, and will defer to members on other questions. She will try not to duplicate questions from Search Committee, yet some should be asked again.
- Next meeting of the Selectmen will be held on August 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Final interviews with TA candidates will be held on August 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Minutes**

Mr. Belanger asked that we hold on 3/11/13 and 3/27/13 Executive Session minutes for Counsel's approval.

MOTION: Mr. Dennison moved to approve 2/27/13 and 5/29/13 Regular Session minutes and 6/24/13 Executive Session minutes. Mr. Buckley seconded. UNANIMOUS

**Ballot Question**

MOTION: Mr. Belanger moved that pursuant to MGL Chapter 59, Section 21C the Board of Selectmen seek voter approval to assess an additional One Million Five Hundred Thousand (\$1,500,000) Dollars in real estate and personal property taxes for all lawful budget purposes for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2013 and that the Board Chairperson and Town Administrator arrange the final drafting of the referendum question and placement of the question before the voters. Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

MOTION: Mr. Belanger moved to adjourn. Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

The meeting was adjourned at 8:59pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan LeChasseur, Administrative Assistant