

**MINUTES
SELECTMEN'S MEETING
DECEMBER 10, 2007**

Chairman Belanger called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Members present were Douglas Belanger, Thomas Brennan, Dianna Provencher, and Richard Antanavica. Selectman Zagorski arrived approximately ten minutes late, and had to leave before the end of the meeting. Also present was Town Administrator Robert Reed.

Jim Coughlin/Highway Superintendent

Chairman Belanger noted that tomorrow, December 11th, has been designated as "Jim Coughlin Day" in the Town of Leicester. The Board noted the many skills of this valued employee, who has worked for the Highway Department for thirty-five years. Jim's good hearted nature was recognized. The Board asked that the townspeople thank Mr. Coughlin for his years of dedicated service to the community.

FIRE/EMS Study – Report of Consultant and Fire Chief

Fire Chief Robert Wilson and MMA Consulting principal Mark Morse were present to discuss the study report authorized by town meeting with a \$16,000 appropriation.

Mr. Morse gave a brief report on the findings, including the following:

- Current Location – fire department conditions have three sites, a separate location within each village, two on the outskirts of town, requiring an inward response system. The main station on Water Street is too small a site to expand the facility, expanding into a two-floor structure is not feasible, the building is in poor condition, and there is little or no parking available. The sub-stations are in good condition and with proper maintenance could last a long time.
- New Location – recommended location to house a new station would be in the vicinity of Station 1/Water St. A new headquarters located centrally within the town would allow for a 360 degree response system. Mr. Morse advised that we must think 2-3 generations out to build a suitable fire station; one that would service the community under present day standards and beyond. Ideally, a second station should be located in the Route 56/Pleasant Street area, with the other two sub-stations closed, but that plan is more long-term.
- Site Options – a number of locations were viewed, some too far west to accommodate proper response system, some not large enough to accommodate facility that could house proper vehicle equipment and allow for needed parking, some where roadways could not accommodate the traffic.
- Staffing – he commended the response capability of this call department, which is above normal. The Town is not looking to go to a full-time department.

Chief Wilson noted that the current building on Water St. known as Station 1 has no office space, the building is deteriorating and is not structurally sound, it cannot house today's equipment, and there is absolutely no where to park. The Department is limited when purchasing equipment, as most fire apparatus will not fit in these stations. They are currently building an addition to Station 2 out of desperation to house one of the vehicles. Having Emergency Medical Services located within a headquarters facility would be very beneficial. He felt that the Town has been generous with the needs of the Departments as far as equipment goes, but it is time to step up and fund a new facility to meet current standards. He commended the efforts of his call firefighters, but moral is low, they need the proper facility to work out of; a department that runs on a very lean budget is asking for the Town to step up.

Study Group members Douglas Belanger, Dianna Provencher and Richard Antanavica also commented:

Mr. Belanger stated that we all respect the work of our firefighters and commend their efforts of our behalf. It had been discussed years ago and agreed; after the new police station facility was built, we would look at a new fire station facility next. Unfortunately, financial constraints have put us in a tough position at this time, but he felt we should bring the issue forward to the townspeople and let them decide how the Town will proceed.

Mr. Antanavica, a long-time firefighter, noted that Station 1 is not even close to current standards, the number of deficiencies linger and continue to worsen. He felt the Town Administrator should look into any possible grant opportunity. He understands the financial constraints, but the Town must look at an override, or where do we draw the line as far as services to the community; the people must realize their needs and make a choice. He felt strongly that we must have a plan to bring the Town into the next century; as the leaders of this community, we need to bring awareness to the people.

Ms. Provencher reported that the Committee met with the consultant several times. The study process was very detailed, the knowledge of the consultant was apparent; it was an informative and good working relationship. She agreed that the Town needs to keep the strong EMS and Fire Departments that we have now.

Mr. Brennan agreed with the needs, but what if the townspeople say “no”. What is the group’s alternate plan? He disagreed with an override of any kind. However, perhaps a debt-exclusion could be considered. He did feel that we need to be ready with any plans should the opportunity arise.

Mr. Morse suggested a phased approach could be used; a new building that would allow for expansion might be considered, a slower approach to what is needed. However, he did not think you would really save much doing it that way.

Mr. Reed stated that an alternative construction method was not anticipated by this working group. Perhaps the next phase would determine that, but first we need to allow further investigation to bring options forward and designate a site.

Mr. Brennan agreed that the next phase should be funded, but felt the group should have two or three locations to choose from. He also felt option such as using the third floor of the Police Station for office space and meeting rooms should be considered, along with other ways to handle parking constraints.

Mr. Belanger inquired as to how much would be needed for the next phase. Mr. Wilson felt somewhere within the \$10-15,000 range; perhaps as much as \$20,000. He cautioned the public that we are not talking about closing stations at this time. And he reported that the Town gets a bargain with the total annual budget for the Fire Department at \$210,000. The firefighters need the Town’s support to move this project forward.

Mr. Zagorski asked how the group will look at potential sites; through eminent domain takings, donations, purchase. Mr. Antanavica stated that all options are being considered. Mr. Reed noted that purchase would be the quickest way to obtain property. Mr. Belanger elaborated that preferred sites are being considered, some being potential gifts, with possible purchase of adjacent properties.

Mr. Belanger noted that the next step would be to pursue funding for an engineering study. Mr. Reed stated yes, as he mentioned before, potential sites are time sensitive or the option to obtain them may be lost. Mr. Belanger estimated \$20,000 but would that include enough to obtain property as well? Mr. Reed stated these issues need to be determined in the next few months in preparation for town meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to reserve an Article on the next Town Meeting Warrant to seek funding for design and land acquisition for potential fire station replacement. Ms. Provencher seconded.
UNANIMOUS

Mr. Reed noted that the group will continue to meet and gather more information. Mr. Zagorski asked that the public be kept informed; perhaps land donations would come forward. Mr. Belanger noted that the prime area for relocation is within a ¼ mile of Route 9/Route 56 intersection at the center of town. Mr. Belanger, having been asked, wondered why not the Town-owned Hillcrest Country Club site. Mr. Wilson stated that it is too far from the center to meet response times.

The Board thanked the Committee for their work to date, and the consultant for his presentation.

Correspondence

1. Memo from Police Chief requesting authorization to hire five (5) additional part-time dispatchers for the Police Department.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to approve request to hire five part-time dispatchers.
Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

2. Memo from Police Chief requesting authority to hire five (5) part-time police officers for the Department.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to authorize the Civil Service hiring process of five permanent intermittent police officers. Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

Signatures

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to execute Bond Anticipation Note in the amount of \$32,000.
Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

Public Hearing

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to open the public hearing.

Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

Pasquale Turano was present on his application for a Class II Used Car Dealer License at 515 Main Street in Cherry Valley. He is asking for a twenty (20) car limit and, if approved, hopes to have the building renovated up to code and use as an office and possibly a showroom. He will not be doing any repairs. He has held a license in Worcester for many years at 1332 Main Street, but that property is now being sold.

Mr. Belanger expressed concern over the layout of the lots. Mr. Zagorski agreed; the property was viewed when another business opened there last year. His concern is fitting this number of cars on the lot. He can't see how it would work, with customer parking needs and snow accumulation issues. He wondered if Mr. Turano could show him physically how that many cars would work at that lot. Mr. Brennan also had concerns with the map that was submitted, which he did not feel was to scale; where are the curb cuts, the right of way, the island? Mr. Belanger agreed that the drawing needs to be more accurate, we can't guess; neighbors and fire access areas should be detailed. With the safety concerns that were brought up in the past for this location, the Board will have to do a site visit.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to recess the public hearing, to be reconvened at 7:00pm on January 7, 2008. Mr. Antanavica seconded.

Discussion – Ms. Provencher felt there is sufficient parking in back of the building to accommodate this number of vehicles. She asked if the old trailer was still there. Mr. Turano stated no, it was removed yesterday. She suggested having employee parking where the trailer had been. Mr. Turano felt his plan would work, and asked if he could place a dozen cars there to see if it would. Chairman Belanger agreed to this idea, but no vehicles for sale, only to allow for visualization.

VOTE: UNANIMOUS

Senator Augustus – Fiscal Update

Chairman Belanger wanted it made clear that we are aware of the Senator's efforts on behalf of the Town of Leicester, which we are appreciative of; this Board is pleased that he is here again this evening as he has done in the past. He reported that Rep. Binienda, however, was unable to attend due to a death in the family.

Senator Augustus stated that he has tried to be intellectually honest with his constituents. Cities need more money, which is very plain. He has tried to vote responsibly and has in fact voted five times not to roll back income tax. He has fought to hold Local Aid and Chapter 70 Aid numbers for cities and towns. Bridges statewide need some \$119,000,000,000 in repairs. Billions are being poured into this new health care initiative; the Commonwealth's pilot program, if successful, may be a template for the country. He can appreciate that the funding provided by the State is not enough; costs increase while revenues remain flat.

Mr. Belanger understood the limited revenues, but when various proposals are made to increase aid to cities and towns, those ideas should at least be looked at, not put into a drawer somewhere under "study". If they don't like any of these proposals, come up with another suggestion at the very least. Proposals should be brought to the floor for debate.

Mr. Belanger allowed the Selectmen, followed by various departments, to express concerns or ask questions of the Senator:

- Mr. Zagorski asked if Mass. Lottery rules allowed for the State to withhold some \$450,000,000 in Mass. Lottery Funds that are meant to be distributed to the cities and towns; is this legal?
 - While not a rule, the Senator felt it prudent to disburse Mass. Lottery Funds as intended
- Mr. Zagorski felt that the Municipal Partnership Act (MPA) proposal by Governor Patrick showed merit, yet that seems to be going by the wayside.
 - The Senator noted that portions of the MPA have been supported by different sanctions, yet the package as a whole is not getting full support by legislators.

(Mr. Zagorski left the meeting at this time.)

- Mr. Antanavica about the proposal that has been offered to remove tax exemptions being received by Verizon, which is also being ignored. He felt it a worthwhile proposal; and let the Towns tax Verizon directly on the utility poles within each community. He asked why these proposals are not moving forward.
 - While the proposals remain under study in the House, the Senator believes that philosophical issues at the leadership level have prohibited these ideas from moving forward.
- Mr. Antanavica noted that staff increases at the Legislative offices have cost millions, with our tax moneys footing the bill.
 - The Senator owed these artificial staffing levels to the Romney administration.
- Mr. Antanavica felt that laws are passed when the powers-that-be want them in, such as meals and travel expenses for legislators, costing tens of thousands of dollars of the taxpayers' money. Why should they be paid for mileage to drive to work when they are already being paid a salary by the taxpayers?
 - The Senator noted average salary for legislator is \$54,000.
- Mr. Antanavica cautioned that the Verizon proposal should be passed, or the legislators will be voted out of office.
 - The Senator acknowledged that this option is available every two years.
- Ms. Provencher asked how the communities are supposed to handle the resulting costs of the School English as Second Language (ESL) mandates. She noted that the continuation of State mandated programs is killing the towns. She wondered why the recent decrease in Mass. Lottery proceeds.
 - The Senator reported that the Lottery program has peaked, it had to at some point, estimates continue to run high, with proceeds not meeting goals.
- Mr. Brennan felt the system in Boston is broken. He urged that communities such as Leicester not be penalized for doing its job and managing the Town prudently while others that have not done so get bailed out; what is the sense of being fiscally responsible if you benefit by not doing so.
- School Committee members commented. Scott Rieder thanked the Senator for listening. He stated that Special Education mandates are killing us. And they have exhausted all areas where fees can be implemented to improve revenues. Linda Looft agreed. They continue to work through their association seeking increased revenues and relaxed mandates; there needs to be efficiencies made to the current SPED transportation program, which should result in cost savings for the communities. Mark Armington concurred; the SPED program needs to be adjusted; they are paying more to transport these children, who all deserve a chance, than to bus the rest of the school population. There needs to be some relief in this area specifically. General speaking, the towns should be allocated the additional half million dollars in Lottery Aid that was promised; these funds have been cut over the last two years and it is killing us. He asked for support of Rep. Karyn Polito's proposal to distribute these funds.

Chairman Belanger thanked all involved for their participation this evening. He stated that it is the Board's mission to fix the State's Lottery Aid issues and get the revenues back to level funded numbers. He urged all municipal associations to reach out to the legislature, petition the Commonwealth to listen to funding proposals, have open debates on the floor, this is what succeeds.

He asked that a special thank you be sent to Senator Augustus for his participation here this evening.

Petition – Chairman Belanger read aloud a petition being circulated to award cities and towns the Local Aid designated for the communities:

"We, the undersigned residents of Leicester MA, request that the Legislature release from Committee any and all bills related to Local Aid for cities and towns for open discussion, and that the Legislature enact a law dedicating a minimum of ten percent of all growth taxes be used for Local Aid in order to provide for a reliable and consistent source of funding for Local Aid to cities and towns."

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved that the Board of Selectmen be the first to sign the Petition.
Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

Mr. Belanger noted that the Petition will be made available in Town buildings, on the Town website, and circulated by the townspeople. They urged all to support this important effort.

Hillcrest Country Club – Lease Agreement

Mr. Reed presented two original copies of a one-year lease extension between the Town of Leicester and Hilltop Management Group LLC, commencing on January 1, 2008 and continuing month to month until the Lessor or

Lessee gives written notice to the other of their intention to terminate the tenancy; agreeing to give each other a sixty (60) day written notice. He noted that other terms remain the same.

Mr. Antanavica disagreed; he felt the language should state "tenant at will" in the best interest of the Town. Mr. Brennan disagreed and felt the tenants should not sign any such agreement. Mr. Reed felt that this proposal gives the Town the flexibility should the use of the facility change.

MOTION: Mr. Antanavica moved to extend the lease for one month through January 31, 2008.
NO SECOND WAS BROUGHT FORWARD.

Mr. Belanger wondered, as a business, how is Hilltop Mgt. supposed to succeed; he felt this was a negative proposition to the business with no gain to the Town. Mr. Antanavica felt that we need the flexibility to move quickly; we are paying some \$260,000/year in debt vs. the \$25,000/year we receive in rent. Mr. Brennan stated that circumstances prevented the HCC Committees from having a new contract in place for January 2008, his goal. He felt there is not need to rush into this, we will all be here next year, the facility is being maintained on a daily basis, at the very least, by the current tenants, saving the Town from having to do so.

Mr. Reed made a concession; extend the lease through the season, with a 60day notice afterward. Mr. Belanger felt we need to go at least through September, but after that there may not be anyone there to heat the facility and there may not be any rent coming in. Mr. Antanavica felt we should table this discussion until our first meeting in February, prior to which the details should be worked out.

MOTION: Mr. Antanavica moved to extend the lease for Hillcrest Country Club through February 4, 2008.
Ms. Provencher seconded.

Discussion – Mr. Brennan felt any new lease should run through the end of the calendar year, giving tenants' opportunity to schedule their facility, an area of the business that fills up the winter months. Mr. Antanavica felt a lease through the golf season followed by a 60-day notice would better serve the Town.

VOTE: 3-1, Mr. Brennan opposed.

Correspondence (continued)

3. Letters from Town of Charlton relative to their needs for a potable water supply and committees formed seeking same. The Board agreed to forward copy to Moose Hill Water Commission. FILE

End of Year Agreement – Board of Selectmen/School Committee

Mr. Reed noted 2nd Draft of this Agreement, prepared by the Town Accountant and including changes the Board requested.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to approve and execute Agreement as presented.
Mr. Antanavica seconded. UNANIMOUS

Town Administrator's Report

- Mr. Reed reported on Snow & Ice budgets having but a \$1,000 remaining.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to authorize deficit spending in the Snow & Ice Accounts.
Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

- Mr. Reed recommended appointment of Meggan Jarmulowicz as Assistant Animal Control Officer to supplement staffing.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to appoint Meggan Jarmulowicz as AACO, subject to all Town personnel policies and procedures. Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

- Mr. Reed recommended appointment of Kathleen Keenan as Library Director, per screening group's recommendation. Mr. Belanger asked about funding of the position, he realized it is available in the current budget, but there are no guarantees with future budgets considering the fiscal state of the town. Are the Trustees aware of this. Mr. Reed assured the Board that he has had these discussions.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to appoint Kathleen Keenan as Library Director, subject to all Town personnel policies and procedures. Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

MOTION: Mr. Antanavica moved to extend the meeting past 10:00pm.

Mr. Brennan seconded. UNANIMOUS

Board Reports/Other Business

Mr. Belanger discussed a request dated 12/4/07 from Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) to adopt a Resolution relative to budgeting issues effecting service reductions, etc.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to support adoption of Resolution to be executed by the Board.
Mr. Antanavica seconded. UNANIMOUS

Mr. Antanavica reported that the Capital Planning Committee meets tomorrow night, at which time annual requests for capital projects will be discussed.

Mr. Antanavica cautioned the public that ice is not save on ponds, beware. Also, have your fire places and stoves inspected annually to prevent a major cause of house fires.

Ms. Provencher stated that the Town received two responses for RFP on environmental work at Burncoat Park. Responses will be reviewed a report made to the Board at a later date.

Mr. Brennan suggested that we authorize the Town Administrator to hire truck drivers if needed for snow removal, the staffing levels being down. Mr. Antanavica asked that proper licensing and testing be in place for any potential candidates.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to authorize the Town Administrator to hire truck drivers if needed in an emergency. Ms. Provencher seconded. UNANIMOUS

The Board wished all a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Executive Session

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to go into Executive Session for the purpose of contract negotiations and litigation, no public announcements forthcoming. Mr. Antanavica seconded.
The Board was polled: ALL AYES

The Board went into Executive Session at 10:10pm.
The Board came out of Executive Session at 10:20pm.

MOTION: Mr. Brennan moved to adjourn.
Mr. Antanavica seconded. UNANIMOUS

The meeting adjourned at 10:21 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan LeChasseur,
Administrative Assistant