

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 9-29-09

Present: J. Prager (Chair); M. Flynn, J. Cochran, T. Sangiolo, J. Crowley, R. Hughson (arrived 7:10); V. Jenkins (Town Accountant).

Excused: P. DiFranco

Guests: *For the Conservation Commission:* Bruce Eason, Marshall Giguere, David Pitkin. *For the Planning Board (meeting posted and called to order):* George Barringer, Russell Burke, Raymond Capes, John Giger, Scott Wilson. Michelle Collette (Town Planner). *For the Board of Selectmen:* Anna Elliot

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 7:02 PM. The minutes of the meeting held on 9/23/09 were approved unanimously upon motion by Mr. Flynn and a second from Ms. Cochran. Ms. Jenkins informed the Committee that there are tentative plans for the Nashoba Technical School to meet with the Board of Selectmen on October 5, 2009 and the Committee is invited to attend. Mr. Prager will be available, and Ms. Jenkins will confirm the date and time. The intent is to discuss a potential lowering of the district assessment due to the receipt of Federal funds, and for the district to address information, presented in letters to the Editor of a local newspaper, that the district feels is incomplete.

The FinCom requested the Conservation Committee to present details of three potential land purchases, summarized as follows:

- **Boston Road** – portions of land currently owned by MatBob Development. The Commission has placed an informal offer of \$450,000 (appraised at \$400,000) for the parcel, and intends to apply for a State Reimbursement Grant of 60% of purchase price and closing costs (estimated in the \$240K-250K range). If the Commission does not get the grant award the land will not be purchased. Mr. Giguere noted that the land is valuable for a large vernal pool and significant uplands where several important species reside or migrate. Mr. Hughson raised concerns about paying above the assessed value of the land.
- **Lowell Road** – portions of land currently owned by the Fucillo family. The Commission has placed a formal offer of \$150,000 (appraised value of \$205,000) for the parcel, and intends to seek State Grant reimbursement. The Commission will purchase the land even if the grant application fails. This land purchase, combined with contiguous land already purchased by Groton Electric Light Department, allows the utility company to move and furthers the development of Station Avenue. The Finance Committee has already unanimously supported the Conservation land purchase.
- **Island Pond** – portions of land north of Island Pond Road and contiguous to the decommissioned "Red Line" railroad bed. The Commission has offered \$65,000 (appraised value \$65,000) and will apply for grant reimbursement. The Commission intends to purchase the land even if the grant application fails. The land will allow the Commission to merge sections of a major trail network.

The FinCom thanked the Commission for its time.

Mr. Capes of the Planning Board called the Board to order prior to a discussion of its request for funding for the Master Plan update (\$100,000). Ms. Collette provided a copy of grant awards and low interest loans obtained over the last several years that she believes were successful due in part to the presence of a current Master Plan; and further noted that the three grant Conservation grant applications cited in the previous discussion also are dependent on the current Master Plan. Members of the FinCom raised several concerns:

- The “value” of having a current Master Plan appears to translate to a maximum of 6 points (out of a possible 140) on the Commonwealth Capital application form. There appears to be no information regarding the significance of a Master Plan in “winning or losing” the grants on the list Ms. Collette presented. The Planning Board explained that the value of the plan for grant applications may be a small part of successful grant applications, but there is a more significant need to have a comprehensive plan for Planning Board guidance and also stressed that the work to update the plan will be thorough and involve as many town neighborhoods and constituencies as can be encouraged to come.
- The requested cost of the update, at \$100,000, is substantial in view of the fact that more State cuts in lottery aid are expected and the current budget may need to absorb further cuts. Members of the Planning Board argued that other areas, including the appropriation to the Country Club, must factor into any budgetary short fall. Members also pointed to consultation fees in the past that have provided several thousands of dollars for very small, targeted reviews; in contrast to these “special interest” expenditures, the Master Plan will provide a coordinated review of 9 elements.
- The FinCom acknowledges the past expenditures but argues that some of the elements of the Master Plan seem to have been completed and paid for from Community Preservation Funds or Town meeting articles in the past (notably, town wide housing reviews, specific economic development reviews/Station Avenue, and archeological and historical surveys). This has the appearance of paying for consultation time twice. The Planning Board members noted that the work that had been done would not be ignored by the Master Plan consulting firm, and information gathered had served to lower the original bid by several thousand dollars.

The FinCom thanked the Planning Board for its time and significant information.

Mr. Barringer, who is also a member of the West Groton Sewer Committee, remained with the FinCom to review the ATM article to add the West Groton neighborhood to the Lost Lake neighborhood sewer district evaluation and engineering. Mr. Barringer believes that the work should be done but notes that the eventual construction could be a “harder sell” in West Groton because the home owners’ systems have not yet failed; in the Lost Lake area the situation is more serious. The FinCom had already supported, at a previous meeting, the inclusion of West Groton in the overall plan.

Having concluded its review of the articles under discussion the FinCom took positions as follows:

Ms. Cochran moved, and Mr. Hughson seconded support of funding to update the Master Plan. The motion carried with a vote of 3 in favor (J. Cochran, J. Prager, R. Hughson); 2 opposed (M. Flynn, T. Sangiolo) and one abstaining (J. Crowley). Those in favor noted for the record that their support is considered “reluctant”. It is recognized that the Master Plan is important and that an update is necessary, but there is also disappointment that there appears to be no willingness from those involved to apply the skills of the Town Manager and the Town Planner, as well as the Planning Board itself, in order to be more cost effective.

Mr. Hughson recommended support of two of the land purchase articles in a single motion, and was seconded by Mr. Sangiolo. The Committee unanimously supported the Conservation Commission's articles to purchase the land on Boston Road and the land north of Island Pond Road and to apply for State reimbursement.

The Committee agreed to meet next on the night of Town Meeting, October 19th, 2009, beginning at 6:00 PM. Three articles remain to be considered and positions taken: deposits to the Capital Stabilization Fund and the General Stabilization Fund and the budget for the Country Club.

The meeting adjourned at 10:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Jenkins, Recording Secretary