

## TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 6/7/2011

**Present:** J. Prager (Chair), S. Webber, J. Crowley, G.Green, P DiFranco, R. Hargraves. V. Jenkins (Town Accountant, recording), P. Dufresne

**Absent:** M. Flynn

**Guests:** D. Black for the Fire Station Location Committee, Town Manager

**Documents Available:** Analysis of funding for new fire station land purchase

Mr. Prager called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM. The minutes of the meeting held 5-2-2011 were approved unanimously after a motion Mr. Webber and a second from Mr. Crowley.

**Fire Station Land Purchase:** Mr. Black and Mr. Haddad reported, on behalf of the Fire State Location Committee, on the results of the evaluation of several sites that had been explored for possible construction of a new center fire station. He reported that the Committee ruled out many sites on the basis of cost, sight lines, or other concerns. There are three sites remaining, which the Fire Station Committee rank-ordered, by a vote of 6 in favor and 1 opposed, for recommendation to the Board of Selectmen. The order of preference is as follows: land on Main Street, currently owned by the Boston Archdiocese where the abandoned Sacred Heart church building is located; excess land at the end of Station Avenue, which the Electric Light Department intends to sell and has offered to the Town at a modified sale amount; and the land containing the Prescott School which will revert to the Town soon.

The FinCom reviewed the costs and benefits for each site:

In terms of the **Main Street land** the FinCom was told by Mr. Black and Mr. Haddad that the site had the nearly unanimous approval of the Fire Department itself, for reasons that range from the most reasonable lines of sight and entrance/exit benefits for the vehicles to the firemen's preference for new and "separate" facilities. FinCom members raised issues about the \$450,000 cost, noting that it is the most expensive in terms of land acquisition. Costs to prepare the land for a fire station may be less than other sites but the cost of erecting the building is probably higher due to the need to build a multi-story facility because the lot size is small. There are lot-line setback issues that will make it difficult to place a new building on the site. Finally, there is concern that the Town would be purchasing property with an abandoned building, which, if removed (or moved) by the Archdiocese, would leave just the land itself, which is valued at \$260,000 and would be a better purchase for the Town.

The **Station Avenue land**, currently in the hands of the Electric Light Department, has been offered to the Town by the Light Department at a cost of \$199,000 plus the cost of demolition of the current GEL garage complex at \$40,000; but the site preparation costs are currently unknown. Possible additional

costs involve improvement of the water line, estimated at \$250,000 which the Town would split with GEL, if PWED grant money is not forthcoming; evaluation of the water table and possible construction of retention/detention areas. Again, due to the small lot size, the cost of building construction is higher, and there are questions about wetland setbacks. Sight lines and safety of vehicle exit onto Main Street are considered less favorable than the Main Street site, as can be demonstrated by current use of the old center fire station, but the FinCom argues this could be fixed with a red light that halts traffic as needed.

The **Prescott School property** is owned by the Town, and rights of use will revert to the town soon. There is no cost of acquisition, but the current building would require some renovation and single story garages could be build behind the current building. However, the sight lines are the least favorable, and exit onto Main Street is hampered by traffic congestion from nearby businesses and a pending development nearby. There are unknown costs associated with utilities, potentially unstable land to the rear of the building beyond the parking area; and wetlands requiring setback of the proposed garages. The property is not immediately available since the District School is still using the Prescott building.

Regarding all three of the potential sites, Mr. Prager questioned the need to purchase immediately. Various answers were provided. Mr. Webber of the FinCom noted that costs to construct would probably increase with delay; Mr. Haddad noted that the Main Street land might be vulnerable to a 40B development; Mr. Black cited potential cost savings from constructing the new GEL offices and the Fire Station together, although Mr. Haddad noted that different procurement rules than those used by GEL apply to bidding for Town engineering and construction.

Mr. Haddad reviewed the funding sources for purchase of the Main Street land (copy attached). The plan calls for \$275,000 to come from Stabilization and \$175,000 from EMS receipts. Neither fund will be depleted by the purchase. Mr. Haddad plans to replenish the Stabilization Fund from certified "free cash" at the fall town meeting; and the ambulance fund gains about \$18,000 per month in fees, so will build up over the next fiscal year again.

FinCom members stated discomfort with the lack of information about costs beyond acquisition of the land for any of the sites; thus making a decision about any of the sites risky. Some members expressed interest in the opportunities presented by the Station Avenue site if all costs could be obtained; others thought the Main Street land might prove the most cost effective when all the information is available. However, the FinCom is asked only to make a recommendation on the article remaining on the Town Meeting warrant, which seeks to purchase the property on Main Street for \$450,000. The continuation of Town Meeting is called for June 13<sup>th</sup>; no further information will be available prior to the meeting. Therefore, Mr. Green moved, and Mr. Webber seconded support for the purchase of land on Main Street for \$450,000. The motion failed by a vote of 2 in favor (Green, Webber) and 4 opposed (Prager, Hargraves, DiFranco, and Crowley). The Committee noted its support for continuing to plan for a new fire station. With more time to obtain cost/risk information, and if the matter is brought up a future Town Meeting (e.g. in the Fall) their recommendation might have be different.

The next meeting of the Finance Committee is June 28<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Jenkins  
Recording Secretary