

BOARD OF SELECTMEN – REGULAR SESSION MINUTES – 11/19/01

"MINUTES APPROVED"

Present: Chairman Peter S. Cunningham, Clerk Dann Chamberlin, Member Thomas P. McCuin, Jr. and Administrative Officer Jean E. Kitchen.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.

JOINT ELECTION – Board Of Assessors

Mr. Cunningham invited the Board of Assessors to call its meeting to order. Assessor Ed Kopec did so with Hugh McLaughlin agreeing.

In response to Mr. Cunningham's question, Sylvia Sangiolo said she held the position of Assistant Assessor in Carlisle for 3 years, then became elected as Assessor in Carlisle, holding the position for 3 years. Rule Loving severed 2 years on the Finance Committee in the late 80's. He currently works in the office at a bank.

Mr. Chamberlin noted that he had received more complaints in the past 2 years regarding the way people are treated by the Assessor's office than in the whole town hall. He read a letter he received that stated that there was a feeling of unwelcomeness; that there was an air of hostility in the Assessor's office. He asked the candidates what importance they attached to user friendliness. Ms. Sangiolo said this was an unfortunate situation. Communication with DOR is important. The Assessor's office is the main statistical center and taxpayer service. Public relations is most important. M. Sangiolo stated that when she was in Carlisle she wrote a question and answer article for the newspaper re: Assessor's functions and assessment issues. Mr. Chamberlin said that when someone is hired for this office, it is very important to get someone user friendly.

Mr. Loving said he has worked in industry where it is perceived to be unfriendly. He now works for a small bank and builds a reputation on service. Mr. Loving believes that a person who has had an unfriendly meeting would like the ability to go to someone higher.

Mr. McCuin asked what the candidates thought of the concept of financial consolidation. Ms. Sangiolo said it would make better coordination, but cautioned that the Selectmen needed to be very careful that the checks and balances are not infringed upon. Mr. Loving said keeping the departments separate would be more important. Combing the 2 may not allow for checks and balances.

Mr. Cunningham asked the candidates about bringing everything in-house. Ms. Sangiolo said that in Carlisle they did everything in-house. Carlisle hired a certified Assessor 3-4 days a week. Mr. Loving said he would want to keep independent analysis as the Town has now (via Patriot Properties).

Mr. Chamberlin asked about the debt of commitment to a regional search for an Assistant Assessor. He asked what bias the candidates brought. Ms. Sangiolo said she knew Ms. Swezey's background and hired Ms. Swezey in Carlisle. Ms. Sangiolo did not believe that the upcoming vacancy in the Groton Assessor's office was a done deal. Mr. Loving did not know Ms. Swezey and did not harbor any bias if someone knows someone. This was not necessarily negative. He was not opposed to an area-wide search.

Hugh McLaughlin said the Assessors were going through an open search and looking for the best fit for the Town of Groton. Ms. Swezey will be applying for the job and resigned as Assessor for that reason. She called the State Ethics Commission for an opinion and has applied in another community for a position.

Mr. Loving said that if things work out well he would run, but had not experienced this before.

Mr. Chamberlin moved the nomination of Sylvia Sangiolo and Rule Loving as Assessor, term to expire May 20, 2002. The nomination was seconded unanimously.

Vote: Mr. Cunningham – Ms. Sangiolo, Mr. McCuin – Ms. Sangiolo, Mr. Kopec – Ms. Sangiolo, Mr. Chamberlin – Mr. Loving, Mr. McLaughlin – Mr. Loving

TAX CLASSIFICATION PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Chamberlin moved to open the public hearing for the purpose of receiving comments on the issue of adopting a tax levy percentage for Fiscal Year 2002. The motion was seconded and voted unanimously.

Mr. Kopec said that Westford was the only town around that has a dual tax rate. Mr. McCuin said Ayer also has a dual rate. 95% of the Town is residential. Mr. McLaughlin said there was very little justification and little to be gained by having 2 rates. The Selectmen agreed with the single tax rate for 2002.

Mr. Chamberlin moved for a single tax rate for Fiscal Year 2002. The motion was seconded and voted unanimously.

Mr. McLaughlin explained the residential tax rate mechanism. The Town can elect to exempt 20% of the valued property in Town each year. The Vineyard has this exemption, This is the only vehicle to give a tax break to lower income families. The exemption is applied to all properties. It becomes a surcharge for higher valued property. It would be an additional burden on the Assessors staff .

Mr. Chamberlin said it makes the tax rate less regressive. Mr. McCuin said it mitigates the difference in tax value increase. Mr. McLaughlin said there may be an advantage to instituting a lower than 20% exemption. Mr. Chamberlin said he would like more time to think about that. Mr. Chamberlin said he would like some mechanism to obtain residents input. Mr. McCuin felt that the exemption would mitigate the impact for longer term residents and those on the lower end of the scale. Mr. Chamberlin agreed with the concept but wanted more time to determine the percentage. Mr. McCuin asked what percentage the Assessors wanted to see. Mr. Kopec said he was against it but would take a lower percentage and leave it to the discretion of the Board of Selectmen. Rena Swezey (former Assessor) said it would affect the overlay. Mr. McLaughlin believed it should be 10%. He suggested running a table. Ms. Kitchen asked if the exemption would require additional staff. Mr. McLaughlin said it wouldn't require any more than already planned for.

Mr. McCuin made a motion to continue the tax classification hearing regarding the exemption until 8:30 PM on November 26. The motion was seconded and voted unanimously.

JOINT ELECTION – Water Commissioner

Water Commissioners Mark Patnode and Larry Swezey convened their meeting.

Chris Kelley was the only applicant. Mr. Cunningham asked him what the largest issue the department was facing. Mr. Kelley said it was the sources of water. The Town needs more storage at a separate location. The other issue he noted was the need for a rate study.

Mr. Chamberlin said there were thoughts of merging the 2 water departments. Mr. Kelley said the Town would have to look at the options because W. Groton is a district controlled by the ratepayers. The Groton Water Department is a Town department. Mr. Chamberlin asked if it was advantageous to do so. Mr. Kelley said he did not know the particulars of the savings. H & V is a major customer of the West Groton Water District and is looking for an expansion. Mr. Patnode said the Water Commissioners made a recommendation to elect Chris Kelley.

Mr. Cunningham asked if the Town needed to establish a policy on underground sprinkler systems.

Mr. Chamberlin moved the nomination of Chris Kelley as a member of the Water Department, term to expire May 20, 2002. The motion was seconded.

Vote: Cunningham – Kelley, Chamberlin – Kelley, McCuin – Kelley, Patnode – Kelley, and Swezey - Kelley

CONSERVATION COMMISSION APPOINTMENT

Conservation Commission member Peter Morrison said there were 2 candidates. The Conservation Commission recommended Alix Chace.

Ms. Chace said she was a long time resident of Groton and that she was concerned about the impact of development on Town resources. She served as an Associate of the Conservation Commission.

Mr. Cunningham said the Conservation Commission has to balance public interest and concerns about conservation. He asked if the candidates could look beyond the strict interpretation. Ms. Chace said she had spoken out in the past. She said there is a balance interest of newer and older agricultural elements of the community.

Mr. McCuin said he was concerned with the secondary access. It is difficult to call, but Ms. Chace had to go along with the original delineation.

Mr. Chamberlin moved to appointment Alix L. Chace as a member of the Conservation Commission, term to expire June 30, 2002. The motion was seconded and voted unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

W. Groton Pond & Park Committee Appointment

Mr. Chamberlin moved the appointment of George Moore, Jr. as a member of the W. Groton Pond & Park Committee, term to expire June 30, 2002. The motion was seconded and voted unanimously.

Public Health Hearing

Mr. Cunningham said Mr. McCuin and Mr. Chamberlin attended a public health meeting. It did not sound like the issue was resolved regarding the area of public safety. He was concerned with the tone and nature of the hearing, which was causing concern among the residents. Mr. Cunningham did not feel there was a problem in public safety. He said the Town should communicate the message with those departments. He instructed the department heads not to engage in discussions with the Chairman of the Board of Health regarding this issue. Mr. Chamberlin said the discussion of this issue by the Board of Health was grandstanding. He said that at some point the Town should look at the structure of the fire department, but that needed to come from the Fire Chief, not the Board of Health. Mr. Cunningham said he participated directly in the Fire Department study. They looked at all those things at that time. He said it was not an issue that had not been investigated.

Culver Road Bound

Ms. Kitchen noted that the Culver Road stone bound was moved approximately 10 feet to the proper location to show the bound between Groton and Ayer. This type of bound is a road stone and road stones are not required to be located the exact line.

Main St. Crosswalk

Mr. Chamberlin noted that the Highway Surveyor, Mr. Delaney moved quickly on painting the crosswalk by the Main Street Café. The pedestrians only have the right of way in the crosswalk. He said they need a streetlight on the pole by the crosswalk. Ms. Kitchen said she would speak with the GELD Manager.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – Collective Bargaining

At 8:45 PM Mr. Chamberlin moved to go into executive session in accordance with MGL Chapter 39, Section 23B to discuss strategy with respect to Collective Bargaining, not to reconvene in open session. The motion was seconded and voted unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:40 PM the Selectmen adjourned by unanimous vote.

Approved: _____
Dann Chamberlin, Clerk

Respectfully Submitted,
Jean E. Kitchen
Administrative Officer