

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
JULY 29, 2002  
REGULAR SESSION MINUTES  
“APPROVED”**

**Present:** Clerk Thomas P. McCuin, Jr., Member Peter S. Cunningham, Administrative Officer Jean E. Kitchen and Administrative Secretary Maria Casey

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m.

**Assessors – Office Staffing**

Mr. Ed Kopec, Chairman of Board of Assessors (BOA), reported that Assistant Assessor Ms. Swezey has had some medical concerns and that the Board of Assessors learned that Ms. Chalmers intends to retire with the ERI incentive. Ms. Rogers has been filling in as needed.

Mr. Hugh McLaughlin reviewed the memo of July 24, 2002, (attached) submitted to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) originally submitted as part of the budget in April 16, 2002. The BOA felt this was better plan for their Department. However, due to budget constraints, the BOA was told to hold the line with 2 people. For the couple of hours that the Assessor's office remains closed in the afternoon each day, it has increased the efficiency of the department; however we need to advise BOS that we are in course that is unacceptable to Town and BOS. There will be substantial consequences with the Department of Revenue (DOR). We would like to work this out now and correctly.

Similar to the Treasurer and Town Accountant's retiring and department reconfiguration, the BOA feels this would be a perfect opportunity to set up optimal productivity. It's a long-term requirement to do it properly now. This reconfiguration will greatly improve and increase revaluations, as well as public hours and get a bigger tax base to help town with all of the upcoming big projects. This will also allow the Town to maintain a fair and level taxation.

DOR is cutting back from their level of their availability of technical support and yet won't suspend the reporting requirements. The audit may find us unacceptable and not allow a tax rate to be set.

There are no alternatives. The need for staffing to increase is now. Cross training is critical and then catching up of administrative work and taxation work.

Mr. McCuin inquired, "What is out of control? How long of a delay?"

Mr. McLaughlin replied that they were out of control as of July 1<sup>st</sup> and right around the corner are the deliverables for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

Mr. Cunningham inquired, "What is preventing Rena from being able to do her job?" Mr. McLaughlin replied that dealing with demands of office. Not only that, she could be out in the field considerably more and focusing on market analysis.

Mr. Cunningham asked if it be possible for Office Manager to assume Rena's and office clerk position recognizing that this position is retiring? Would an enhancement to that one position help you?

Ms. Swezey felt that the Assistant position now is 34 hours and if someone is at the counter and then the phone rings or if someone needs assistance at the computer, it is a continual interruption of the sales analysis or sketches she works on.

Mr. McCuin inquired how much of an increase over your current budget does this total \$97,617 represent including health insurance cost, retirement, etc.?

Mr. McLaughlin did not have access to these hidden costs. It is approximately \$24,000 over and above their current budget, approximately a 1/3 increase.

Mr. Kitchen noted that full time health insurance cost to the Town is approximately \$7,000.

A Job description and salary survey were done in April and are available at the Assessor's Office. The Principal Assessor/Appraiser job is a title change.

Currently Patriot Systems are paid appx. \$18,000 per year; however, we have a three-year contract in the amount of \$56,000. It

was less money to go three years. They send people to do building permits; Ms. Swezey will put the values and grades on the house.

BOA feels there needs to be a correlation between old services and new services, to increase the staff at this point and do these functions to overlap for a year to improve the accuracy and then cut next three-year contract.

It was asked if there was a possibility to realize immediate savings by eliminating some of the need from Patriot? A change order and reduction would need to be done if the Town does some of the work next few years. The group plan gives us good rates.

Patriot provides a good solid estimate; they build databases with market survey based on more than just "Groton's data" including other communities which increases our inaccuracies. Their measurements and data entry is effective. Ms. Swezey then reviews, revisits and revalues. However, the BOA feels it not in the best interest of the town when establishing valuations.

Mr. Cunningham inquired how much is being lost to the tax base.

One error is under valuation and the other is omission within the tax base. They sometimes miss a property or a feature on that property, especially with new construction. Market valuations need to be redone. It is critical to do Interim adjustments every year.

The BOA would like to not rely on outside contractor. Finance Committee reviewed this and looked at avoiding adding new positions given the fiscal forecast; however, more enhancements are needed in the office to allow for more comprehensive revaluations.

Jeff Wilson, Chairman of the Finance Committee spoke next. The next budget cycle doesn't look good. They will be clamping down on new hires and increased hours. In the spring, it was thought that functionally the assessors could do what they needed to do with the people they had but the office can't be kept open. Finance Committee had no problem with that as long as the work gets done. It makes it possible to collect revenue. The Assessors Office could be considered a quantitative organization if you make the case that you can collect more revenue and collect at lower costs.

Mr. McLaughlin stated that "The job is not getting done now and we don't want any surprises." The fixing of map numbers turned out more difficult than they thought. He fears that we are not going to make our deliveries.

If the Sales analysis falls below 90% of market value, the DOR will require that you bring the values up to 90%.

The additional hours would only help with the clerical part and some cross training. Rebuilding personnel board could additional hours per week.

Mr. McLaughlin did not want to diverge from his request. The critical path is the office manager.

It was queried what if the Personnel Board rates the two positions, Finance Committee gives their blessing but it doesn't pass Town Meeting. What happens then?

The Interim adjustment would go which would run a concern with DOR. Real estate prices were up 13% in May, which are driven by sales in June. The housing market is fluctuating more then DOR revenue.

Ms. Swezey would like to customize tables to allow for more styles for higher ranked homes; however this takes time to establish.

Mr. McCuin asked what the net effect would be and Ms. Swezey replied that there would be higher net value for the Town.

Mr. McLaughlin said that if the full impact of the small tax base is not captured accurately, we could lose 20% of new growth permanently. Without interim adjustments being made, once those figures are complete, they cannot be changed. They are grand fathered.

Jeff Wilson remarked that something of this magnitude would make a difference in considering the change in department if it would make a difference on the revenue received.

Mr. Cunningham requested that additional hours from the Town Hall floater be reviewed to assist the Department.

The procedure for this change would need to be sent to the Personnel board for job description rating and approval, salaries studied, then to the Finance Committee and then all the of the jobs would need to be advertised.

Mr. Cunningham said that the BOS would call personnel board to speed this process along.

Mr. Cunningham would like the BOS to be more proactive in supporting Personnel Board by sitting in on some of the meetings to help by being a buffer for hard decisions that need to be made.

### **Personnel Board – Appointment**

*Mr. Cunningham moved to appoint Alberta E. Erickson to the Personnel Board, term to expire June 30, 2004. Mr. McCuin seconded. Unanimous vote.*

### **Water Dept. Part Time office Assistant**

*Mr. Cunningham moved to approve the hiring of Regina Hull as the Part-Time Office Assistant to the Water Department's Business Manager with a grade and step to be determined by the Personnel Board. Mr. McCuin seconded. Unanimous vote.*

### **3 vs. 5 member Board of Selectmen**

Ms. Kitchen spoke with Bob Ritchie, Assistant Attorney General (AG). In the past, all that was needed to change the Board of Selectmen from 3 to 5 was a vote of Town Meeting. Now the AG is of the opinion that it's either by charter or home rule petition. Town's that have voted this way in the past will be grand fathered.

Ms. Kitchen did call Mr. Bill Miller who initiated the citizen's petition and explained that his wording was incorrect but that the BOS would include the correct verbiage of the article, as well as his article.

Mr. McCuin read from the Attorney General's opinion regarding Swansea (attached).

Mr. Cunningham wanted it noted that this shows that the BOS is being forthright and honest with this petition. BOS could let it go, but they understand people's plight and will seek to put the correct language to put it in front of the people.

Ms. Kitchen states that the verbiage must be loose enough in order for either the House and Senate Counsel to amend.

### **Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) Agreement**

Ms. Kitchen clarified for the Board that MRPC is the agent to disburse the \$30,000 for technical assistance and planning services to assist in producing Community Development Plans.

*Mr. Cunningham moved to authorize the Chairman to sign the Community Development Plan: Initial Agreement. Mr. McCuin seconded. Unanimous vote.*

### **ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER REPORT**

The Administrative Officer report was given by Ms. Kitchen and is attached.

She also added that upon deed research for the Squannacook Sportsmen's Club, it was discovered that they don't have access to their property. Squannacook. Language will be drafted for Town Meeting to provide access.

Ms. Kitchen also presented a Cooperative Agreement for Federal Excess Personal Property for the Fire Department for the Board of Selectmen's signature and noted that Department Heads understand that these types of equipment are not replaceable by the Town. It's a one-time buy.

*Mr. Cunningham moved to authorize the chairman to sign the Federal Excess Personal Property Cooperative Agreement. Mr. McCuin seconded. Unanimous vote.*

Resident Peter Moeller approached Ms. Kitchen with regard to parking at Rail Trail on Station Avenue. There is no line of sight due to cars parked at the gate. Ms. Kitchen and Mr. Cunningham will site view.

Mr. Cunningham commented on last week's planning board deliberations on Mill Run. It seems that Hannaford's has made a good faith effort to address concerns with planning board and the residents. It seemed that input was favorable. The meeting ran more smoothly than previously in past and he would like the Planning Board commended for keeping the focus on the concept plan rather than the issues.

Mr. McCuin saw drawings of new plan in paper. He was impressed by the way that concept plan is changed around. The chief complaints of residents were that space was left on the parcel where Hannaford could still build. Hannaford's has taken away their ability to build on space by adjusting their plans and have added space to their parking lot. He felt it was a large gesture on their part.

It was announced that on August 8<sup>th</sup>, the Planning Board will be having a site plan review at 8:00 P.M. for Route 119 & Sandy Pond Road Lacombe/Shaw's Supermarket. The Planning Board is looking for comments prior to the meeting and the plans are in the office.

Jeff Wilson also reported that the Finance Committed unanimously vote to support the ERI.

*Mr. Cunningham moved to adjourn at 8:25 p.m. McCuin seconded. Unanimous vote.*

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Thomas P. McCuin, Clerk

Respectfully submitted  
Maria Casey  
Administrative Secretary

Date Approved: August 12, 2002

Attachments (3)  
Review of the Staffing of the Assessors Office Memo  
Attorney General Opinion regarding Swansea  
Administrative Officer Report