

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
AUGUST 4, 2003
SPECIAL WORK SESSION MINUTES
"APPROVED"**

Present: Thomas D. Hartnett, Chair; George F. Dillon, Jr., Vice Chair; John L. Saball, Clerk; Peter S. Cunningham, Member; Virginia C. Wood, Member; Administrative Officer Jean E. Kitchen; Maria Casey, Administrative Secretary; and Kathleen Newell, Office Assistant.

Also present: Ms. Valerie Jenkins, Town Accountant, Mr. Steve Weber and Mr. Win Nordblom of the Finance Committee.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Mr. Hartnett stated that this meeting would be a workshop with members of the Finance Committee on how to improve the budget process in order to avoid problems at the town meeting similar to the last annual town meeting.

The topic of the School budget was raised. Mr. Hartnett stated that the schools make up most of the budget and the people look to the departments to cut the budget. Mr. Cunningham stated that he had met with the GDRSD School Committee and they have scheduled a series of meetings in order to educate on the budget and budget process. Ms. Kitchen stated that the bottom line is people do not want their taxes raised. Ms. Kitchen stated some confusion arose from that fact that the school district does level services budgeting whereas the town does level funding budgeting, and the two are hard to compare. Ms. Jenkins stated that Personnel Board is currently working on the issue of insurance and researching information on other Town's percentages covered by the employee. It is important to understand what type and percentage of coverage the school offers (i.e. indemnification) and compare it to the Town's percent and type of coverage (HMO).

The Board agreed to send a letter to the Superintendent of Schools to immediately re-institute Treasurer's Focus Group made up of Town Accountant (Valerie Jenkins), Town Treasurer (Christine Collins), Town Administrator (Jean Kitchen), Dunstable Accountant, GDRSD Business Manager (Craig Young) and School Treasurer (Cathy Dulaney).

The Board of Selectmen concurred that education of the townspeople was the number one priority. Ms. Wood suggested that a one-page handout be developed which are easily understandable for the public. She also suggested that we speak with the Library to see if they would be the "Distribution Center" for all Town Meeting Handouts making them available the end of March, beginning of April. Ms. Woods stated that she had met many people who were not from New England, who do not know what a town meeting is nor are they aware of their responsibilities. It was suggested to make use of the Cable Television access by presenting issues prior to Town Meeting, contacting Jane Bouvier to solicit her assistance in explaining the Town Meeting process on her show "Around Town", possibly encouraging the drama group from the high school to stage a mock town meeting. Mr. Nordblom stated that January, 2004 will be education month - via cable shows, Selectmen meetings, televising Finance Committee meetings, and utilizing the website. During the month of February/March, Town Meeting Articles hearing - Selectmen to discuss each article a little more in-depth to educate the public.

The Board concurred that the Finance Committee should begin meeting in August and draft the budget explanation process cover memo. The Budget Memo and Worksheets will be sent out September 15 to all Departments, Boards, Committees & Commissions and will be due back to the Town Accountant November 1st; Finance Committee to update Selectmen monthly between the months of October and Town Meeting. During the month of October (while Finance Committee is waiting for FY04 budgets to return) they will be preparing long-range budgets with broad projections coming up with a 5-year forecast. Any budget not returned by November 1st will be funded at the FY 03 budget. The Selectmen and Finance Committee Liaisons will discuss presented budgets no later than November 30th. The Board of Selectmen will be actively seeking to fill the Finance Committee slot. Ms. Wood would talk to Jane Bouvier about bringing the position of Finance Committee vacancy to her show "Around Town."

Ms. Jenkins stated that the Town Meetings did not appear as a business meeting. The Board concurred that the Town Meeting should begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. with preliminaries, such as plaque presentations, individual reports and the like (would need to be coordinated with the Moderator Mr. Bob Gosselin), then begin the Business Meeting at exactly 7:30 p.m. and no more than ½ hour presentation (Business Meeting) on the financial items of the budget and its impact on free cash and stabilization and the tax rate. The Board and Finance Committee members concurred that all financial and capital expense items should be at the beginning of the meeting.

Ms. Kitchen stated that the Board of Selectmen Liaisons needed to talk with their committees and discuss the budget.

Mr. Hartnett moved to adjourn at 8:30 p.m. Mr. Dillon seconded. Unanimous vote.

Approved: _____
John L. Saball, Clerk

Respectfully submitted,
Kathleen Newell, Office Assistant

Date Approved: August 25, 2003