

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2008
APPROVED**

Present: George Dillon, Jr., Chairman; Joshua A. Degen, Vice Chairman; Stuart Schulman, Clerk; Peter Cunningham; Mihran Keoseian

Also Present: Jeff Ritter, Interim Administrative Officer; April Iannacone, Office Assistant

Mr. Dillon called the regular meeting of the Board to Order at 7:00 p.m. and reviewed the agenda for the public.

He then wished everyone a Happy and Health New Years.

Tom Delaney, Highway Surveyor, RE: Request to Exceed the Snow and Ice Appropriation

Tom addressed the Board to request permission to deficit spend the Snow and Ice Appropriation for FY-08. There are a lot of towns that have expended their entire budget before the end of December. He has not used up all of his budget as of yet, however he needs to plan ahead to have enough on hand if there are any other storms this winter. There is a high demand for salt and the cost has increased about 20%. He tries to keep the salt application to 2 applications per storm, but with some of the larger storms that we have had so far he has had to use 3-4 applications. The cost per application is about \$2500.

Mr. Dillon stated that Tom and his staff have been doing a good job, which has not been easy due to the frequency and intensity of the storms. Tom replied that he gives credit to his guys. There have been times where they have done well over 24 hours of work, gone home for 4-5 hours of sleep, and then have returned for another 16 hours.

Mr. Keoseian asked Tom if he used a fixed amount of manpower for each storm. Tom replied that he did not. The manpower was storm dependent and different for each storm. He tries to do whatever he can on regular time rather than overtime and tries to plow as much as possible rather than salt.

Mr. Degen stated that unfortunately the storms that have hit this year have been on weekends and holidays, which work out to time and a half and double time pay. Every town is on the edge of their budgets or exceeding their budgets right now. However, this is an important and necessary thing to do because public safety comes first.

Mr. Cunningham stated that once they exceed this year's budget they need to account for it in the next fiscal year. Mr. Dillon agreed that it did have a direct effect on next year's budget.

Mr. Degen moved to exceed the Fiscal Year 2008 appropriation for snow and ice removal. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

FY09 Budget Reviews

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that they would be reviewing the 5 budget items under the Board of Selectmen. With the exception of the Insurance & Bonding and the Town Counsel, all of the budgets are either level funded or less than appropriated last year. Under the Selectmen's budget he maintained the stipend for the Board. The checkers for Town Meeting have currently been paid less than minimum wage and minimum wage has gone up to \$8 so that item would be going up. The other expenses under the Board increase slightly to account for an increase in MMA annual dues. The engineering and consulting budgeting for the current Fiscal Year was \$5,000 and he would recommend they cut that item back to \$3,000.

Mr. Dillon stated that he would recommend eliminating that item entirely. After some discussion the Board consented to leave the Line Item open with a \$0 value to help keep the budget figure down. They would go to Town Meeting for a reserve fund transfer in the future if the funds became necessary. Mr. Dillon also stated that the revenue estimates were missing, and he suggested that the revenues of approximately \$47,000 be included with the budget report.

Mr. Degen moved to refer the Fiscal Year 2009 Board of Selectmen's Budget to the Finance Committee as amended this evening. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Mr. Ritter stated that the current Insurance provider MIIA and another carrier were currently looking through the Town's records to come up with more competitive price quotes. He will have the figure complete by the middle to end of January and recommended referring the existing number to FINCOM with the understanding that it may change.

Mr. Degen moved to refer the Fiscal Year 2009 Insurance and Bonding budget to the Finance Committee with the understanding that the recommended budget figure and the Town's current insurance carrier may change after proposals have been received and reviewed. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Mr. Ritter then reviewed the Administrative Officer's budget which included the salary for the Administrative Officer, the salary for the full time and part time positions and an expense line item. He was recommending a level funded salary for the Administrative Officer's salary.

Mr. Cunningham asked if part of this reduction in the budget was accomplished by the reduction of hours. Mr. Ritter replied that people are willing to recognize that it is a hard year, and are willing to do what has to be done to help.

Mr. Keoseian stated that he commended Mr. Ritter for stepping forward and offering that sacrifice, but he does not support someone taking that kind of hit in salary knowing what town administrators are making. He also stated that this is on the lower end of what others in his position get.

Mr. Degen stated that he believed that Mr. Ritter was trying to lead by example, and it is an important step to be taking. If there is not enough money to fund the Town and they are giving out raises then people will loose jobs. He would rather support a 1 year wage freeze then layoffs, and felt that employees would be more willing to give up their raise than risk themselves or someone else being laid off. He commended and thanked Mr. Ritter and encourage every other dept head to do the same thing. If Mr. Ritter wants to move forward with this proposal he would hope that the Board would reconsider and support what he is doing.

Mr. Cunningham commended the thought, but he felt it would set the town up for difficulties further down the line and set up a false sense of security if the Town Manager is approved. The Town will need to offer and pay someone competitively to what other towns are paying. He also felt that the union bargaining unit is more likely not to go for giving up their raise.

Mr. Dillon stated that it would have to be a voluntary give on the part of the bargaining unit. Mr. Cunningham replied that the union will typically go along with the reduction in force knowing that it will affect the newest person(s) in. Mr. Degen stated that there would be the same workload and fewer employees to do that work if they want to take that approach. The request would be to give up the base number not the COLA.

Mr. Ritter then stated that the wages line item supported the full time Administrative Assistant and the part time Office Assistant. There was also a line item for overtime in the Selectmen's Office to cover the office during periods when the Administrative Assistant and the Administrative Officer are out at the same time. He stated that the office has not drawn on these funds for a long time and he felt that they could eliminate the item saving \$1,271. The second adjustment to this budget item is a reduction of hours for the part time Office Assistant. The reduction would be from 15 to 10 hours and would save \$4,200 per year.

Mr. Cunningham asked Mr. Ritter what would be sacrificed by that reduction, if there were any tasks that would be given up on, and how would it affect office coverage and support. Mr. Ritter replied that the minutes would be sustained, and then there would be a little extra time to assist in preparing books for the weekly meeting. There just would not be as much time spent in the office.

Mr. Dillon stated that there were things that were being done by the Administrative Assistant in the past that are now being done by the Personnel Manager, so there are a few less responsibilities on the Administrative Assistant.

Mr. Degen moved to refer the Fiscal Year 2009 Administrative Officer's Budget to the Finance Committee. Mr. Schulman seconded. The vote was 3 in favor (F.D., S.S., J.D.), 1 abstained (P.C.) and 1 opposed (M.K.).

Mr. Ritter stated that the postage and office budget was not included in the Selectmen's packets and he requested holding that item and placing it onto next week's agenda. He stated that there would be a slight increase in postage, but they do not yet know what that will be. There would be no changes on the \$4,100 itemized supplies.

Mr. Dillon recommended passing the item on as level funded for now.

Mr. Degen moved to refer the Fiscal Year 2009 Postage and Office budget to the Finance Committee. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Mr. Degen stated that the Town Counsel budget should be referred over as level funded. There is no way to know if the Town will come close to the \$90,000 appropriation. There appears to be a decline in the use of Town Counsel but that cannot be proven right now. Mr. Schulman asked if the use was more routine or litigation. Mr. Ritter stated that it appeared that most of the use was litigation.

Mr. Dillon stated that two thirds of the budget has already been spent in the first 6 months and he hopes it will come down.

Mr. Degen moved to refer the Fiscal Year 2009 Town Counsel budget to the Finance Committee with the understanding that the recommended budget and the Town's current Town Counsel may change after proposals have been reviewed. Mr. Schulman seconded. The result of the vote was 4 in favor (F.D., S.S., P.C., M.K.) and 1 abstained (J.D.).

OTHER BUSINESS

Mileage Reimbursement Adjustment, Effective July 1, 2008

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that there have been some employees that have asked that the amount of reimbursement be reviewed and looked at for those using their own private vehicles. Patrice had done a survey of other towns and the reimbursements ranged from a high of 48.5 cents per mile to a low of 40.5 cents per mile. Our current reimbursement is 40.5 cents per mile and he suggested moving to 45.5 cents per mile.

Mr. Degen stated that the reimbursement was just upped in September of 2005 which was a 12.5% increase and the price of gas was the same \$3 per gallon as it is now.

Mr. Dillon stated that he would like to see the number rounded off. Mr. Cunningham suggested 43 cents which would be 2.5 cents over what we are at now.

Ms. Connie Sartini asked the Selectmen how many Town Employees currently use their own vehicles for work purposes. Mr. Dillon stated that some of the people using their own vehicles were the Building Inspector, the Assessors Office, the Conservation Commission, the Planning Board, other local inspectors and any employees that were going to meetings, conferences and trainings.

Mr. Degen moved to increase the mileage reimbursement from 40.5 cents per mile to 43 cents per mile effective July 1, 2008 for Fiscal Year 2009. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Review Responses for Town Counsel Services

Mr. Ritter stated that he had sent out a RFP for Town Counsel services to solicit competitive price quotations. He has received 4 responses and each one is proposing a retainer plus an hourly rate. What he needs to research now is what services are covered under the umbrella of the retainer, and which under the hourly rate. The highest retainer being proposed is \$60,000 and the lowest is at \$35,000. He would like to set up a team of people, including those who use the services the most, to help go through these proposals. His goal is to try to come up with a couple of firms to present to the Board on a future agenda for interviewing.

After some discussion, the Selectmen consented that the group would also need to look into what the typical breakdown of the current legal expenses has been. They needed to determine how much of the use was for litigation and how much was normal day to day routine operating needs.

Mr. Schulman stated that one of the firms had said that they were capped at a certain number and if we went over that figure there would be no additional costs.

Mr. Cunningham stated that through the screening process it would be beneficial to find an attorney to help them review the proposals. Mr. Dillon replied that the Chair of the Zoning Board, Bob Cadle is an attorney and that he should be asked if he could participate in the process.

Mr. Schulman stated that he was willing to work with the screening group.

Review Responses for Affordable Housing Consultant

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that there was nothing in their packets this evening regarding this discussion. The response date was Thursday the 27th of December. He has received 2 proposals from H&H Associates and Mike Hagan. He would like to form an advisory group to look through the proposals and then have the companies in for a discussion with the Board. He would like to see this completed by June 30th if possible. He then suggested some names for the advisory group and asked the Selectmen to inform him of any other people who would better represent the Town’s needs. The Board consented to allow Jeff to move forward with this process.

REPORT OF THE INTERIM ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that during the Department Heads Meeting this morning the Chair of the Finance Committee (FINCOM) had outlined the revenue expense forecast. They are trying to communicate the problem now so that everyone can work together on solutions. He then reminded the Board that the Joint Budget and FINCOM Meeting will take place on February 12 at 7:00 p.m. at the High School Library. A letter will be going out to Keyspan detailing the Police and Fire costs of the recent event to try and ask for some reimbursement. A draft letter to Bruce Wheeler regarding the Academy Hill area marker has been sent to Martin Beck for review and comment. He will be looking to open the Annual Town Meeting Warrant in the next few weeks and keep it open for 1 month. He requested the Board start to think about any Articles they may want included. The Board will need to find a replacement for Dr. Eger on the Great Ponds Advisory Committee Effective Jan. 1, 2008. The Charter that was sent to Representative Hargraves Office was reviewed by House Counsel and a few minor inconsistencies were found. House Counsel will contact Lauren at K & P to finalize those details. Lastly, Mr. Ritter reviewed some of the Agenda items for next week.

SELECTMAN LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Dillon stated that he had attended the Department Heads Meeting this morning. Dr. Genovese the Superintendent of Schools had also attended. He had also attended the farewell luncheon for Onorina on Friday who resigned as of that day. Before the luncheon Onorina swore in the new Interim Town Clerk. Mr. Dillon then stated that there were some questions as to the number of hours the local inspector may or may not be working when he returns. He requested that Mr. Degen set up a meeting with Bentley and Elizabeth to follow up on this issue.

MINUTES

Mr. Degen moved to approve the regular session minutes of November 19, 2007. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Mr. Dillon reminded the public about the bon fire on Friday night at 6:00.

ADJOURN

Mr. Degen moved to adjourn at 8:30 p.m. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Approved: _____
Stuart Schulman, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
April Iannacone
Office Assistant

Date Approved: February 25, 2008