

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES JANUARY 14, 2008
APPROVED**

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

Absent: George Dillon, Jr., Chairman

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

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

Information Technology (I/T) Committee Budget

Jim Selders stated that the necessary computer work in town has been done entirely by volunteers. There is no one on staff for almost 90 computers, and all network equipment and wiring. Last quarter the volunteers spent a total of approximately 500 hours, which is the equivalent 1 full time person. This level of support is difficult to sustain with volunteers. The I/T Committee is recommending hiring a full time staff member to address these issues. This person would be able to look at ways to cut costs and improve the efficiency of functions/processes/procedures through computers and automation. The Town needs to protect the information asset of data stored on the computers, because when the systems go down all processing is stopped. There is no I/T department to evaluate any of the software for upcoming projects. Recently the Committee took on the transition to a new infrastructure, which took 600 person hours. The new infrastructure enables increased efficiency, the opportunity to work on computers and read email from home. The public safety building cannot get an upgrade on their networks because the building has old wiring. It would require approximately 50 hours to re-wire the building in order to get better performance on their systems. Support calls consume from 20-50% of a full time employee per week, and most of that workload goes to him and Steve. They also have a contractor that assists on an as needed basis. The Treasurers software is 3 versions out of date, and takes numerous hours of support. There are different versions of QuickBooks in use, and the older versions had issues with security and would not work with the new environment. Aside from the day to day functions, an I/T manager could improve the quality of communications with the public regarding property value changes, meeting minutes, and the ability to fill out forms and paperwork online. He has done a comparison of nearby towns, and just about every town has someone to take care of this. He believes that there are a few ways to come up with the funding. One way could be to shut down satellite offices like legion hall and move the few employees to other offices, which would drop costs. Another would be to dump vendors that drive costs in town. These vendors write bad software which costs more in the long run due to recurring errors and the work that we do causes more problems with business down and paying employees.

Mr. Degen thanked Jim for a clear and precise presentation. The Committee has done a tremendous amount of work, and the Town has laid a lot of burden on volunteers in the past. As far as the funding they are at a major crossroads. The Town is facing a \$500,000 deficit, how would they justify spending \$85,000 on an I/T position. Jim replied that the current I/T Manager was approved at \$61,000 and a director would be at \$85,000. He believed that the reason the deficits exist is because of the inefficiency. The Town's budget has been funded to enable these inefficiencies. They need to look at finding ways to do the current job better without these issues.

Mr. Schulman stated that this was eye opening to the impact of technology, and how much that Jim and Steve really do. When you eliminate these products the savings and the benefits are not realized right away. He believed that they have to fund this position, and bite the bullet to see the savings in the long run. Jim replied that if they invest in the position now, to expect that in 1-2 years they will see the benefit, but the investments do pay off.

Mr. Cunningham stated that this was something that was looked at last year as a priority, because it crosses all aspects of town. They need to start prioritizing what's critically important. Having the volunteers has been a crutch to avoid hiring this position for way too long.

Mr. Keoseian gave thanks to Jim for a well developed presentation. If anyone had any doubt this certainly clears things up. This is an investment, and you don't see returns right away. He supports doing what needs to be done this year. Regardless of how we get funding we need to address how we are going to get it done, rather than why we can't. Jim stated that technology is the enabler for everything else. It is a cost, but it enables all other activities in town. This will be better for staff and residents.

Mr. Cunningham stated that there had been suggestions of sharing the position with School Department, and he asked about what was happening with them.

Mr. Degen stated that it should be brought up at the joint budget meeting. He thinks that they need to quickly explore the option with the school district or inter-municipally.

Mr. Cunningham then asked if this idea of sharing the position is realistic or setting them up for failure. Jim replied that the Town already has a full time need, and there would not be any available time for any other needs.

Mr. Schulman stated that if there was already a full time need he doesn't see how sharing would achieve much.

Mr. Degen asked how much of the \$38,000 budget was going to be dedicated to the consultant. Jim replied that it would be very little. His rate is \$25 per hour when the market rate is \$100+, and they don't call him often.

Mr. Degen stated that they need to proceed the way they currently are through process. Initially they may be able to get some funding for the position. Whether fully or partially funded, if the volunteers do in more limited function, then they could bring someone in on a more limited function initially. Jim agreed that the best time to invest is when things are financially strong, but that it is hard to do with the shortfall. If it is not done this year then they need to look ahead to what might happen from year to year after this.

Mr. Degen stated that they would be working in conjunction with FINCOM. He then asked if there was anyone in the public who had any comments.

Jim stated that the I/T Committee power point presentation was available on the town website for the public to view.

The Selectmen all thanked Jim for all of his hard work and for the presentation.

Mr. Schulman moved to support, endorse and refer to the Finance Committee the operational budget of the Information Technology Committee. Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

Chief of Police, Donald Palma, Highway Surveyor, Tom Delaney, & Main Street Committee RE: Review the Status of Main Street Traffic

Mr. Degen stated that he was approached concerning the traffic on Main Street. A crossing guard in the past has had an accident, and Mr. Sartilli the current crossing guard is present with his concerns.

Tom stated that some of the improvements that have been done to make crosswalks more visible include new signage, which was brought to state standard, raised thermoplastic, and new lighting. The problem comes down to the speed and the way that people drive. When schools are open traffic is not moving well, and commuters are most of the issue.

Mr. Cunningham asked if the idea of the bump-outs that go out a little into the travel lane was still something that was being considered. Tom replied that they can always be added, but there would have to be painting of no parking areas which would cut down on parking. He would be in favor of doing them if there were more parking in the area.

Chief Palma stated that when available an Officer stands outside the school as a traffic calming measure. However, most often it comes down to inattentiveness rather than speed.

Mr. Keoseian stated that aside from the parking issues that Chief Mulhern had with the bump-outs, the safety issues also had to be considered. All of the signs, speed bumps, and other devices have proven that they don't add up to the inattentiveness. He is aware that the safety factor could be minimized if done correctly with proper painting, signage, and educating the public that they are there, but like anything else there is a cost associated with doing this.

Mr. Degen stated that with the Station Ave. project there has been some discussion of bump-outs, and as part of the technical grant they would be looking into traffic calming measures.

Chief Palma stated that they would also need to look at the effect that the bump-outs would have across the board.

Mr. Sartilli stated that he believed that a sign with a flashing light, or a sawhorse with a flashing light, might grab more attention and be less expensive than the bump-outs. If that is not possible, then looking at maintaining an Officer down there to discipline when necessary.

Mr. Degen stated that having an Officer available is only an option based on availability. Also, the fact that there is not already a flashing sign might have something to do with the school being in a historic district.

Mr. Cunningham stated that driving by when a crossing guard is stopping traffic for students is against the law. He suggested that Mr. Sartilli get a plate number when there is an issue and report it to the police. Maybe if there are more tickets issued people might pay more attention the next time.

Chief Palma stated that he is willing to help, but he cannot guarantee coverage during all open school hours. It is an issue and it is illegal so he will step up the enforcement, as well as leaving the lights on the cruiser when they are there to grab attention. He does not believe that a flashing light will solve the problem.

Mr. Keoseian stated that on Main Street traffic is dangerous on a daily basis, and people are aware that Groton isn't known as a hostile town towards ticketing drivers. He agreed with stepping up the police efforts and presence. Chief Palma stated that they would do what they could to increase enforcement in terms of warnings and tickets.

Mr. Sartilli asked Chief Palma about what the process would be if he called in a complaint with a plate number. Chief Palma replied that it was best for him to call the Police Station with all complaints and give them the plate numbers. The Department would then take the necessary steps to help resolve the issue. The Selectmen thanked everyone for coming in regarding this concern.

Highway Surveyor, Tom Delaney RE: Weed Harvester Report

Mr. Ritter stated that Tom was there with some background information on last week's discussion, because he had a great understanding of the history.

Tom stated that the original weed harvester was borrowed or leased from Harvard. He ran it for a few summers, and then after a while Harvard wanted it back. Three or four years later Earl purchased one on private funds. Then it was purchased by the Lakes Association, and run for a few years through the Lakes Association. The operation of the harvester has been out of his department for approximately 10 years.

Mr. Cunningham asked Tom how staffing levels would work if the town were to be involved. Tom replied that he had lost 2 summer helpers to the budget deficit. He will have to pull equipment operators from jobs to mow grass, and do other tasks that the summer help would do.

Mr. Keoseian asked if Tom might be able to find a way to have someone available to run it even for a limited amount of hours. Tom replied that if he still had his summer helpers he would, but being down 2 employees he will have a real shortage of help.

Mr. Schulman stated that if the Town is cutting the grass cutters positions, why would we fund the weed cutters. Tom replied that there was a drowning a long time ago that had facilitated this process in the long run.

Mr. Degen stated that there was no question that this causes a public safety hazard. When the town used the Diaquod treatment, they were told that the weed harvester causes more to grow than there were in the first place. The Great Ponds Advisory Committee had investigated a plastic barrier to help deter the growing.

Tom stated that the biggest reason for any treatment is to remove nutrients for the rest to grow.

Mr. Degen stated that as the process of the budget moves along they will have to see how to fund a project that they have not been funding. Even though it is not a lot of money, it will be difficult to fund. He also stated that someone needs to be qualified to use the harvester to limit any liability.

Brad Harper from the Weed Harvester Committee was present and informed the Board that grant money used to be available. The Lakes Association has run on a volunteer basis and focused only on public areas, which has not been enough. Increasing the amount of hours, and money to pay someone about \$3,300 - \$3,500 would help a lot. Things are so overgrown that removing a few weeds wouldn't do much.

Mr. Degen encouraged the Committee to go to the budget meetings on February 2nd & 9th, and put together as much information as they can. He then gave thanks to Tom and Brad for their time.

Highway Surveyor, Tom Delaney RE: Review of Sidewalk Clearing Procedure

Tom informed the Selectmen that what he currently takes care of are a couple of areas on Main Street, the schools, Farmers Row, Riverbend, and West Groton center. Right now it is mostly areas that have through traffic, or commuter traffic. In terms of man hours, for a 3-4 inch storm it typically takes 4 to 5 hours. During a storm where they have to use snow blowers, it is around 16 hours.

Mr. Degen requested that anyone in these areas who get delivery of newspapers be aware that if the papers are in the path of the snow blower it will suck them up, and they have already had a snow blower break this way.

Mr. Cunningham stated that he knows that the Town cannot clear every sidewalk, but there are people who have been forced to walk in the road. He asked if there was a policy that stated that people are responsible for clearing the sidewalks in front of their own homes.

Mr. Keoseian stated that they should look into a Bylaw that puts the responsibility on the homeowners and businesses. The requests for the Town to clear more sidewalks will continue to grow. All those little requests, and little timeframes, translate into a lot of hours.

Mr. Degen stated that the Town does need to take care of the municipal property. He agreed with the suggestion to create a general Bylaw putting the responsibility on the homeowner, and making clear what the town maintains. The Town cannot continue to add on any additional expense from this. There are other towns that have this policy in place and enforce it by writing tickets.

Tom stated that they needed to define the Town's responsibility and the responsibility of the residents and make sure it is set clearly.

Mr. Keoseian stated that the Town takes care of Municipal or Town properties, and should not be taking care of private enterprises and homeownerships.

Michelle Collette suggested that the Town work with the Groton Dunstable Regional School District to determine where people are required to walk to school. The compromise is that the Town should take care of whatever the radius is for walking to school, and then people who live beyond those areas should be responsible for their own.

Mr. Degen suggested working with someone in the school district, or Dr. Genovese.

Mr. Cunningham suggested a small working group that should include someone from the schools and a Board member.

The Board consented to a working group, and Mr. Keoseian agreed to participate.

Chief of Police, Donald Palma & Emergency Management Director, Bill Shute RE: Reverse E-911 Proposal

Bill Shute informed the Selectmen that through homeland security and regional public health the Worcester County Sheriffs' Office has been funded for reverse 911 services. The reverse 911 will include all Verizon listed phone numbers, and not cell phones or other cable company numbers. The Geocast program will send out regional type notices within a region of an event. The Communicator program will allow different municipal functions and notification of events. Different departments can be notified by telephone that there was a message, or that all people involved in emergency situation report to the event, including Fire, Police and the Board of Health. The Worcester County Sheriff is funded through June of 2008, and there are grants pending for funding for the following years. Chief Palma stated that if the funding does not happen, it would be between \$500 and \$1,000 per year to maintain and operate.

Bill then stated that in looking at being NIMS compliant, they want to know if the Town has a signaling system to let people know if something is wrong. At this time the Town of Groton does not. The only timely method of broadcasting information is through speaker systems, and posting a message on our cable message board.

Mr. Degen asked about the technology, and the hardware necessary to implement. Chief Palma replied that the arrangement was that the Worcester County Sheriff will house the technology and hardware for us. The estimated town wide notification will be about 45 minutes. This system would have been appropriate during the Willowdale incident, or for a water main break to notify abutters on the road. The Verizon database will not be able to cover everybody. A system is available at a much larger expense that will take care of everybody, but with a tight financial situation in town it would be worthwhile to start out and get something in place.

Mr. Degen asked if this was similar to the Connect Ed system that the school system uses, and if he based on the Willowdale incident was it worth it in terms of public safety. Chief Palma replied that it was a similar system, and that anyone can record the message so that people recognize the voice. He also stated that it would be worthwhile to opt in, to reach people who don't get Connect Ed.

Mr. Schulman stated that a lot of people in town have Charter phone service, and asked Chief Palma if they will not get notified. Chief Palma replied that Mr. Schulman was correct that they would not be notified.

Mr. Cunningham asked if Chief Palma could look into the user fee to see if they could determine a more specific number to base on. Chief Palma replied that the fee would be based on the number of telephones that would be in the system, so it wouldn't be determined until the information is in the system.

Mr. Keoseian asked if this figure was all inclusive without any other management fees. Chief Palma replied that it was the only fee. They are not looking to make money off of us. They already have the system and resources.

Mr. Degen stated that they would bring this item back on next week's agenda to take action on, because they were not prepared to make a motion tonight.

Town Planner, Michelle Collette RE: Chapter 43D Contract

Michelle stated that the Town had applied for technical assistance funding and the application was presented on December 13. The funding was approved, and now the contract needs to be executed by the Chair of the Board. She is requesting that the Board approve the Chair to execute. The Contract needs to be returned no later than February 8th. This is not a reimbursable grant, the funds are electronically transferred to the Town. When this takes place then the 120 day clock begins. She has found 25 volunteers who are enthusiastic, and ready to participate on 5 different committees to make this happen.

Mr. Degen stated that it was great that this project received this funding and everything was in order. The Selectmen gave thanks to Michelle for all of her hard work.

Mr. Schulman moved for the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen to execute and sign the contract with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development, which accepts the provisions of MGL Chapter 43D on the approved Priority Development Site referred to as the Station Avenue Overlay District .Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

OTHER BUSINESS

Review Board Policy, RE: Boston Post Cane

Mr. Ritter stated that a resident had recently requested to borrow the cane for a funereal, due to the death of a relative who was the oldest resident in Town at 104. They allowed her to take it, but because they have never encountered this before he felt it was best to create a policy to make sure that it is protected.

Mr. Degen gave the public some background information regarding the Boston Post Cane. Some towns have never received it back, so the suggestion was to take back the original cane and keep it in the Town Hall, in a case with a plaque that has the name of the oldest resident. He then read the drafted policy.

Mr. Cunningham stated that what this is saying is that they would like to continue the tradition, but have a replica created in order to store the original.

Mr. Degen stated that it was the Town Clerk's job to present the cane to the oldest resident, but it is easy for a family to forget to return it with all the events that happen after a death takes place.

Mr. Cunningham felt that the Town should hold true to the original intent that the original cane be transmitted to the next oldest citizen. He agreed that they need to keep track of it and follow up with the family, but the Town has managed to keep it going for 100 years, and the tracking ability now is more sophisticated than it used to be.

Mr. Keoseian stated that he was not in favor of a replica.

Mike Bouchard, Temporary Town Clerk, stated that he thought the intention was to honor the oldest resident. He is concerned that the Town Clerk is responsible for the cane, and how does the office go about getting it back. He feels that the Town should preserve the cane and keep on display with a plaque, and then continue the tradition with a replica or certificate. Of the original 700 or 750 canes only about 400 can be accounted for.

Mr. Cunningham stated that there were many different protocols in tracking. They needed to create a method for tracking, as well as making it clear that the cane is on loan while the person survives. He felt that there was something about the original intent of the publisher, and people are usually grateful to be the temporary custodian.

Mr. Ritter suggested a loan agreement between the recipient and the Town, even just a simple one page document stating that the family agrees to return the cane upon their passing.

Mr. Schulman stated that this is such a fascinating 19th century tradition, and he wouldn't want to mess with it. It has been owned by many people, and he felt that they should honor this guys wishes.

The Board consented to working on this draft and a possible loan agreement or promissory note.

Appointment of Police Chief Donald Palma to the Main Street Committee

Mr. Degen asked Chief Palma if he could brief the Board on the incident that happened over the weekend. Chief Palma replied that the incident this weekend occurred on Saturday night into Sunday, at 2:00 a.m. The officer noticed a vehicle out of place in a parking lot. The people were in the process of robbing a business and taking about \$550 - \$600 with them. The Officer proceeded on a foot chase and then returned to catch the car, which was stolen. There is now an on going search. The Officer should be commended for a job well done. The public needs to know that the Officers are out there. Mr. Degen stated that it was nice to know that the patrols are paying off. The police are out there and active.

The Selectmen thanked Chief Palma for being willing to serve on the Main Street Committee. Mr. Degen then announced that there was still one opening remaining on the Main Street Committee for a Groton business owner.

Mr. Schulman moved to appoint Chief of Police Donald Palma to the Main Street Committee for a term to expire on June 30, 2008. Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

Presidential Primary Warrant

Mr. Degen stated that the Selectmen needed to sign the warrant to post for the Presidential Primary.

Mr. Schulman moved to sign the Presidential Primary Warrant for Tuesday, February 5, 2008. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

Review Board Policy, RE: Public Building Use

Mr. Ritter informed the Board that this discussion was informational only. He will have a proposed policy within the next 3 weeks. This discussion originated out of Council on Aging, and a request for the use of the Council on Aging building. He was looking to establish what buildings are town owned and an understanding of how the buildings are being used. He will bring this up at the department heads meeting next week, and then to the support staff, to give everyone a heads up that things may change.

Mr. Keoseian asked Mr. Ritter if he had found any hidden costs that the town ends up eating due to this practice. Mr. Ritter replied that the only building being rented out is the Council on Aging. Mr. Degen stated that during the building of the Lost Lake Fire Station there were discussions of use of the station by the public. They need to remember there was an appropriation for public use as a community center. Mr. Schulman stated that there have been Groton reads meetings, concerts, and public stuff held there in the past. Mr. Cunningham asked if there was already an existing policy on this of some sort. Mr. Ritter replied that there was a policy for Town Hall and security, and what can be placed on walls. So there was not a general use policy. The Selectmen reached a consensus for Jeff to take a further look at this issue.

Town Meeting Warrant Articles

Lost Lake Sewer Committee

Mr. Ritter stated that he has been in contact with the US Department of Agriculture. A program is available with money tied to it to help communities. He feels that either the Board should create committee, or put it on the warrant for Town Meeting to authorize a committee. This is a significant project, and they need a significant amount of dedicated people to work with this.

Mr. Degen stated that this is a public health issue that is requiring this need to be hooked up to sewer, and create a new sewer district.

Mr. Cunningham stated that he was in favor of putting a place holder on the Town Meeting warrant.

Mr. Ritter stated that he can prepare a draft article for the Board to review.

REPORT OF THE INTERIM ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Mr. Ritter stated that he had attended the MMA Annual Meeting on Friday and Saturday. He attended seminars on Financial Management, better managing energy costs, human resources, and the latest legal decisions regarding labor issues. He met with the new Marketing Manager of the Groton Inn to discuss areas of mutual concern. Lastly, he reviewed the agenda items that would be coming up before the Board next week.

SELECTMAN LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Degen stated that he had attended 2 days of MMA meetings. The repeal petition for the 40B issues failed to get the required amount of signatures, so it failed to pass. Governor Patrick spoke. The MMA Delegates voted to mandate the State to pay \$450 million in funds back to communities. Mass Citizens for fair taxation were also there, and they strongly believe that Chapter 70 funds will not get cut and will be level funded.

The Board of Assessors is meeting on Wednesday at 3:00 pm. Residents can attend this meeting to get answers to their questions.

Mr. Schulman stated that he had also attended 1 day of the MMA meeting. He participated in a session involving flex time, and flexible hours for employees. Date with mark arguing Washington green case has been postponed many times.

Mr. Keoseian asked if they talked about flex time from a legal aspect. Mr. Schulman stated that they were showing the benefits, and how what seems at first as not beneficial could prove as beneficial due to changing patterns of work ethics.

Mr. Degen stated that MMA distributed a DVD to every municipality regarding revenue sharing. This revenue sharing is where 40% of all fees paid to the state will be paid back to the municipalities. The Selectmen will view the DVD and make sure that they agree to this concept before publicizing on Cable TV.

ADJOURN

Mr. Schulman moved to adjourn at 9:35 p.m. Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

Approved: _____
Stuart Schulman, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
April Iannacone
Office Assistant

Date Approved: *March 24, 2008*