

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES JANUARY 28, 2008
APPROVED**

Present: George Dillon, Jr., Chairman; Peter Cunningham; Mihran Keoseian

Absent: Joshua A. Degen, Vice Chairman; Stuart Schulman, Clerk

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.

Michael Bouchard, Temporary Town Clerk, RE: Update and Appointment of Election Workers

Mr. Dillon stated that the Presidential Primary will be on Tuesday from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm. He then asked Mike about the process of absentee ballots. Mike replied that the ballots are available, but they were received late across the State because the primary changed from March to February. He suggested that people vote in the office because there is not enough time to mail out the ballots and have them mailed back in time to be counted on the 5th. Mr. Dillon then asked what happens if someone is not able to get in for an absentee ballot. Mike replied that a family member can come in to fill out the form for the person, but it still has to be mailed out to that person.

Mr. Dillon then asked about the issue with the census and dog license forms. Mike replied that the vendor that mails out the census usually mails the dog license forms with the census as a reminder to register dogs by February 29th. The vendor's machine that coordinates putting both forms together in one envelope did not work properly, so not all residents received the form with the census. He stated that they have placed an ad in both local papers which will be paid for by the vendor.

Mike then updated the Selectmen on his first month of being in the office. The election is expected to be very busy due to the amount of absentee ballots and registrations coming in. There were 40 students registered from the high school. The census has gone out and is now coming back in, as well as dog licenses and preparing for the election. He has worked with Jeff and Elizabeth to increase hours of the office staff to help get through this busy time. It has been a tremendous help, and he thanks the Board of Selectmen (BOS) for their support. Everything is running roughly equivalent to last year, including the number of passports. There was some expectation that things would drop off, but it is running pretty steady. The Town has also signed up for the Federal census several months ago, and just received some materials.

Mr. Dillon wished Mike good luck with the election. The Selectmen all thanked him for working hard and for the update.

Mr. Cunningham moved to appoint the following people as Election Workers, terms to expire June 30, 2008:

Carole Bouchard as Election Worker, Irene Corsetti as Election Worker, Jean Cummings as Election Worker, Richard Hewitt as Election Worker – Clerk, April Iannacone as Election Worker – Clerk's Office, Eileen Navien as Election Worker, John Ott as Election Worker – Clerk, Rena Swezey as Election Worker – Warden. Mr. Keoseian seconded. Unanimous vote.

Surrenden Farm Resource Management Plan Update

Mr. Cunningham stated that as part of the project the Conservation Commission was to put together the resource management plan for the land. A sub-group of the Conservation Commission has been working on this, and he felt it was a good idea to get an update from the group on their discussions.

Marshall Giguere stated that Barbara had prepared a report that he will summarize. The parcel was acquired in December 2006 for 160 acres of cultural open space. They needed to create a 150 unit sub division plan. This was a State acquired Conservation Restriction. The Department of Fish and Game required the design of the resource management plan. They acquired 3 unique areas, and needed to find a way to formulate a plan that worked for each of the 3 areas different uses and requirements. Zone 1 is the westerly and southern portion of the land, and is mainly lowlands and wetlands. It contains forest area, rare species and wildlife. Zone 2 is the middle part of the land which is primarily meadows and hay field. Zone 3 is the northernmost portion of the land, and it is upland with mixed softwood and hardwood forest. The draft plan covers a description of the property, the history and guiding principals from the Conservation Restriction. It has been subdivided into 3 mini plans, and then each of those 3 has been subdivided. Mike Roberts has done a cultural resource inventory, Barbara has created agricultural plans, and they

have received input from the public on trails. The plan is very large and far from complete, but they have until this December to have it completed.

Mr. Cunningham stated there is concern among some of the representatives from National Heritage on the trails in the zone 1 area, and they need to make sure that it is looked at closely. When people at Town Meeting approved the project they believed that it would be open to the public, and that there would be the ability to access the property and existing trails. Marshal replied that the property is open to the public, and that there will be access to all parts of the parcel.

Paul Funch, the Vice Chair of the Trails Committee, stated that he had attended meetings of the ad-hoc resource committee, and had made recommendations to the management plan. The plan is being far more restrictive than the Conservation Restriction dictates. The language in the zone 1 draft states that there will be no marked or maintained trails permitted in this area. He believes that reasonable accommodations can be made as to where the trails might be located, and some way of allowing public access on this parcel. They should not be restricted to not having any trail at all. There has to be a way to accommodate their concerns, but still meet the needs of the public.

Mr. Dillon stated that there are some trails there that have been used for quite some time, and the wildlife has done ok in that time. Past experience is that the Town's trails are not heavily used. He does not think that it is reasonable to expect an extreme amount of activity, and things can be looked at down the road if it does become a concern.

Craig Almond stated that there was no one saying that there won't be trails, and there will be public access. They are just concerned about this one section.

Mr. Cunningham stated that anyone in Town who supported and was involved in this understood that the purpose was to protect the habitat, but also to allow the public to access it. Having some maintained trails is not inconsistent with the plan, and things have managed to co-exist down there to this point. Marshal replied that for any use of the property to take place, the Restriction requires that the management plan be in place.

Chris Corwin stated that there are other places that have public access, but trails are not allowed because of a species protected by National heritage.

Marion Stoddard, a member of the Greenway Committee, stated that they would like to have more information from the Conservation Commission and the Trails Committee before making their own recommendation. She felt that when looking at the development of conservation areas in town, they needed to determine if there are places that are wild and should be kept wild. This is an environmentally sensitive area, and they should be conscious of that.

Michelle Collette stated that the suggestion of dividing the parcels has some logic to it. No one is suggesting that people not have access, they just believe that it is the level of activity that needs to be moderated.

Mr. Dillon encouraged the public and anyone concerned over these issues attend some of the meetings that are taking place, and gave thanks to all for coming in, and he appreciated the time and efforts to put this together.

Bentley Herget, Building Commissioner/Zoning Enforcement Officer, RE: Alternate Building Inspector Townsend

Bentley stated that he was looking to coordinate efforts between himself and Townsend's Building Commissioner to cover inspections for each other if one is out sick or on vacation. The towns would appoint each of them as alternate commissioners. This is generally done with small towns that do not have a big building department, and doesn't cost either town additional money. The Town has 30 days to approve or deny a permit and this arrangement would be for a 5 day period at a time, so approval could wait until they return.

Mr. Dillon stated that the agreements were the same and he had followed up with a memo. Each town has to appoint the alternate.

Mr. Keoseian thanked Bentley for taking this initiative. The document is simple and understandable, and has good safety nets. He agrees with the spirit of cooperation.

Mr. Dillon asked if any action had been taken by Townsend. Bentley replied that they would be discussing it at their meeting tomorrow night.

Mr. Cunningham stated that the previous inspector had done this with the Town of Berlin. It is something that makes sense.

Mr. Dillon suggested that they add contingent upon a reciprocal agreement by the Townsend BOS.

Mr. Cunningham moved to approve Bentley Herget as Alternate Inspector of Buildings for the Town of Townsend, with the following conditions: this agreement is for the purpose of conducting inspections only, no permits shall be issued without prior and specific authorization; this agreement is intended for the purpose of coverage during mutually agreed upon absences not to exceed 5 consecutive business days. If longer it must be agreed to in writing;

it is understood that there will be no charge to the community for service rendered under this agreement. Contingent upon a reciprocal agreement by the Townsend BOS. Mr. Keoseian seconded. Unanimous vote.

OTHER BUSINESS

Landfill Monitoring Contract (6 month)

Mr. Ritter stated that the Board of Health (BOH) has referred down an addendum to their 3 year contract with LFR. This would be to provide continued landfill monitoring in the amount of \$7,465 through June 30, 2008. The company provides quarterly monitoring, and generates an annual report in April for the Mass DEP and the BOH. A site inspection is conducted by a professional engineer. The BOH has put out to bid for a new 3 year contract, and a new contract will be entered into between the Town and the next vendor.

Mr. Dillon asked if they will continue to do all the testing that they did before for metals and organic compounds. Mr. Ritter replied that they would continue to do everything, and that this was just an extension.

Mr. Cunningham moved to approve and enter into a contract addendum between the Town of Groton (Board of Selectmen and Board of Health) and LFR, Inc. in the amount of \$7,465 to provide continued landfill monitoring at the Groton landfill, Cow Pond Brook Road, for a period of six months or until this phase of the monitoring is complete. Mr. Keoseian seconded. Unanimous vote.

Prepare for Budget Hearing (2/2 & 2/9)

Mr. Ritter stated that he wanted to give the Board a reminder of the budget meetings for February 2nd and 9th. He will get them a copy of schedule. These joint meetings worked well last year. The public is welcomed and encouraged to attend.

Mr. Dillon stated that the Town was in receipt of the Governors initial budget for this year. The local lottery aid is level funded to all of the towns, totaling \$935 million. \$134 million is pending on the passage of the casino legislation. If the aid stays level funded Groton would receive \$957,000, but \$127,000 is what is contingent upon the legislation. If the legislation does not pass it would be a decrease of 13%. The budget projections were created looking at level funded. The Groton Dunstable Regional School District schools would receive an increase of \$320 or \$323,000 which is 2.8% above last year. The BOS is requesting an update from the Community Preservation Committee regarding the CPA State matching funds, because they are expected to go down this year and only receive 60-70% of matching.

Mr. Cunningham stated that it might be a good idea to have the CPC come in and have a discussion. The Town has already committed to the CPA funds, and they need to continue to use those funds for Surrenden Farm.

Mr. Dillon stated that of the communities that receive 100% matching funds, 71 of 127 of them have adopted the maximum figure.

Mr. Keoseian stated that this was a good example to show that the Town needs to start being a little more careful in tying the budget projections to the States funding. On one set of the Governors figures the best case if that we are going to get level funded. This same case or worse is going to be predictable for the foreseeable future. Chapter 70 funds have gone down because bigger cities have been receiving more.

Mr. Dillon stated that they are still projecting a significant deficit. FINCOM requested that the department heads bring back budgets with changes. There has been some good back and forth discussion with all people involved, but it is difficult to find the best way to get things done. A significant reduction in costs has to be made from last year.

REPORT OF THE INTERIM ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Mr. Ritter stated that he had held meetings with both the department heads and the support staff. He is receiving feedback that there is uncertainty within the workplace which is causing a lot of stress and concern about job security. He requested that while the Board goes through the budget hearings and pull together final budget, they consider any reduction in personnel in a fair and equitable way, and try to keep the process as transparent as possible. The department heads have solutions to save money, and the Board should recognize that there may be options other than reducing jobs. He also suggested that any employee or group that has ideas on what can be done come forward. The Board should do what they can to send a message that they are doing whatever they can to ensure that employees will have continued employment.

Mr. Dillon replied that they will take all of these suggestions into consideration when looking at what cuts could be made. The department heads were asked to make serious reductions to the budgets. After the budget submissions the Selectmen and FINCOM will see what deficit remains, and indicate with each budget where it has to be cut back. After this it will be the decision of the department heads to make the cuts to reach that goal.

Mr. Cunningham stated that when making cuts to the budgets they need to determine what the core, or essential services are that the town needs to provide, and then work backwards. Then if reductions in force take place they need to determine if the cuts will affect these essential services.

Mr. Ritter stated that there had been some significant reductions and cutbacks already and he complimented the department heads for doing so. He and Mr. Keoseian have done the Personnel Director's evaluation, so all evaluations are up to date.

Mr. Dillon stated that they needed to flush out the risk rating based on the payroll data to see if there were things that could change. Mr. Ritter stated that this was one of the key things that he was looking at.

Mr. Dillon then asked if the Selectmen had received a letter from the Police Patrolman's Union to start negotiations and Mr. Ritter stated that they had.

SELECTMAN LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Keoseian stated that he had met with Elizabeth to finalize her evaluation. He commended her on all the work that she had done to get a performance evaluation document that is comprehensive. He felt that it must have been a difficult task coming from a human resources setting where things are established and well working, to a municipality that needed fixing from the ground floor up and providing new policies. On her Self Evaluation he commended her for taking an honest approach to recognizing what she has done and still needs to do. He is reassured that she is on top of things.

Mr. Ritter complimented her for rolling out the performance evaluations. It was not an easy process to get going, but it is an important management tool.

Mr. Dillon stated that the Station Ave planning 43D funding is expected in the next 2 to 3 weeks. Most of the subcommittees have already started meeting. Tomorrow the Infrastructure Committee will meet with Judith Mitchell over at the GELD Lineman's Building.

MINUTES

Mr. Dillon stated that they would hold of on the meeting minutes of November 26, 2008 until next week.

ADJOURN

Mr. Cunningham moved to adjourn at 9:10 p.m. Mr. Keoseian seconded. Unanimous vote.

Mr. Dillon gave thanks to Zoey Herse and told her that they appreciate the job she is doing recording the meetings.

Approved: _____
Stuart Schulman, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
April Iannacone
Office Assistant

Date Approved: *March 24, 2008*