

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES MARCH 3, 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.

Michael Bouchard, Temporary Town Clerk RE: Review Current Fees

Mike stated that he had done a review of the fees in the Town Clerk's Office due to the budget crisis. He has given the Board of Selectmen (BOS) a summary sheet that indicates current fees and a proposal of what the fees could be. The Clerk's Office issues birth, death and marriage certificates, and dog licenses. There are approximately 25 various permits, certificates and licenses issued. He has done an analysis of 9 surrounding towns for equivalent services, and his proposed fees would put us in middle of the range of all of these towns. Many of these fees haven't been raised since 1991, and the cost of doing business has gone up. He was there for informational purposes and looking for feedback from the board. Then, assuming the BOS agrees with the proposed fees they could hold a public hearing, and no town meeting vote would be required. The Federal Government sets the rates for the passport service fee. The town's execution fee is now \$5 less than what we have been getting in the past. With all of the proposed fee increases and the reduction in passport fees, the Clerk's Office would net about \$4,500 more revenue than last year.

Mr. Degen stated that there had been a major increase in passport applications last year, and there was an expectation that passports would slow down this year. He asked Mike if they were slowing down. Mike replied that they were down a little, but there is still a good demand and we are still at about 80-85% of last year.

Mr. Keoseian asked Mike if he had found anything that isn't on list that we should be charging for during his research. Mike replied that he was not aware of any that we are not charging for that we could be.

Mr. Keoseian stated that the town hasn't seen an increase in a number of years, and he thanked Mike for keeping a moderate and balanced review.

Mr. Cunningham stated that the fee for the street listing seemed steep and not supportive of the comparables, and he would suggest \$20.

Mr. Schulman stated that he would support the recommendations with Mr. Cunningham's modification.

Mr. Degen suggested dropping the proposed fee for the street listing a little as well. He then stated that if anyone was interested in looking at the proposed fees they will be available in the Town Clerk's Office and the Selectmen's Office.

The Selectmen then thanked Mike for his time and information.

Donald Palma, Police Chief RE: Streetlight Report and Current Fees

Chief Palma stated that he was reviewing the feasibility of turning off some of the street lights to save money. He has determined that it is feasible and there would be a cost savings. He has talked with Kevin at GELD about a couple of things, and has requested a master list of all street lights, and a list of those paying for their own. He should have the list by the end of the week. GELD will also be purchasing LED street lights to put on Station Ave to look into the differences and possible benefits. They were also looking into the option of changing sensors and timers on lights so that they are only running during peak hours. There are intersections and bad curves where there is a need for the lights, but there are a lot of roads where there are not many lights and safety has been ok.

Mr. Cunningham asked if there was a general sense that there were a lot of lights that are not critical. Chief Palma replied that there are a lot that are burnt out and no one has noticed or reported them, and there are a lot of areas that have clusters of lights where 1 or 2 of the 3 lights could be eliminated. It will take him a couple of weeks to review everything and report back to the BOS.

Chief Palma then stated that his second request was get feedback from the Selectmen about looking into some of the parking rules and fees. The parking rules were adopted in 1986, modified in 1991 and have not been raised since. The fee for parking in a handicapped space is only \$30 where most other towns are anywhere from \$50 to \$100. Also the charge for a beach pass is \$25 for the season and the fine for violating the parking is only \$5 so most people

feel it is worth not getting the pass. The Selectmen are the board that set the rates for all parking fees. He could come back in to hold the public hearing at the same time as the Town Clerk.

Mr. Schulman stated that it made sense to set the handicapped fine as high as possible.

Mr. Degen requested that Chief Palma get blank copies of templates from other towns to compare to.

Mr. Keoseian stated that he agreed that if it was a safety issue, or parking in a handicapped space, he would also support setting the fine as high as possible. Down at the beach he has seen that there are a lot of people from out of town, or out of state that are parking down there and are unaware that they need a sticker, and have stated that they have never been ticketed for parking there. He felt that with enforcement there needed to be a reasonable fine to send a strong message. Chief Palma replied that there were a number of ways to implement this new fee schedule and the increase in enforcement.

The Board consented to allow Chief Palma to look into the parking rules and fines and report back to them in a few weeks.

Bentley Herget, Building Inspector RE: Review Current Fees

Bentley stated that he had put together a few graphs for the Selectmen to review, and had also compared Groton fees to comparable towns. The graph represents a 3,000 square foot home. He then shows Groton's current rates, the rates of a few other communities and then the proposed new rate for Groton. The fees were established in 2001 when most other towns have increased between 2004 and 2007. He is proposing fees that will be more competitive to surrounding towns. He then stated that the structure of the fee schedule in Groton currently is not as fair as it could be. The new proposed fee schedule is dependent on the size of the house rather than the cost of the house or job.

Mr. Degen suggested reviewing the fees every three years as the cost of living goes up.

The Selectmen then thanked Bentley for all of his hard work and preparation.

Valerie Jenkins, Town Accountant RE: Request to Fill Assistant Town Accountant Position

Mr. Degen stated that the Personnel Manager had done a needs analysis on this position and was here to report her findings.

Elizabeth had stated that she has had interviews with Valerie and Barbara to take a closer look at day to day tasks, and how long it takes to complete those tasks. Her recommendation is to change the position from 30 hours per week to 27 hours per week. Some of the jobs in that office have transitioned to her in personnel, and payroll has recently been moved to the Treasurer's Office.

Mr. Degen stated that the information in the analysis was extremely detailed and helpful. Elizabeth replied that since Barbara had been here 11 years it made this process a lot easier.

Valerie stated that she was ok with the 27 hours, but Barbara was extremely efficient and someone new coming in will take more hours to do some of her tasks. She was requesting that she be able to have Barbara come in to help with training from now until the end of June. Barbara has agreed to do this for her and she should have a little extra money in her budget to do so. Mr. Dillon is aware of her request, and she is just looking for support from the rest of the Board.

Mr. Degen stated that between the pay step being vacated and the step coming in there should be enough funding to allocate the money as needed. She has had her hands full and he does not object to her request.

Mr. Schulman also stated that he had no objection to the request either. If the person who has been temporarily covering the job since Barbara has been out were to apply for the position and get it, then they would be a little more trained than someone else. Val replied that the person who has been covering temporarily has been good, but he has only done one specific task and would still need more training. Anyone who has good solid financial skills, a good attitude and enthusiasm will work and will be able to pick it up quickly.

Mr. Cunningham agreed with the request also, but asked Val if GELD would be able to make time available for Barbara to be able to help. Val replied that Barbara has a 30 hour per week position over there and would be able to help either before or after she starts.

Mr. Degen stated that the position would be posted for 5 days internally before being posted external. Anyone who may be interested in the position that works for the Town has first chance at the position.

The Selectmen thanked Val and wished her good luck in her search.

OTHER BUSINESS

Annual Town Meeting (ATM) Warrant

Mr. Degen stated that the first part of the warrant stated what positions are currently available for election, and then read what those positions were.

Mr. Keoseian announced that regrettably he would not be seeking re-election. He has enjoyed serving for the past 3 years. There is still a lot that remains to be done, but because of his other work commitment he is unable to give this position the right amount of time necessary.

Mr. Degen stated that Mr. Keoseian's time on the Board was extremely helpful and he had enjoyed working with him. He then stated that if there was anyone in Town who was interested in running for Selectmen it would be a good opportunity to not have to run against an incumbent.

Mr. Ritter then stated that the warrant closed last Thursday, and there were 31 articles submitted and 2 questions. This was the second draft and he will be continuing to make sure that the wording is refined. There may also be some articles removed from the warrant. There will be a Special Town Meeting (STM) held within the ATM which has been past practice. The warrant for the STM would be opening next week for just a few days.

Mr. Degen stated that there will be two ballot questions one for the override and one for the Charter approval. He believed that the Charter question should be first and the override question should be second. The Board consented to switch the order.

Val stated that there would also be a question regarding the debt exclusion for a bond.

Mr. Cunningham asked about the Regional School District and the override.

Mr. Degen stated that the bond was for the School District for financing of the land for the High School. There would be articles on the Wage Classifications, Surrenden Farms, the fiscal year 09 budget. FINCOM is going through the numbers at their meeting on March 11, and then the public hearing would be on the 24th.

Mr. Cunningham asked if there was a ballpark idea of where the budget deficit was at. Val replied that the last number was \$341,000 on the Town side of the budget. FINCOM did not receive 5 and 8% budget reductions from all departments.

Mr. Cunningham then asked if it looked like it might be achievable to get that number down. Val replied that it was achievable, but it would take time. There needed to be some reduction in forces.

Mr. Degen stated that during the two Saturday joint meeting sessions some recommendations were made, and they were working on coming up with a solution, or solutions, that would work for everyone.

Mr. Keoseian stated that the budget process and deficit projections began on assumptions. He then asked if there were any significant changes in those assumptions that would have a major affect on the budget. Val replied that included in this figure is prior year bills, the snow and ice deficit and deficits in abatement reserves which have totaled about \$170,000. She had hoped when they had started that it would be only around \$100,000. There are more students enrolling at Nashoba Tech. which will cause higher costs to be paid to the Tech. The Governor has projected that local aid would remain level to last year, but \$127,000 of that is dependent on the passing of the casino legislation. If the legislation does not pass and he does not receive the revenue that he expects then the town will have an additional \$127,000 deficit in funds.

Mr. Keoseian stated that all 3 of those items were on the high end of creating or adding to the deficit we are facing. Val replied that unfortunately there is nothing we can do about any of those 3 items either. The health insurance estimate was high, but it came in lower than projected and saved approximately \$65,000.

Mr. Degen stated that they would hear more after the 11th and the 24th public hearing. He then asked who was sponsoring article s. Mr. Ritter replied that Jay Prager had requested the article and wanted to know who might sponsor it on his behalf. They were looking at either the Highway Surveyor, the Board or taking it out of the warrant.

Mr. Degen stated that he would like Jay to come in and justify why he requested this article.

Mr. Ritter stated that he would suggest that Jay and Tom Delaney attend next weeks meeting to discuss the article.

Mr. Degen asked when the warrant was scheduled to go to Town Counsel. Mr. Ritter replied that the Board would see another draft for review next Monday and then it would go to Town Counsel next Tuesday.

REPORT OF THE INTERIM ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Mr. Ritter stated that the Annual Town Report was complete and available in the Selectmen's Office. He congratulated Patrice who was responsible for the report from start to finish. Patrice is working on the creation of electronic packets of the Selectmen's weekly agenda backup material and daily correspondence in order to save time and money. The switch of Payroll from the Accountant's Office to the Treasurer/Tax Collector's Office has gone

well. The contract with Dick Heaton is now fully authorized between both parties. There will be an affordable housing meeting this Friday, and Dick Heaton will report back to the Selectmen at the end of the month. The Fire Department has received a \$25,000 Fire Grant Award for the fourth year in a row. The Town Counsel planning group met this afternoon to review the 6 firms that responded. Three of the 6 were full service firms and three were more specialized. The group will begin interviews with these firms next Monday and then they will come back to the Board with input. He then wished Mr. Keoseian the best in his decision to leave the Board and stated that he would be missed.

SELECTMAN LIAISON REPORTS

Mr. Cunningham also thanked Mr. Keoseian for his time on the Board. There were certain projects that he took on and headed, and knowing the school system was also extremely helpful.

Mr. Schulman stated that his length of service has been less than a year, but in that time he has learned a lot from Mr. Keoseian.

Mr. Keoseian thanked all of the Selectmen for the kind words. He has gotten a lot accomplished, but there is still a lot more to be done, and the Board needs someone who can give it more time than he has been able to give.

Mr. Ritter stated that the office had received an email regarding a public hearing at Nashoba Tech. on Tuesday the 11th at 6:30 pm.

Mr. Degen stated that the Selectmen had received a letter from Nikki Tsongas informing them that there would be a Homeland Security Grants Seminar on Monday March 10th in Littleton from 2:30 pm. to 4:30 pm. He would be attending the seminar and if any other Selectmen are interested in attending they will need to RSVP. He then stated that he had met with Bentley to speak about his fee schedule, and has been continuing to work with Chief Palma on the street lights analysis. The affordable housing consultant will begin working on reviewing town owned land, and all homes in town to determine where there is the greatest need for affordable housing, mid range housing and mixed use developments.

MINUTES

Mr. Cunningham moved to approve the regular session meeting minutes of January 7, 2008. Mr. Schulman seconded. Unanimous vote.

ADJOURN

Mr. Schulman moved to adjourn at 8:29 p.m. Mr. Cunningham seconded. Unanimous vote.

Approved: _____
Stuart Schulman, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
April Iannacone
Office Assistant

Date Approved: *May 12, 2008*