



OFFICE OF THE
Advisory Board
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April 25, 2016

Present: Harold Simmons, Christine Muir, Ron Mikol, Dana Metzler, Pam Crocker
Absent: Amie Stevens

Also present: Tracey Hutton

Meeting opened at 7:00 p.m.

Town Meeting Warrant Review

Our meeting opened with consideration of the remaining three articles on which we have not yet voted. The first article concerns the CPC Recommendations to spend \$36,800 on the Middle School track and \$4,000 on the Town Hall building evaluation. The board considered these items separately. After much discussion, we voted 3-2 to support the use of funds for the middle school track. Christine was one who opposed on grounds that this sets a precedent of charging users rather than owners. We voted unanimously to support the \$4,000 expenditure for building evaluation.

Secondly, we discussed the Westford Street Conservation Restriction. Tracey presented assessors' data showing that approximately 76% of the land in Dunstable is not taxed at its full potential, either because it is conservation or protected (under Chapter 61A or B or other) or other. Members of the Conservation Commission and Dunstable Rural Land Trust voiced their support for this purchase. The Advisory Board decided to table their vote until the next meeting. This precluded the need to discuss the next article, which provided for the use of Timber Funds to support the CR purchase.

At 7:30 p.m. we moved to open the Public Hearing. Approximately 24 members of our community attended this hearing.

The Advisory Board presented each article on the town meeting warrant. Unless otherwise stated, the board is in support of all articles.

Article 4 CPC Recommended Transfers includes from Housing for the Master Plan, the sum of \$5,000, and from Historical for the repair and restoration of the picture frame surrounding Christopher Roby's portrait in the library, the sum of \$1,250.

Article 5 Inspectors' Stipends will be funded through overlay surplus dollars.

Article 8 Salaries of Elected Officials should reflect a beginning date of July 1, 2016, not 2015. The motion will be correct.

Article 9 to appoint rather than elect the Town Clerk was supported by the Advisory Board but Selectman Ken Leva noted that this is not a recommendation from the DOR audit done several years ago. The BOS have not voted to support this and Ken suggests taking no action at town meeting.

Article 10 provides for the operating budget of FY17. New growth revenue comes from construction and assessments, while local receipts includes excise taxes, permits, fines, etc. Our current free cash balance is approximately \$254,000. An audience member asked what the cherry sheet is; Town Accountant Lorraine

Leonard answered that it is state aid. It usually includes Chapter 70 money but because we are a regional district, those funds go directly to the school district. These used to be printed on cherry-colored paper, hence the name.

In summarizing the budget, Dana said that about \$15,000 is intended to staff our fire department when the chief is away, and that we can expect 75% reimbursement of funds spent on Veterans' Benefits. We can also anticipate 60-90% reimbursement of the Essex Aggie transportation costs. Approximately \$430,000 of the requested override is intended to cover municipal costs; the rest covers education.

An audience member asked about the status of a property on High Street that had been given to the town. The house has been sold and the funds are currently in escrow while a scholarship fund is established.

The board was asked if the \$430,000 would hold the municipal side for more than one year. It is not likely because of anticipated stormwater management costs in FY18. This does help us stop the practice of using free cash to balance the budget and does support the Personnel Board's recommendations over a three-year period.

Dana noted that there are two debt exclusion questions on the ballot, which will free up funds from the operating budget and help with future costs. These exclusions are approximately \$15,000 for the middle school roof and \$40,000 for the Greater Lowell Tech School renovations. Sue Psaledakis asked us to define what the debt is excluded from; it is excluded from the Proposition 2 ½ cap. These are essentially temporary overrides with defined end dates. There was further discussion around what debt is excluded and where it fits into the budget line items. Someone asked that we post the debt schedule and budget overview sheet to the website.

Sharon Flanagan asked how many students attend Greater Lowell Tech; the board said it's about 14 this year.

Another resident asked if we still had a deficit in the snow and ice budget. We don't currently have a deficit in that line item. We have an amortization schedule to pay off last year's deficit over three years; one payment has already been made.

Another resident asked about the plan for the Pelletier property on River Street, purchase about 15 years ago.

Article 11 Chapter 90 funds amount to \$178,411 this year.

Article 24 CPC recommended transfers include the following: from FY2016 CP Undesignated Fund for the repair and restoration of the Middle School Track, the sum of \$36,800; from FY2016 CP Historic Reserve for a building evaluation of Town Hall, the sum of \$4,000; principal payment on Ferrari Farm Note, the sum of \$80,000; interest on Ferrari Farm Note, the sum of \$34,650; administrative Expense, the sum of \$9,000; Open Space Reserve, the sum of \$27,737; Historic Reserve, the sum of \$27,737; Community Housing Reserve, the sum of \$27,737; and the balance to Undesignated, \$70,508.

There was significant discussion around article 25, the purchase of a conservation restriction on Westford Street property. Sue Psaledakis said the land is valued at more than \$663,000 and the town would pay approximately \$264,000 from CPC and Timber Funds. The remainder would come from a state match. Residents debated the value of open space and how much land should be preserved. An Open Space plan is on the town's website for residents to review. The Advisory Board's presentation includes a slide on current land use statistics, which show that approximately 76% of the land in Dunstable is not taxed at its full potential, either because it is conservation or protected (under Chapter 61A or B or other) or other. The Advisory Board has not voted on this article yet, as there is still more data to evaluate. Article 26 is closely

related to this one, as it provides for the use of Timber Funds towards the CP purchase price. Again, the Advisory Board will vote on this at its next meeting on May 2.

Article 30 provides for a different way of distributing town reports next year. There is not likely to be a significant decrease in cost unless it turns out that we need fewer copies of the report in FY18.

After reviewing the presentation and all articles, Ron opened the floor to general questions. He noted that the budget is contingent upon the override vote on May 16, one week after town meeting. If the override does not pass, a second Town Meeting will be held to vote on a revised budget, although we do not yet know what that budget will look like.

Selectman Ken Leva asked if we should be concerned with the decisions and actions of Groton and its town meeting. Dana suggested that each town should consider its own best path forward.

Resident Diane Cao asked if it was accurate to summarize the budget by stating that revenue does not meet recommended spending. It is.

Resident James Prescott asked what the selectmen and Advisory Boards can do to promote the recommended budget and associated override. Dana answered that we are legally prohibited from advocating for or against a ballot question, unless we participate in a PAC as individuals. He noted that the Advisory Board has placed its trust in the various department heads to provide us with the best assessment of their financial needs for FY17. We have vetted their data and requests, and put forward what we think is the best budget for the town. Dana said that we have been getting by with using free cash to balance the budget and it is likely time for a "reset" to get revenue where it needs to be.

The hearing closed at 9:30 p.m.

The Advisory Board adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Dana S. Doyle
Douglas J. Melsel
Paul K. Quinn
Christine Muri