MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN with FINANCE COMMITTEE

October 29, 2019    7:00 p.m.    Town Hall, 5

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman, Mr. Boling, Ms. Driscoll, Mr. Steinert. Ms. Jaques and Mr. Bodmer-Turner

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: Town Administrator, Mr. Federspiel, BOS/Finance Committee Clerk, Ms. Hunter

GUESTS: CPC Members, Ms. Thorne and Mr. Burke, Finance Committee Chairman, Mr. Creighton, Finance Committee Members, Mr. Pratt, Mr. Weld, Ms. Mellish, Mr. Oldeman (Ms. Harrison and Mr. Even were not in attendance) and Town Moderator, Mr. Wilson

PRESS:

Mr. Boling called the BOS meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

Mr. Boling stated the meeting was not being recorded by Studio 1623, the meeting is being recorded by Ms. Hunter for accuracy in minutes. He asked if anyone was recording the meeting to please let him know and requested attendees silence their cell phones.

Mr. Creighton called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

Mr. Boling stated the goal for this evening’s meeting is to approve the final warrant with a recommendation on each Article; to avoid a pre-town meeting on Saturday, November 16, 2019. The Board and Committee will also decide who will speak to each article this evening.

Article 1:

The purchase of 12 acres (more or less) located off Preston Place Road. Mr. Boling stated a walk through is planned for Saturday, November 2, 2019 at 9:00 a.m. with interested parties meeting at the end of Crooked Lane.

Mr. Boling stated the property has been discussed at several meetings. The Board reserves opinion to put the land under conservation and can make that recommendation on Town Meeting Floor. Finance Committee has recommended Article 1 and purchase of the land be delayed to Annual Town Meeting in spring. Mr. Boling opened discussion on Article 1.
Mr. Pratt asked why the acres needed to be designated conservation and suggested maintaining flexibility. Mr. Boling pointed out the downside to that is the Town would need to pay for the parcel with reserves not allocated CPC funds.

Mr. Oldeman indicated the land was privately owned and not developable. Mr. Federspiel stated the land has potential access points, but access is not easy. According to Mr. Federspiel, the land was appraised at $60K. The appraiser stated his appraisal was based on assuming the land would not be developed. If the land had access and permits were provided it would be appraised at a higher price.

Ms. Mellish asked about putting Affordable Housing on the land which is precluded by defining the land for conservation.

Mr. Creighton clarified the Finance Committee’s recommendation to delay the decision to Annual Town Meeting in April because the Committee is interested in considering the LCD and looking at the whole picture with this parcel as part of the discussion.

Ms. Jaques asked if this would be a trade off and wondered if the Planning Board has weighed in on the LCD and zoning by law changes. Mr. Federspiel stated discussions are in the early stages regarding the land in the Western Quadrant and LCD. Mr. Creighton pointed out if the timing of those decisions were to be made at the same time it would make for a stronger argument in favor of the LCD.

Mr. Wilson stated the Planning Board is required to make a report at Town Meeting in regard to Real Estate purchases and acquisitions. Mr. Federspiel stated the Planning Board is meeting on Monday, November 4th to finalize their recommendations.

Mr. Creighton restated the Finance Committee’s position is to delay a decision until April Annual Town Meeting to see how this parcel of land fits into the bigger picture; and additional information is needed. Mr. Boling stated if the Finance Committee is strong in that position it is an argument to take the parcel off the Warrant.

The downside of taking the land off the Warrant is political in working with conservation groups. Mr. Oldeman stated he believes it is useful to have a broader strategy with regard to purchase of land and committing land to conservation.

Mr. Boling asked the Board to comment on Article 1. Mr. Bodmer Turner is familiar with the land and believes the land is very challenging to access. He recommends going forward with the purchase with CPC allocated funds for conservation. Ms. Jaques agrees that land should go to conservation and worries about the trade off with LCD.

Ms. Driscoll stated she would like to see the decision made by the residents who join us at Fall Town Meeting. Mr. Steinert expressed concern about the Town being overly involved with real estate transactions. Mr. Boling pointed out CPC funds had been allocated for purchasing land for conservation.

Mr. Boling concluded that it did not appear there was consensus of either the Board or Committee on Article 1. Article 1 will be removed from the Fall Town Meeting Warrant.
Article 2:

Mr. Boling stated this is Town owned land in the Western Woods the request is to put the land under conservation. The Article came in very late. Mr. Boling expects to have a conversation with the Conservation Commission regarding the need for the Conservation Commission to be involved well in advance with the Finance Committee.

Mr. Federspiel stated the parcel of land is listed as 5.7 acres, however, the deed states the parcel is a 7-acre parcel. The land is south of the 12-acre parcel and closer to the schools on Route 127. Mr. Federspiel stated the land has been assessed as having the highest natural resource values. The land has easier access, however, it is an odd shaped lot which is not easily developed.

Mr. Boling stated there are a significant number of constituents who are conservation minded and they are asking for this land to be determined as conservation land. There is an argument to be made to allow them the opportunity to express their will.

Mr. Federspiel went on to state the best means of access for the 12-acre parcel is over this land. If the Board wanted to maintain a right of way for access to that parcel it can be done within the Article.

Mr. Steinert is not opposed to putting the land in conservation, but he would like to see it in context of a bigger picture. Mr. Bodmer-Turner is in favor of supporting the move of the land to conservation and supports the strong active residents who are in favor of land conservation. Ms. Jaques agrees with Mr. Bodmer-Turner and believes we need to be receptive of efforts by the Conservation Commission and supports retaining a right of access to the 12-acre parcel. Ms. Driscoll is also interested in the right of access.

Mr. Boling asked what the mechanics of maintaining the right of access were? Mr. Wilson indicated as the article is currently written he would question the right of access because it is written purely for conservation. He stated you can fix that by changing the article to provide for rights of access the Selectmen may determine. Mr. Federspiel stated he could make the change and get the Warrant to the Cricket first thing in the morning.

Mr. Bodmer-Turner asked if it was the intent of the Article to allow for access. Mr. Boling stated it was the intent of the Article that the land go into conservation, however it is up to the Board to decide the final form of the Article. Mr. Wilson confirmed Selectmen can change the wording of an Article.

Mr. Boling moved to advance Article 2 and to leave open the option for access. (Mr. Wilson proposed inserting after 2nd to last line ... subject to such right of access the selectmen permit.) Mr. Boling accepted the language as a friendly amendment. Ms. Driscoll seconded the motion. The motion passed. Mr. Bodmer-Turner opposed.

The Finance Committee will make their recommendation on Town Meeting Floor. Mr. Oldeman and Mr. Weld supported the language, Mr. Pratt was opposed, and Ms. Mellish was undecided.
Article 3:

1) Town Common Renovation (recreation/open space) $225K
2) Trask House Restoration (historic preservation) $3K

Mr. Boling asked if anyone had an objection to the Trask House Restoration funding of $3K? The was no objection to the funding of the Trask House Restoration.

Mr. Federspiel stated there had been 2 bids received for Town Common Renovation: one bid was $372K and the second bid was $1.1M. Additionally, Manchester Friends of Trees will donate new trees for the Common, DPW will be doing site and prep work for the project and both Mr. Dam and Mr. Desrosiers have reviewed the bid to their satisfaction. The contractor is from Walpole and has broad experience on working with municipal contracts.

Ms. Driscoll expressed concern about depleting the Beaumont Fund on one project and would like to see some of the fund maintain for future beautification projects. Mr. Bodmer-Turner asked if tree removal was part of the project estimate, it is.

Mr. Creighton asked if the project is fully permitted, it is. Ms. Jaques expressed concern regarding using Town Hall funds for the Town Common. Mr. Federspiel clarified Town Hall funds were being utilized for the ADA ramp. Ms. Jaques also philosophically has a difficult time with the total cost of the project. Mr. Boling shares some of Ms. Jaques’ concerns and supports using Town Hall funds to defray the use of the Beaumont Fund.

Mr. Creighton indicated the Finance Committee was in favor of the project and had withheld final approval until the bids were in.

Ms. Driscoll moved to approve Article 3; Mr. Bodmer-Turner seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Creighton moved to approve Article 3; Ms. Mellish seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Article 4:

Ms. Driscoll moved to approve Article 4; Ms. Jaques seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Finance Committee had previously voted to approve Article 4.

Articles 5 and 6:

Ms. Driscoll stated the proposal had been reviewed and vetted by the Finance Committee and with their recommendation she approved Articles 5 and 6. Ms. Jaques agreed.

Ms. Jaques moved to approve Articles 5 and 6; Mr. Bodmer-Turner seconded the motion. The motion passed. Mr. Steinert opposed.
Town Meeting:

Article 1: will be left off the warrant.

Article 2: Mr. Gang, Conservation Commission and Ms. Jaques will speak to the Article. Conservation Commission will move the article and Ms. Jaques will second.

Article 3: Ms. Thorne will speak to the Article and Mr. Federspiel will provide the historic overview of the project. Ms. Thorne will move the article and Mr. Burke will second.

Article 4: Mr. Steinert will speak to the Article and move the Article, Mr. Boling will second.

Articles 5 and 6: Mr. Boling and Mr. Creighton will speak to the articles. Mr. Boling will move the Article and Ms. Jaques will second. Mr. Wilson noted Article 5 needs to pass with a 2/3 vote. If Article 5 does not pass Article 6 will not be relevant.

Joint Discussion on Local Receipts:

Mr. Boling stated the Finance Committee’s position is the Town has been far too conservative regarding local receipts for a number of years and it is time to be less conservative. The Finance Committee would like guidance from the Board regarding what the budget percentage ought to be regarding local receipts.

Mr. Creighton stated the reserve fund has grown to a significant level and is currently 16% of budget; the Committee believes it should be closer to 12%. The Town has been accumulating reserves at a steady rate and the key driver to that is the conservative estimation of local receipts. The Committee is considering being less conservative with an attempt to level off growing reserves.

Discussions have considered taking a rolling average over the past 5-years of 80% to level the increase down. Historically we projected receipts lower than anticipated to fund Capital Projects. Finance Committee would like to see forecasting more accurate. Mr. Boling stated we’re currently doing a more structured approach to Capital funding, so it is time to dial back on local receipts.

The .8 number allows for dealing with local receipts in the event of recession. In 2008 local receipts dropped by 11%, the .8 number is more conservative and still allows for a comfortable margin of safety. Over 5-years there would be a cushion of $600K. Mr. Federspiel did not look at new growth during the crash as that is an additional factor to consider. Local receipts are approximately $2M and new growth is $250K to $300K. Ms. Mellish asked when the final number for new growth is available and Mr. Federspiel stated it is not known until mid-April.

Mr. Pratt indicated this is an ongoing process and can be adjusted annually. Mr. Creighton pointed out this is a philosophical change in direction. Ms. Mellish pointed out in 2011 the reserve fund was 5.6% and it has increased significantly in 8 years. Mr. Boling stated as of tonight the Board is supportive of you going in this direction. We will have additional discussions as the year moves forward.
Ms. Mellish asked what was the Board’s assumption regarding this year’s tax rate and would the Board be in favor of using the fund balance to reduce taxes? Mr. Boling stated he would be in favor of a less conservative approach, but he believes we should target any tax relief toward debt overrides while still maximizing the regular levy limit. He also believes we need to proceed carefully being mindful of economic downturns.

Mr. Oldeman stated the Committee had considered paying down school debt and OPEB funding. Mr. Boling stated he would like to see a more tangible benefit to Town residents. He would like to be spending it on school debt. The 16% reserves can be put into school debt payments or use local receipts for school debt which would not impact the levy limit.

Ms. Jaques would like to see the Town do something tangible for taxpayers. Mr. Bodmer-Turner mentioned the new Fire Department tanker, as a tangible item that would support the residents.

Mr. Boling concluded the Finance Committee has consensus of the Board that tax relief is a good goal. There will be more meetings between us and we will continue the discussion at future budget meetings.

Ms. Mellish moved to adjourn the Finance Committee meeting; Mr. Oldeman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2) Executive Session – Per M.G.L. CH. 30A Sec. 21 (A)(2) To Conduct Strategy Session in Preparation for Negotiations with Non-Union Personnel

Mr. Boling moved the Board into Executive Session – Per M.G.L. Ch. 30A Sec. 21 (A)(2) to conduct strategy Session in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel; Ms. Jaques seconded the motion. The motion passed with a roll call vote: Mr. Boling, yes, Mr. Steinert, yes, Ms. Driscoll, yes, Ms. Jaques, yes.

Meeting Documents:

- Town Administrator’s Report
- Town Meeting Warrant Articles

Upcoming BOS Meetings

- November 4, 2019
- November 18, 2019
- Fall Town Meeting, November 19, 2019