

PRESENT: Selectmen Joseph A. Sergi, Patrick J. McNabb, and Joseph Hallisey; John Moak, Town Administrator; Peggy Mazzola, Administrative Assistant

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 PM at the North Middlesex Regional High School. Members of the Board and the Town Administrator attended the school finance sub-committee meeting until approximately 7:00 PM.

The meeting reconvened at Town Hall at 7:30 PM.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES: On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, the regular and executive session minutes of the meetings of January 11, 2010 and January 25, 2010 were unanimously approved; executive session minutes will not be released to the public until the matter is resolved.

APPROVE WARRANT/SIGN PURCHASE ORDERS: The Board signed the warrants.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS: Mr. McNabb announced that the Annual/Special Town Meeting will be held on Monday, May 3, 2010 (and Tuesday, May 4, 2010 if needed) at 7:30 PM at Nissitissit Middle School. Articles are due to the Board of Selectmen no later than 2:00 PM on March 4, 2010.

Roger Lau, Deputy State Director for Senator Kerry's office, was present to report that the Town is the recipient of a grant in the amount of \$188,000 for the purchase of SCBA's and extra tanks and training for the Fire Department. This grant comes from Homeland Security money. Mr. Sergi asked if this grant is for FY '11. Fire Chief Toby Tyler stated the funds are available now and that the Town's share is \$9,897; he will have an article on the Annual Town Meeting warrant. The Board thanked Mr. Lau for coming to the meeting.

APPOINTMENTS/RESIGNATIONS

Item #1 – Capital Program Committee appointment: The Board reviewed an e-mail from Stephanie Cronin requesting appointment to the Capital Program Committee. Richard Colangelo was present, and stated that Ms. Cronin had contacted him relative to the vacancies on this committee; he is interested in being appointed. Following a brief discussion, and on a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, it was unanimously voted to appoint Stephanie Cronin and Richard Colangelo to the Capital Program Committee, term to expire 6/30/10.

ACTION ITEMS:

Item #1 – School Finance Sub-committee Meeting, at North Middlesex Regional High School: Mr. Sergi stated the Board attended this meeting, which included a presentation by a representative from the state on how the State formula is calculated. The Board heard the beginning of a presentation on the school budget and reduction scenarios for FY '11, which included a \$1 million and \$2 million reduction. Mr. Moak remarked the reduction is from a level services budget, and not a level funded budget. Mr. Sergi stated that there could be an overall increase of 3%; however the Board was not able to stay at that meeting to get further information. Our challenges are separate from the school, and we're trying to come up with ways to bring the two together. The budget process is just beginning for both the schools and the Town, and Mr. Sergi asked that folks stay tuned and continue to provide feedback, as this is a community decision. Sharon Santy commented that there has been no cost of living increase for social security, and she doesn't understand why the school is asking for cost of living increases.

Item #2 – Discussion: Mill Development Analysis and Final Report, with VHB and Mill Site Study Committee: Present were Geoffrey Morrison-Logan and Karen Fiske of VHB. Mr. Sergi thanked each of the members of the Mill Site Study Committee for their efforts and hard work to get to this point. Mr. Sergi pointed out that the study showed that approximately \$80 million is leaving the Town of Pepperell in the form of businesses that could be located here. We want to regain some of those tax dollars, which could be up to \$200,000.

Mr. Logan and Ms. Fiske presented their final report. Following the presentation, the Board invited comments and discussion from those in attendance. Mr. Moak commented that the study is a framework to work from with two diverse paths, showing strengths and constraints. Webmaster Jeff Sauer stated the report is on the town's website. Mr. McNabb stated that Mr. Moak summed it up very well; he is interested in getting feedback from the Mill Site Study Committee. Mr. Hallisey remarked the report is a tool to deliver a message to potential developers.

MSSC member Sharon Santy stated she is pleased with the detail in the report, and she prefers the first scenario. Ms. Santy stated she realizes it is a concept, but would like to see a private/public partnership. Ms. Santy stated the reason she prefers the first scenario is she feels there is a need for housing, particularly elderly housing. Mr. Sergi remarked Ms. Santy makes some good points, and this is the reason why the overlay district was created.

Mark Boyajian stated he attended the meeting in November. He was thrilled when the first developer "fell through" so we could take some control, but we really have no control; the owner can do what he wants with the property, and a developer could do the same. He would love it if the Town owned the property, because then we could send a clear message of what we want. He stated there are opportunities for grant money if we own the land.

Mr. Sergi stated if the property is not built out in a certain way it will forever change the character of our downtown area. Mr. Sergi and Mr. Moak were updated on available grants during a meeting with several state agencies; economic development grants are gone and Brownfields may not be in the best interest of the Town.

Mr. Boyajian remarked that \$80 million is leaving the Town, and wondered what it would cost to buy the property. Mr. Sergi replied it is premature to have this discussion; the Board has met with the landowner and the price would have to be at a steep discount. Ms. Santy asked if there were opportunities for grant money through Conservation or DEP for cleanup. Mr. Sergi replied this would only be available if the Town took ownership; and why would the Town want to take control and be responsible for the clean-up?

Roger Goscombe stated we need to give credit to the owners, who have put up funds for these studies. They are more engaged and understanding of what can be done. The current economic climate probably won't invite a buyer in the near future; if we let it unfold perhaps the market will drive it. Mr. Sergi stated the mill owner contributed \$25,000 towards the cost of the studies, with the total being \$125,000; no town funds were used for these studies.

Mr. McNabb asked what the next step would be in the process. Mr. Sergi stated we would go forward, with Mass. Development, to put out an RFP to find a potential buyer.

Mr. Boyajian asked when the two other public meetings would be held. Mr. Sergi stated the committee didn't think it made sense to have additional feedback, because it wouldn't change what we have here today. If we get bogged down with a plan that's just conceptual it won't add any value to the final study. The committee will not be disbanded; if a developer does come forward they would

probably want to meet with the MSSC. At this point we need to finalize this report and move on to the next phase, which is to see if a private developer is interested in this site.

Mr. Sergi stated after working on this for four years, he feels the reality is the economy is not going to move any time soon. If this site goes entirely to a private developer it may take another five years to develop the site. He would be happy just to have the site cleaned up.

Steven Themelis stated we should exhaust all grant opportunities. Mr. Sergi stated the Board has already looked at this and has a commitment from Mass. Development for site assessment; any other grant money would require the Town to take ownership, and he doesn't feel that is in the best interest of the Town. Mr. McNabb stated until we get a handle on those clean-up costs he would not entertain purchasing the property. Mr. Sergi explained it is currently a closed site by DEP and the property owner doesn't have to do anything at this time.

Mr. Moak explained there have been discussions between the Board and the property owners, and the board is trying to determine strategies. The landowner is willing to consider numerous options and has brought many concepts to the Board. The clean-up is the elephant in the room and is an unknown at this point.

MSSC member Matt Nesbitt stated he came up with a creative concept for the site and wondered if he could offer it to post on the website to spur more creativity. Mr. Sergi stated we want to keep only official documents on the website.

The Board entertained additional questions from the audience relative to the site and the possibility of locating a Town Hall, Police Station or Fire Station on the site. Mr. Sergi stated that in the coming year the Board needs to come up with a long-term plan to address these needs.

The Board thanked the representatives from VHB and the Mill Site Study Committee for attending the meeting.

Item #3 – Discussion: Waiver of Hiring Freeze to fill 16-hour per week Transfer Station position: Highway Superintendent Peter Shattuck would like to fill the 16-hour per week position at the Transfer Station, which is an Enterprise Fund and not tax-based. Currently if employees at the Transfer Station want to use vacation time, or if one is out sick, Mr. Shattuck must back-fill with Highway employees, who are paid overtime to fill in. This was the reason the position was created in the first place, and the Finance Committee actually suggested creating this position to eliminate overtime. Sharon Santy asked if the employee must be paid at prevailing wage rates. Mr. Shattuck stated this would be a Town employee. He would like to post this position in-house to see if there is any interest; this person would work on Fridays and Saturdays, but should be flexible in the event that an employee is out sick on another day. Mr. Moak stated the funding for this position is already in the Transfer Station budget. Mr. Shattuck stated that if the person who was laid off from the combined position (Highway and Transfer Station) had been willing to stay on for 16 hours at the Transfer Station, he wouldn't need to come before the Board to request a waiver of the hiring freeze.

Mr. McNabb asked if the Board of Public Works has weighed in on this issue. Mr. Shattuck replied that he did not take this to the Board of Public Works; he spoke with Town Engineer/DPW Director Bob Lee who agrees that the position should be filled. Mr. McNabb wondered if this would be an opportunity to save some money.

Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that the Board would defer a decision until the next meeting to allow time for Mr. Moak and Mr. Shattuck to do a cost analysis.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS:

Item #1 – Discussion: Police Chief and Staffing: Mr. Moak had provided the Board with information regarding the Police Chief Replacement process, and stated a decision needs to be made fairly soon as Chief Davis' last day is March 12th. The Board needs to decide how it wants to fill this position. Mr. Sergi stated he would like more time to review the information provided, and suggested the Board meet next week. A tentative meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, February 16th at 7 PM; the agenda will be kept to one or two items only.

Item #2 – Discussion: Reserve Fund Transfer Request: Mr. Moak explained this reserve fund transfer request was prepared following previous discussion regarding the exterior condition of Town Hall. The wording of the original Town Hall renovations article is very clear that it was intended for interior use only, so we can't use these funds to hire an engineer/firm to prepare the exterior painting specs, and we can't ask Town Meeting to change the scope of the article without knowing the cost. The reserve fund transfer is in the amount of \$4,900. On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, it was unanimously voted to recommend a transfer from the reserve fund in the amount of \$4,900 to be used for engineering services to prepare bid specs for exterior painting and repair of Town Hall.

Item #3 – Discussion: Covered Bridge Committee: Mr. Sergi read a memo from the "interim Covered Bridge Committee" requesting the formal, recognized creation of a Covered Bridge Committee. Mr. Sergi commented that as we get closer to an opening celebration, it makes sense to formally organize; the Board will take the memo into consideration and work with Mr. Moak and get back to the interim committee members.

Elfie Parker stated the celebration will be in September, to give them more time. Too many things are planned to put them under time constraints. They are working with the people of Pepperell to create a celebration. Ms. Parker explained they are currently conducting a memory walk fundraiser, allowing individuals to purchase engraved bricks that will be incorporated into a walkway. Diane Cronin explained additional information can be found on the website. Ms. Parker stated they are planning a street dance on a Saturday evening. Mr. Sergi stated that Mr. Hallisey suggested that a lottery be conducted to see who will be the first person to drive over the bridge. Ms. Parker stated there will be a Prudence Wright reenactment prior to officially opening the bridge. Ms. Cronin commented that people are donating artifacts to auction off to raise funds.

Following a brief discussion, the Board agreed to take the matter under advisement.

Item #4 – Discussion: FY '11 Budget: Mr. Moak distributed a worksheet prepared by Town Accountant Tom Wilson which shows financial projections and expenditures for FY '11. Mr. Moak stated the goal is to limit as much as possible any reductions in staff. Mr. Sergi asked if the Board would meet with the Finance Committee. Mr. Hallisey remarked the FinCom hasn't even completed their review of the budgets. Mr. Moak stated he sent letters to two unions asking them to freeze their wages and other payroll issues (bi-weekly payroll and direct deposit). He will address payroll issues with the other two unions later this week.

Item #5 – Town Administrator Report: Mr. Moak stated much of what is included in his report has already been discussed. Mr. Sergi stated that he spoke with Richard Potts, and the Cable TV Advisory Committee is close to getting a computer set up to increase the variety of programs broadcast. CATV Advisory Committee member David Pease stated when this computer is on line they will be able to schedule eight or more programs. The equipment is in Lomar Park and is currently being tested.

Mr. Moak stated he is preparing the Town Reports for the Board of Selectmen and Personnel Board.

Item #6 – Any other Old/New Business: Mr. McNabb requested that the Board disband the Town Administrator Search Committee. On a motion by Mr. Hallisey and seconded by Mr. McNabb, it was unanimously voted to disband the Town Administrator Search Committee.

Mr. Colangelo asked if the Board has considered looking at doing something with Town owned land, such as alternative energy; there are grants available for this purpose, and some parcels would be great for wind/solar power. There are also state parcels, and perhaps we could do something with those. Mr. McNabb stated this is a great idea; he has spoken with Mr. Moak about it and forwarded some information to him. There is a lot of money out there for these types of projects that we need to evaluate. Mr. McNabb stated his idea was to put out an RFP to lease town-owned land for this purpose. Mr. Sergi suggested Mr. Colangelo work with Mr. McNabb and Mr. Moak on this project.

ADJOURNMENT: On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, it was unanimously voted to adjourn at 10:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Mazzola, Administrative Assistant

APPROVED:

Joseph A. Sergi, Chairman

Patrick J. McNabb, Clerk

Joseph Hallisey