

**MINUTES**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN/FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**OCTOBER 7, 2009**  
**6:30 P.M.**  
**SENIOR CENTER**

**Board of Selectmen:** Rich Cunningham, Jerry Corcoran, Chris Aiello, Andy Burbine

**Finance Committee:** Theresa Maze, Carl Bellitti, Mike Boyle, Barbara Cristoforo, Maureen Jansen, Paul Joyce, Katie Marini, Dan McDonnell, Sean Patrick Tyler

6:45 p.m. **Discussion on budget cuts for STM, October 26, 2009.** Town Manager gave introduction. The town will be looking into cutting back on street lights, cutting back on snow and ice removal, increasing fees, instituting fees and instituting fines to increase revenues. Town Accountant gave overview of next fiscal year. We are in a revenue deficit, or structural deficit. With a budget of \$37,455,837, an increase of 3% increase would be over \$1M. They would have to increase revenue by \$675,000 in property tax area. There will be possible 9C cuts. They estimate no increase in local receipts, may institute pay as you go, new growth will probably be stagnant. Revenues won't sustain growth on budget. The snow and ice budget produced a large overrun. Fixed costs and salaries represent 80-85% of budgets.

Various suggestions were made from the public.

- Increase excise tax by ten or 20%, from \$25 to \$27.50 or \$30, which would generate over \$1M.
- Change the tax rate on commercial business. It was explained that the town can't exceed 2.5%. Asked if it could be temporary measure, suggested additional special assessment for this year.
- Closing Library for 2 or 3 years, temporarily. Health insurance – negotiate with unions to raise employee portion. It was explained that the Library was built with a grant – it would have to be paid off if Library was closed.
- Look into health insurance. It was explained that GIC is more expensive than our plans.
- Health insurance costs - Plymouth County has a surplus. Could we get them to release some of that? It was explained that there is a \$13M surplus, which will be used to keep rates low. FY2011 could possibly be lowered with the surplus.

Board strongly recommended everyone to write letters to urge State representatives and senators not to grant the power to the Governor to cut local aid.

**Review of Town Manager's Recommended Cuts**

Comments from the public:

Was there any thought to not filling the Town Manager position? Board stated they are required to fill the position and would not recommend that they wait. Applications are due by the end of November, so the position would probably not be filled until February or March anyway. Town Manager clarified that a search committee has to be formed immediately, but the position does not have to be filled within a specified time. The budget cuts in Selectmen salary line would have funding in place as of 02/01/09 for Town Manager's salary. As far as Friday afternoons, Town Hall would close at 12:30, but this will require contract negotiations.

Questions from FinCom about Town Building budget and North River Collaborative, which were explained.

Question re busing students to South Shore Vo Tech – students do not pay for busing to get there.

### **Police Department**

Chief David Majenski – was asked about any salary reductions. Administration has taken 7.5 furlough days. The union is without a contract and has taken a reduction; didn't receive state side of Quinn Bill for education – a reduction of \$5-8,000. They haven't had a pay raise for several years, are in arbitration. They have fewer people than they had in '98. Town is obligated to pay their share of Quinn Bill. He is cautiously optimistic about detectives.

Comment – at the end of arbitration, they get retroactive increase.

### **Fire Department**

Chief Arthur Pelland – after looking at situation again, he is looking at a layoff of three firefighters. Station 2 will be closed. 90% of budget is salary so cutbacks are difficult. They have a one-hour minimum.

FinCom asked about stimulus money. They have submitted two grant applications and are hoping to hear the beginning of November. They will look at increasing ambulance revenues. BOS would vote on proposed rate increases after receiving letter from the Chief. As long as they can provide mutual aid, they will receive mutual aid. There will be delays in response. Master box charge is \$100/yr. Mentioned ISO rating, which could result in increased homeowner's insurance.

Comment – if arbitration is settled, where does that money come from?

David Farrell, Fire Dept. – arbitration is through state – could be one to three years down the road.

John Nuttall, Fire Dept. – they have lost one-quarter of their firefighters. Emphasized impact. Consider menu override - would be \$16/ yr per \$100,000.

Resident thanked the Fire Dept. for saving her life in May.

FinCom – felt there was larger cut to Fire than Police.

### **School Department**

Superintendent Peter Schafer – went through summary of cuts. School Committee has not voted this yet. Forty-two positions were let go over the summer. They need self-funded activities. Teachers agreed to three furlough days, saving \$168,900, which is a \$1200 hit to salaries. Cutting administration will cost the town more if there are oversights. Accreditation could be affected in three years. Wanted to be considered a “core” service of the town.

Several students spoke – expressed appreciation to the teachers foregoing \$168,900. Students want to be a part of this and want to help. They explained what the cuts mean to them, have a negative atmosphere at school. Suggested paying for electives or work-study programs for

library and office. It was explained that as far as paying for electives, that would privatize a public education.

FinCom – three people will come off when the \$74,000 article becomes available. Asked for summary of loss of accreditation, which was given.

The School Dept. is mandated to pick up costs for special education; this reduction on schools falls short on core protection of schools.

FinCom was concerned that there wasn't enough communication between Town Manager and School Dept. Does BOS support the 61% portion of reduction from Schools? Town Manager assured FinCom there has been daily communication with Superintendent; fixed costs were figured into the percentage of reduction. The School Dept. is definitely considered a core service of the town. BOS – this is about Town Manager presenting cuts to FinCom.

Comments:

Could School Committee sell land it owns, including North School, and earmark it for School Dept. use only?

Priority should be given to Police, Fire, School – close Library, Senior Center; minimize as many layoffs with nonessential positions.

Many concerned parents and students spoke in support of School. Parent suggested cutting back two assistant superintendents to save some teaching positions. Superintendent defended administrative positions. Compared to other schools, we have less.

Parent – colleges are looking at course loads and grade point averages more than SAT's.

FinCom- they should try to keep teachers in front of students. Superintendent – they have done this. If they lose management, it could cause oversight. They are using administration to cover some of positions that have been laid off. They won't get the benefit of money left in special education until next year. FinCom – felt Superintendent made compelling reasons for administration.

Parent - focus should be school system; can't they put the money in schools?

Resident – not in favor of override, people just can't afford it.

Town Manager pointed out that employees took 5 days furlough last year, 7.5 this year, among the other departments.

### **Highway**

Superintendent Kenan Connell – looking to raise fees for some of their services. Lighting budget is for illumination, not repair. They are looking into shutting off some lights; 747 are paid for by town and almost equal number by private citizens. 98% of town's vehicle work is done in-house. Police and Fire Chiefs attested to what a cost savings it is for their departments. Cutting Highway doesn't seem fiscally wise. There is a collective bargaining issue involved with layoff. Question on snow budget – largest amount is for salt Salting and sanding is done in-house.

Plowing is 50/50. Resident – suggested people shovel the sidewalk and fire hydrants in front of their houses.

### **COA**

Bill Kendall – spoke in strong support of Senior Center. Seniors need these services. Has same budget as when housed in Town Hall. Cuts aren't in proportion. A lot of the services provided are done by volunteers. Friends of Abington Seniors, Inc. have agreed to pay gas and electric bills through June 30, 2010, as well as \$1,000 deficit.

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David Klein, Co-Interim Director – building could be used for other things that would possibly bring in revenue. A person who just retired is being replaced by volunteers. There is interdepartmental cooperation.

COA Van was donated by Anderson Insulation. There are a lot of services the Center provides to the town that the town doesn't have to pay for.

### **BOARD OF HEALTH**

Town Manager has talked to BOH Chair about an increase in recycling, increase existing fees and institute new fees. They are looking for a health agent, possibly part time, and looking into regionalization.

### **PARK AND RECREATION**

Superintendent Mark Chirokas - proposed cuts would close Park and Rec. Dept. unless programs became self-funding.

Resident – suggested combining Park and Rec. with Strawberry Valley Golf Course. No need to close Dept., use SVGC enterprise account.

Resident - close library for 6 months to a year to fund this.

### **LIBRARY**

Chairman of Library Trustees Henry DiCarlo – the town received a \$1.3 M grant to build the library. If it is closed, the grant needs to be paid back immediately. They are in year 12 of a 20 contract.

Director Deborah Grimmet - gave an overview of the many services that are being utilized at the library, emphasizing the tremendous increase in usage since the economic down turn. The library is not a luxury in economic tough times, it is essential. They are considering a 10% reduction in hours, down to 45 hours; 40 hours would be below state level for waiver. Certification with a waiver allows borrowing from other libraries.

On October 19, 2009 from 4-6 p.m., flu shots will be given at library.

### **PROPOSITION 2 ½ OVERRIDE:**

Treasurer/Collector Leo Provost – Once an override is voted, it has to be held within 35 days, which affects the town in setting the tax rate. If it is decided on October 26, they would have no chance of issuing actual tax bills by 12/31/09, and taxes wouldn't have to be paid till May 1, 2010. DOR wouldn't allow the town to mail preliminary tax bills. This would cause the town

to borrow money, which could affect future borrowing rates. Suggested it be voted on tonight to give everyone more time.

Town Accountant Anthony Sulmonte – explained override process.

Resident – if override is approved, could it be a menu override rather than one lump sum?

FinCom – premature to call for override now when there will be further cuts later in the year.

BOS – will take another look at the other budgets.

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Pay as you throw was brought up, as well as funding snow and ice budget with an annual override.

Board of Selectmen meeting is continued to October 19, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 12:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Nancy Hurst