

#11-07

Meeting was opened at 7:00 P.M. in the Upstairs Meeting Room. Present were Selectpersons, Patricia Pruitt, Allen Ross, and Patricia Allen; Town Administrator, Frank Abbondanzio; Police Chief, Ray Zukowski; John Reynolds; and others.

*Allen made a motion to approve the minutes of Monday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, as modified. Ross seconded. Unanimously approved. Allen-Aye. Ross-Aye. Pruitt-Aye.*

#### **Police Building Committee – Update**

- According to Zukowski, a small group had gone down to Connecticut and visited three police stations in communities of similar size to ours. The police stations were around 10,000 square feet, and Zukowski thinks that that would be potentially a good working size building for Montague.
- On March 16<sup>th</sup>, the architect will be coming up for the day to work with Chiefs Zukowski and Godin on finalizing the space needs assessment. He agreed not to leave until they've figured out what the needs of the agencies are.
- The committee will be meeting on March 29<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 at the Turners Falls Fire Department, and plan to continue to do so every other week until June. The meetings have been posted.
- ZUKOWSKI: We met with the Prudential Committee tonight and the Fire District. We are trying to get their sense of where they are with the project and where they want to go.
- Kim Levitch, who's doing the appraisal on the potential site for the town, informed Zukowski that he should have an answer as to where we are with the land acquisition by the end of the week.
- The committee plans to make a presentation at the Annual Town Meeting in the beginning of June.

#### **Frank Abbondanzio, Town Administrator's Report**

- **DPW Purchase Policy**
  - ABBONDANZIO: The DPW submits a capital plan to the Capital Improvements Committee every year for desired purchase of vehicles and equipment. This year, the Capital Committee segregated \$90,000 and basically gave the Superintendent the authority to decide how that would be spent. However, the CIC felt that they would've liked more oversight, and wanted a policy in place that governed how the Superintendent went through the process of spending that money and selecting what projects he would spend it on, just to make sure everybody was in the loop.
  - Abbondanzio reviewed a draft of the policy (see attached).
  - Regarding Item III, some CIC members felt that possibly some of the purchases could be delayed if there was funding available to replace it.
  - The CIC questioned whether this funding could be used also for the purposes of making major repairs. Abbondanzio asked Allen to bring that up at the next CIC meeting.
  - ALLEN: The example was that we were looking at a backhoe that needed \$11,000 in repairs. And we asked ourselves, "Does it make more sense to perhaps spend \$11,000 and not have to purchase a new backhoe for another two or three years?" We kind of went back and forth, but we did recognize that there might be times when it would make sense to actually put in a fairly substantial amount of money once on a vehicle. Also, there isn't that kind of money in Tom's regular operating budget for a major repair, and yet right now we don't do warrant articles.
  - According to Allen, another piece of the discretionary money was the feeling that sometimes the Superintendent might find a good deal on a piece of equipment that he needs, but doesn't have time to go through Town Meeting.
  - The amount is unspecified and may change from year to year depending on what the Town can afford.
  - The policy states that unless otherwise authorized by the Board of Selectmen, discretionary spending may be used for current year expenditures only, and may not be used to pay a one-year installment of a multi-year lease.
  - As the discretionary fund is a blanket appropriation, any unspent money would carry forward to the following year.
  - Pruitt suggested adding an "H" in the policy, stating that any monies left over can be carried over.
  - Abbondanzio would be the "Designee." If the Board wants the final vote to be the Selectmen's vote, Abbondanzio would do the reviews and the Selectmen could actually make the final vote.
  - ABBONDANZIO: So if you (Allen) could bring that before the Capital Committee on Thursday, they can vote on it. Then I can bring it back to the Board of Selectmen next week, maybe, and then vote on it as a final.
- **CDBG 2006 Citizen Advisory Committee**

ABBONDANZIO: We're looking for three community members to serve on a Citizen Advisory Group for the Citizen Participation Plan for the Avenue A Crosswalk Architectural Barrier Removal Project. We're looking for one low/moderate income rep. Also, because we're doing the handicapped accessibility, if there was a handicapped or disabled member, that would be a plus as well. Anybody who is interested, please contact me.

- **Dry Hill Feasibility Study.** The discussion was postponed until next week.
- **Website**
  - ABBONDANZIO: Massachusetts Common Cause is evaluating all of the towns in the commonwealth to see what we provide to the public on the website. The things they'd like to see on the websites are: postings of all key governance records (which we are doing); town meeting warrants and results (we're doing the town meeting warrants, but not the follow-up results); the budget (I've done some research and have found some really neat presentations that we might think about working towards developing); and bylaws (which we don't have, but which the Town Clerk and I could work towards).
  - Some of the things that we do include on our website are the ability to make on-line payments of sewer user bills and taxes; meeting minutes for a lot of the committees (the Capital Improvements, Selectmen, Planning, Con Com); agendas of a lot of the committees; Zoning Board information, including decisions; some links (i.e., RiverCulture); sections of all the departments of the Town; a virtual tour; a calendar; and search capability on the home page.
  - Some of the things that are not included in our website which are worth pursuing are links with local businesses; information on plans (i.e., master plans, economic development plan, etc.); and promotional information for the Industrial Park or other Town-owned buildings or land. Other possible links suggested included connections to the school system, sports schedules, performance schedules, the Colle, and the Discovery Center.
  - According to Abbondanzio, Wendy Bogusz had suggested activating the in-house committee, which included herself, Cheryl Clark, Deb Bourbeau and Allen Ross.
  - Dan Laroche's background would make him an ideal in-house source in terms of technical advice. Ross suggested asking him if he could have a role in some of the responsibilities mentioned.
  - REYNOLDS: All the things that have been mentioned are key issues to have as far as the Town pushing the things that we have as a positive thing to help the Town grow. But in-house, within the business of the Town Hall, I'm puzzled that everything gets funneled through Wendy. It seems like an overload.
  - We only have three people (Cheryl, Deb, and Wendy) with the training to do updates on our particular system.
  - Ross mentioned that the website was down for a week or so because there was some updating going on, and there was some discussion about whether it was because of Eclectics versus the server company.
  - Reynolds suggested that the format of Eclectics is part of the problem, and discussion ensued about possible solutions, including purchasing software that can adapt to the specific language that Eclectics uses so that individuals without that special training can make entries, or switching to another system (which could change the expenditure from hundreds of dollars to thousands of dollars).
- **Town-Owned Buildings**
  - Reynolds asked if the Town has a good handle on the buildings we own and what they can become or not become.
  - Abbondanzio reviewed where we are with the various Town-owned buildings:
    - Strathmore Building: An individual has expressed interest and may end up owning that building shortly.
    - J Street property: We have a letter basically saying we almost own the property through the tax title process. Abbondanzio is looking at that property as a potential artist workspace.
    - Rod Shop. The need for asbestos removal reduces the incentive for any potential user to do anything with the building. We would need to get involved in some kind of a grant program to help deal with the asbestos.
    - A building in Montague Center. There are tenants in that building that we're dealing with eviction through our Town Counsel.
  - As was the case with the Ristorante DiPaolo building, we are hoping to get involved with the Commercial Homesteading Program for the J Street property.
  - Allen suggested asking Dan Laroche, the Town Planner, if Robin Sherman had made a list of all the Town-owned buildings in terms of the size, what condition they were in, etc.
  - REYNOLDS: I think that it all comes back to Town-wide planning. We have *x* number of buildings. What are good uses for these? What can they be put to? I don't know what it would take. It seems that grants were being generated by Robin to do this kind of study. We may have people in town who are architecturally oriented that might actually donate some time. I think that's a kind of a push that we as a Town should be doing with these properties that we have instead of waiting until something's thrown at us.
  - Abbondanzio reviewed some studies that have been done, including an inventory of Town-owned land in terms of parcels and acreage and how much property was acquired through tax title; a space needs assessment of the Town Hall done in 2000-2001, which resulted in the work done on the building; and a study of all the school buildings done by the regional school district back in the late 90s (which the Planning Department was not involved in).
  - ABBONDANZIO: We really haven't been looking at those buildings because they weren't on our list of potential projects until the most recent year when the whole issue of school reuse came into existence. That is a new problem

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that we need to address. But if you really want to do the job properly, the Town would have to spend some money to have a professional evaluation – a space needs feasibility study for those buildings as well. That study is going to take some time. If you have a building in mind, then we could possibly put in some Community Development Planning Feasibility money, but the project is only eligible if the final thing you build is also eligible in terms of the grants program (i.e., the senior center).

- ALLEN: Tomorrow night's meeting is about the programs, what we need, but I think what John's suggesting is it would be good to maybe ask the Planning Department if they could figure out if we could get a grant to figure out exactly what buildings we have, what kind of shape they're in, what the potentials might be used for, recognizing that over the next two to five years, we need those answers. So maybe we could ask Dan what he thinks of the whole idea and if it's a project that he might be interested in or thinks is appropriate to start looking into; because I agree that it would take quite a while to do it and do it right, and it would probably cost money. I think we're all sort of getting to the point of recognizing that we're going to need that information.

**Announcements**

- **Selectmen's Association Quarterly Meeting.** The dinner and Quarterly Meeting of the Franklin County Selectmen's Association will take place at the Franklin County Technical School on Thursday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 6:30. Ken Rock, a retired Superintendent of the Blue Hills Regional Tech School, will be speaking about state and local funding on public education.
- **Award/Doug Brown.** The Northwestern District Attorney's Office will be awarding the Ellen Sedlis Award to Officer Doug Brown at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Child Abuse Awareness Month Kickoff Breakfast on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007, at the Log Cabin Banquet & Meeting House.

**Applications to Place Sign on Montague Center Common**

- **Montague Old Home Days.** *Allen made a motion to approve the use of Montague Center Common for Montague Old Home Days, sponsored by the First Congregational Church of Montague, beginning August 1<sup>st</sup> and going to August 22<sup>nd</sup> at the latest, with the fair dates of August 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, the other dates for putting up everything and taking it down; and to authorize Patricia Pruitt as Chair to sign it. Ross seconded. Unanimously approved. Allen-Aye. Ross-Aye. Pruitt-Aye.*
- **Easter Sunrise Service.** *Allen made a motion to approve the request for use of Montague Center Common by the First Congregational church of Montague for the Easter Sunrise Service on April 8<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 a.m. to 7:30 in the morning; and to authorize Patricia Pruitt as Chair to sign it. Ross seconded. Unanimously approved. Allen-Aye. Ross-Aye. Pruitt-Aye.*

*Allen made a motion to go into two Executive Sessions, one for Real Estate and the other for Collective Bargaining, with the idea that we will come out only to adjourn the regular meeting. Ross seconded. Unanimously approved. Allen-Aye. Ross-Aye. Pruitt-Aye.*

Two Executive Sessions.

The second Executive Session led to a discussion about the recent issues brought up related to the Highway Department's budget, and the Selectmen came out of Executive Session to have a discussion during the Open Meeting.

**Budget Discussion**

- Allen stated that if the Highway Department is going to cut \$150,000 in their budget, the sooner they know it, the better.
- Ross suggested telling the Highway Department after estimates become a little more accurate.
- Regarding the request for new positions (one half-time in the Highway Department, one full-time in the Police, and one full-time in the Highway), Abbondanzio stated that there is "just no money for any new full-time positions."
- The Highway Department's expense budget has gone up by \$100,000 (19%), and Abbondanzio suggested that efforts should be made to bring that down to between 5% and 10%.
- ROSS: If we don't have the money, we don't have the money. I think we need the Highway Department to cut back, we're going to have a limited amount that we can pay for the school budget, we should try and hold the Police even, and we can make a recommendation that maybe the Clerk's salary be lowered. We need to at least make the statement, "This is the budget. This is the reality." We need to make them see that everybody's getting chipped away at.
- Abbondanzio suggested that perhaps Bergeron was hoping the Town would go for an override.
- ABBONDANZIO: I did talk to Tom about the use of Chapter 90, and I think what he's going to do is in Year 1, use \$25,000 out of that \$100,000 discretionary, because he needs Chapter 90 to do Avenue A. And then in Years 2-5, he'll use Chapter 90.

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I gave him that option. If he's not going to use Chapter 90, you can take the \$25,000 out of the \$100,000, and he ends up with less money that way. But he'll still have \$75,000 other discretionary items.

- In response to a question by Ross, Abbondanzio estimated that the total expected cost of the police/fire station would be about \$3 million (at \$300 per square foot), plus the cost of the design (at 15%, it would be about \$450,000), plus the land (about \$250,000).
- ABBONDANZIO: For the \$3 million, it's about \$320,000 a year for principle and interest over 20 years. So the only way you can afford that is if you do a debt exclusion.
- ALLEN: That land gives us access to the back side of the landfill. If we don't buy all the way to the cemetery, we can't get in the back way.
- Using a map, the Board explored different options of gaining access to the landfill.
- Ross asked for a crude estimation of how much it would cost per Montague inhabitant to come up with the police station; Abbondanzio answered 55 cents per \$1,000 (i.e., approximately \$75 per household).

*Allen made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ross seconded. Unanimously approved. Allen-Aye. Ross-Aye. Pruitt-Aye.*