

SELECTMEN'S WORKSHOP
Minutes of 1/29/07
5:15 p.m.

Selectmen:

Peter Miller, Chairman
Peter Brothers
Miller Lovett
Frank Michel
Colette Worsman

Town Manager:
Recording Clerk:

Carol Granfield
Karin Landry

The Workshop was opened by Peter Miller, Chairman, at 5:15 p.m.

W 07-01 Revenue, Overlay and Fund Balance (Provisional Page for Town Report)

In order for the Board to set the provisional tax rate projection, it must decide what amount will be taken from the General Fund to reduce taxes in 2007 and the amount of the 2007 overlay. The public will want to know the impact of the board's budget on the tax rate and this is a crucial part of establishing the provisional rate. Brenda Vittner prepared three scenarios illustrating the effect on the tax rate when \$750,000, \$1M or \$1.25M is transferred from the Fund (**SEE ADDENDUM I**). Brenda's recommendation is to transfer \$750,000 from the General Fund to reduce taxes and \$100,000 for the overlay. The valuation used for her recommendation does not include an estimate for increased assessed valuation and there will be a better sense of what should be set aside for the overlay by March 1, the filing deadline.

Selectman Lovett expressed concerns regarding the health of the General Fund and does not think \$750,000 should be transferred from the Fund. Chair Miller spoke in favor of using the \$750,000 figure together with \$100,000 for the overlay. Assessor Jim Commerford told the Board that there is nothing significant in the way of abatements thus far. Dialogue ensued regarding the advantages of keeping a healthy Fund balance, including reserves for a catastrophe, and favorable bond ratings. Selectman Michel spoke in favor of the \$750,000 figure pointing out that a steady tax rate is good for the community. Selectman Lovett reiterated that he is not comfortable with \$750,000 and suggested \$500,000 (together with a Budget decrease) to show the public that the Board is trying to reduce the tax rate and protect the Fund balance.

Frank Michel motioned that the Board use \$750,000 to reduce taxes and \$100,000 for overlay as recommended by Brenda Vittner. Seconded by Colette Worsman for discussion purposes.

Although Selectman Worsman believes it is good to have a savings account for disasters, she does not believe she can support the \$500,000 figure in light of the increase in the budget. Chair Miller addressed the need for lengthy dialogue with the voters and taxpayers if the Board wants to use less than \$750,000 from the Fund balance to reduce the tax rate. Selectman Michel

pointed out that the current Fund balance was affected by the \$1M that was used over the last three years to offset expenses associated with borrowing for the community center and police department. He also pointed out that there is a group of citizens that wants to use more Fund balance to reduce taxes.

4-1 (Miller Lovett opposed). Motion carries.

W 07-02 Draft Town Warrant Review

Article 2&3:

Carol Granfield explained that although the Board is not required to vote on the warrant articles, they may do so if they wish. Article 2 and 3 have not been reviewed by the Planning Board at this time – their recommendation will be available at the Town Meeting.

Article 4:

Frank Michel moved that the Selectmen adopt Article 4 regarding the bundled project for \$2,238,000.00 as presented. Seconded by Peter Brothers.

Bob Hill, Superintendent of Water & Sewer, reported on the status of an application for a grant from Rural Development for the project. Once the amount of the grant has been determined, the Town will know what the loan and interest rate will be. The Town should have the final figures from Rural Development by Thursday of this week. The Board discussed the advantages of taking on debt to save on construction costs, attract larger contractors and qualify for Rural Development grant funds. Bob told the Board that Rural Development was impressed with the water evaluation and water management plans the Town put together. Chair Miller recommended that the Board get back to this warrant article at the meeting on February 12. Resident Lou Kahn expressed concerns with meeting the 15-day notice requirement prior to the Town meeting. Carol Granfield told the Board that February 19 is the last day to publish the notice and February 26 is the last day to hold a public hearing.

Article 12, 13 & 14:

Assessor Commerford recommends that Article 12, the blind exemption, be increased from \$15,000 to \$30,000. This exemption was left out when the others were increased last year. There are currently five residents that qualify for this exemption. Article 13 and 14 adjust the income limit for the elderly and disabled from \$20,000 to \$25,000 if single and \$25,000 to \$33,000 for married persons. He made his recommendations based on the limits set by surrounding towns.

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 12, the blind exemption from property tax, to increase the amount of the exemption from \$15,000 to \$30,000. Seconded by Peter Miller.

Selectman Brothers pointed out the change in demographics towards a more elderly population. Although the increase in exemption limits is good at this time, he expressed concerns with being able to lower exemptions at some point in the future if it makes sense to do so. Assessor

Commerford explained the mechanics of the exemptions and the asset levels that are taken into consideration when granting the exemption.

5-0. Motion passes unanimously.

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 13 with respect to the elderly exemption from property tax income to increase it to \$25,000 for single and \$33,000 for married persons. Seconded by Colette Worsman. 5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 14 with respect to the disabled exemption to increase exemption income levels to \$25,000 for single and \$33,000 for married persons as presented. Seconded by Peter Brothers. 5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Article 5:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 5 which in substance states that we change the name of the Boardwalk Renovations Expendable Trust Fund to be known as the Waterfront Infrastructure Improvements Expendable Trust Fund. Seconded by Colette Worsman. 5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Article 6:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 6 which says "Shall the Town of Meredith vote to dissolve the Sullivan County Regional Refuse Disposal District?" Seconded by Peter Miller.

Mike Faller told the Board that this is a housekeeping issue with respect to dissolving the agreement entered into 20 years ago. Dissolving the District will ultimately allow the Town to discontinue their relationship with Wheelabrator.

5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Article 7:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 7 which says "In the event that dissolution of the Sullivan County Regional Refuse Disposal District is not approved by the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the members of the District, shall the Town of Meredith vote to withdraw from the District?" Seconded by Colette Worsman. 5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Article 8:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 8 which in essence sends a message to the President and Congress to address the issue of climate change and encourage New Hampshire citizens to work for emission reductions within their communities. Seconded by Peter Brothers.

Chair Miller pointed out that this is a petitioned article brought forth by citizens. It will appear on the warrant regardless of what action the Board takes. The Board took no action on the warrant article.

Frank Michel withdrew the motion.

Article 9:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 9 which in essence allows certain lots that were deeded to the Town to be brought under the auspices of the Hamlin Recreation and Conservation Areas and also designate both parcels as Town forest pursuant to the applicable statute. Seconded by Colette Worsman.

Selectman Lovett corrected a typographical error from “Ares” to “Area” in the second line of the Article. The supporting materials were put together by Chair Miller at the request of the Conservation Commission. He explained that the properties ended up on a list of properties needing disposition.

5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Article 10:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 10 which in essence states that the Selectmen accept consideration requests for community revitalization tax relief incentives. Seconded by Peter Brothers.

Under the tax relief incentive, an owner is not taxed on the new value of a building created by an improvement that is deemed for the public benefit. In order to meet the requirements, the building must be a qualifying structure, the proposed rehabilitation must be substantial, and there must be a public interest. The Selectmen are not required to approve every project presented.

5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Article 11:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 11 which seeks a vote to designate three parcels of land as town forest, the Leighton properties and the Eames property as presented. Seconded by Colette Worsman.

Chair Miller reminded John Sherman that the Conservation Commission has not provided supportive materials relative to this warrant article. Dialogue ensued regarding the location of the properties and the ramifications of designating the parcels as Town Forest. The Board expressed concerns with making the recommendation without the supportive materials from the Conservation Commission and a copy of the statute for their review.

The motion was withdrawn by Selectman Michel.

Article 15:

Frank Michel motioned to recommend Article 15 to see if the Town will vote to sell the Old Police Station Building property, or the Town Hall Annex upon such terms and conditions and employing such methods to accomplish the sale as the Selectmen shall deem to be in the best interest of the Town, and to authorize the Board of Selectmen to take all actions reasonably necessary to effect the sale of one of these properties. Seconded by Peter Brothers.

Carol Granfield explained that the wording gives the Board the authority to sell one or the other building if the voters give them the o.k. to do so. Dialogue ensued regarding the wording of the Article. The Board wants the wording to indicate that they are under no obligation to sell either of the buildings if it is not in the best interest of the Town. The Board was in general agreement that the motion needs to be wordsmithed before being brought before the voters at Town Meeting. Dialogue ensued regarding options regarding the lease, use or possible sale of the police station building. Resident Phil McGowan pointed out that the Board has nothing to lose by having the right to sell both of the properties.

Frank Michel withdrew the motion.

Article 16:

Article 16 is a petitioned article and the Board took no action.

Article 17:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 17 which in effect is housekeeping to discontinue certain Trusts that are no longer needed. Colette Worsman seconded for discussion.

The first two Trusts are very old Expendable Trusts that were taken off the Town's books when they reached \$0 but remain on the DRA books. The DRA requested that they be discontinued. The last three Trusts have fulfilled their purpose.

5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Article 18:

Carol Granfield told the Board that Article 18 is not an Expendable Trust Fund. It will be changed and placed on the Warrant as Article 23.

Article 19 to 25:

Articles 19 through 25 were recommended by the Board at the budget level. Board members reviewed the Articles for wording.

Brenda Vittner explained that the Warrant Articles for Expendable Trust Funds and Trust Funds must be separated, thus accounting for the difference in the amount needed to be raised as set forth in Article 26 (\$11,854,842.00) and the bottom line of the budget (\$12,317,342).

Article 26:

Frank Michel motioned that the Board recommend Article 26 in the amount of \$11,854,842. Seconded by Peter Brothers. 3-2. Motion passed.

Colette Worsman motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 p.m. Seconded by Peter Miller. 5-0. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted:

Carol M. Granfield, Town Manager

Peter N. Miller, Chairman

Karin Landry, Recording Clerk

Peter F. Brothers

Miller C. Lovett

Frank Michel

Colette Worsman