

BOARD OF SELECTMEN WORKSHOP
Minutes of 07-18-11
4:15 p.m.

Selectmen:

Colette Worsman, Chairman
Peter F. Brothers, Vice Chairman
Miller C. Lovett
Nathan J. Torr
Herbert R. Vadney

Town Manager:

Phillip L. Warren

Recording Clerk:

(Absent with Notice)

Karin Landry

Call to Order: Chair Worsman called the meeting to order 4:15 p.m. She introduced the Board and Town Manager, and made announcement pertaining to emergency exits and the use of cell phones.

W 11-16 Abatements and Valuation Adjustment

Assessor Jim Commerford reviewed the final five abatements for 2010, and made a recommendation for adjustments in the total amount of \$2,490.88:

- Wilson, 26 Veazey Shore Rd. - Purchased in November of 2010 for \$825,000. Equalized value of \$899,900 compared to time adjusted sales price is 5.7%, which is within the 10% that is considered comparable. No adjustment recommended.
- Currier/Meredith Realty Trust, 72 Eaton Ave., single family home - Assessed at \$283,400. Appraisal of \$240,000 basis for appeal. Adjust style to modular ranch, basement quality to average, for a recommended value of \$269,800. (Difference of \$13,600 - \$174.08 in taxes.)
- Demayo, 68 Patrician Shores Circle, single family home - Assessed at \$216,400. Appraisal of \$173,000 and 2010 sales price of \$163,000 basis for appeal. Adjust land value for distance from beach for a recommended value of \$182,000. (Difference of \$34,400 - \$440.32 in taxes.) Mr. Commerford explained that while adjustment for location of land in communities with common features is often not made, in addition to the distance from the beach, noise factors were considered because the parcel is in close proximity to Route 25.
- Hoefs, 68 Winona Rd., 1.10 acres of land, single family home - Assessed at \$104,700. Abutter purchased property in 2010 for \$40,000. Adjust for size, quality, and condition. The property is presently uninhabitable. Best use of parcel is vacant lot. Recommended value of \$57,800 (Difference of \$46,900 - \$600.32 in taxes.) Mr. Commerford explained that the appraiser in the field is instructed to notify code enforcement when a property is dangerous or presents a safety concern, and that has been done in this case.
- McGowan, 23 Grouse Hollow Rd, Grouse Point, single family home - Assessed at \$687,000. Purchased in 2010 for \$435,000. Appeal based on appraisal of \$529,000. Adjust for obstructed view, quality grade of house, for recommended value of \$587,300. (Difference of \$99,700 or \$1,276.16 in taxes.)

The median ratio for 2010 is 104.1%, the co-efficient of dispersion is 10.9%, which is within the 20% recommended by the state. There were 22 abatements in 2010, and 18 foreclosures. To date, the median ratio for 2011 is 109.9%, the co-efficient dispersion is 15.51%, and there have been 8 foreclosures. The mobile home ratio is 186%, and Assessor Commerford recommends that mobile homes be adjusted this year to bring that figure down. The ratio for waterfront sales is at 97%, which is slightly below the median. Waterfront sales are currently based on 2-3 transactions, and will continue to be monitored for trends. The ratio must be within 90% and 100% at the time of certification, which is 2013.

W 11-17 High Risk Rural Signage Program

Stewart Thompson, Highway Safety Engineer with NHDOT, explained the rural signing improvement project that is being undertaken in approximately nine towns throughout the state. The project is meant to decrease fatalities in severe crashes on rural roadways, and focuses on the reduction of runoff road crashes. Improvements in signing, particularly on curves, have been shown to reduce those types of crashes by about 40%. Mr. Thompson explained the procedure for identifying the towns eligible to participate in the project, one of which is Meredith. The project replaces signs indicating the sharpness of a curb, markings to guide vehicles around a curb, and advisory speed plaques. An analysis was made of crashes in the preceding 10 years to identify where signage improvements are needed. A preliminary plan was presented for the Board's review. Once comments and questions are taken from the Board, a final plan will be drafted, and a bid will be put out for a contractor to install the signs. Once the signs are installed, they belong to the town. If signs are removed, both the sign and post will be given to the town. The town will be asked to work with property owners to keep vegetation cleared around the signs, and report crashes to the DOT so locations in need of improvement can be identified. The final engineering estimate must be completed by the end of September, and the Board's feedback was requested within the next couple of weeks.

Selectman Vadney lives off Windsong Place, which will go from 4 signs to 14 in a distance of less than a mile. He pointed out that 90% of the accidents on Windsong Place are related to winter road conditions, and that signage will not have an effect on those incidents. He is concerned with having to maintain the signs once they are installed and thinks there will be considerable public comment on the matter.

Selectman Brothers is concerned whether safety benefits and a reduction of traffic will result from the installation of additional signs. The Rte. 3 and 25 corridor solution should be considered to determine what primary and secondary roads people will be directed to. He is concerned about all kinds of pollution and sign pollution is one of them. He would rather see the money spent on road width, condition, and curbs.

Public Works Director Mike Faller pointed out that traffic is increasing on pass through roads because GPS devices are directing drivers to use them. He will make an attempt to keep signage at a minimum on roads with a rural character. His plan is to review the preliminary plan with the Town Manager and make his suggestions, eliminating some roads altogether and focusing on pass through roads such as Corliss Hill, Livingston, and Batcheldor Hill Rd.

Mr. Thompson explained that approximately 50% of the signs are replacement signs, and that by 2013 certain signs will be required to be installed on curves, as well as the replacement of signs that don't comply with reflectivity standards. It is not known at this time how the requirements will be enforced.

Chair Worsman inquired whether the number of existing signs has been analyzed and what the new sign inventory would be. Mr. Faller explained that while that has not been done, many of the signs will be replaced or relocated. This is an opportunity to bring a lot of signs to current standards at no immediate cost to the town. He intends to review the preliminary plan to determine if all the proposed signs are needed, but thinks the benefits outweigh the hindrance.

Selectman Vadney inquired if the signs can be removed once they are installed. Mr. Thompson explained that the state prefers that the decision to do so be made prior to the signs being installed.

The Chair would like to have the addition of signs held to a minimum, and pointed out that there will be a carrying cost going forward.

Selectman Vadney suggested getting the word out to the public through the media so they are aware of the matter.

Resident Bob Gage of Windsong Place is concerned that there is a lot of unnecessary signage in the plan. Most drivers on Windsong Place are residents who know the road. The road is strictly residential and less than one mile long. He would like to see additional signage at the intersection of Meredith Center Rd. and Windsong Place.

Dialogue ensued regarding the timeline for the project. The state will hold the matter for a few weeks for the Boards review, but if there are further delays, the work will not commence until the spring. If the Board decides not to move forward with the project, another town will be pursued.

Mr. Thompson clarified that the state is not dictating the number of signs that need to be put in, but that the ones that are put in or replaced need to meet current standards.

The Town Manager recommended that the preliminary plan be posted on the website, with a request for public comment. The matter will be reviewed with staff, and comments taken from the Board. A hearing will be scheduled for a Board meeting in September. The meeting date will be posted on the website and the public will be invited to attend.

W 11-18 Town Forest Conservation Easement Proposal

The conservation commission formed a study group to strategically think about the properties the town owns that the commission has stewardship responsibility for, as well as properties it oversees or manages with a town held conservation easement. The group consists of Mark Billings, John Sherman, Don McFarland and Peter Miller. Mr. Billings explained to the Board that the driving factor behind the formation of the group is the protection of important open space parcels that the town owns. There are 12 significant parcels that the conservation commission has management or stewardship responsibility for. Although those parcels have varying degrees of protection, none of the town owned property has the level of protection afforded by the easements the Town holds on parcels such as the Moulton, Bushnell, Long Meadow, Sherman, and Smythe. The exercise the group is embarking on is to understand the levels of protection on the properties the town oversees, and to explore what can be done going forward to protect those parcels. If the parcels are not protected, they are subject to future sale or development. There is no level of protection short of an easement that could be imposed by the Town itself.

Selectman Torr inquired whether the Town would be permitted to drill wells for water on properties with a conservation easement if the need arises in the future. Mr. Billings explained

that the conservation easement language is determined by the grantor, which is the Town. The Town cannot hold a conservation easement on its own land, so the terms of the easement are driven by the grantor and accepted or denied by the grantee.

Selectman Lovett inquired whether there are existing easements in place that would prevent the drilling of wells. Mr. Billings explained that the Town only holds easements on property they don't own, and that he does not know if there is language allowing the drilling of wells in those easements. The Town Manager informed that there are no easements on town held stewarded land at this point, so there would be nothing preventing the drilling of wells at this time.

While Selectman Brothers appreciates the ultimate protection a conservation easement provides, it is hard to ascertain the needs of the Town 30 or more years from now, when someone else will be making decisions. He would like to see the parcels protected, but wonders how it can be done without denying reasonable uses. He would like to explore the procedure for amending an easement if informed decision makers see a need to do so in the future.

While Selectman Vadney wishes to see the land protected, he questions if decision makers at this time can make decisions for people 50-200 years from now. It seems as though any easement should be able to be reversed by a town vote. In addition, he wonders if an easement would prevent management that ensures the health of the forest and reduces the risk of forest fires, in addition to preventing cutting for timber.

Three to five years or longer will be dedicated to the plan, and it is the intention of the study group is to get basic direction from the Board in an effort to plan its time wisely. There was a general agreement among the Board that the goal is to gain more information on more adequate protection the properties it owns, while allowing for flexibility in the future.

Selectman Brothers motioned to adjourn the Workshop at 5:25 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Vadney. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully
submitted,

Phillip L. Warren, Town Manager

Colette Worsman, Chairman

Peter F. Brothers, Vice Chairman

Miller C. Lovett

Nathan J. Torr

Herbert R. Vadney