

**THE MINUTES
OF THE
WARRANT COMMITTEE MEETING
February 5, 2003**

Chairman Widmer called the meeting to order at 7:39 PM.

Members absent: W. Hofmann

Also present: Town Administrator Melvin Kleckner, Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney, Selectman Paul Solomon, Assistant Town Administrator Munro, Town Accountant Barbara Hagg, Town Treasurer Susan Kendall Freiner, School Director of Finance and Administration Gerry Missal, and many interested residents

Handout(s) given out tonight:

- (1) FY 2003 State Aid Reduction memo dated February 5, 2003 by Town Administrator Kleckner
- (2) Public Works Consolidation Committee Joint Resolution Study Results handout of the presentation

Public Works Consolidation

Town Administrator Kleckner presented the Public Works Consolidation Committee Joint Resolution Study Results with Highway Superintendent Peter Castanino. They spoke on the value of public works, meeting the daily needs of citizens, and enhancing our quality of life. This is being looked as an initiative of the Board of Selectmen and Warrant Committee, resulting in a joint resolution of the Board of Selectmen, Water Commissioners and Cemetery Commissioners. This is the fourth study the Town has undertaken since 1975. Each of our neighboring communities has a public works structure, and more than 75% of all US cities have public works departments. Town Administrator Kleckner reviewed the approach taken in conducting this study. He also spoke of the legal basis and organizational history of how public works departments are created. The individual functions of the services provided were listed along with several common functions: construction and maintenance, emergency services, administration, human resources and labor relations, and billing and collection (water and sewer). He documented the merits of public works consolidation such as sharing and coordinating activities and breaking down barriers between the departments and their related boards along with the opportunities created by consolidation. Superintendent Castanino and Town Administrator Kleckner proposed their recommendation to establish a consolidated public works department. Town Administrator Kleckner offered some guiding principles of implementation stressing the cost of the combined department shall not exceed individual department budgets. Superintendent Castanino gave his vision of the new organization by creating a cohesive unit with shared mission and a culture of responsiveness, efficiency, excellence, accountability and respect. Town Administrator Kleckner addressed the steps required for implementation. He noted there would be a

formal detailed report of the Public Works Consolidation Committee's findings and recommendations.

Selectman Brownsberger asked Town Administrator Kleckner's thinking of how the Light Department will fit into the picture. Town Administrator Kleckner answered that centralized billing and meter reading could somehow be "contracted" back to the Town in some capacity. Selectman Solomon asked if the operations manager would be an extra position or a current Town employee. Town Administrator Kleckner responded it is the Town's intent to promote from within. He also mentioned currently there is a Town department called Buildings and Grounds. At this point, it is not recommended the Buildings portion would not be included in the Public Works consolidation. It is anticipated there will still be collaboration with the School Department for the Buildings part of that department. It was the Public Works Consolidation Committee's decision to withhold the Town's buildings and take the consolidation one step at a time. Selectman Mahoney asked how Town Administrator Kleckner would propose phasing out the elected boards. Town Administrator Kleckner suggested changing their statutory authority from being elected to appointed. Specifically, the Board of Water Commissioners would have to be changed through legislative action, and it would probably be abolished when the Public Works Consolidation legislation was passed.

In Belmont, the engineering function is included within the Community Development office, separate from public works, which is more the norm in other towns. Town Administrator Kleckner maintained it should continue to remain separate at this time. Member Heigham asked if the other Boards are in agreement with this consolidation. Town Administrator Kleckner said everyone is hearing it tonight for the first time. Member Heigham also asked what unions are involved. Town Administrator Kleckner responded the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and the National Association of Government Employees (NAGE) are the two unions involved in this consolidation.

Member Flewelling noted the operations manager could be found from within the system that still exists.

Town Administrator Kleckner recommended this consolidation would not happen overnight. He is committed to providing the appropriate training and support to have labor work cohesively as a public works department. No employee will lose compensation during this process. Town resident John Bowe asked how long it would take for this to be phased in. Town Administrator Kleckner said it depends, but what makes an organization effective is it's people doing the right thing in the right jobs. There will be a time of transition, and it will take several years before we can say we have it the way we want. There will be some things that will happen almost day one: centralized leadership and management and centralized administration and processes. Cemetery Board member Ellen Cushman asked when the quantitative backup from this study would be available. Town Administrator Kleckner will be presenting to the Board of Selectmen and the two Boards a detailed analysis and recommendation within the next few weeks with the extent the savings can be quantified.

Member Heigham asked about the on-going budget process for FY04. Town Administrator Kleckner has not assumed the consolidation in the budget process. The FY04 Budget presented to the Board of Selectmen does not presume a new department, although he has committed it not be more than proposed already. Member Oates asked the time line for the first stage of this completed. Town Administrator Kleckner mentioned the upcoming report would have the language and time line necessary for Town Meeting. As far as State legislation, he cannot predict how long it will take the Legislature to act. He expects there will be a memorandum of understanding, in the interim of waiting for the State, to allow the Town to operate as a public works department. There will be more detail in the comprehensive report. Member Bruschi asked if the comprehensive report could be ready in the next few weeks so that it will be available for the joint budget meeting on March 6th. Town Administrator Kleckner noted he could not commit to the March 6th date.

Member Heigham asked if it would be necessary for something to be done at Town Meeting in order for Town Administrator Kleckner to be able to reallocate funds across departments. Water Commissioner Richard Kobayashi reminded the Committee it is statutory that money collected for the provision of water is restricted to the expenses necessary to provide those services. So whatever happens to this particular reorganization, that particular issue remains. He also asked if the only reason to go the State is to revoke the Boards, and then the new organization can be created by by-law. Town Administrator Kleckner responded essentially yes, it would be to effect those changes of the Cemetery and Water Boards. Member McCormick asked if the ability to delegate an elected person's responsibilities could be designated to this public works department manager. Town Administrator Kleckner noted the legal aspects would be examined further in detail.

Selectman Brownsberger held "we cannot afford not to do this." While there are many ways we strive to organize the Town's inefficiencies, this will be an effective way to approach inefficiencies. Changes need to be made above the line. We need to create a senior authority and support that person as they face the challenge to organize this new department.

Town Administrator Kleckner reiterated a formal report will be submitted, and the basis of that report he requested the Board of Selectmen to present to Town Meeting. Selectman Brownsberger assured Town Administrator Kleckner the presentation tonight could also be used at Town Meeting.

Town Administrator Kleckner said since the Board of Selectmen along with the Board of Water and Cemetery Commissioners originally commissioned this report, he thinks it is very appropriate the Board of Selectmen meet again with the two other Boards. Selectman Brownsberger plans to discuss the consolidation with the Board of Water Commissioners and the Board of Cemetery Commissioners at the February 24th Board of Selectmen meeting.

Selectman Solomon reiterated this issue has been on the table for a quarter of a century, and it is time to act on this issue.

Other

Chairman Widmer informed the Committee Town Administrator Kleckner would like to add a discussion of collective bargaining issues to tonight's agenda. With sixteen members present, Chairman Widmer then took a roll call vote to enter into Executive Session at 8:38 pm.

- *Member Flewelling made a motion, Member Brusch seconded said motion and the Committee took a unanimous roll call vote to enter into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing collective bargaining issues.*
- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member Brusch seconded said motion and the Committee voted unanimously to return to regular session.*

The Committee returned to regular session at 9:30 pm.

Reserve Fund Transfers

Member White reminded the Committee that Fire Chief Osterhaus asked the Warrant Committee for a Reserve Fund Transfer of \$55K for their overtime account. This is due to some positions being vacant and having to be filled in by overtime staff. Normally, that would be partially offset with straight time, but this year with the 53rd week, the salary account will be coming in at budget. Therefore, the full-time salary account cannot carry the overtime account this year. Member White recommended the Committee approve this transfer.

Member Miller updated the Committee on the 50/50 Special Education reimbursement. She remarked it sounds a little better than the last time the Committee met.

Member Flewelling suggested appropriating ½ now and ½ at year-end when it is determined the money is actually needed. Member White thinks it is conceivable overtime may be less if the possible employee retirement does not occur, but he still recommends transferring the whole amount. Member Flewelling is concerned with dipping into the Reserve Fund quite early, and there may be other things that need to be considered first.

Member Oates asked what the possibility would be to vote on this transfer in June. Member Brusch said the consequence is Chief Osterhaus said some equipment would have to be taken out of service.

- *Member Heigham made a motion, Member Brusch seconded said motion, and it was unanimously voted to transfer \$55,000 from the Warrant Committee Reserve Fund to the Fire Department Overtime account.*

FY03 Budget – Local Aid Cut

Town Administrator Kleckner presented his memo regarding FY03 State Aid reduction. He noted it is helpful the Governor did not cut State Aid as much as originally thought. The Town has received some guidance from the Department of Revenue of how the Town is to handle this issue. Town Administrator Kleckner is recommending a series of steps the Town ought to take. On the revenue side, a transfer of \$100K from the Water Department from their Special Revenue Fund. This has not been done in the past few years due to water rate increases. Also, all departments and any Boards and Committees should review and recommend increases in fees if appropriate. The Town Treasurer has agreed to aggressively pursue delinquent property taxes through the tax title process. Treasurer Freiner noted there is over \$500K in delinquent taxes unpaid from the prior fiscal year.

On the expense side, there are currently 14 vacant Town positions. This will generate some savings and create flexibility for FY04. Member Heigham asked if there is any other department besides the Fire that will incur expenses through vacancies. Town Administrator Kleckner responded Public Safety Dispatch, although none are currently vacant. Town Administrator Kleckner is recommending the suspension of seasonal employment in FY03 unless absolutely critical. There is an expected return of about \$40K in the property/liability insurance and another \$20K in non-contributory retirement. General expenses are being closely watched by Town Accountant Hagg, and they are expected to be between \$25K-\$50K. Capital appropriations are carried forward every year. There are some balances that need to be closed out, and Town Administrator Kleckner is proposing a freeze on prior years capital appropriations. Finally, Town Administrator Kleckner would like to seek the School Department's help in reviewing their line item budget, specifically the \$67K set aside for a special education reimbursement mentioned in previous meetings.

Selectman Brownsberger asked of the list included in the memo, which would Town Administrator Kleckner like action on. He would like the capital projects, fees, and the Water Fund transfer to be supported by the Board of Selectmen and Warrant Committee.

Member Kobus asked if the \$100K is transferred, then would that affect water main replacement programs. Town Administrator Kleckner responded that the Town can show very clearly that Town support assists the Water Department in many ways. Town Accountant Hagg said there is a line appropriation in the Water Department for Town Services.

Member Hobbs would rather live without sidewalk repair than the cut in seasonal workers that take care of the deltas that are enjoyed all summer long. Member Bruschi agrees with Member Hobbs to an extent, but there is a certain part of the sidewalk project slated for this spring and Superintendent Castanino's \$100K of unused money in sidewalk repair maybe should not be touched especially since that was cited as a reason for an override last year.

Member Oates said she has had a number of people call her regarding more allotments made for the School side than the Town side. Chairman Widmer mentioned this would be discussed with the FY04 Status issue deferred to next week's meeting.

FY04 Status

This action item is deferred until the February 12th meeting.

Chairman Widmer reminded subcommittees to meet with their Department Heads this month because subcommittee reports will be due soon.

Member Heigham made a motion, and it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 10:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Recording Clerk