

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

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

Members absent: D. Hobbs, K. Miller

Also present: Town Administrator Melvin Kleckner, Selectman Anne Marie Mahoney, Selectman Paul Solomon, Town Accountant Barbara Hagg, School Committee and Capital Budget Committee member Scott Stratford, School Committee Member Ralph Jones (in place of Kathy Miller) and Town Treasurer Susan Kendall Freiner

Handout(s) given out tonight:

(1) March 4th Cover Memo and financial packet from Town Administrator Kleckner

Acceptance of Minutes

The Committee discussed and the minutes of the February 26, 2003 meeting.

- *Member Hofmann made a motion, Member Heigham seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes as amended of February 26, 2003.*

Reserve Fund Transfer

Member Brusch reviewed the Council on Aging Reserve Fund Transfer request (*Handout 1 page 6*) for money needed to fund the Senior Center transportation position while the current driver is out on medical leave. The amount needed is \$998 for the next few weeks. The driver may come back sooner, but that is not definite. Town Administrator Kleckner noted the Board of Selectmen voted in favor of this transfer last Monday night.

- *Member Flewelling made a motion, Member McCormick seconded said motion, and the Committee unanimously voted to transfer \$998 from the Warrant Committee Reserve Fund to the Council On Aging for transportation services.*

General Government Subcommittee Report

Town Clerk

Member Heigham reviewed this department's FY04 Budget request and office staffing.

Accounting

Member Heigham reviewed this department's FY04 Budget request and office staffing. He focused on GASB 34, which the Town is required to adopt. This will put a strain on the department not only on staffing but expenditures.

Member Heigham also pointed out that several of these Town Hall departments will have Capital Budget requests this year, but keep in mind that all of them have less staffing than 10 years ago.

Assessor's Office

Member Heigham reviewed this department's FY04 Budget request and office staffing. There is a question about the method of distributing a manual on abatements and exemptions available to the taxpayers in the Town. The Internet is an idea, but the elderly as a whole, would not have access to it. They are still working through finding the best way to distribute the manual.

Chairman Widmer asked if there are any outstanding issues. Member Heigham said the departments he talked to are all reconciled to Town Administrator Kleckner's recommended budget.

General Management (Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, Community Relations, and Committees and Commissions)

Member Morley reviewed this department's FY04 Budget request and office staffing. A continuing priority in the General Management area is web site development. The level funding for General Management has been largely achieved by cutting Professional Services. These funds have been used to engage professionals and offer surveys. If this is reduced, then we will be limiting the Town in getting information from the residents. It is the Subcommittee's recommendation Professional Services be restored to \$25K (about a **\$13K restoration**). There is also one Capital Budget item for a computer.

Legal

FY04 proposed amount is \$220K (same as FY03). This amount is difficult to predict and is somewhat uncontrollable. Member Morley stated the Subcommittee thinks this is a respectable level of funding. Member Hofmann asked how realistic is that amount considering the McLean issue. Selectman Brownsberger added the Board of Selectmen would be coming to the Warrant Committee to discuss that issue in a few weeks.

Human Resources

Member Morley reviewed this department's FY04 Budget request and office staffing. The payroll position and related costs has been previously attached to this budget, but it is now transferred to the Treasurer's budget. Member Bruschi asked if the payroll clerk position is full-time. Treasurer Freiner responded it is full-time. Member Bruschi also asked if the Personnel Director was hired at the rate the former Director was paid. Town Administrator Kleckner responded he was not sure but will look into it.

Town Administrator Kleckner mentioned Personnel Director Diane Jenkins and Town Counsel would be bringing the classification proposal to the Warrant Committee on March 19th.

Treasurer

Member Morley reviewed this department's FY04 Budget request and office staffing. Most of the part-time workers were either under the required 20 hours for health insurance coverage, or significantly over the mark. There is \$20K added for costs in short-term borrowing. An additional \$175K has been added to the Debt & Interest Budget for borrowing that may be needed in FY04. Town Administrator Kleckner is hoping to reduce that amount since \$175K is a worst-case scenario. The Treasurer's Office has a few requests in the Capital Budget.

Pension Costs

Member Morley reviewed this department's FY04 Budget request and office staffing. The amount in the Budget is the amount the Committee saw in the fall. The total amount is \$3.4 million (a 10% increase), but this includes the Housing Authority, the Light Department, and the Water Department. There is also additional money included for five non-contributory retirees.

Treasurer Freiner informed the Committee she is talking to the Pension Advisor about an analysis on some pension bonds.

Member Heigham noted another issue is the elected officials salaries, but that is an Executive Session issue to be discussed later. Chairman Widmer agreed.

Chairman Widmer turned to Selectman Brownsberger and Town Administrator Kleckner to review the Board of Selectmen meeting from Monday, March 3rd.

Other

Town Administrator Kleckner reviewed his cover memo and attached information (*Handout 1 pages 1-5*). He went over the latest worksheet of adjustments to the FY04 Budget recommendations. The bottom line is \$282K in additional budget capacity that has been unallocated. The Board of Selectmen talked on March 3rd on how they would like to allocate those funds.

The Board of Selectmen took the long list of identified Town needs. The Board restored \$2K into the Accounting budget for GASB 34. He reviewed other Board decisions from their last meeting.

Selectman Brownsberger would like to see the Capital Budget funded the same as last year. He does not want to cut the School budget any further. The Board has discussed a number of possible ways to review the budget. Town Administrator Kleckner is

reviewing the rest of the Town's budget to find some additional savings. Selectman Mahoney said she is not committed to the March 3rd Budget Worksheet List. However, she is very committed to bringing the Plans Review position back to the Fire Department funded with the proceeds from McLean.

Member Kobus asked about the Youth Commission cut. She wondered if Town Administrator Kleckner met with the Commission regarding their budget. They did, and they agreed a part-time position is needed. However, they did not discuss a specific salary amount. Member Kobus said she budgeted the position for 18 hours/week in her Subcommittee report.

Member White is sensing we are trying to avoid another override, and we are essentially agreeing on an 8% tax increase taking into account the override, debt exclusion, new growth, and other issues. Selectman Brownsberger responded the increase will be substantial this year, and it will dampen any inclination in residents to further increase taxes.

Member Curtis asked about the revenue side. He asked why the projection for MV Excise Tax is going down by \$77K as well as a decrease in parking fines. Town Administrator Kleckner told him they are revising a projection. Town Accountant Hagg said there was an original increase of 3% budgeted, but when comparing prior year's commitments, the amount needed to be brought down to level funding.

Member Flewelling wondered for the average resident budgeting their 2 ½% tax increase, how will we explain to them their taxes are actually going up 8%? Chairman Widmer asked Town Administrator Kleckner to discuss this as well as the plans for tomorrow's FY04 Budget Presentation to Town Meeting Members.

Town Administrator Kleckner is planning to update his FY04 Budget presentation originally given to the Board of Selectmen. He is willing to work with Treasurer Freiner on a few slides depicting the 8% tax increase. The increase is due to: the 2 ½% increment, the residual of last year's override, and the additional debt related to the debt exclusions.

Member Curtis remarked that in a sense, this is something we have done to ourselves. The Town voted by majority for the debt exclusion and override. He hopes there is a gentle way to make that point.

Chairman Widmer added we should be showing the average taxpayer's increase, without new growth included, since they would not be paying that portion. Tomorrow's presentation order will be: Member White, Town Administrator Kleckner, Member Brusch discussing cost cutting initiatives, and Dr. Peter Holland giving the School Department's Budget request.

Capital Budget

Member Brusch informed the Committee the Capital Budget Committee are meeting bi-weekly and reviewing each department's request. Buildings and Grounds and the School Department still needed to be reviewed by the Capital Budget Committee. The Capital Budget Committee is unanimous in requesting the Capital Budget be level funded from last year. She mentioned technology is a major issue. When equipment is needed, departments must also factor in the personnel costs required. The requests to the Capital Budget Committee for FY04 are \$8.9 million. Chairman Widmer noted the Warrant Committee would discuss the Capital Budget further on April 2nd.

Member Schafer reviewed last Saturday's meeting (March 1st). She discussed the School Department's possible personnel cuts for FY04. Mr. Jones further explained some of those personnel details. The Schools are proposing to increase fees for school activities and accept another 30 School Choice students. However, more teachers would need to be hired to accommodate those increases in class sizes. Mr. Jones said that increase in personnel would also accommodate the larger class sizes moving up through the current system.

Member Curtis asked if the School Committee discussed how it would come up with the needed money if increasing School Choice did not occur. Mr. Jones responded cuts would be in personnel.

Member Brusch asked regarding the Administration Building operating costs. She said it had been agreed that those costs would be included in the Town Hall Complex relocation budget. Mr. Jones said he would discuss this with the appropriate School personnel. Member Brusch also asked Mr. Jones's take on hiring a maintenance person instead of contracting services. Mr. Jones will discuss this with School Director of Finance and Administration Gerry Missal.

Member Kobus thinks the School Department should cover the \$5 co-pay expense and not look to the Town to fund the monetary difference. Member Hofmann agrees.

Member Oates would like to see \$42K in change in the School Department Budget around the position of the Volunteer Coordinator. Mr. Jones said the School Committee asked the Superintendent to go back and justify that item. Several people suggested that be handled by a volunteer. He would like that question of using volunteers to be asked in all aspects of the School and Town Budget.

Fire Subcommittee Report

Member White reviewed the Fire Department's FY04 Budget request and staffing levels. It all boils down to personnel, since that is their largest cost. The proposal by the Fire Chief to the Board of Selectmen was for 61 staff, an increase of four firefighters, (1 per shift of the four shifts) and a Training Officer. Town Administrator Kleckner's proposal does not support those added positions. We are doing planning now, but that role needs to be carved out of the existing staffing and training as well. The Chief will have to assemble his troops and carve out those roles to get them done. The Subcommittee's

recommendation is the same as Town Administrator Kleckner's, 56 staff. This does not include a Planning Officer.

Chairman Widmer thought the Committee agreed on having a combined Training/Planning person if a restoration occurs. We will be exposed on two fronts without having a Training Officer and Plans Review Officer. Chairman Widmer would like to put on the table consideration of a combined Training/Plans Review Officer. Member Bruschi asked what are the kinds of things not being done without those positions being filled currently. In the meantime, there is a Town project going out to bid, and we are going to need the Plans Review Officer available to assist in this project.

Member McCormick pointed out what is not being done is oil burner inspections. He is not sure what that liability is, but they are two years behind in the inspections. At some point, the Town either needs to fully staff or shut down the Harvard Lawn Station.

Member Schafer noted over time we have had many years that the Fire Department has come to the Warrant Committee with a funding request for the overtime budget. Is this a reasonable estimate for overtime, or is there some reasonable way to fund this item? Member McCormick said they need to hire the four firefighters and that would cover that overtime. Member Schafer observed if we are hiring them because they are needed for a piece of equipment, then they would not be available for filling overtime request. Member White said we should be willing to fund overtime until the Harvard Lawn Station issue is no longer. Member McCormick and Member White will speak with the Fire Chief further about this issue.

Selectman Brownsberger informed the Committee there are some opportunities of sharing between Watertown and Belmont. We have just had the very beginnings of a conversation of whether we might be able to achieve some economies of scale. He spoke with Watertown's Town Council, and their response was if there was ever a time, it would be now. The Board of Selectmen is looking more closely at this issue.

Member Flewelling made a motion, and it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristina E. Frizzell

Recording Clerk