

FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES- DRAFT

Meeting Date: 18 October, 2007

CALL TO ORDER

The Meeting was called to order at 7:03 P.M. in the First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Brian Morton (chair), Marilyn Blaustein, Alice Carlozzi, Kay Moran, Douglas Slaughter, Andrew Steinberg

OTHERS PRESENT

Sonia Aldrich, (Town Accountant), David Ziomek (Director of Conservation and Planning), Walter Wolnik, Jonathan Tucker (Planning Director)

COMMITTEE AGENDA

1. Town Meeting Articles
 - a. Sunderland Rd Rezoning
 - b. CPAC Article (s)
 - c. Other
2. Draft Report to Town Meeting
3. Speaking Assignments
4. Member Reports
5. Minutes
6. Next Meeting and Agenda
7. Miscellaneous

COMMITTEE ACTION

Steinberg moved that the Committee support the CPAC recommendation to borrow \$295,000 for the Town Hall Renovation from CPAC funds to be paid back over a period of 10 years and to support the CPAC recommendation to use \$100,000 of current funds for the same purpose.. The motion was seconded by Slaughter and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Steinberg moved that the Committee postpone action on Article 7 of the Special Town Meeting Warrant (Community Preservation Act – Open Space) until Town Meeting.. The motion was seconded by Carlozzi and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Morton moved that the Committee recommend approval of Article 1 (Reports of Boards and Committees). The motion was seconded by Steinberg and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Carlozzi moved that the Committee defer consideration of Article 2 (Transfer of Funds – Unpaid Bills) until Town Meeting. The motion was seconded by Blaustein and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Carlozzi moved that the Committee rescind action on Article 13 (Zoning Bylaw – Technical/Professional Offices) and defer consideration until Town Meeting. The motion was seconded by Blaustein and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Carlozzi moved that the Committee defer consideration of Article 17 (Petition – College/South East Street and Belchertown Road Rezoning) until Town Meeting and include a statement in the Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting as to why. The motion was seconded by Steinberg and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Blaustein moved that the Committee defer consideration of Article 14 (Petition – Allowing Professional Offices Accessible by Appointment in Some Zoning Districts) until Town Meeting and include a statement in the Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting as to why. The motion was seconded by Steinberg and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Moran moved that the Committee defer consideration of Article 18 (Petition – Zoning Map – 500-502 Sunderland Road) until Town Meeting. The motion was seconded by Carlozzi and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Moran moved that the Committee defer consideration of Article 19 (Petition – Main/Dickinson/High Street Rezoning) until Town Meeting. The motion was seconded by Blaustein and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Moran moved that the Committee defer consideration of Article 20 (Petition – Waiver of Effluent Fees to UMass – Strategic Partnership Agreement) until Town Meeting and include a statement in the Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting as to why. The motion was seconded by Blaustein and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

Moran moved to accept the minutes of the meeting held on October 11, 2007 as amended. The motion was seconded by Blaustein and passed 6-0 (1 absent).

DISCUSSION

Note: Agenda Item 1b was discussed first.

Aldrich presented the CPAC funding recommendation for the Town Hall Restoration project. It includes \$100,000 in Fiscal Year 2008 for the South Steps (\$75,000) and the Clock Tower and Lighting (\$25,000) as well as \$295,000 to be borrowed and paid back from CPA funds over a period of 10 years. The \$295,000 is the remaining part of the Town Hall repointing contract. The Capital Plan (General Fund) is covering the portion of the repointing contract not covered by the CPA monies (\$162,000). Tucker stated that this article changes the way in which the project is financed. Also, he noted that the Historical Commission made a precedent setting recommendation to approve this use of the CPA funding. The commission did express concerns that the burden of the debt service may prevent future projects. Moran asked if the debt service will have to be approved every year. Tucker responded that that was true and that the CPAC was considering altering the way in which it presents articles to Town Meeting to consolidate all of its debt service into a single article. Both Steinberg and Morton expressed appreciation to the Historical Commission and CPAC for making this recommendation.

Aldrich presented the CPAC vote of 6-1 to support Article 7 (Community Preservation Act – Open Space). Ziomek presented the details of the Article. The funding for the project will be 70% by a state grant and 30% from CPA funds (\$123,000). Twenty eight acres are to be purchased and preserved from development. (An additional 12 acres were originally part of the project but cannot be accommodated and will most likely still be developed.) Steinberg asked if protecting this land would benefit the Atkins watershed. Ziomek replied no, but that Puffer’s Pond would probably benefit from this preservation of open space. Morton asked about the financing process. Ziomek stated that the full amount would be paid out by the Town (the details of where that money would come from and how it would be executed are still to be worked out with the Town Finance Director/Treasurer) and the state grant would then reimburse the town. Blaustein asked about the financial impact of conserving the land, e.g., lost property taxes due to non-development. Ziomek answered that he did not know specifically but that he would speak to the assessor and get back to the committee. He noted that the location would probably have room for 7 house lots. Carlozzi asked did, and if so how, this property fit into a conservation plan. Ziomek stated that Amherst does not have an up-to-date Open Space Plan. The last one was created in 1995 and it did not include the Cushman Brook area since at that time the market pressures to develop that land did not exist. Subsequently, it has gotten more attention due the advent of development possibilities. A new Open Space Plan is being developed and is targeted to be sent to the state for the end of the year, however, the Cushman Brook area meets the criteria that are applied when targeting property for preservation in such a plan. Ziomek stated that the Conservation commission voted unanimously to support this Article. The dissenting vote on the CPAC felt that the property did not rise to the level of importance that other parcels have and therefore was concerned that it was not of sufficient priority to merit preservation ahead of those other properties. Both Ziomek and Tucker mentioned that the Open Space Plan and the Master Plan would both help to clarify the criteria for selection of properties to preserve. Blaustein asked if the Article could be postponed to the Spring Town Meeting. Ziomek replied that due to the way in which the state executes the grant this was not possible. The committee deferred to Town Meeting a decision regarding this Article because of outstanding questions about the Property Tax implications and the likelihood of the grant application being accepted.

Tucker gave a brief description of the 3 zoning articles which were late additions to the Warrant. Two are alternatives to Planning Board articles and compromise articles may be offered to Town Meeting, however the compromise creation meetings have not happened nor have the necessary Public Hearings. The committee discussed the proper approach to take with regard to these articles in its report to Town Meeting, due to their late addition to the Warrant and the lack of sufficient time and information to assess them properly.

Discussion of Article 20 (Petition – Waiver of Effluent Fees to UMass – Strategic Partnership Agreement) centered on whether the committee could take a position for the purpose for a more complete Report to Town Meeting. Morton stated that we should give the petitioner an opportunity to address the committee before taking a position.

The committee discussed edits to and the procedure for completing the Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting.

The committee discussed and assigned speaking assignments for the Special Town Meeting.

Carlozzi reported on the Regional School Agreement Committee meeting specifically noting the committee's displeasure with the state's current plan to handle transportation costs.

Steinberg and Morton reported on the October 17 meeting of the Budget Coordination Group.

The next Finance Committee meeting will be on November 1, 2007.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:11 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Slaughter
Acting Clerk