

MINUTES

Call to order:

Meeting was called to order by Ms. O’Keeffe at 6:30 p.m.

Attendance:

Present: Stephanie O’Keeffe (Chair), Alisa Brewer, Aaron Hayden (Clerk), Diana Stein, Gerry Weiss, Larry Shaffer (Town Manager)

Others presenting: David Keenan, Jim Lescault (Director, ACTV)

Public comment

David Keenan expressed his thanks for our conversation on Town vehicles and brought a full copy of the vehicle list for distribution. He has received a lot of mail about the conversation.

Lucy Robinson, head of the Earth Hour committee wanted us to know that on March 28th between 8:30 to 9:30, there will be a worldwide celebration to bring attention to climate change. Grace Church will ring its bells; the Hitchcock Center for the Environment will have an event to celebrate turning lights off for one hour. She would like us to support the event with a proclamation.

Mr. Shaffer met with Ms. Robinson a few weeks ago and promised his support. He will present a resolution for the Select Board to consider next week.

Announcements

Gerry Weiss gave an update on the Election and Annual Town Meeting schedule;
3/9 is the last day for submitting miscellaneous citizen article petition with 10 signatures for the Town Meeting Warrant
3/11 is the last day to register to vote for 3/31 annual town elections.

Diana Stein noted the 250th anniversary banners around town and the various 250th celebrations, including a panel discussion on Amherst Women on the Move (March 6) and a talk on Slavery in Colonial Amherst by Bob Romer. Bob Romer is publishing a book on the subject and both events were incredibly interesting.

The parade float workshop was also wonderful. The 250th parade committee can’t take up making an Amherst float in the Hadley 350th parade this June but someone should.

Select Board’s actions

ACTV, recent broadcast issues:

The Select Board has been receiving comments since people have become accustomed to high quality in the past that haven’t been met at times recently.

Jim Lescault spoke about the recent problems ACTV has had with broadcasting Select Board meetings.

He described that nature and scope of the work to upgrade and repair the equipment in the Town Room and the difficulty of working in a space that has as much use as it does. He noted that some broadcast problems are caused by the audience or others not speaking into the microphone or feed back from Blackberries into the microphone.

He also described the work going on to convert to digital and to repair the central studio equipment that transmits the live broadcasts from far flung venues, the training that is on-going to bring interns up to speed with the new digital technology, the condition of the cables that connect the far flung venues, and the hundreds of e-mails ACTV receives with appreciation and concern when something is delayed or imperfect.

Mr. Lescault mentioned a new bill on public access TV that is making its way through the legislation and offered to bring us information so that we may consider lobbying for it.

ACTV has 149 shows on its broadcast schedule.

Mr. Shaffer has had a good relationship with Mr. Lescault and ACTV and is deeply committed to making the relationship work and looks forward to working with them in the future.

Alisa Brewer, wondered how ACTV is doing for volunteers to cover this meeting and others. She offered our encouragement for people to step up.

Mr. Lescault noted that ACTV relies mostly on work study interns for covering regular meetings since they are so reliable. He mentioned the challenges the interns face getting to the studio on snowy sidewalks and on a route that lacks bus service. For other individual programs, like Town Meeting, volunteers are very helpful.

Draft of February Select Board Report, accepted without objection.

Meeting on Patriot's Day:

Discussion: Gerry Weiss noted that we will be working on Warrant articles at that time.

Mr. Shaffer said that traditionally the Select Board does not meet on holidays but that there are plenty of venues for the Select Board to meet with many members of the public. He recommends we reschedule to Wednesday 4/22 as Town Hall is closed on holidays.

Approve Minutes

Diana Stein moved to approve the minutes of the *March 4, 2009* Select Board meeting as amended. Aaron Hayden seconded and the motion carried with 3 affirmative votes. and 2 abstentions.

Committee Appointments – Select Board

Alisa Brewer moved to appoint John Townsend to the Public Art Commission for a term to expire June 30, 2012. Diana Stein seconded.

Diana Stein moved to appoint Kathleen Woods Masalski to the Kanegasaki Sister City Committee, for a term to expire June 30th 2012. Gerry Weiss seconded.

Both motions were approved simultaneously and unanimously.

Chair's Report

Petition articles

Ms. O'Keeffe will be attending the next meeting on establishing regional services for veterans.

A list of Town vehicles will be prepared for our packet next week for our review and to determine what issues we need to resolve.

Town Manager's report

Mr. Shaffer's Recent & Upcoming Activity:

Had the first **radio spot on WHAI (98.3 FM)** last Tuesday at (March 3) 7:45. The DJ wanted to talk about events at the previous SB meeting. Mr. Shaffer has received good feedback already.

Attended Saturday's (March 7) **Amherst Cinema fundraiser** that went very well.

Attended the grand opening of the **Transit Facility at UMass (March 9)**. It was an opportunity to celebrate the achievement but also Mr. Shaffer got to meet people with control over the future of transportation in the area.

Received a \$125k **911 grant** to do a feasibility study of regionalizing the dispatch for emergency services. Hadley, Belchertown and UMass are partners and Pelham has expressed interest to be part of the system. The feasibility study will include all these towns. State 911 would entertain the application for a grant to fund the construction of a regional dispatch center. The group will meet again to review the RFP and put it out to get responses. The next round of grants is available this spring but that may be too early for us to apply. Regionalization could result in faster response times as well lower costs.

Health Insurance Trust Fund update: There is a strong positive balance in this fund, the premium holiday will reduce the surplus by about \$1M but will still leave the fund strong. Also Mr. Shaffer has been working to reduce system by buying indemnification for stop loss. Currently the stop loss is \$175k in 18 months per individual. Mr. Shaffer would like to buy this down to \$100k in 12 months. Mr. Shaffer is meeting with the Insurance adviser in preparation for meeting this week with the Insurance Committee.

Outline of search for chiefs – We are actively searching for a new fire chief. Chief Hoyle will resign Sept 1st. Chief Scherpa is required to retire this fall. Mr. Shaffer is putting together a search team that is reflective of the community and the services. The Select Board might consider putting a member on each team which right now has: Larry, a fire chief from another town in Mass with a large school, a representative from Chancellor Holub's office, a community member with personnel expertise (Pat Romney) and John Musante. Mr. Shaffer would like to have 9 people on each committee and will fill the team out as we go forward. There isn't a timeline for the work yet but AFD may start interviews in June to have a hire in place in September.

Update on managing the **Human Services Funds from the Waxman Case:** Mr. Shaffer has done some research with the Town auditor to determine whether the funds (\$105,000) need to be appropriated by TM. It turns out there is no requirement for appropriation but we should open a special fund that is guided by the court order on how the money is to be used. Roy Rosenblatt is beginning to outline a policy on how the funds could be used. Mr. Shaffer will review the recommendation and bring it forward to the Community Development Committee and ultimately the Select Board for review.

Disabled access issues update: Mr. Shaffer met with Gerry Weiss as liaison to the DAAC and Nate Malloy, the DAAC Chair, to go over the issues raised in their February 24th meeting and set up a protocol for tackling them.

Budget discussion

Gerry Weiss notes that Public Safety is the largest single budget item and would like to get a lot of data to show Town Meeting that Public Safety is keeping up with the need – or not. There is a great deal of interest in Town Meeting on this, and it would be good to have the data collected and prepared for them. Data are best received in large amounts and analyzed; small bits are ready now but they are not useful by themselves. It is important to see how each component interacts with many others.

Mr. Shaffer is working his way up toward core budgets – Considers the Public Safety budget is most important, Public Works is next followed by Community Services. Community Services has seen a dramatic change in how they provide services. It is difficult to pull out one part of a larger budget, and the data are not valuable without the analysis. Need to look at the data in the context of policy and every thing else. With LSSE this extensive analysis was done.

Working through the Public Works budget is next; it may take a year to do the data collection and analysis. He will get to the Public Safety budgets after that. He thought it would be good to work through it when the new chiefs are on board.

Gerry Weiss is looking for baseline data to be developed so that changes can be tracked. He suggested that ultimately the Emergency Medical Service could support itself and the Town would continue to support the fire services.

Alisa Brewer looking for a time to consider other budget items outside the schedule – either by putting it on the agenda or simply asking. In looking at the budget and sources of funding for EMS it would be good to see past the year's receipts as part of the Financial Committee report.

Mr. Shaffer reports the data is available but that the ambulance is funded in a different manner than other services and doesn't fit in the report format easily. One method for tracking is to measure total revenue against total budget; the percentage is increasing.

Decision: Let Town Manager continue in the direction outlined. Accepted without objection.

Gerry Weiss would like to know that we will get to the budget analysis next year, it would be nice to have the data to give to the new chief if possible.

Member reports

Budget Coordinating Group: Gerry Weiss attended the BCG meeting today where they considered the “worst case scenario” that is looming out there. We don't know how it will affect Amherst specifically but it may be as much as a \$1m. There is not a lot for us to do right now, we have to wait. It would be good to put Town Meeting's consideration of the budget as far out as possible so that as much of the state budget can be known. – There isn't enough budget information to coordinate right now.

The BCG will keep the Select Board informed since their work will affect ours a great deal.

Blue Ribbon Committee update: The BRC is meeting regularly. It will make its recommendation in due course. The BCG has invited the BRC to meeting with them. The report will likely not have an effect on this year's budget.

Joint Capital Planning Committee update: Diana Stein reported it was very informative to see all buildings and the many aspects there are to dealing with Town and School buildings. Learned how things happen, how big ticket items are handled over a long period of time and that there is a grand plan.

The JCPC is looking to wrap up by end of March and is still gathering information from various departments. This week the JCPC will be dealing with Town and School IT.

Annual report status update, Alisa Brewer is meeting with Maria Friday to coordinate the effort on the remaining work to complete the Annual Report.

Report on MMA legislative breakfast: Diana Stein reported the news was gloomy, the recession is now the “Great Recession” and there is a possibility that there will be more cuts in this year’s budget. Mike Reardon commented that being able to design our own health care program with the same flexibility allowed the State could save Amherst a \$1m or more.

The flexibility for State and local health care plans differs – the State has exempted themselves from having to negotiate about the plans. There is a movement to allow Towns to do the same. For example, the State can raise co-pays; Amherst co-pays are reported to be \$5. The Health Care Reform bill will allow the same exemption to towns.

On other revenue sources: it seems the 19-cent gas tax won’t happen (and with a smaller tax it seems unlikely that any money will make it out to the Western part of the State).

Gerry Weiss discussed whether single payer health care had any traction on the state level since it might save a considerable amount of money.

Diana Stein noted the Representative Kulik is part of a mindset that single payer can’t work (despite evidence to the contrary).

The MMA is pushing for local option taxes and to fix charter school reimbursement so that it would be fairer to cities and towns.

Liaison & Representative Reports

The Planning Board’s Zoning Sub-committee has changed the date of the public hearing on the Municipal Parking District to 3/18.

The Agriculture Committee has a meeting tomorrow to discuss how to sell more local produce locally.

The Chair of the Shade Tree Committee asked for a volunteer to organize the tree “wardens” to take care of newly planted trees.

There is a Committee Charge in place for the Historical District Study Committee. The committee is forming now and might benefit from an increased number if it is not too hard to change. Maybe they will have enough people to fill the current committee next week.

Gerry Weiss met the manager of the new Papa Gino’s who worried about getting parking permits for employees. It was taken care of directly. We don’t want them to be parking on the street and there will be a larger number of employees for a while as training for the restaurant starts up.

Aaron Hayden reported on the TMCC’s recent efforts to streamline Town Meeting and some concerns they have on the fairness in the order of the presentation of the budget. The TMCC is feeling some time pressure to get everything ready in time for Spring Town Meeting. Mr. Hayden will attend the TMCC’s next meeting on Friday and should be able to get some clarity on the specific concerns and proposed remedies.

Alisa Brewer reported on the work of the K-6 Regionalization Committee. They explored the diverse history of school organization and issues that have to be resolved for regionalization.

Enrollment in Amherst is not growing. In some districts, the school population has shrunk. Pelham has only 80 kids in K-6. Shaftsbury's last plan for the renovating their school expected 229 students by now; today they have 160.

TM warrant question: Alisa Brewer notes that Hadley's Town Meeting warrant was published today in the paper. When will the details of our warrant be ready?

Mr. Shaffer noted that the Warrant Review is March 27th and everything will be ready before then. The articles submitted are being compiled right now. The citizen petition articles are in and include: voting rights for non-citizen, restoring taxation support for Human Services, acquiring 79 So Pleasant St, and support for the gas tax increase.

Liaison Policy Revisions to the policy as distributed need to get to Kate by late Thursday to be included in next week's packet.

Diana Stein was invited, as a local citizen involved in health care, to work with a group of Russians from Pskov visiting Amherst through a program begun by Stan Rosenberg. The group includes six politicians such as city councilors and six in medical professions. Ms. Stein will carry a welcome from the Select Board to their meeting April 27th as agreed to by the board.

Gerry Weiss noted that a group from Pskov also visited last year.

ADJOURNMENT

VOTED unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

Next meetings

3/16 Regular meeting; by-law enforcement of rental properties, executive session on update of negotiations with bargaining units

3/23 Regular meeting; DPW issues; traffic calming plan, plan, Lincoln Ave proposal, Cottage Street parking changes, approve section of Downtown Sidewalk work.

3/30 no meeting

3/31 Annual Town election

April meetings will be mostly on Warrant Articles. Agenda items need to be brought in as early as possible.

Comment and correction encouraged

Respectfully submitted;

Aaron Hayden