

Hampden Advisory Board
625 Main Street, Hampden, MA 01036

MEETING MINUTES
January 27, 2005, 6:30 p.m.

Present: Beth de Sousa, Peter Nossal, Doug Boyd, Tim Marini

Minutes for the meetings of December 13 and January 10 were approved.

Each board member was given his/her mail and a copy of the Finance Committee Handbook (in CD format).

In going over the budget packet they received, Advisory observed that some departments put only contractual increases, some put in 2.5% increases, yet some others didn't put any increases in. Only the Library and Council on Aging submitted 2 budgets as requested by the Advisory Board, one level funded budget and one wish list. Parks and Rec submitted a request for \$10K for the Memorial Park pool.

Plans for the improvement of the Memorial Park were discussed. From meetings around town, it was learned that Sue Raucher wants to raise money and ask Community Preservation Committee for some of it to improve the Memorial park. Her plans are different from those of the Parks and Rec department. She wants to make the pool into a wading pool with a fountain, which can become a skating rink during the winter. She also wants to do other things to the park to make it nicer. The Devon Raucher memorial fund currently has \$10K and Sue has plans of raising more funds.

6:45 P.M.: Meeting with Assessors:

Representing the Board of Assessors were Diane Hildreth and Stanley Witkop.

- **The Assessors submitted their budget request** in 3 formats; 1 level-funded, 1 with restored clerical hours (26 hours), 1 with clerical step increase. Currently, the Assessors' office is authorized for 20 a week. The state is requiring more and more paperwork that it is difficult to keep up. They are finding that they are running more and more behind. They are open to the public only 7 hours a week. They've had a few complaints and the public wants them to be open more.
 - Diane pointed out the budget item for revaluation update. This is for software support fees for the assessing software. The figure should be \$5K. Advisory corrected the figure on their copies.
- **Not in the budget but important to know now.** One item that is not in the budget that needs the Assessors wished to bring up is the state-mandated full list and measure that they are required to do on FY09. This is done every 9 years. Including the revaluation,

this could cost as much as \$87K. The money should be ready by FY08. In the past, we did this over a 4 year period. How should we fund for this? Should we do this as a cyclical process, take a portion of the total no. of homes per year and make it an ongoing process? This would be easier on the budget. If we set aside \$ starting this year and do the same thing for the following years, we should be set for FY09. This year we will need 23K for the revaluation (requested for as a warrant article) and 10K for list and measures and the same thing for the following years if we are going to fund it annually. List and measures can be submitted as a warrant item this year and can be incorporated in the budget starting next year.

- Diane explained what the full list and measure entails and the procedure involved in conducting one for the Town. Cost not including revaluation is \$45K, \$25 per household. Diane will submit a schedule to the Advisory board showing the number of households x \$25/household divided by 9 years to show yearly cost. The revaluation will run about 23K for the software conversion.
- Also, assessors are looking for other vendors list and measures for a better price. Aside from the current vendor's high fees, the assessors are having several issues with them. If we do not end up using the same vendor, we could be looking at a lower cost.

7:15 PM: Board of Selectmen

Selectmen Duane Mosier and James (Jim) Smith with Bill Gouzounis of the Personnel Review Committee came to speak with the Advisory Board.

Jim Smith introduced Bill Gouzounis from the Personnel Review Committee.

- **BOS submitted the warrant articles for Advisory information only** and not to be discussed at this meeting. This is merely a compilation of what people have brought forth to the selectmen. The BOS have not yet deliberated on any of these articles.
- **The ever-present revolving funds.** How can we do away with warrant articles asking to establish numerous revolving funds every year? Jim is talking with Town Counsel to see if we may be able to make a motion to describe what's happening wordwise and have a table that says "as applied to this table". The table will say "so much for this account", "so much for that". The motion will say "money to be raised according to table and spent according to table". This should make it less cumbersome.
- **Town meeting change:** Beth explained the rationale behind this request of bringing it out further: firmer figures, avoid telling the town people one thing at first and then another later on. Have the town meeting on last Monday of April but just have the warrant articles, without any numbers (money matters) and then adjourn and continue into May, maybe on the last Monday of May. We may need to talk to Dick Patullo about

this too. Maybe we should have this discussion during the Town meeting as a warrant article, to change the date. Ask the townspeople what they think about it. Say our intention is to have the town meeting and conduct business at that point in time but it may be necessary to have a special town meeting. We're only talking about moving it to 2 or 3 weeks.

- ❖ Remember another deadline: June 30, town must have an approved budget. We need 35 days to vote on the budget. Set Town meeting on a Monday and have the override election the following day.
- ❖ We will still hold the Special Town meeting in March or April, to re-appropriate \$ between accounts for current fiscal year. Currently, there is a special legislation that allows us to transfer funds between accounts with the concurrence of the Board of Selectmen but this is only good for two years, and we're in the last year.

- **BUDGET:**

- ❖ Police contract is in default extension of a previous contract. There will be no increases for this fiscal year. Any negotiations for increases will be for FY06 or later. This includes the chief - his contract opens in December of 2005. The Police Dept. is asking for 2 cruisers.
 - ❖ Veterans Benefits operation went up 50%. The Selectmen will find out what the increase is for.
 - ❖ Town House Maintenance increase is due mainly to fuel costs...gas increase (utilities).
 - ❖ Gasoline services. For the same volume of gas, there is a 40% increase in price.
 - ❖ Streetlighting and Academy Hall should also show increases due to rise in fuel costs.
- Peter Nossal expressed his feelings, which Beth echoed, about pay increases given to bargaining employees. He said that if we can give the bargaining units any increase, we should give the same rate increase to all the town employees. He said that the town employees have suffered the biggest hit in the budget cuts. He said that instead of hurting the town employees, we should go with measures that will hurt the town people instead, i.e. take away the park and rec, library, etc. We should also probably look at the old method of targeted overrides.
 - Jim agreed with Peter and added that what's good for the district should be good for the town. The district employees get step increases and cost of living adjustments while the town employees do not. Salary increases for the district employees are at least 5% per year.

- The group discussed debt load planning, any overlaps, use of bans (bond anticipation notes) to take advantage of lower interest rates, etc.
- **Fair pay rates.** Jim reintroduced Bill of the Personnel Committee. He said that several years ago, the Board of Selectmen worked with Tabor Associates for job evaluations and job classifications. Tabor Associates gave us rates based on Western Massachusetts Employee Rates for Non-Bargaining Employees. The goal then was to get our employees up to 95% of those rates. For a while, it seemed that everyone's job classifications and pay rates were properly adjusted. Then, the budget hit the fan. Employees got no increases, and mere 2 ½ % increases for a couple of years. This year, Tabor gave us the current numbers and looking at these values, the numbers have drifted significantly from what we're paying. Goal is to get back on track.
 - ❖ Bill Gouzounis from the Personnel Review committee recommended that we review the pay comparability level from Tabor, make sure they are acceptable to the personnel committee with recommendations back to the selectmen and then work with Advisory Committee on adjusting the % based on the budget. The good thing about this is that it's a lot more palatable to the employees. We can explain to them that we are paying them comparable to the private sector but at a reduced rate, not because we don't know what private sector is paying but because of budget considerations. It's a little more understandable.
 - ❖ The Selectmen will come back to the Advisory Committee with a recommendation that works toward getting the pay rates back to what they should be based on Tabor. Advisory is looking forward to seeing this and will try to get there if we have the money.
- **Septic loan.** Was it a grant or a loan program? Should the \$ be spent or put in the stabilization fund? Cliff doesn't want to do anything with it until he gets something from the state and the auditor. We don't want to have to be in a position where we are asked to pay back the money after spending it.

Meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Next meeting: February 14, 2005 at 6:30 pm, in the Melville Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth M. Perkins

