

MEETING

ADVISORY BOARD

MARCH 20, 2006

Approved May 22, 2006

Attending: Doug Boyd, Carol Fitzgerald, Timm Marini, Kathy Pessolano

Absent: Michael Crowley

Also Attending: Cliff Bombard, Donald Collins

Kathy addressed the board in regards to the public hearing being held tonight. The objective of tonight's meeting is to give an overview to the town's residents on the two schools of thought that the advisory board is going to be discussing over the next few weeks. One is one that was brought forward by a member of the board of selectmen in that the opening of the library and the senior center be contingent on a successful proposition 2 ½ override. The plan would restore those services to the pre-override levels. If the override fails hopefully the community would still have the opportunity to start planning for the future. We need to have cash available to start to rebuild stabilization. The school district for next year is going to be a big unknown, because they came in with such a low assessment from last year. There are some compelling arguments on that side to go forward with an override. The other school of thought is to work with the money we know we have, the 2 ½ plus new growth which is approximately \$300,000. We would try to open those services on a limited basis, not full restoration, and knowing that next year or the year after there are no guarantees that we won't be right back to having to ask for an override. The other philosophy is that the highway overrides debt exclusion is something that is very important, assuming that we all agree that that's an important thing that needs to be brought before the voters for \$3,000,000. Due to the overrides failing for the past 3 years, we feel that people are trying to tell town officials that as far as the operating budget goes we need to live within that 2 ½ level. After this we will start to read the warrant articles and give people things to talk about. Is this a relatively objective, fairly presented picture of what we are going to be faced with over the course of the next couple of weeks as we start our deliberations in regards to what we are going to recommend? All agreed.

Kathy also addressed the board regarding a phone call she received from Dick Jones which in turn prompted her to call Dick Patullo for some clarification. If the board of selectmen agree to go forward with an override it was their position (and Kathy said she didn't know if this was Jim's position, she was getting this second hand) that the board of selectmen do not have to agree with the advisory board's recommended budget, and could offer their own budget in lieu of advisory's. Do they have the right to include something in our supplement? Do they send out a separate publication? Do they want to include yet

another column in the green sheets, maybe under column heading of selectmens budget? It would certainly elicit some very healthy debate on the floor of town meeting if we included it and maybe we could get an even better sense as to how the voters want us to proceed, although they are probably not going to be in favor of an override. Kathy said she looked at the town by laws over the weekend on line. The advisory committee is charged with the responsibility of presenting a recommendation to town meeting, not to the board of selectmen. It is very explicit in the language that it uses. Having said this, what we need to keep in the back of our minds is that we may have this looming on the horizon that the selectmen may just disregard our budget and go full force with what they feel is the correct posture for the community to take over the course of the next couple of years. Kathy said her position at this point and time is that that is fine, if they want to introduce a different budget on the floor of town meeting. Kathy feels that the residents may want to hear both sides and she doesn't have a problem with that, but she doesn't want it to become a dogfight, but she also doesn't want to acquiesce for the appearance of unity with the selectmen in the event, over the course of the next couple of weeks, we as a board feel that an override is not the prudent way to go. Kathy said she feels that, as we go through our deliberations as a board, if we come to the conclusion that we want to do things within the 2 ½ and new growth that we are united on that as a board and not putting on a front as being united with the selectmen (if they are asking for an override) at town meeting because that would be doing a disservice to the people.

Doug said as he sees things, we have 3 options. Option A – we maintain the existing level of services, Option B – we have a bare bones restoration, and Option C – we do a full restoration. Where you fall on the override question depends on what option you want to support.

Kathy said that she would also like the residents to know that we are trying to be conservative in our projections, but that there is the possibility that there could be some additional monies coming towards us at the end of the summer once the budget is passed. Kathy said that she thinks there is an underlying fear on the part of the selectmen, that if we don't vote the budget in April, the school district is going to come back and ask for more money if the Governors budget figures go down. They want to close to vote the budget in April. She initially had felt that the more prudent thing to do was to wait and vote the budget in June when we had more information. She is not sure who controls that, is it just voted on a motion that is made on the floor of town meeting and then someone seconds it and we adjourn it to another time, or if the selectmen have to agree to that. At this point and time Kathy said she is not opposed to voting the budget in April, voting a conservative budget and if we get more money in then we can appropriate it at fall town meeting towards savings or other things. If the override passes and the residents go with the selectmens budget that fine too, either way we will be sitting pretty good. If the override passes that would be great for the town but if it doesn't at least we have a budget that we can work with. There are many different schools of thought that we need to be looking at over the course of the next few weeks.

Doug said he was originally in favor of adjourning town meeting until sometime in June, but the more time he spent with it and thought about it, the less he is in favor of it. Doug

said he is more inclined to go with a conservative revenue projection and live with it, because every year it is uncertain.

Carol said she would have to think about it a little bit because she had it in her mind that she was still hopeful that we could operate with real numbers and that would mean waiting until June. Carol said if we are conservative, if we do things on a limited basis, that would be fine and then if we get more money in we can build ourselves a cushion.

Timm said he was comfortable with the numbers because Cliff had clarified at the last meeting that this was a predictable number that we can manage things by. Timm said he is comfortable with closing the meeting in April and if more money comes in that would be great.

Doug said he felt that the message should be delivered that we are budgeting very closely. Doug also felt that Jim Smiths' prediction has some merit to it. Kathy said she agreed but, she thinks that the numbers used to fill that prediction are skewed, and that's the problem that she has with it. Doug said that the numbers are all assumptions, but what will happen is, if we restore positions and bring back the salaries and the benefits that go with it, and if the school district goes back to historical revenues, which we have to assume it will, we are going to be over extended on our budget next year.

Timm said that we weren't recommending full restoration of services, which was just one of the options; there is also an option to restore the services to some level to the services that were bled last year and also to put some money in the stabilization fund.

The board asked Cliff what the current dollar amount is in the stabilization fund. Cliff said he thought there was about \$370.

Kathy said the budget that she initially gave to the other members, the advisory's' draft budget, certainly has room to make adjustments. There is \$10,000 we can take from library; there is money we can take from the senior center, park & rec. The cruiser issue, if we are able to buy the cruiser at either the special town meeting within the annual town meeting because of the transfers that we are going to be able to do, or with the overlay money that the assessors have released, although Kathy said she would like to earmark that money for the highway truck.

Cliff said that the overlay money is not really available because he feels the assessors did not back out the uncollected taxes against those levies, maybe the assessors felt that that step wasn't their responsibilities, but in any event the money that they released cannot be spent until it is collected. Cliff said that right now he only has numbers thru January 31, 2006, and we still have 3 months collections and of reporting to get before the town meeting and he gets a monthly report from the Treasurer, who in turn gets a monthly report from the Collector, whose reports are always a month behind, that why things are so slow. Timm asked if it was fair to assume that some majority of that overlay money could be collected by June. Cliff felt we could only use what is collected by town meeting so that is going to require some homework. He will have to do it manually so that we have the most up to date figure for town meeting.

Kathy said she would like all the advisory members to do between now and the next meeting, is to go through the draft recommendations column and figure out what we can reduce even further and then we can see about putting money right away into stabilization fund at the town meeting. Another thing is that the selectmen are looking to buy a new cruiser with some of the money that should be available at the special town meeting. If that is the case, then we could back out the whole \$45,000 that was put in the police budget, and maybe at the special town meeting in the fall when we have better numbers, we could vote to purchase another cruiser or lease one. Kathy noted that there is flexibility in the budget regarding library, senior center, park& rec, COA, the police cruiser, and the street lights.

Doug said he would like to take a look at the street lights. He is not sure if it makes sense to restore all of them. Kathy said if we do decide to turn on the street lights, that we should wait until august so that we do not have to pay the \$3,000 turn on fee. Everyone agreed with that. Doug felt that we shouldn't turn all of them back on, there is 160 lights, do we really need that many?

Kathy said that after the public hearing tonight that she would like the board to leave. She feels it is going to be a long meeting and it is the public chance to give us an idea of what they want and how they feel. Then we will meet again on Saturday March 25, 2006 at 7:30am. All agreed.

Doug motioned to end and Carol seconded. All agreed.

Meeting ended at 7:00pm

Respectfully submitted,
Ann Murphy