

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
Minutes of 02/23/09
5:30 p.m.

Selectmen:

Peter F. Brothers, Chairman
Miller C. Lovett, Vice Chairman
Robert C. Flanders
Charles G. Palm
Colette Worsman

Co-Interim Town Managers:

John C. Edgar
Brenda L. Vittner

Recording Clerk:

Karin Landry

Call to Order: Chairman Peter Brothers called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. He introduced the Board, Co-Interim Town Managers, and the Recording Clerk, and made announcements pertaining to fire exits, listening assisted devices, the use of microphones, and cell phones.

ACCEPTANCE AND/OR CORRECTION OF MINUTES:

09-11 Minutes of the February 9, 2009 Workshop, and the February 2 and February 9, 2009 Regular Meetings.

Selectman Palm motioned to accept the minutes of the February 9, 2009 Workshop, and the February 2 and February 9, 2009 Regular Meetings. Seconded by Selectman Worsman. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

INTERIM TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT:

Nothing to report.

VISITOR'S AND RESIDENT'S COMMENTS:

Resident Lou Kahn expressed his gratitude to the Public Works and Police Department for their prompt assistance in clearing his road during a recent snowstorm, enabling him to transport a family member for a medical emergency.

NEW BUSINESS:

09-12 Public Hearing – SB2 Petitioned Warrant Article Per RSA 40:14 IV

Selectman Palm motioned to open the public hearing at 5:45 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Worsman. 5-0. All in favor. Motioned passed unanimously

A petitioned Warrant Article regarding SB2 was received at the 2008 Town Meeting. It was not affirmatively passed at the meeting. Seven days subsequent to the meeting, another petitioned Warrant Article came forward for the 2009 Town Meeting. The Article will be included on the March 5 ballot. It requires a 3/5 majority vote.

Resident Steve Nadeau acted as Moderator for the public hearing. He opened by reading Article 3: *Shall we adopt the provisions of RSA 40:13 (known as SB2) to allow official ballot voting on all issues before the Town of Meredith on the second Tuesday of March?*

No petitioners stepped forward to speak on SB2.

No one from the general public stepped forward to speak in favor of SB2.

No one from the general public stepped forward to speak against SB2.

Resident Lou Kahn contrasted the conventional Town Meeting with the SB2 process. He provided a detailed discussion in writing. In the conventional Town Meeting held the second week of March, votes are taken on Zoning Articles, Town officers, and certain other Articles required by law to be on the official ballot. All other Warrant Articles can be debated, modified, passed, or voted down at the Town Meeting. Any five residents can request a secret ballot on any Article. In the SB2 process, a deliberative session is held in the first week of February. Any Warrant Article can be amended at the deliberative session. Nothing is adopted until it goes to official ballot.

In the conventional Town Meeting, bond issues can be adopted by 2/3 of the people present and voting at the meeting. In SB2, a bond issue must be authorized by a vote of 60% on an official ballot. Historically, more registered voters cast an official ballot than attend Town meeting; however, requiring an official ballot vote on all Warrant Articles results in cluttered, cumbersome, multi-paged ballots that slow down the voting process.

Resident Don Ewing asked if it is mandated that the deliberative session be held the first week of February. Mr. Kahn explained that the petitioned Article sets forth that the official ballot vote shall be in the second week of March. If the Article is adopted, it is mandated that a deliberative session must be held the first week of February. In subsequent years, an Article may be brought forward by the Board of Selectmen or by petition to change the official ballot vote to April or May.

Mr. Ewing asked if SB2 allows for motions to reconsider. Mr. Kahn explained that in the SB2 process, there is an option for a motion to block reconsideration that cannot be overruled. Once the deliberative session is over, an Article cannot be reconsidered. In the conventional Town Meeting, a motion to block reconsideration of an Article can be overruled, and a subsequent meeting can be scheduled to address the matter.

Mr. Ewing expressed concerns with the Town Budget (Article 21) being the last Warrant Articles. It is discussed at Town Meeting after most people have gone home, and many of those remaining have vested interests. Mr. Kahn explained that the previous Articles bear on the total

budget, and must be addressed in order to know the total Town budget. He agrees that it can be a frustrating experience. There is a provision for Town Meeting being continued to a subsequent day and time if it is running inordinately late. Town Meeting typically ends by 11 or 11:30.

Ms. Vittner explained how the Town Warrant is constructed.

Resident Rod Smith asked if the meetings can be scheduled earlier in the afternoon. The voters were not in favor of a change in the day or time of Town Meeting when it was proposed a few years ago. The Chair spoke in favor of bringing the option up periodically, in order to attract as many voters as possible to the Meeting. He asked Town Meeting Moderator Steve Nadeau to propose a couple of options at this year's Meeting.

Resident Keith True pointed out that the SB2 process will not provide for shorter meetings.

Selectman Flanders explained that in order to avoid confusion, the terminology "deliberative session" should only be used in conjunction with the SB2 process. Town Meeting does not include a deliberative session. He is not in favor of SB2. If a proposed budget is voted down in SB2, there is the possibility that a higher default budget will go into effect (the same budget as the previous year plus any contractual obligations). If a deliberative session is poorly attended, a small number of voters can amend a Warrant Article. The Town Meeting process allows voters to become informed on the issues and make intelligent votes. The SB2 process allows a smaller group of people to make substantive decisions, and can result in the delay of projects that ultimately cost the Town additional money.

Selectman Worsman motioned to close the public portion of the hearing at 6:20 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Flanders. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

09-13 Public Hearing – Increase of Solid Waste Sticker Fees and Boat Launch Fees per RSA 41:9

The Board held a workshop several weeks ago regarding an increase in Solid Waste sticker fees and boat launch fees. It is proposed that the Solid Waste sticker fee that has been in place for a number of years be raised from \$10 for a two-year period to \$20 for a two-year period. It is proposed that the boat launch fee that has been in place for 20 years be raised from \$10 to \$20 per launch. The proposed fee increases require a public hearing.

Selectman Flanders motioned to open the public hearing for boat launch and Solid Waste sticker increases at 6:24 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Lovett. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Resident Richard Green inquired about the financial impact of the increased fees. The increase in Solid Waste fees will result in \$30,000 in additional revenue. The increased boat launch fee will result in \$3,000 - \$4,000 in additional revenues. Mr. Green suggested that it is hard to justify the time and effort for collecting the additional boat launch fees, and that increased fees may deter boaters from using the launches. Selectman Worsman explained that the Board had to consider various ways to address the \$381,000 revenue shortfall in 2008. The increase in boat launch fees will not affect Meredith residents. Cadets currently collect boat launch fees, so

additional manpower will not be required. The Board supports having a presence at the boat launches in order to educate boaters on the spread of milfoil. There is no fee to launch boats in Lake Waukegan.

Resident Keith True is in favor of the increased boat launch fees. He pointed out that the boat launch attendants also enforce the 3-hour docking at the Town Docks.

Selectman Flanders pointed out that the Board has been moving towards a user-based philosophy over the past few years, eliminating a hardship on those who can least afford it.

The Chair summarized by saying that because of the current economic condition, the Board worked to find ways to raise revenues in addition to controlling expenses. The Board has been looking at the possibility of fee increases for some time, and putting them in place will help offset declines in other sources of revenue.

Selectman Lovett moved to close the public hearing at 6:32 p.m. Seconded by Selectman Flanders. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Selectman Worsman moved to adopt the increase in the fees for the boat launch as proposed and the Solid Waste sticker as proposed. Seconded by Selectman Lovett. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

09-14 Approval of Abatements

Four abatements came before the Board for approval. They are broken down into two separate warrants. The first includes three abatements in the aggregate amount of \$1,076.09. The second is for one abatement in the amount of \$598.21. Assessor Commerford provided the Board with detailed backup information for the abatements. If approved, the abatements bring the 2008 total to six abatements, in the aggregate amount of \$1,911.52.

Selectman Palm moved to approve abatements aggregating \$1,076.09 applying to three individual pieces of properties. Seconded by Selectman Lovett.

Selectman Worsman abstained from the vote because she lives on one of the roads.

4-0-0. Motion passed.

Selectman Palm moved to accept the abatement in the amount of \$598.21 for one piece of property. Seconded by Selectman Lovett.

Selectman Worsman abstained from the vote because she lives on the road.

4-0-0. Motion passed.

SELECTMAN COMMENTS:

Dialogue ensued regarding the proposed state budget and how it negates the work the Board has done to overcome projected revenue shortfalls. As a result of the Governor's budget, which will pass in late June, there is no doubt that the Board will have to look at additional cuts to the budget. The possible effects of the stimulus bill are unclear at this time.

Selectman Worsman suggested that the Board send a letter to the state asking them to fully fund the retirement system, as originally proposed, and cut spending at the state level as opposed to passing lack of revenue on to municipalities. Selectman Lovett suggested sending the letter to state representatives, senators, and the Governor's Council as well. There was a consensus among the Board to send the letter. The Town Managers will draft a letter for the Board's review.

Steve Nadeau spoke in his capacity as State Representative. He is closely monitoring the state budget and is doing everything he can to look out for the interests of the Town of Meredith.

The Chair cautioned that no definitive decisions have been made at this time, and that it would be unwise to prematurely make further cuts to the budget. Selectman Flanders is not in favor of waiting until June or July to make changes. The Board will continue to monitor the state budget and the stimulus bill. It will use avenues including networking, organizations, and acquaintances to influence decisions that will be made at the state level. The Co-Interim Town Managers will make suggestions and recommendations in terms of what the Town should do immediately upon the budget being appropriated and will take a cautious and conservative view following Town Meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

None

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:

New Hampshire Municipal Association

The Association will hold a meeting on Monday, March 2, 2009 at 9 a.m. at the Local Government Center offices. The purpose of the meeting is for the membership to vote on potential new or expanded state revenue sources that will avoid cuts to local aid programs. The positions taken by the members will give direction to the Association's lobbyists relative to the budget process. Chair Brothers plans on attending the meeting.

Gambling Legislation

The Town of Belmont has asked surrounding communities to consider writing a letter of support for gaming proposals that will generate additional revenue. The Chair would like to concentrate on other ways of generating additional revenue. Selectman Worsman strongly opposes gambling and slot machines. The potential revenue must be weighed against increased costs for services. She does not think that gambling fits in with the values and morals of the State of New Hampshire. She also opposes the increase in gas tax because it will put additional hardships on

families and small businesses. Selectman Flanders is unequivocally opposed to gambling. The increased revenues would be far outweighed by increased costs for police, fire, and general assistance. He also opposes the gas tax. Selectman Palm agrees with their comments. Selectman Lovett does not support the gaming proposals. Although the proposals will lead to more money for the state, the costs associated with gambling must be considered. He believes that the gas tax is fair because it is proportional to the wealth of a family, but has serious concerns with how the money is spent.

ADJOURNMENT:

Selectman Palm motioned to adjourn the Board meeting at 7:05 p.m. and continue in the Workshop mode after a short break. Seconded by Selectman Worsman. 5-0. All in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

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Respectfully submitted,

John C. Edgar, Co-Interim Town Mgr.

Peter F. Brothers, Chairman

Brenda L. Vittner, Co-Interim Town Mgr.

Miller C. Lovett, Vice Chairman

Karin Landry, Recording Clerk

Robert C. Flanders

Charles G. Palm

Colette Worsman

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