

**Board of Finance
Regular Meeting – April 21, 2009
MINUTES**

Attending:

Board of Finance Members: Robert Kelso, Jim Meinhold, Andy Pforzheimer (7:35 p.m.), Warren Serenbetz, Lynne Vanderslice (Absent: Al Alper)

Others: Joseph Dolan, Philip Damato, Brian Shea (Bulletin)

Call to Order:

Warren Serenbetz called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m.

Approval of Minutes:

- Regular Meeting of March 17, 2009

Mr. Serenbetz suggested the following correction:

Page 4, Council on Ethics Decision - Amend end of last sentence in paragraph to read: "...recuse himself from all future discussion on all capital projects that come up at the same time as Ambler Farm."

Bob Kelso motioned that the Minutes be approved as amended; Jim Meinhold seconded, and the motion passed 4-0. (Pforzheimer not present for voting)

- Special Meeting of April 9, 2009

Mr. Kelso motioned that the Minutes be approved as written; Mr. Serenbetz seconded, and the motion passed 2-0, Meinhold and Vanderslice abstaining. (Pforzheimer not present for voting)

Tax Collector's Suspense List:

Phil Damato, Tax Collector, distributed materials and reviewed the proposed FY 2009 suspense tax transfer, which totals \$48,230, compared to \$69,820 for FY '08. He reminded the Board that his office and the collection agency will continue to actively pursue collection of those delinquent accounts on the suspense list, and he noted that since July, 2005, \$325,000 had been collected by the collection agency at no cost to the Town.

Mr. Kelso motioned to approve the suspense tax transfer as recommended by the Tax Collector. Mr. Meinhold seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

Budget Process Review:

Mr. Serenbetz opened the floor to comment on this year's budget process, e.g. what should be done the same or differently next year and suggestions for improvements. Extensive discussion ensued.

Mr. Kelso stated that he thought "raising the alert" early on so that the respective boards could work cooperatively towards a common concern was the single best thing the BOF did during this budget cycle.

Andy Pforzheimer stated that next year the BOF should ascertain whether or not the departments are willing to actively engage in discussions of keeping budgets at guidelines, and if so it would be helpful to schedule more work sessions at an earlier stage; otherwise, the BOF should give a hard target number, even if it will change. Mr. Serenbetz noted that had the Board given a specific target very early on, based on information at that time, the final number would have been a very different number. Mr. Meinhold stated he thought giving a mill rate target early on would have more of an impact on how the respective boards may think next year.

Mr. Kelso asked Joe Dolan to explain what happens if the budget is voted down at the Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Dolan reviewed the process should the budget be defeated. He explained that the BOF would need to submit a reconsidered budget, but he noted that under the Charter, the resubmitted budget could not be voted down. Discussion and Q&A on the subject followed.

Mr. Pforzheimer further stated that in addition to encouraging the BOF to make an effort to better educate the public at an early stage about the budgets next year, he would prefer not to reference specific items as possible areas to cut but would instead recommend giving the BOS and BOE a hard number with respect to the magnitude of reductions the Board may be seeking.

Lynne Vanderslice stated what was most striking to her was that there were fewer people at the public meetings than she expected, despite the level of cuts this year, which she believed "spoke volumes." She also said that engaging and communicating with the respective boards very early on in the process was a very good thing.

Mr. Pforzheimer asked whether it was the BOF's responsibility to have the BOS and BOE take "really hard looks at the way they did business" as opposed to hitting a target for a single year. Mr. Serenbetz said he thought the BOF's responsibility is to be fiscally responsible for the Town of Wilton and that its role is to suggest at the early outset which end of the spectrum the boards need to be, which he believed the BOF did this year and needed to do again next year. Mr. Kelso said that the BOF is the one single entity in the town that has overview of the Town's entire financial picture, and its role is to ensure it knows what's going on and to do whatever it takes to get to what it thinks is a proper financial management of the Town accomplished.

Mr. Meinhold stated he believed that meant taking a holistic process approach and that the BOF should be looking at budgets from bottom up, as well as top down. He also said that he would still be in favor of having an educational session or workshop to get the public more engaged and educated as to what role the BOF plays and how the whole process works. He further stated that he felt the process overall went very well this year in terms of the final outcome.

Mr. Pforzheimer asked Mr. Dolan if there was any sense of the BOS's reaction to the budget process this year. Mr. Dolan stated he felt the BOF was undervaluing the impact of its early warning and that he was very surprised at how much departments cut back on expenditures when the requests were received in December. He cautioned, however, that except for Charter Authority, it's very unlikely that much will be returned to the fund balance at the end of 2010, and that some capital items, especially in Information Systems, would re-emerge in the future.

Mr. Serenbetz concluded by summarizing the issues and suggestions discussed, and he stated that there appeared to be consensus on the need to start early next year by convening a tri-board meeting again when the budget cycle starts in September.

Other Business:

Inter-Town Shared Resources:

Mr. Meinhold noted that he was very pleased to read in the newspaper recently that the Police Department was working with neighboring towns to work more effectively on traffic and speed control. He said he would like to see the Town expand that to find other opportunities for sharing resources. Mr. Dolan explained that when opportunities are identified, the Town does work cooperatively with other towns, such as when purchasing electricity and fuel for example, but he noted there is definitely an impact on service when you start sharing staffing resources. He reported that the Town is currently in the process of looking into the possibility of joining a regional health district with Westport and Weston.

Public Letters:

Mr. Meinhold advised that he was formally submitting a letter received on April 20 from Sloane Levy, on behalf of a group of parents, to the Board of Finance and Board of Education regarding the budget, for inclusion into the public record (copy appended hereto.)

Annual Town Meeting:

Mr. Dolan advised that the Legal Notice for the May 5, 2009 Annual Town Meeting would appear in the newspaper this week as mandated by the Charter.

Public Comment:

No public comment.

Adjournment:

Mr. Serenbetz asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Kelso so motioned; Mr. Meinhold seconded, and the motion passed unanimously at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anna Corra
Recording Secretary