

**MINUTES OF THE
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
February 23, 2010**

Present: First Selectman Tom Frenaye, Timothy Reynolds, Eileen Moncrief, Brian Fitzgerald, and Joanne Sullivan. Mr. Frenaye called the special meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. on February 23, 2010 in the lower level conference room.

Public Comment: None.

Discussion & Decision on Cell Tower Lease. This Cell Tower Lease has been pulled from the Town Meeting scheduled for March 2nd. A restriction on the use of Bruce Park was discovered yesterday during a title search. Several years ago, the Town took money from the State and Federal government that went into building Bruce Park, and when doing so, an Agreement was made that states Bruce Park would be used for recreation and conservation uses only. In speaking with the DEP regarding this restriction, it was determined that there are ways to eliminate it but would be difficult and time consuming to do and unless the Selectmen direct Mr. Frenaye to proceed with this, he felt it best to drop the issue and let Verizon find another location for the Cell Tower. The Selectmen agreed not to pursue this.

Selectman Fitzgerald made a motion to approve the action of the First Selectman to withdraw the proposed Bruce Park Cell Phone Tower Lease from the Town Meeting on March 2, 2010, because of a Restriction recorded on the Suffield Land Records. The motion was approved by unanimous vote.

2010-2011 Budget Discussion & Review:

(Finance Director Deborah Cerrato was present).

Mr. Frenaye recently met with department managers regarding their submitted budgets. For the last several days, Mr. Frenaye was looking at these budgets in detail. He is still looking at Insurance costs and may be a few more weeks before we have firm numbers on Health Insurance. Insurance benefits are about a tenth of the budget which is a major portion. Mr. Frenaye distributed a summary by department of budgets. Instructions given to the departments were not to ask for more staffing, although several departments did request more resources. Mr. Frenaye took out quite a few dollars from departments that wanted more. That included Parks & Recreation, Senior Center, Tax Collector, Emergency Management, Conservation, Public Works, Elections and the Fire Department who didn't actually ask for more staff, but the Town did apply for a Grant to add a firefighter. Also the departments didn't actually ask for additional staff members, almost all asked for additional hours for existing staff members.

The Selectmen discussed the benefits line item. There are three pieces to this, workman's comp insurance costs are up, medical insurance is up about 18%, but we should know more in a few weeks as to the actual increase. An estimate for Pension costs is showing a 5.5%-6% estimated increase, however this number will not be available until the end of March. Based on reductions made so far, there will be a 2.7% overall increase in the Selectman's Budget which does not include salary increases, but that does include the 53rd pay week. The non-salary budget is up less than a percent, but in order to go to the Board of Finance, he has to cut it back more.

The Insurance line item, Conservation Commission and Social Services budgets were discussed because of requests for increases.

There was a question of the trash fees and whether to include them in the budget or not. This would not payoff in the first year, but by the second year it could generate \$200,000 additional income from the State and can be done at a no net cost difference to the Town if we wanted to do it. This would slightly increase taxes for the business owners and the condo owners in Town.

This budget will go before the Board of Finance on March 1st, but whatever is given to the Finance Board on Monday will be a tentative budget until the Selectmen finalize and approve it at their Board meeting on March 3rd.

Mr. Frenaye would like to update some of the capability in the Assessor and Tax Collector's Office and Town Planner dealing with the technology they have. For example the GIS data the Town Planner has is not up to date as it should be with the changes Zoning & Planning has done with mapping, etc. This is starting to fall behind and would need about \$10,000 worth of updates the Town Planner would like to do. Also in the Tax and Assessor's Offices, there are things we can do so tax payments can be made on line, and ways we manage the Town website need to make changes. This all would cost about \$20,000-\$30,000 to deal with these issues and it is not included in the budget at this point. Another area is Economic Development. This is the area where the Town should invest more funding, but in this difficult time, it is difficult to justify.

Selectman Fitzgerald said the Assessor's office is a money raiser for the Town if it's done properly. If we underfund the Assessor's office, we get hurt long term. He wants to make sure the Town is doing the proper assessments. Mr. Frenaye said he proposes not to fill the Assessor's job at this point and to continue using the consultants.

Selectman Moncrief asked why the 5% increase in the Ambulance budget? Mr. Frenaye said the primary reason is because there are more volunteers who they expect to qualify for the property tax abatement.

Selectman Fitzgerald questioned the Police Budget being up 2.6%. Deb Cerrato said the department requested three new cruisers instead of one. The Commission is also looking into the use of private companies for roadwork rather than hiring police officers at a higher rate.

Mr. Frenaye felt we would get more from the State grants with other revenues coming from fees that the town charges. Although with the lack of development going on those fees aren't doing as well.

Investment activity is down, and rates are still low. The Grand List should be flat or up slightly.

The Board of Finance in their discussion has been talking about Capital Expenses and they really don't want to cut it this year and wants to fund the roads at a higher level than last year. The Board of Education is struggling with their budget as we are, but they have an extra month to present it to the Board of Finance.

Mr. Frenaye said the upgrade of the police and fire department radios is ongoing and is an expensive project. The Town applied for some federal grants to help pay for it. The

Town also applied for a federal grant for extension of the water line down Rte. 75 towards Bradley Airport.

Advisory Commission on Capital Expenditures is still meeting and should present to the Board of Finance at the end of March and to the Selectmen on March 17th.

Mr. Frenaye asked if the Selectmen had any other input to send it to him and he will present the budget on Monday to the Board of Finance and will come back to the Selectmen on Wednesday for their final approval.

There being no further business, the Selectmen Reynolds made a motion adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Christine Koren, Recording Secretary
Transcribed from tape recording