

Select Board Minutes  
Meeting – December 12, 2012

Present: Select board: Paullette Leukhardt and Ron Coler  
Executive Assistant: Mary Fitz-Gibbon

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. Ms. Leukhardt announced the meeting is being recorded.

**Minutes:** none reviewed

**Appointments:**

**Veterans' Services:** Present – Veterans' Agents Leo Parent and Mark Fitzpatrick

Mr. Fitzpatrick said the Veterans' organization serves 24 towns in the county. Massachusetts is the only state that has this program. The program which began after the Civil War provides financial and medical reimbursement assistance to veterans. The program is income eligible and assets fixed. For qualified veterans. The Town pays the benefits on a monthly basis and is eventually reimbursed at 75%. For a 100% disabled veteran, the State of Massachusetts provides an annuity that pays \$1,000 every six months. There are other benefits such as real estate abatements.

There is a comprehensive website that provides information on benefits at the state level. Veterans leaving the military who have been injured generally have the required paperwork already filed. The VA in Leeds is a model facility for veterans. It has a section 8 federal program for homeless veterans to provide for the veteran and family. A big part of the program now is helping veterans, especially those who are retired, with medical expenses. The Veterans' agents work with Franklin County Home Care to provide needed services. Housing needs are sometimes met through the Regional Housing Authority (FCRHRDA) Housing Rehabilitation loan program.

Questions were asked about property abatements and how the towns are reimbursed. Mr. Parent explained that the reimbursements show up on the cherry sheets. To a question about how towns are notified of a veteran is town needing benefits, Mr. Fitzpatrick he recently notified Ashfield's Treasurer that a veteran may be coming to Town and will be requiring monthly benefits. At this point, this has not been confirmed by Boston, but he likes to give the Town as much warning as possible. The difficult thing is the inability to predict when veterans will come in looking (and qualifying) for benefits. He went on to explain that there are two line items in the Town's budget: administrative and benefits. Since there is no way to know in advance what the benefit cost is going to be, he suggests towns be prepared to use free cash or some other fund to cover the expense temporarily until the amounts needed can be voted. When the request for benefits is confirmed, the Veterans' Services office will prepare a "warrant" which is sent to the treasurer; benefits are paid directly from the town to the veteran. It should be noted that this is confidential. The Veterans' Services is currently recertifying all of the veterans it assists to be sure that each veteran is receiving the right benefits for the right reasons.

**Housing Authority:** Present - Robin Sherman, Director  
Finance Committee members – Ted Murray, Tom Schriver, Tom Carter, Ricki Carroll

Ms. Sherman began by explaining that the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority is a public agency in existence since 1973. She outlined its role in facilitating grants for the benefit of low-moderate income families. She briefly described the process through which federal funds are distributed through state agencies to help communities upgrade the housing stock by providing funding for small scale projects administered by the housing authority.

Until recently, these housing loans have been 100% deferred, i.e. only repaid when the property is sold or transferred. In 2009 the program was changed so that new loans that were more than 15 years old could be repaid at a declining rate (1/15 of 50% of loan over a 15 yr period ). Ashfield has not participated in a new round of grants since 2006; however, if Ashfield should get a new grant the declining rate practice will apply.

In the late 1990's a revolving loan fund was established so that the funds from loans that are paid back could be reused to create new loans for housing projects to meet the needs of people when there were no new grant monies available. The housing authority charges a servicing fee to administer the loans. That fee, which has been 15% up front and 15% at the end, is being changed to 24% up front and 2% at the back end.

In the new program there is a loan forgiveness provision so that, if the town agrees, under extraordinary circumstances the loan may be forgiven. This is rarely done and would likely occur if a property were foreclosed upon.

At this time there are seven Ashfield households on a waiting list. There is \$56,000 in the revolving fund and another \$26,000 in returned loans that can be added to the fund that can be used to fund some of these projects. Before anything is done the Town needs to complete (by electing from a number of choices) and sign an agreement with the housing authority.

After a grant has been closed, which is usually not for at least five years, monies being returned may become unrestricted. Such monies can come back to the town for uses approved by the Select Board. Ashfield has a Grant Program Income account into which these funds are deposited.

Comments from some of the Finance Committee members present were that all of the returning funds should be recycled. It seems important for there to be this program available for Ashfield residents. This is not town money. They also questioned the wisdom of the declining repayment policy for new grants. It is prudent to allow the housing authority flexibility in awarding projects that exceed the general amount (for example when lead abatement is required).

Other points made – Improvements to residents translates into increased value of property for tax purposes. Obtaining new grants is as important as recycling existing funds as that is how the revolving fund is replenished.

Following this lengthy discussion, the Board decided to delay completing the agreement until next meeting.

**Special Town Meeting:** The Finance Committee voted at its meeting to recommend the one article on the STM warrant.

Ms. Leukhardt wanted the record to show that a copy of last week's written response to Open Meeting Law violation did go to the Attorney General.

**Financial issues:** The Financial Advisor has recommended that the Board execute all documents in advance of the STM so that deadlines can be met. The Financial Advisor's fee will be \$300 - \$350. The interest rate on the monies to be borrowed is .59% for one year. **Mr. Coler made a motion, seconded by Ms. Leukhardt, and voted, that the Board endorse the document to borrow \$195,000 to cover storm damage expenses from Irene in anticipation of reimbursement from MEMA.**

**In-kind grant** - At the request of Doug field, the Emergency Manager, the Board signed documents for an in-kind grant of \$2,000 for a generator. The in-kind services will be labor.

**A motion was made by Ms. Leukhardt, seconded by Mr. Coler, and voted, to sign the FEMA Performance Grant.**

**Liquor Licenses:** The Board reviewed renewals of liquor licenses for: Edge Hill Golf Course, Lakeside Ventures d/b/a Neighbor's, **Lidian Businesses Inc** d/b/a the Lake House, and Elmer's Store LLC. Separate motions were made and voted for each license.

**Statewide mutual aid agreement: A motion was made by Mr. Coler, seconded by Ms. Leukhardt, and voted, to endorse the State-wide Public Safety Mutual Aid Act.** A comment was made that this act has been in development for a number of years; this is the first time highway departments have been included. The intent, which comes out of Homeland Security, is to make sure that any equipment can be used anywhere across the state where might be needed in an emergency. The agreement solves a number of legal liability issues that would otherwise prevent a town from responding.

**Special Town meeting (STM):** There was a brief review of the article on the warrant and the motion to be made at the STM. Note was made that the correct title for the Board is Select Board. Among points that may be made is that DOR (Department of Revenue) now requires the Town to engage the services of a Financial Advisor when it borrows money. Borrowing at this time is to make it possible for the tax rate to be set.

**FCCIP (Building Inspector program):** Mr. Coler reported on meetings he has attended. At the July meeting of the FCCIP the discussion was about the on-line permitting process. At the November meeting discussion was about ticketing persons/contractors who violate the permitting process. In order to do this an appeals officer is needed, as these are non-criminal offenses that should not involve the courts. The suggestion was made that the cost of the appeals officer be paid from the ticketing fees, but this would be a conflict of interest; no decision has been made on this issue.

**Agricultural Preservation Restriction:** Mr. Coler reported on what he has learned about the process. Notice has to be posted and also published in the local paper. Abutters within 300 ft. will be notified.

**Open Meeting and other requests:** An extension has been granted for an open meeting violation response. Work on collecting requested material for another request is in progress.

**Liaison Reports:**

**Police Department** - The Taurus has been sold for junk.

**Public Forum:** A comment was made about people who wear perfume or have other scents that bother other people. This is a sensitive matter and a discrete reminder needs to be made.

A motion was made to adjourn at 10:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Priscilla Phelps

## Document List

Attorney General Office response to extension request to Open Meeting Law Violation filed by Suazne Corbett on June 6, 2012 and re-filed by Suzanne Corbett on August 24, 2012.

Statewide Public Safety Mutual Aid Law Adoption

Commonwealth of Massachusetts Contractor Authorized Signatory Listing/ Standard Contract Form

Agreement of Sale – Old Bus

Memorandum regarding Agricultural Preservation Restriction Related from Ron Coler dated December 9, 2012

FRCOG - Board Meeting Agenda for November 15, 2012

Draft Copy of the Memo to All Departments/Committees/Board from Mary Fitz-Gibbon regarding FY14 Budgets.

2013 Year to Date Expense Report (Budget vs. Actual)

Alcoholic Beverages Licenses to Lake Side Venture, Inc. (Ashfield Neighbors), Lydian Enterprises, Inc. (Ashfield Lake House), Mark Graves, June L. Heideman, Suzanne Connell (Edge Hill Golf Course), Elmer's Store LLC,

Contract to borrow \$195,000 to Peoples United Bank for Storm Irene Damage

Letter of Gratitude to Doug Field for serving as a member and chair on the Ashfield Select Board dated December 12, 2012.