

Select Board minutes – March 30, 2011

Present: Board members - Dave DeHerdt, Doug Field, Norm Russell
Assistant Administrator – Mary Fitz-Gibbon

Meeting called to order 7:05 PM

Minutes – Minutes of March 17th were approved by DeHerdt and Field, with Russell abstaining. Minutes of March 23rd were approved with the addition of time of adjournment at 10:00 PM.

Appointments:

Police Department: Present - Chief Droney

Droney said it had been about a month since he had begun as Chief and he wanted to bring the Board up to date on a few things. First of all he thanked the Board for signing the underage alcohol grant.

Grants - And speaking of grants, he has applied for a traffic safety grant through a large insurance company to purchase a speed trailer similar to the one Conway uses. He feels it's a good way to educate the public without having to give out tickets. Cost of the model he chose is around \$8,000, more expensive than some, but it has downloading capabilities.

Training - Officers Wilder and Beauchesne have been doing in-service training. Next week Droney will travel to Chelsea for MA firearms training that he is required to take. Officer Konapko has completed his weapons certifications and is back in service.

Survey - The Chief has prepared a survey that will be included as an insert in the *Ashfield News*. It's also available on the Town's website and at town hall. He plans to use the information gathered in developing department policies and activities. He plans to submit regular informational contributions to the Police blotter in the *Ashfield News*.

Explorer - The Explorer is at the tech school. He had a call today that three bolts in the exhaust manifold are broken off. Depending upon where the bolts are broken, and, as this is a labor intensive project, there may not be enough time left in the school year to finish the project. Russell asked if it could be done in the fall; he said it could. Droney also said he's having the Taurus looked at by a mechanic in Buckland. Two of his officers are going to be participating in a driving course and he needs the cruiser ready for that. The course is free; he feels it's a good thing to do in terms of liability for the Town.

Cruisers - Russell said in budget discussions there had been talk about replacing a vehicle. In 2012 Ford is coming out with a vehicle just for police use to replace the Crown Vic. which will no longer be available. The new vehicle will be available in either rear wheel drive or all wheel drive. Droney said the price of a Crown Vic police package is around \$30,000; he expects the new vehicle (the Interceptor) won't be any less. Russell wondered if this vehicle would be considered energy efficient i.e. acceptable by "Green Community" standards.

Droney said he has been looking into used police vehicles from a place in Chicago. Those vehicles (front wheel drive Impala) run around \$7,000, but they have to be equipped. By the time the equipment is added the investment is closer to \$15,000. DeHerdt asked what the expected life of a used vehicle might be. Although he couldn't determine what average mileage in Ashfield should be, Droney thought three or four years were possible. To a question about the life of a new vehicle, he said, depending on usage, five years would be reasonable. Droney said he has been in contact with a friend in Enfield who is familiar with Justice Administrative Grants (JAG) that provide funding for police vehicles.

Policies - Droney said he is working on department policies and a mission statement. He will present them to the Board for review and approval. One of the first policies he plans to work on is sexual harassment. It'll be straight from the State statute.

Droney has been reviewing evidence held by the department. The state requires a very specific chain of custody in the handling of evidence. He feels that due to the way evidence has been handled, whatever is in the department's custody has been compromised. Currently, anything held as evidence can be accessed by any of the officers. This must be changed. The good thing there isn't much in there.

Moving the police station - Chief Droney said he has been looking into improving some problems the department encounters in its current location. He said he is willing to move downstairs where there is a closet that can be locked. The space is smaller, but he has some ideas for utilizing the space. To address a concern about safety, as there is only one door to the space, he talked to the Building Inspector. The Inspector told him a second exit isn't necessary as long as the distance is less than 75 feet. Having the entry to the department close to the outside door, would improve the access and provide greater privacy for police matters.

To make the move all of the computers would need to be moved. Arrangements would need to be made with the state to move the LEAPS computer. Droney said he has someone coming in next week to help with the evidence situation. DeHerdt suggested that the downstairs be changed to a dutch door. That way people could complete routine transactions at the door without having to actually enter the station.

Budget Review and Articles for Annual town meeting:

Fitz-Gibbon presented a sample of the Buckland annual warrant that does not include amounts of money in the articles. Articles simply state a "sum of money" to be raised and appropriated or transferred. The money numbers are identified in the motion made at the meeting. The Board would like to consider this further. Fitz-Gibbon will scan the sample and email it to Board members for further consideration.

In the discussion of budget items increases were noted in the Highland Ambulance assessment, due to increased fuel and health insurance costs. Additionally, reimbursements from medicare have been reduced. Health service from FRCOG, which jumped more than \$3,000, was questioned.

The way that unemployment compensation is handled was discussed. The Town has historically been self-insured, paying into the system only when employees were laid off and only the amounts that individual is entitled to collect. Just how long the Town's liability for those employees extends is not known. It appears that the Town continues to have some liability when former employees who had moved on to new jobs were once again laid off. The Select Board has a proposed amount of \$20,000, down from the previous year's \$35,300. Tom Carter suggested splitting the difference and making that number \$27,500. There was discussion about some policy whereby the Town was assessed a minimum annual contribution. Russell questioned this as a change from the self-insured status. This needs to be looked into.

Senior issues - Ricki Carroll asked for an explanation of Council on Aging matters. She wondered how many Ashfield seniors took advantage of programs. DeHerdt said the Shelburne Senior Center is in transition. It is re-working the agreement to make it easier for additional towns to join the consortium. However, he suggested that it might be wise to send a "gentle notice" advising that if something isn't

worked out, Ashfield might withdraw. Tom Carter commented to really find out what townspeople think, bring it up at Town meeting. It was clear to some that to provide the services available at the Senior Center would require more money than the town's assessment to the consortium. The lease arrangement that the consortium has with the Masons, who own the building, is not considered by many to be a good one. It appears that the Senior consortium is responsible for maintenance of the building, which was not the case in earlier agreements. According to DeHerdt the Community Hall on Main Street had been looked at as a possible site for senior activities in Ashfield. Accessibility issues would need to be addressed. He said it was his understanding that the intent of the new plan was for senior activities to be held in the member towns, with staff from the Shelburne center coming to the towns to hold the various programs.

Highway - Carter is interested in finding a way to refinance the highway garage to take advantage of reduced interest rates. If it can be done, he would recommend keeping the payment the same, which would shorten the term. He offered to visit some banks to see what could be done.

Field said Highway has \$15,000 remaining in Chapter 90 money. He understands this year's bond issue is currently being worked on and expected to be passed by the first of April. Carter explained how the Town used to handle chapter money. He said, if the issue was for \$100,000 it would be used on a primary road; if it were \$80,000 it would be used for secondary roads. Labor used to be paid from Chapter money; now that labor is not included, more can be done. Russell said he questioned whether the General Highway amount of \$26,000 was enough. Poissant said if there was another \$15,000 or so available General Highway would be the place to put it. DeHerdt felt the highway budget had been flush for several years. He would like to see a leaner budget and would not recommend increasing it should additional funds be available.

Schools - Emily Robertson walked in at this time with information about the roof and window repair project at Mohawk. She said the source of water damage had been determined, but the cost was still not known. It appeared that a special town meeting would be needed in June. Carter pointed out this would likely be a debt exclusion item which would require a ballot vote. Robertson said the reasons for going forward with the project are 2: 1) The state will reimburse 63.25% of the cost; 2) There was an unusual amount of damage this winter. The difficulty is the short time to accomplish the project; it must be completed by the end of June. In addition, the design must be by a firm on the state's list of accepted engineering firms. She also said that the project would not be done if the grant were not received. There will be a school committee meeting on April 13 at 7:00 PM which she urged the Board to attend as it will be at Sanderson Academy.

Liaison Reports:

Green Community - Russell reported on the Green Action Committee meeting held at the Bullitt place. He described the meeting as very direct. There are choices of renewable energy, but the one being discussed was the one acre solar installation type. He found the people putting on the meeting be very encouraging.

FRCOG Procurement information – Numbers of projected amounts for fuel, gas, and diesel usage need to be determined in order to complete the bid request. Board members still very aware of the situation a year or so ago, when more fuel was ordered than was needed, want to avoid a repeat. In addition, bidding seems to be done when fuel is at its highest. Possibly under estimating required gallons would solve both situations.

New Business:

High speed internet service - GAW a high speed internet company has obtained permission from the FCC to use FCC technology to this area. GAW would like to visit Ashfield to demonstrate the new technology. The new technology brings with it new costs which it would like to review. GAW would like to schedule a meeting in Town at some point. DeHerdt has sent an email to GAW recommending that when GAW contact Fitz-Gibbon to be placed on the board's future agenda for an informational meeting.

Ricki Carroll wanted to know if this technology been tested as to its affect on wildlife – in particular bees. She went on to explain that it is thought that waves, such as those emitted by wireless technologies are creating a problem for some important wildlife. Bees become disoriented and can't find their way back to their hives. Field agreed saying he knew that the apple people are having problems.

After a brief discussion of the position of constable and who could hold the position, a motion was made, seconded, and in a roll call vote, to close the open session at 10:00 PM and enter executive meeting to discuss pending litigation. It was announced that the board would not reconvene into open session.

Respectfully submitted,
Priscilla Phelps