

TMMA Executive Committee Minutes: December 14, 2005

Attendance:

TMMA Officers:

Gloria Bloom – (Chair Pct 4)
David Horton – (Vice Chair Pct 8)
Andy Friedlich – (Treasurer Pct 5)
David L. Kaufman – (Communication Officer Pct 6)
Darwin Adams – (Clerk Pct 3)

Precinct Officers:

Pct 9: Francine Stieglitz, Vicki Blier, Fred Rosenberg
Pct 8: Charles Hornig
Pct 7: Jim Courtemanche
Pct 6: Alan Lazarus
Pct 5: Eph Weiss
Pct 3: Arthur Katz

Presenters:

Ingrid Klimoff (Pct 3: “Idle Free” campaign)
Carl Valente (Town Manager)

Guests:

Pct 7: George Burnell

Agenda:

Gloria called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm in room G-15 of the Town Office Building.

An Informal Meeting with Carl Valente:

Carl began by relating some of his impressions of the town. He was impressed at how welcome he felt and by the degree of citizen’s involvement. He then presented a few issues of key importance to the Town.

- **The Budget:**

Health insurance continues to grow at approximately 14% per year. He had expected the rate might slow to 7% or so, but this did not happen this year.

There are important issues with the Town infrastructure. Maintenance and repairs have been deferred over the past few years primarily due to our tight budget. He felt that attending to the infrastructure is very important not only to maintain the quality of the Town, but to avoid the extra costs that poor maintenance can cause.

- **The Town Comptroller:**

Lexington has been without a Controller for approximately 2 years. This is a very important position to fill and Carl indicated that the Board of Selectman was interviewing some very promising candidates. He indicated the John Ryan, while retired from that position, had been

filling in for the vacant position, but the Town needs a full time person to properly manage its finances.

- Keyspan:
While gas was restored to much of the Town in within 2 weeks of the accident, Keyspan problems have occupied the Town for nearly 6 weeks. We have had to bring in gas inspectors from other communities and we have had to provide police details and other Town services during the final work phases of the reconstruction.
- 2006 Budget Plan:
The budget will “roll out” in the next 2 weeks. The school superintendent has a budget with a significant increase over last year. We may get a bit more money from the State this year, however we anticipate significant gaps – even in for a budget based on level services from last year.

Gloria asked about morale in the town departments. Carl said he feels morale is pretty good and that employees have been very welcoming toward him. One of our concerns is failed overrides and many departments are overworked and understaffed. The Board Of Health is particularly overloaded with the avian flu and homeland security issues added to their tasks.

Mr. Valente was initially concerned about collective bargaining agreements, but we have now settled with the Library, Fire Department, and one of two Police unions. Even though there will not be much increase in salaries, the departments at least know where they stand and can move on with their work. This helps improve morale.

The Fire Department has been very busy due to the Advanced Life Support work they do. They must attend to a significant number of medical emergencies – both in town and at accident scenes on 128. Also, hospitals are sending people home earlier, leaving people at somewhat higher risk for medical needs at home.

Staffing reductions in the Police Department must be considered very carefully because understaffed duties can present officer safety issues.

Andy Friedlich asked when the Met State property would begin construction. Carl indicated that Avalon Bay is closing the property purchase soon. Andy expressed concern that Avalon Bay might require additional police and fire details.

Vicki Blier asked about the practice of using overtime to cover normal operations of the Fire Department. Carl pointed out that we do have coverage, with 13 people per shift. Since we require only 12 people, many routine absences can be covered without overtime. However, when several people are absent, overtime must be used to cover the shift.

Eph Weiss asked about our budget and whether the Town offers too many services. Carl responded that more and more services require fees and that no tax benefit would accrue by reducing these. The main portion of the budget is controlled by Schools, DPW, Police, and Fire and these all require collective bargaining to manage their budgets. While this is fine, it does take several years to make significant changes.

David Kaufman noted that part of our budget problems might be due to lack of support for operating overrides in past years by the Board of Selectmen.

Darwin Adams asked how our budget situation compared to similar towns in the area. Carl said that we are very typical among similar towns and only cities and towns with large commercial areas have been doing better.

Jim Courtemanche asked the Town would be locked into increasing costs of benefits. Carl felt that we probably would need to deal with this issue for the foreseeable future.

David Horton noted that rising health costs are really a national issue and that it might be difficult to manage such problems only at a local level.

Andy Friedlich emphasized his concerns about Capital Expenditures and the timing of the CPA (Community Preservation Act) vote with respect to an anticipated operating override vote later in the spring. Carl responded that the Board of Selectmen had unanimously voted to support the CPA and that many expenditures already planned by the Town could be covered under the CPA.

Anti-Idling Committee:

Ingrid Klimoff provided several hand-outs explaining the initiatives of the Anti-Idling Committee. They have several initiatives supporting an Anti-Idling campaign. A flier will be sent along with our next tax bills (to save postage). The flier explains the Anti-Idling laws and the problems that idling can cause. The committee has also been working on some modest fund raising activities to support public awareness of the Anti-Idling issues. The committee has help from Ann Kelly who did an anti-idling campaign for the State. She and her child (in Lexington schools) will be working on a project to count cars which are found idling too long.

Much discussion followed talking about how to get the “word out” to the community. Several good ideas were offered to Ingrid and her committee.

Eph Weiss suggested parking fees at and around the High School. Other ideas included giving out tickets – some with fines – others which simply helped drivers realize the law.

Memorial Gift in the name of Don Chisholm:

Gloria asked if the TMMA Committee would like to provide a gift in memory of Don Chisholm. Andy Friedlich moved “That we approve that \$50 be contributed to Habitat for Humanity be made by TMMA in memory of Don Chisholm.” The motion was approved unanimously.

CPA Informational Meeting:

Gloria was approached by Betsy Weiss to see if TMMA would sponsor an informational meeting to the Town regarding the pros and cons of passing the Community Preservation Act next spring. Much discussion ensued about the neutrality of the TMMA and its primary focus on Town Meeting. Since Town Meeting had already approved the CPA, committee members spoke at length about whether it was appropriate for TMMA to sponsor such a meeting. Eventually, the committee decided to decline sponsoring the meeting. David Horton moved “That we decline the request to sponsor the CPA informational meeting.” The motion passed 2 abstentions. The committee agreed to discuss in more detail the types of meetings TMMA should support at a later date.

Approval of minutes:

The minutes of the November 16th meeting were reviewed and accepted.

Treasurer's Report:

The treasurer's report showed 2 checks that had cleared. The report was approved unanimously.

Crosspoint at Hanscom Letter:

Andy Friedlich presented a letter asking the Governor Romney to limit expansion at Hanscom. The letter was to be from TMMA based upon numerous votes at Town Meeting over the past few years regarding Hanscom Field. After some discussion about the wording of the letter and some typos, the letter was approved unanimously.

Burlington Sand and Gravel Development:

Arthur Katz reported that the developer (Perkins) proposed to convert the open gravel processing business to an enclosed "batch concrete" operation. The applicant's environmental consultant showed that this use would decrease particulate pollution by approximately 91%. The current operation creates about 3 tons of dust per year. The proposed operation would only create about 600 pounds per year.

Arthur felt that the proposed development would represent a significant improvement over the existing plant. Perkins also showed a layout with a fully enclosed building set at a low point on the site where it would be less visible from Middlesex Turnpike. Since the operation would be indoors, noise would also be significantly reduced. The truck traffic is predicted to be similar to current levels, although the current gravel trucks would be replaced by cement trucks. The Burlington Conservation Commission has not yet approved the plan.

Andy Friedlich noted that some of the gravel currently trucked from the site goes to Watertown via Lexington roads. His guess was that cement trucks would probably go directly to 128 for delivery to the job site(s) and that we might experience lower levels of truck traffic in Lexington.

Arthur offered further information and access to documents to anyone expressing an interest.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05pm.

Submitted by Darwin Adams, Clerk