

**Advisory Committee
Meeting #30
Wednesday, March 24, 2010**

Peter Cory, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Those present included Judi Donnelly, Virginia Ferko, Jack Haley, Rick Hill, Kathy Macdonald, Barbara McMahon, Maura Murphy, Rich Page, Caren Parker, Derek Redgate, Steve Simons, Steve Sykes, Marc Taylor, Jason Whittet

Board of Selectmen. Selectmen Chair Barbara Searle, Vice Chair Katherine Babson, Jr., members Terri Tsagaris, Owen Dugan, and Ellen Gibbs, and Executive Director Hans Larsen joined the meeting to address issues relative to the upcoming Annual and Special Town Meetings.

ATM Article 27 - Linden Street Agreement. Mr. Larsen expects that there will be a 2-year lease extension with the Volkswagen dealership. Details will be discussed at the next Selectmen's meeting, and reviewed with Advisory at its March 31 meeting.

ATM Article 26 - Cochituate Aqueduct Easement Agreement. Mr. Larsen reported there will likely be a proposed long term lease for the Town's Aqueduct property near the Star Market on Washington Street. Details will be discussed at the next Selectmen's meeting.

STM Article 3 - 494 Washington Street. Ms. Tsagaris reviewed the details relating to the purchase of the property at 494 Washington Street, outlining the issues considered prior to signing the purchase and sale agreement, including: the potential use of the property for parking for the proposed new senior center; location of the property close to other Town offices and property; and the Selectmen's belief that the purchase of this property is a prudent investment for the Town.

Ms. Tsagaris reviewed the potential tax impact on property owners. The cost of Senior Center is presently estimated at \$5.06 million, including the \$800,000 Tolles gift, results in a cost of \$4.2 million or in a \$34 annual increase to the median residential tax bill. If the additional property is purchased at \$1.27 million, the resulting increase to a median tax bill is \$44 per year.

Questions were raised on the value of the combined property; how the purchase price was determined; whether the Selectmen feel confident the \$1.27 million purchase price is the best price they could have negotiated for this property at this time; and if the Senior Center is not built, will the purchase still be considered an appropriate one? The group also discussed the letter from St. Paul's Parish expressing concern with parking if the Senior Center is built. The Selectmen understand the Parish's concern, and will address those issues after completion of the Spring Special Town Meeting. Committee members stressed the need to adequately justify the \$1.27 million purchase price at Town Meeting, and the need for this property in this economic climate.

New Motions under ATM Article 7 and Article 8. Mr. Larsen indicated there may be a motion under Article 7 to transfer funds from the Facilities Maintenance personal services budget to its expense budget to cover additional expenses incurred by the School Department for facilities maintenance expenses. In addition, Mr. Larsen indicated there may be an amendment proposed for Article 8 requesting restoration of funding for the Library's Book Preservation Specialist, which was eliminated to meet budget guidelines.

Liaison Reports.

CPC. Ms. Murphy reported the CPC is reorganizing its motions to separate the three smaller projects listed in one of the motions. Advisory voted each project separately, so it does not appear that there will be additional action required by Advisory. In addition, the private funds raised for the Abbott Road street sign, will be appropriated and administered by the DPW.

School Committee. Ms. McMahon reported there will be a meeting on April 1st at 7:30 a.m. to discuss the consultant's findings with the School Committee and the Middle School SBC. The proposed project and costs were discussed. The School Committee will meet with the Advisory Committee at its meeting on Monday, April 5th, at 6:15 p.m. prior to Town Meeting.

Article 3 – STM Warrant – 494 Washington Street Purchase. The Committee discussed this issue at length. There was discussion concerning the need for and proposed cost of the property, the premium being paid, the qualitative values of the property to the Town, the viability of the Senior Center project with and without the purchase, and possible alternative uses for the property if the Senior Center is not approved. Members recognized that this purchase would add value and utility to the current Town-owned site on Washington Street by providing additional on-site parking for the proposed Senior Center, making it a much more viable project, and resolving parking concerns expressed by St. Paul's Parish.

After discussion, Ms. Macdonald moved and Ms. Ferko seconded recommending favorable action on Article 3. **The vote was 6 in favor; 8 opposed.**

The majority of Advisory is concerned with the reasonableness of the purchase price, and while recognizing that it is often necessary and appropriate to pay a premium to acquire property that, due to its size and location, has a value to the Town beyond that which is captured in a traditional real estate appraisal, they are not convinced that 59 percent over the appraised value has been justified. Many are concerned about the cost of this acquisition in light of the economic challenges in upcoming years, and in addition, although the incremental tax impact associated with debt service for this acquisition is modest, it may be significant to some taxpayers when added to the recent tax increases associated with the high school project. Some were also opposed in principle to the acquisition of the property before a definitive decision has been made by Town Meeting and the voters to proceed with the Senior Center.

The minority believes that the value added to the adjacent Town-owned parcel and the significant benefits that would result from the availability of on site parking for the proposed Senior Center justify the premium included in the purchase price. Some also believe that even if the parcel is not ultimately used by the Town for a Senior Center, opportunities to acquire a well-located parcel, adjacent to other Town-owned land, are rare and should be actively pursued.

Adjournment. Upon a motion made by Ms. Donnelly and seconded by Ms. Macdonald, the Committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Adeline G. Doherty
Administrative Assistant