

Board of Selectmen – September 26, 2011

Present: Searle, Tsagaris, Gibbs, Babson, Dugan

Also present: Larsen, Connolly, Ketchen, Robinson

Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm.

Warrants approved: 2012-012 (\$3,171,600.91)

1. Executive Director's Update

- Mr. Larsen noted the Board will meet next Tuesday, October 4th and the warrant for the November 14, 2011 Special Town Meeting will close on Friday, September 30.
- In response to issues related to traffic on Washington Street, the Beta Group has been asked to submit a proposal for a system-wide reassessment of the “traffic loop” (the integrated network of traffic signals on Washington and Linden Streets.
- The next quarterly traffic update, which will include a public hearing to consider changes in the parking meter rates will be held on October 24th.

2. Projects and Other Updates

- Wellesley High School – Ms. Babson noted the Wellesley Reads Together program, the activities planned for the Thanksgiving Day weekend and the program called. Further information is available www.wellesleycelebrateseducation.org
- Senior Center - none
- Wellesley Square Initiative – Ms. Searle summarized the results of a meeting held with Wellesley Square merchants and noted an upcoming meeting with Wellesley Square property owners.
- Advisory Update - none
- Fuller Brook Park – Ms. Babson noted the group has been meeting regularly and has been interviewing consultants.
- Public Transportation Study – Ms. Gibbs noted the group's final report has been published and is available on the Town website. The group is meeting to review the report with various parties before returning for a followup meeting with the Selectmen.
- Regional Matters – Mr. Dugan noted the Norfolk County Advisory Board will be having their first meeting in this fiscal year next week.
- Sustainability – Mr. Ketchen noted the successful Sustainability Expo held on September 24th.
- Ms. Searle noted the Town has once again received a
- Mr. Larsen noted the following additional items
 - The staff is organizing a meeting with Walter Heller, the new Acting Director of MassDOT District Six to discuss Wellesley's needs with respect to roads under MassDOT's jurisdiction.
 - The Inter-Board meeting scheduled for October 6th will begin at 8:00.
 - The Town hosted three women from Pakistan last week, as part of the exchange program sponsored by the U.S. State Dept., as coordinated by the MMA. Mr. Larsen expressed the Town's thanks to Adam Blumer, Jamie Chisum, Andrew Keough and others for helping to make the women's visit a success.

- Representatives from the Town will meet with restaurant owners on October 13th to discuss the proposal to reduce the minimum number of seats required for an alcohol license from 100 to 50.

3. Tax Classification

Ms. Searle and Ms. Gibbs outlined the agenda for the evening and the Board's expectations regarding the conduct of the meeting.

Mr. Ketchen gave a presentation prepared by the Selectmen's office, summarizing various aspects of tax classification including:

- Roles and responsibilities of the Selectmen vs. the Assessors
- Wellesley's current tax profile
- Explanation of a split rate
- Potential impact of splitting the rate in Wellesley
- Classification considerations.

The Board asked several questions of Mr. Ketchen.

Jim Miller, 50 Pine Street gave a presentation summarizing his advocacy for a dual tax rate. His presentation focused on disparities between commercial property tax rates in Wellesley vs. many comparable communities.

The Board asked several questions of Mr. Miller.

Maura O'Brien, Peter Ashton and Siohban Conlon, representing the Chamber of Commerce gave a presentation summarizing the Chamber's objections to a dual tax rate. Their presentation focused on the disproportionate impact of a potential shift to a dual tax rate and the attendant adverse impact on commercial properties.

Dennis DiSchino, commercial property owner and manager, expressed the view that shifting to a dual tax rate will negatively impact future "new growth", as defined under Proposition 2½. He also argued the difference in total commercial property value between Wellesley and Newton does not accurately reflect the comparative value of properties, i.e., the Assessors in Wellesley do a much job of accurately assessing the full value of commercial properties.

Larry Letteney, 16 Riverdale Road, a resident and business owner questioned the extent to which the Board has studied the same issue in prior years. Ms. Gibbs noted the Board has periodically done a more rigorous study. Mr. Letteney noted it has been difficult to sell people on Wellesley as a result of the perpetual override cycle.

Elliot Swan, 49 Damien Road, questioned whether anyone had analyzed the potential impact of the implementation of a dual tax rate on the cost of goods and services in a community. His initial view is the impact of a dual tax would be illusory, i.e., higher commercial property taxes would be offset by higher costs of goods and services.

Frank Mitchell, 23 Northgate Road, noted he would be watching how the Board acts on this issue.

Patti Quigley, 7 Kipling Road, questioned what would happen to Linden Square if residents could not afford to pay the property taxes in Wellesley and suggested the Board should make their decision on current facts, as opposed to historical data.

Paul Derrickson, 30 Riverdale Road, requested more information regarding the comparability of tax bills between comparable properties in different communities, e.g., a Starbucks in Wellesley vs. a Starbucks in Lexington.

Dario Fauza, 19 Boulder Road, suggested the Selectmen should submit this to a Town-wide vote, and Board members should disclose any financial interest they might have in commercial property.

Stan Shockus, owner of Potpourri Designs, suggested the merchants have no flexibility to raise their prices, particularly in competition with internet businesses. He noted a strong, vibrant downtown does much for the residents. He further noted that Concord (single rate) has fewer vacancies than Lexington (dual rate), and Lexington has had more turnover in commercial tenants and the only constants have been national chains.

Each of the Selectmen noted they have no interest in commercial property. Ms. Searle noted that, per State statute, it is the Selectmen's responsibility to decide on the tax classification and tax rate.

Ms. Searle noted a second session will be held on October 17th and the League of Women Voters will hold a session on the same topic on October 13th.

At 9:40, the Board voted all aye to go into executive session to discuss the potential acquisition of real property.