

**BRATTLEBORO SELECTBOARD
FRIDAY, JANUARY 3, 2014
SPECIAL MEETING – 7:30AM
MINUTES**

Selectboard members present: David Gartenstein, Kate O'Connor, David Schoales, Donna Macomber, and John Allen.

Staff present: Interim Town Manager Patrick Moreland, Planning Services Director Rod Francis, Public Works Director Steve Barrett, Finance Director John O'Connor, Police Chief Gene Wrinn, Recreation & Parks Director Carol Lolatte, Library Director Jerry Carbone, Fire Chief Mike Bucossi, Town Assessor Russell Rice, Assistant Fire Chief Peter Lynch, Police Captain Mike Fitzgerald, Police Sergeant Mark Carignan, and Executive Secretary Jan Anderson.

Media present: None.

Others present: Mary Ide and others who did not sign the attendance sheet.

Chair Gartenstein called the meeting to order at 7:35am in the Hanna Cosman meeting room. He confirmed that the meeting was officially warned.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

NEW BUSINESS

FY15 Budget – Discussion. Gartenstein said that the Board was provided with a memo from Interim Town Manager Moreland, a revised budget, and correspondence from Department Heads regarding the effect of reduction to staff hours. He summarized previous discussions and decisions by the Board regarding the FY15 budget. He said that the Board would discuss and consider further budget matters, including whether to adopt reductions in staff hours, Human Services funding, and cuts to three personnel positions. Other Board members asked to also consider a "hiring pause," the use of surplus funds (Unassigned Fund Balance), and recommendation of a local option sales tax. Gartenstein said that in addition to matters decided at this meeting, the Board would consider at its January 7 meeting other subsidiary items that were previously discussed, including re-designation of agriculture funds and transfer of \$310,000 in skating rink funds from the capital budget to the general budget.

The Board first discussed the recommendation of the Human Services Committee for funding in the approximate amount of \$122,000 for FY15 and whether to suggest the reduction of funds. There was general agreement that the Board should meet with the Committee next year during its review process in order to provide budget considerations for the following fiscal year. There was discussion by the Board about human services in Town, the Human Service Committee's recommendations, Representative Town Meeting authority, and asking the Committee to reduce its recommendations from approximately \$122,000 (exclusive of any funds to be allocated to Brattleboro Climate Protection) to \$110,000. Gartenstein asked that the Administration contact the Committee and that the Committee provide its response prior to setting the agenda for the January 21 Selectboard meeting.

MOTION BY DAVID GARTENSTEIN THAT THE BOARD REDUCE THE HUMAN SERVICES FUNDING FIGURE TO \$110,000 AND TO ASK THE HUMAN SERVICES FUNDING COMMITTEE TO PROVIDE A REALLOCATION OF THE AVAILABLE FUNDS ACROSS THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE DESIGNATED TO RECEIVE THOSE FUNDS SO IT CAN BE INCLUDED IN THE BUDGET WHEN IT IS FINALIZED ON JANUARY 21. MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

The Board then held discussions about the possible reduction of hours in various Town departments. There was much discussion about the general budget, impact of the pending Police-Fire facilities upgrades, review of decisions made last year at Representative Town Meeting, the disproportionate and adverse impact on non-union employees, and adverse impact on the delivery of services.

MOTION BY DAVID GARTENSTEIN TO ADOPT CUTS IN HOURS FROM 37.5 TO 36 HOURS FOR NON-UNION EMPLOYEES AS INQUIRED INTO BY KATE O'CONNOR AND INVESTIGATED BY PATRICK MORELAND. MOTION WAS DEFEATED 0-5.

The Board then discussed a "hiring pause" as proposed by Kate O'Connor. O'Connor suggested that when an employee leaves, the Town institute a "pause" and reconsider the position before replacing the employee. She said it could be a long-term consideration in an effort to improve efficiency and change "business as usual." She said the pause would provide an opportunity to consider ways of delivering services differently or more efficiently and possibly shifting responsibilities. There was discussion by the Board about the "pause," possible cross-departmental assistance, interdepartmental cooperation, and current cost-conscious practices. The Board generally agreed to add the matter to a list of items for long term discussions.

The Board then discussed recommending implementation of a Local Option Sales Tax. Gartenstein suggested that the Board consider adding an article to the Town Meeting ballot asking voters if they support implementation a local option sales tax to add revenue to the budget in an effort to offset the expenses of the Police-Fire facilities upgrade project. He said that the vote would be cast by Australian ballot and would be non-binding. He said that an article would also be added to the Representative Town Meeting to be voted on by Australian ballot and that the Town Attorney was researching the procedure and legality of the matter. There was discussion by the Board about the local option sales tax, giving the electorate an opportunity to voice their opinions, whether to add a sunset clause, the procedure going before Town Meeting and Representative Town Meeting, procedural difficulties, and possibly holding a special town meeting. The Board agreed to discuss the matter further at the January 21 Selectboard meeting.

The Board then discussed John Allen's suggestion to apply \$300,000 in unreserved, undesignated funds (more accurately defined as Unassigned Fund Balance) to offset taxes. Allen said that his goal was to lower the tax rate to make it sustainable to live in town and give the taxpayers hope that they are able to continue to live here. He asked Finance Director John O'Connor where he projected the budget to end up at the end of the fiscal year and the amount of funds in the Unassigned Fund Balance. Mr. O'Connor said that the fiscal year was half over so it was too early to accurately project the budget balance at the end of the year and he said that the budget was tight. He said that the Unassigned Fund Balance contained approximately \$1.7 million which was slightly over the recommended 10% of a \$16 million budget. Fire Chief Bucossi asked about the impact on next year's budget if some of the Unassigned Fund Balance was used this year. There was much discussion by the Board about use of and retention of the Unassigned Fund Balance, unanticipated disasters and damages, the recommended balance for the Fund, the funds being taxpayers' money, and the responsibility of the Board to manage funds responsibly. The Board agreed to discuss the matter in public at the Selectboard meeting on January 7 and, if necessary, again at the meeting on January 21. Kate O'Connor and other members of the Board asked Interim Town Manager Moreland if salary increases were reflected in the proposed budget. The Board asked Moreland to remove the "level service" column from the proposed budget and provide for the January 7 Selectboard meeting a budget with comparison of the FY14 and proposed FY15 budgets.

There were other recurring matters discussed throughout the meeting, including the Selectboard's responsibility to thoroughly investigate a responsible budget, the democratic process relating to Town Meeting decisions, funding of the Police-Fire facilities upgrades, tax burden on taxpayers, determining more global and long-term solutions to the financial status of the Town, delivery of services, and finding additional revenue sources.

MOTION BY DAVID GARTENSTEIN AT 8:50AM TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS A PERSONNEL MATTER WHERE THE SELECTBOARD HAS CONCLUDED THAT PREMATURE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE WOULD PUT THE MUNICIPALITY AT A SUBSTANTIAL DISADVANTAGE. INTERIM TOWN MANAGER MORELAND, POLICE CHIEF WRINN, AND POLICE CAPTAIN FITZGERALD WERE INVITED TO ATTEND. MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

Gartenstein reconvened the meeting at 9:10am. He said that in executive session the Board decided not

to adopt staffing changes that had previously been contemplated. He asked that Moreland provide an updated budget for the Selectboard meeting on January 7.

There was no further business.

MOTION BY DAVID GARTENSTEIN AT 9:12AM TO ADJOURN. MOTION CARRIED 4-0 (SCHOALES WAS NOT PRESENT AT THE TIME OF THE VOTE).

David Schoales, Clerk