

**Town of Auburn
Board of Selectmen
Workshop Meeting
January 16, 2020**

Selectmen Present: Richard Eaton, Keith Leclair and Todd Bedard

Also Present: Rick Alpers and Shelley Walts, Primex Member Services Consultants; and Town Administrator William Herman.

Mr. Eaton called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Finalize Town Meeting Warrant

Mr. Herman reported there were two items of consideration left for the Board with respect to articles appearing on the Town Meeting warrant. The first is the petition article received concerning the adoption of a property tax exemption for solar energy systems. As presented, the proposal is to exempt 50% of the assessed value of the solar energy systems. Mr. Herman indicated the petition was submitted within the time frame required for petition articles, and had more than 25 signatures of registered voters, so it needs to appear on the warrant. The decision for the Board to make is whether they wanted to recommend the article's adoption or not, or to not list any recommendation on the article.

Mr. Eaton indicated he felt it was important for the Board to include a recommendation and that where there already nearly \$1 million in assessed valuation in the Town's base for solar energy systems, he felt the exemption for what in essence was a property improvement should not be exempted and the Selectmen should include a "not recommended" citation on the article.

Mr. Leclair indicated he was torn on the issue as he understood both the positives and negatives if the article were adopted. He is concerned about the financial impact this would have on the majority of taxpayers as the valuation loss from the 50% of value of the solar energy systems would be shifted to all of the non-solar property owners, which is the majority of local taxpayers. He felt the federal and state governments should be offering incentives for property owners to consider solar, and that it was not appropriate to do so at the local level.

Mr. Bedard stated he saw the cost value and social value to increased use of solar energy, but he also understood providing the exemption would shift a greater part of the property tax burden to other taxpayers. He thought this should be an item for the voters to determine without a recommendation from the Selectmen.

Mr. Leclair moved for the Board of Selectmen to not recommend the adoption of the proposed solar energy tax exemption. Seconded by Mr. Eaton. A vote was

taken: two were in favor (Eaton and Leclair) and one opposed (Bedard); the motion carries.

The second warrant article for consideration was Article #7 concerning the funding of construction of a storage garage building. Mr. Herman noted when the NH Department of Revenue Administration (NHDRA) reviewed the draft language of Auburn's warrant, they inquired whether the Town was only going to do the project if Municipal Aid revenue was forthcoming from the State of New Hampshire. When they were advised that was the intention of the Selectmen, it was recommended the sentence "*Should the Municipal Aid Revenue from the State of New Hampshire not be received by the Town, this warrant article will be null and void*" be included in the article to make that point clear.

It was suggested two other options might be: "*Should the Municipal Aid Revenue from the State of New Hampshire not be received by the Town, this sum shall come from the unreserved fund balance (surplus) as of December 31, 2019 with no additional amount to be raised by taxation in 2020.*" Or, "*Should the Municipal Aid Revenue from the State of New Hampshire not be received by the Town, this sum shall be raised by taxation in 2020.*"

All three Selectmen agreed their intention was not to raise the \$43,000 from general taxation, and they would not be in favor of that option at this point. The Board discussed the likelihood of the Municipal Aid revenue approved in the current State budget being eliminated in 2020 by the Legislature and their overall discussions on this item have been that it would be funded by this one time source of funds.

There was a general consensus that the more layers there are to a warrant article, the more confusing the article can be to some voters. The Board was not attempting to develop a complex warrant article on this issue. They also felt the project had only been discussed and presented as being covered through this source of funding.

Mr. Leclair moved for the Board to include the language: "*Should the Municipal Aid Revenue from the State of New Hampshire not be received by the Town, this warrant article will be null and void*" in the storage garage warrant article. Seconded by Mr. Bedard. A vote was taken, all were in agreement, the motion carried unanimously.

Painting of Safety Complex Training Room

Mr. Eaton provided the Board a cost estimate he had received for the painting of the Training Room in the Safety Complex that totaled \$2,100. He indicated a significant amount was the cost of materials for the project, and he felt this was a fair cost for the work. Mr. Leclair indicated his initial thought was the cost was high, and he would like to see a second or third quote for this work. Mr. Bedard and Mr. Leclair agreed they

would each secure a cost estimate for this project to enable the Board to have comparison figures to consider. The item was tabled until the Board's next meeting.

Presidential Primary Election Set-Up

Mr. Eaton noted with the upcoming February 11th Presidential Primary, the Board should be looking at the set-up for the election due to the renovation of the Auburn Village School and the space available in the entry area and the hallway outside of the gymnasium where voting will take place. He recommended organizations such as the Historical Association and Girls Scouts should not be in the gymnasium, but in an area outside of the gym. It was noted the election and facility are under the control of the Town Moderator at the time of an election, and the concerns shall be shared with Mr. Tillery.

February Board Meeting

The Board reviewed the anticipated Board meeting schedule of February 10th and February 24th. There was discussion about travel plans of one of the Board members and the potential of moving the February 24th meeting to February 17th. It was ultimately agreed to leave the meeting schedule as planned for February 24th.

House Bill 1568

Mr. Bedard brought to the Board's attention a legislative proposal (House Bill 1568) which could restrict local elected officials from doing business with the Town. Mr. Bedard expressed the concern that, particularly for smaller communities, local officials and local business owners, are often the same people. He also noted the recent work for the addition to the Police Department and how Mr. Eaton volunteered his services as a benefit to the community. He felt the proposed legislation could prevent that type of effort in the future if adopted, which would be to the detriment of the community. Mr. Eaton and Mr. Leclair agreed with Mr. Bedard on this issue, and felt it was something that should not be legislated at the State level, but was better to be addressed locally.

The Board concluded its limited business workshop meeting at 9:50 AM in order to move to a facilitated Goal Setting Session.

Facilitated Meeting – Town of Auburn Goal Setting Session

Mr. Alpers opened the meeting by thanking the Board of Selectmen for inviting Primex to assist the Town of Auburn with a goal setting session to define and outline their goals for the community for the coming year.

Mr. Alpers provided brief introductions of Shelley Walts and himself, and of Primex as an organization. He then outlined the process and guidelines for the meeting, all aimed at formally establishing the top two to three goals for the Town in the coming year.

The first portion of the workshop was focused on reviewing the goals established for 2019 by the Board of Selectmen and what degree of success was achieved during the past year. The summary of 2019 goals and action taken includes:

- *Focus on the development of the south end of Auburn including the cost of bring water to the area, potential amendments to the zoning of properties and the re-authorization of the Auburn Development Authority.*

The Board noted they received an estimate for the cost of bringing a municipal water line to this portion of town, and it was determined to be cost prohibitive for the Town at this point in time. The Planning Board did meet with several potential developers to discuss the development of a 55 & Older Housing regulation, which has since been developed by the Planning Board and is proposed for adoption at the March 2020 Town voting. The Board had determined the re-authorization of the Auburn Development Authority was premature once attention was focused on senior housing, which could be located in many areas of the community.

- *Renovation of the Police Department facility and storage plans for Parks and Recreation.*

The Board reported it was able to achieve an addition to the Police Department during the past year that addressed the major points noted in an MRI Review of the department, which was the provision of separate male and female locker room facilities; storage space for larger items, and the provision of dedicated records storage. They noted the project was done within existing funds available to the Town and the receipt of unanticipated Municipal Aid from the State of New Hampshire in 2019. The Board also noted a plan for a storage garage for Parks & Recreation has been placed on the warrant for the March 2020 voting. The project is proposed to be funded by the 2020 Municipal Aid to come from the State of New Hampshire.

- *Exploration of digitizing of Town Records.*

Mr. Herman reported the Town Hall staff has gathered sufficient information from a Manchester-based firm that is used by a significant number of municipalities, in addition to large businesses, medical offices and hospitals, for this type of service. With the information in hand, the Town will be able to issue a Request for Proposal in 2020 to be able to have cost estimates in hand for the FY 2021 budget process to begin this process.

Mr. Alpers complimented the Board for focusing on the goals they set for the past year and accomplishing a lot of what they set out to do, also recognizing that several items were long-term efforts and would not have been fully accomplished in a year's time.

The second portion of the workshop was structured for each member of the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator to suggest what they individually felt were the top two or three goals for the Town for the coming year. Each individual offered what they felt were the three top goals for the Town in 2020. There was a lot of similarity and overlapping of many suggested goals, and the meeting recessed to allow Mr. Alpers and Ms. Walts to review and compile the discussion into three overall goals for the Board to consider. When the meeting resumed, the proposed goals included:

- Passage of the warrant article for the storage garage building for Parks & Recreation in March, and the ultimate building of the facility before the end of 2020.
- Work with the Library Trustees to focus attention on the potential of an expansion of the Griffin Library and development of community center space on the expanded property the library is situated. The planning efforts would include a professional review of the Town property and the existing building to know what the property could support and how realistic it would be to expand the existing building. In addition, a community-wide survey of interests and needs would be undertaken, as well as potential focus group sessions. This would lead to a general facilitated forum in the fall similar to what had been done in recent years for the Auburn Village School project and the design of Parks & Recreation.
- Focusing attention on the Town's need for a building maintenance effort for the ongoing maintenance of four main Town facilities – the Town Hall, Safety Complex, Pingree Hill Fire Station and the Griffin Free Public Library. The effort could potentially result in the development of a part-time maintenance position, a partnering with the Auburn School District or possibly contracting with a property maintenance firm. There is also the need to make improvements to the Pingree Hill Fire Station to be undertaken in 2020 and, for which, funding is included in the FY 2020 warrant articles.
- Undertaking discussions with Manchester Water Works to address a number of items and issues both sides have had various discussions or interests in order to move them forward to conclusion. Among the items for discussion include the use of the Severance School building for a community center facility; improving the intersection of Hooksett Road and Depot Road; land for expansion of the Auburn Village Cemetery; provision of a permanent right-of-way access for MWW to their property behind the Safety Complex, and cleaning-up and defining property lines and uses in certain areas between the MWW, Auburn School District and Town of Auburn.

The Board and Town Administrator agreed on what they felt could be reasonable time frames for significant progress or completion of each of the goals identified.

Mr. Alpers and Ms. Walts will formalize the information developed during the workshop meeting and provide the Selectmen and the Town Administrator with a document they can use with the Town departments and public in communicating their goals for the coming year.

Adjourn

Mr. Eaton moved to adjourn; Mr. Bedard seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 11:12 a.m.