



Town of Boylston 221 Main Street, Boylston, MA 01505

Board of Selectmen Minutes 01/21/2014

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, January 21, 2014

Location: Town Hall, 221 Main Street

Time: 6:10 PM – 8:30 PM

Members Present: Chairman James Wood; Michael May; Brian Falk, Town Counsel; Martin McNamara, Town Administrator, Lori Esposito, Administrative Assistant (Others as listed on attached sheet.)

Absent: Matt Mecum

The meeting commenced at 6:10 PM.

This is a joint meeting of the Board of Selectmen with the Finance Committee and the Board of Assessors. Present: Dave Butler and Eric Brose of the Finance Committee. Carl Cravedi, Mike Juliano, Margo Richardson and Paul O'Connor of the Assessors' Office.

- Harold Scheid from Regional Resource Group, Inc. (RRG) of Leominster made a presentation entitled "Property Tax Assessment Service Proposal" for the Town. This offer is an alternative to a principal Assessor/Staff person present in Town Hall. Ashby, Lunenburg, Sterling, West Boylston are examples of some of the towns utilizing Mr. Scheid's services. He said this solves problems for small towns with advantages of regionalization without all of the headaches. They serve 18 cities and towns in total, most in Central Massachusetts and North Central Massachusetts.
- They would take over the management and administration of the Assessors' Office.
- A team is assigned to each town. There are lead assessors with an inspector, GIS staff and an administrator to oversee/train clerical staff. It is tailor-made, depending on the needs of the town.
- Carl Cravedi asked what is in the proposal. The budget is outlined on Page 10 of his proposal; it totals \$78,725, which includes Assessors' stipends and salary for a part time clerk in Town Hall, as well as miscellaneous expenses and their contract.
- Carl asked if we would have a clerk handling day-to-day tasks. Mr. Scheid said we would. He asked what RRG provides. Mr. Scheid said the Clerk would be re-evaluating, performing customer service, etc.

Discussion regarding how clerical services would work. Part-time potentially for two mornings or one morning and one afternoon.

- Carl asked if the ATB hearing is included. Harold said it is included, regardless of how many times it is necessary to go or commercial versus residential. He estimates one to two per year but would respond to as many as necessary.
- RRG's retainer would be \$45K with expenses, clerical wages, etc., separate from that figure.
- Carl asked for their certification schedule/valuations. Harold said all is on a very tight calendar; if they are behind and it is necessary, additional staff is added. Valuations are done at the end of summer. Certification is the first and second week in September.
- Eric Brose asked where the re-evaluation cost in Year Three in the proposal is. Mr. Scheid said the cost is built in over a three-year contract.

Discussion regarding the abatement process.

- Carl asked if they have ever not gotten tax bills out on time. Harold said yes, once this past year.
- A computer virus crashed their hard drive and the backups were empty. They needed to have a company pull data which caused a delay.
- Margo asked if the \$45K includes re-evaluation. The response was in the affirmative.
- Frank Reale, in the audience, said, because the Assessors are elected do they have control over what RRG is doing. Harold said that if they are elected, they report to the Assessors. If the Assessors are appointed, they report to the Town Administrator/Manager. Marty McNamara said the Board of Assessors has control over staffing in the office; they are the only ones that can hire and sign a contract with RRG. They would also need to do an RFP to comply with procurement law. The Board of Assessors needs to instruct the Town Administrator and the Board of Selectmen for the next step, if they are interested. The TA has an RFP ready to go. This takes time and the process should be started soon to be timely for the next fiscal year.
- Dave Butler said the Finance Committee is in support of going out for a RFP. Carl Cravedi said the Board of Assessors makes that decision.
- Mike May said in the event we have a contract can it be cancelled or terminated? Mr. Scheid said it cannot. Mike asked what technical resources RRG brings to the table. Harold said they have all licensed appraisers with ten years-plus experience and the ability to value any property. Mike asked what other benefits are there to the community. Harold said they would become familiar with property and issues in Town over time. Alternately, vendors are in every three years for two to three weeks and then leave with no expectation of defending the values. RRG has a vested interest to do a credible job since they answer directly to the taxpayers.
- Mike asked about liability, contractual terms, etc. Do they hold the community harmless, etc.? Are we protected from claims? Harold said they have general liability insurance. There is no insurer who will insure errors and omissions; this is a subjective service. They use the same abatement process, covered by a Board of Assessors overlay.
- Mike asked about the tenure of their current employees. Harold said that over the past 12 years they have lost only two employees. One left for full-time town work and one was terminated for less than expected service and performance.
- We have several DOR non-taxable parcels. What control do they have with State valuations that seem much undervalued? Harold said six years ago they appealed a DOR assessment in West Boylston and Sterling. The outcome was not what he hoped for but needed to accept the Commissioner's final decision on the valuation of the land. Subsequently, in Sterling, they re-inventoried every property and buildable parcel held by DCR. He can't reveal the outcome but they decided to "let sleeping dogs lie."
- Carl asked if things are flexible. What if the Board of Assessors didn't like the staff assigned; do we have a say in that? Yes. Carl asked, regarding the contract, what are the fees over the last three to four years to a certain community; what are the increases. Harold said he typically sees a 2.5% increase year to year.
- Paul O'Connor asked if special projects cost extra money. Harold said no.
- Mike May said we have a lot of properties with questionable title/ownership. Would a project to make headway with that entail additional cost from RRG? Would we need a resolution to address the questions to capture additional revenue? We have assets not being realized. Harold said ad-hoc ownership questions come up over the course of business; they do their internal title research. However, they are not attorneys and would advise the Town to go beyond their cursory review; they would refer them to Town Counsel or a title examiner.
- Mike mentioned, regarding mapping, that their proposal shows \$1,800 for services recommending a different vendor from what we now have. Why is there such a disparity? We have a \$4K/year vendor. Harold said he believes he gets a better price due to volume; all but two of his communities use it.

The Board of Assessors, following a brief discussion, voted unanimously to proceed with a RFP.

7:06 PM Frank Reale re New DPW or DPW/Fire Building:

- He has had several meetings with the Highway Superintendent and the Fire Chief and presented a floor plan for a DPW-only building and also for a DPW/Fire combined building. They measured all DPW vehicles and equipment before coming up with the floor plan. The fire station is very cramped with only about two feet between each vehicle. New vehicles won't fit; the building is obsolete.

- Frank obtained a cost per square foot for single-floor structures. For the DPW and estimated total, based on the floor plan, would be \$2,421,936. The fire station is estimated at \$1,552,584. A combined total cost of \$3,974,520. Frank has estimates by a contractor, who believes these figures are high.
- He surveyed four area towns that recently built:

Groton	\$16M	}	
Ashburnham	\$75 M	}	All under bid
Holden	\$10 M	}	
Paxton	\$7.7 M	}	

- He reviewed the advantages of a pre-engineered steel building.
- We could sell 11 acres of Town-owned land on Sewall Street and use money from the DPW Stabilization Fund, debt exclusion. There is the potential for seven to eight homes on that property and taxes would also be collected.

Potential locations:

YOU, INC.	FOOTBALL FIELD	HILLSIDE	
First lot on left of driveway	to left of driveway – not field itself	either side	driveway off Tivnan Dr,

- Jim Wood asked when Hillside comes off the tax rolls. The TA said in April 2015. Dave Butler said the net effect on the tax rate would be about 33¢, very minimal. Mike May asked if the department heads endorse the concept and design? Frank said "Yes, the plans are according to what they want."
- Have any discussions addressed the most efficient way to design from a cost perspective? Frank said we could approach a design-builder and ask about the cost per square foot. Mike May asked if there is an expansion potential over the next 20 years and Frank said there is but we shouldn't need more space over the next 20 years.
- Mike said he had three reservations:
 - He wants to see all budget requests for the upcoming year.
 - Expense item – would like to be within 10% of the actual cost.
 - Big questions regarding septic/sewer on Route 140. He wants to solve that issue first to develop the 140 Corridor and secure revenue. The single barrier to commercial revenue in this Town and that is his top priority, personally.
- Frank said, as a Selectman, he has heard the same for years – no money to do it. We need to take care of it now. Dave Butler said we have \$20K to go toward the architect/engineering. Mike May is sure a DPW-only building can be done for \$500K. Jim Wood said timing and money is the issue. In a couple of months we will know what is going on with the FY'15 budget. Meanwhile, get together with Steve and Joe to find out the estimated cost and building designs. He is 100% behind the project but doesn't want to raise taxes.
- Mike May said he feels that if the DPW went into the building first, then Phase 1 is fire, it can be done and is more tolerable to the community. Mike will reach out to some contractors, bring the information to the table and participate in discussions with Frank. Frank said he will wait for Mike to contact him.

Town Accountant, Dan Hayne's, Update to the Board:

- Things are proceeding slowly but surely.
- Jim asked if he feels the Tax Collector/Treasurer position should have more hours? Dan said Jeff has been able to make it work and is on time with monthly receipts.
- Mike asked him to define his role. Dan said he works very closely with the Treasurer/Collector. For a small town, it works well.

- Dan prepares documents needed to conduct an audit
- Exercises control over books/records
- The industry software program is not integrated with the Treasurer/Collector but that is fairly common in small towns, due to cost.
- Mike asked if there is any exposure or penetration of the accounting system; any redundancy. Dan said there are no real risks. Redundancy is on the school side, due to the regional system.
- Mike discussed the potential need to host/store in a cloud-based environment. This avoids risk to the community. It is very inexpensive, via a subscription fee.

Report of the Town Administrator to the Board of Selectmen:

- **Central Mass Mosquito Project:** The TA attended the annual meeting of the Central MA Mosquito Project in Northborough. Following the meeting all member communities received the estimated Cherry Sheet assessment for FY15. Our assessment rose by 1.8% to \$37,401. Executive Director, Tim Deschamps, gave a presentation outlining the components of the program. The TA feels it might be worthwhile to have the Project do a presentation at a Selectmen's Meeting and requests the Board approve him scheduling such a meeting.
- **Retirement System:** The TA attended the annual meeting of the Worcester Regional Retirement System in Sturbridge. The Boylston assessment for FY15 is \$413,394, an increase of 5.7% or \$22,422, over last year. This is the second year we are being assessed using the actuarial method. Any increase or decrease in the number of employees or retirees will not be reflected in the valuations until next year. New numbers will be reported to the WRRS this month to be used for the FY16 assessment. The Retirement System has given initial approval for Officer Ron Rajotte's retirement. It now must go to the full Retirement Board for final approval. More information should be available in February.
- **Treasurer/Collector Position:** Of the numerous resumes received for the Treasurer/Collector's position only three resumes have any municipal experience; interviews with them have been arranged for later this week. Meanwhile, former Assistant/Treasurer/Collector Joe Daigneault has expressed interest in filling in as Interim Treasurer/Collector. We have agreed on an hourly rate of \$25. If appointed, Joe would start on January 27, giving him several days to transition with Jeff Ugalde.

Mike May made a motion to appoint Joseph Daigneault as Interim Treasurer/Collector at \$25/hour, to start on Monday, January 27, 2014, continuing until position is filled. Jim Wood seconded the motion; voted all in favor.

The TA said he has spoken with several Treasurer/Collectors in the area and found that most believe 26 hours per week is insufficient to effectively do the job. Those seeking full-time employment have an issue with this. The second issue is the salary level. While the hourly rate is competitive the short hours produce a low annual salary. This position handles in excess of \$14M annually and is responsible for bonding and/or borrowing tens of millions of dollars for the Town, as well as being responsible for a multi-million dollar annual payroll. There have been four different people in the position in the past five to six years. The need for stability in the Treasurer/Collector office is crucial and the TAQ recommends the Board approve an increase in weekly hours to a minimum of 32 hours per week at the same pay rate. Jim wants to pay someone enough so they want to stay. We need to be competitive with other towns.

Mike May made a motion to increase the position to 32 hours a week, at the current hourly rate. Jim Wood seconded the motion; voted all in favor.

- **MIIA Grant:** We received a \$4,848 grant from MIIA to purchase and install a Fleet Maintenance Program. Lori has ordered and received almost all of the computer equipment needed for the system. We will order software and begin tracking maintenance on vehicles and equipment starting with the Highway Dept. vehicles, and will add other vehicles as we go along. This will be very helpful in tracking our maintenance costs and keeping the equipment in good condition.
- **PILOTS:** We received a payment of \$2,111.32 from the MA Center of New England on Linden Street. This is approximately 15% of what the tax would be on the property if assessed. On the negative side, the Board of Directors of Calliope Productions has voted to decline any PILOT contribution, stating that they pay for various licenses to operate. They also make their parking lot, plowed at their expense, fully accessible to the

- Police Dept. for traffic surveillance and to the School Dept. as a school bus stop.
- There has been no response as yet from New England Forestry, Boylston Housing, Sudbury Valley Trustees, Greater Worcester Land Trust or Tower Hill.

Mike May recommends a standard letter for the positive responses received—a thank you from the community. Also for negative responses, possibly suggest an in-kind or alternative offer.

- Delinquent Tax Payments:** Approximately \$75K has been received over the past several months from delinquent taxpayers. The Treasurer will shortly send out the third demand for payment to non-responders.
- Shared H/R with Berlin:** The Berlin Board of Selectmen sent a letter regarding the possibility of creating a shared Human Resources position between Berlin, Boylston and Tahanto. Funding might be available through CMRPC to cover the cost of a study to determine the need for such a position. The TA's opinion is that such a need exists and requests the Board send a letter of interest to Berlin.
- Mike May said we should be working together but the Berlin Board didn't agree with the shared school position proposed by the School Committee. Why would this be different? We'll attempt to cooperate but will they then reject it again?

Mike May made a motion to endorse having a study made by CMRPC to determine the need for a shared H/R position for Berlin, Boylston, Berlin-Boylston Schools. Jim Wood seconded the motion; voted all in favor.

- Joint Purchasing:** The CMRPC is considering a new program for joint purchasing. They already do that for heating oil and other items such as salt and sand. They are now considering joint purchasing of medical supplies for ambulances, etc. The TA has expressed interest in being involved in this program. There is also the possibility of grant funding being available that would allow us to form a regional group consisting of Boylston, Berlin and West Boylston for the purchase of highway equipment.
- Chapter 90 Reimbursement:** The form needs to be signed by the Board for us to be reimbursed for road work done in the summer and fall.

Chapter 90 documents signed by members of the Board and the Town Accountant.

Highway Superintendent's Report to the Board:

Steve Mero met with the West Boylston DEPW Director; they are both trying to save some money in winter. West Boylston is using a new material to salt roadways. Much less product is required and it is easier to clean up in the spring. Using this product could save Boylston \$10 to \$15K. Steve will get more information and present it at the next Selectmen's Meeting.

At 8:30 PM Mike May made a motion to adjourn. Jim Wood seconded the motion; voted all in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lori Esposito, Administrative Assistant