



TOWN OF BLANDFORD
Board of Selectmen, Minutes
April 14, 2015

Attendance: Andy Montanaro, Bill Levakis, Adam Dolby and Cara Letendre – Secretary

Open Meeting:

7:04 p.m. Adam meeting opened, provided notice that meeting may be recorded.

Posted Agenda Items:

1. Finance Appointing Committee: See Town Clerk Minutes. Appointed Jeff Bacon to a three year term.
2. Eric Kinsherf: CPA doing assessment of accounting process through PVPC.
 - a. Mr. Kinsherf specializes in municipal finance and accounting. He is currently working with Amy DeRoscher (an expert in the field of regional accounting) on an accounting evaluation for Blandford through a DLTA funded PVPC program. His goal is to get an idea of where we stand and to develop an accounting profile to put into an RFP for the Regional Accounting position. Mr. Kinsherf is here to get the Board's perspective and expectations.
 - b. Mr. Dolby explained the history of this project to the audience.
 - c. Mr. Kinsherf: has determined that the Town needs two services, one to get us caught up and one to continue with ongoing work.
 - d. Mr. Montanaro: Concerns/Goals
 - i. Outcome based
 - ii. Closing books on times
 - iii. Books matching year to year
 - iv. Monthly reconciliations
 - v. Coordination between financial officers.
 - e. Mr. Kinsherf: How much face time with a Regional Accountant would be desired?
 - i. Mr. Dolby: Would like to hear from the firm that is bidding on the RFP as to the hours needed and why. Envisions more face time early and then scaling back.
 - ii. Mr. Montanaro: What would Regional Accountant do from a far?
 - iii. Mr. Kinsherf: expected to answer phone calls and emails in reasonable time. They would also have remote access to SoftRight.
 - f. Mr. van Werkhoven: Financial officers have recently spent a lot of time fixing transactions that were improperly posted in the past. FY15 should be smoother and we expect to do an FY15 audit. Town has hired a consultant to work on policies and procedures. Who will be processing invoices and producing the weekly warrant?

- any town that pulls out will still have to pay their share. Blandford's portion of the school budget is 5% less this year than in 2009. State aid has been reduced.
- i.** Mrs. Garfield: Have any Blandford families approached the Board about sending our children elsewhere?
 - i.** Mr. Dolby: yes several.
 - j.** Mr. Dolby: the financial issue is not the only issue, but is a huge part. Bottom line is our enrollment is down 30% in the last few years and the cost has remained the same, or increased. The intent of the letter was that we can't wait to react. Worthington happened fast and we have to at least look at the possibility. It seems that other towns are exploring other options as well.
 - k.** Mrs. Garfield: the school is not a business, it's about our kids.
 - l.** Mr. Dolby: The Town is a business and we have to make tenable decisions for the whole town.
 - m.** Mrs. Garfield: The School Committee had to pass the level funded service budget because of the Worthington withdrawal. We had to file an education plan. With the small number of students leaving from Worthington in each grade not much changed and we had to pass level funding to maintain services and hope for mitigation.
 - n.** Mr. Levakis: How is the school budget drawn up and moved along. Does each member of the School Committee know what each line item is?
 - i.** Mr. Hopson: In September/October start putting the budget together. In November have a line item budget. In December the School Committee has that budget to begin review. We have had 4 budgets this year so far: a 7 town budget, a 6 town budget, a 6 transitional budget, and a 0% assessment budget. Once it is adopted by the School Committee it goes out to the towns. If new numbers come out in the House & Senate budget then the assessment numbers will change. However, we will not know for sure until the Governor signs, which could be as late as September. The budget is 16 pages long, can't guarantee that the School Committee members would be able to explain each line item, pay administration to do that. The School Committee is looking at options.
 - o.** Mrs. Crane: Worthington left the district due to educational reasons, not to save money. Not sure if a request to the state to leave the system to save money would pass. The 6 remaining towns need to start making noise to the State in a unified positive direction. This move was hurtful to the staff.
 - p.** Mr. Dolby: It is easy to blame the Commonwealth. We have to do something to make them notice.
 - q.** Mr. Hopson: if we were to get 100% of transportation funding from the State then our problem would go away. Last year they gave us 90% then took it away. However, we may be getting that money back as there is a lawsuit in progress. In 2003 and 2004 the district lost 1.8 million in funding, but we endured.
 - i.** Mr. van Werkhoven: during that period we closed several schools and picked up a substantial increase in our cost of managing this building (Town Hall). We are now a district with less than 900 students. Asked the district to consider other options as a whole, either convince us that the district is viable or present other options.
 - r.** Mr. Gordon Avery: Suggested that we acquire students from other surrounding towns
 - i.** Mr. Hopson: for them to get out of their district requires them to go through the legislative process. Rather than close districts, looking into sharing services. Gateway does offer school choice.

- s. Mrs. Debbie Robbins: Our home values would decrease if we send out children to other districts.
 - t. Mr. Levakis: Can we cut transportation costs?
 - i. Mr. Hopson: we have already cut them from \$1.5 million to \$800,000 in last ten years. There is a law as to how far students can walk to a bus stop.
 - u. Mrs. Linda Smith: GTAC is a unified front. Their hope is to get the School Board to take the towns more seriously. The Blandford Finance Committee has decided that the Town can afford to fund 2 parts of the school budget. It is a place holder budget and needs to be re-worked. We are not saying we don't believe in education.
 - v. Mrs. Cheryl Hopson: (disclosure – married to Dave Hopson) Worthington started voicing their concerns 5 years ago and Blandford was not interested. There are budget meetings every month and no one shows up to represent Blandford. Suddenly we have to look at other options?
 - i. Mr. Dolby: No not suddenly. The school budget is untenable and the Selectboard has been making efforts to get informed. We are working with the School Committee to see what is next. Not a knee jerk reaction, starting a process.
 - ii. Mr. Montanaro: We were under the impression that all of the other six towns had to be in agreement for Worthington to leave and that didn't happen.
 - w. Mr. Hopson: The school budget has not increased, the assessment has increased and thus the dollar figure is up.
 - x. Mr. Levakis: We thought Worthington would not be allowed to secede. We reacted this way after hearing that other towns were considering pulling out of the district. Blandford has to have a plan.
 - y. Mr. Dolby: What does the School Committee suggest as a next step for the Selectboard?
 - i. Mr. Hopson: is assuming that the school budget will not pass. The School Committee will then take another look at it. The School Committee will come up with alternatives. To go the route of Worthington with the cost involved would not be as effective for Blandford as letting the School Committee re-assess.
 - ii. Mrs. Crane: The School Committee already has prioritized cut options.
4. DLTA Request to PVPC: Mr. Dolby was approached by Representative Pignatelli who was approached by Mass DOT. Mass DOT suggested that it would be prudent for Blandford to approach PVPC to get DLTA funding for a feasibility study for the land behind the westbound Mass Pike plaza. This would be at no cost to us.
- a. Mr. Levakis: disagrees, concerned with State's intentions. Feels that the site is not feasible.
 - b. Mr. Dolby: Mass DOT has a mandate from the Governor's office to develop the land. They don't want to sell or give it to us. If we don't participate in this project we defer the choice of what is done with the property to DOT. This feasibility study will provide us with the answer as to what use will be best for the site. The question is whether or not we want to have input.
 - c. Mr. Dolby motion to submit request to PVPC for DLTA to fund a feasibility study for Mass DOT land behind the westbound plaza on the Mass Pike, Mr. Montanaro second, discussion:
 - i. Mr. Montanaro: it is not our money being spent on the study and it's a possibility (Adam: "a certainty") that something will happen with the

land whether we participate or not. Recommends that we have a seat at the table to influence the decision.

- ii. Mr. Levakis: Wait and do research.
- iii. Mr. Dolby: The DLTA funding expires next week.
- iv. Mr. Jemiolo: If we do this then our other feasibility study is a waste of time.
- v. Mr. van Werkhoven: Town has commissioned a feasibility study for the safety complex and is looking at the same parcel of land through that study. However, this is a totally separate study that DOT is proposing. This is our chance to let them know what we are thinking for this site. We need to be at the table to have influence on the decision. Zero cost is attached.
- vi. Mr. Dolby: This is the research. There is no commitment. The feasibility study for the safety complex is also funded by DOT. This is an extra study to see what other options for the site might be. DOT can't fund a second feasibility study so they proposed this option to be funded through DLTA.
- vii. Mr. Jemiolo: stormed out of the office in a fit of rage.
- viii. Mr. Levakis: Skeptical about why and who started this.
- ix. Mrs. Linda Smith: We found out about the wind turbines 25 days before it was supposed to happen. If we have an opportunity to sit at the table and get information early then we need to do that.
- x. Vote: Mr. Dolby – yes, Mr. Montanar – yes, Mr. Levakis – no. Motion passes.

5. COA Municipal Agreement for Aging Consortium Southern Hilltown Council:

- a. Drawn up by Kopleman & Paige.
- b. Board will review and revisit.

Old Business:

- 1. Feasibility Study: Mr. TJ Cousineau presented Building Planning Committee's recommendations as the chair, Mr. Steve Jemiolo, no longer present.
 - a. After hearing both presentations, the Building Planning chose Kaestle Boos. They can start ASAP.
 - b. Mr. Dolby motion to approve Kaestle Boos per advice of the Building Planning Committee to conduct the feasibility study and preliminary design for a Highway Safety Complex, Mr. Montanaro second, unanimous vote.
- 2. Annual Town Meeting Warrant:
 - a. Board asked Mr. Langmore to invite Wired West representatives to mini-meeting and annual meeting.
 - b. Cara will revise warrant and have Town Council give final approval.

New Business:

10:20 p.m. Mr. Dolby motion to adjourn, Mr. Montanaro second, unanimous vote.

Submitted by: Cara Letendre

William Levakis

Andy Montanaro

Adam Dolby

