

Swampscott Finance Committee Meeting
Wednesday May 10, 2017
7:00PM

Attending: Marzie Galazka (chair) Polly Titcomb, Jill Sullivan, Mary Ellen Fletcher, William Jones, Joan Hilario, Cinder McNerney, Tim Dorsey

Absent: Gail Rosenberg

Also present: Peter Spellios (BOS) Leah Ryan (CIC) Darren Klein , Sean Fitzgerald (TA), Ron Mendes (ATA for Administration)

Meeting was opened at 7:00

Ms. Galazka stated that there may have been a problem with the posting of our meeting last night and we will look into it and take corrective action if necessary.

Ms. McNerney asked about a list of communities that used eminent domain for acquisition of rail/trail lands. She wanted to know if the takings were of private property other than that of the utility. Mr. Fitzgerald indicated that both types of takings were done – an audience member disagreed.

Ms. Galazka read a new warrant for the Rail Trail including the requirement of an appraisal being done after the engineering but before any takings so that we would be sure that the current appropriation is enough to cover the acquisition.

Mr. Jones indicated he would like the plan split in two phases: design in this town meeting and acquisition later. Ms. Fletcher indicated that this process has been stressful and disapproves of how this has delivered to the finance committee and CIC. We still don't have a capital plan and our facilities director says we need a lot of funds invested in buildings. A rail trail would be an asset, but it's a want and not a need. Eminent domain shouldn't be taken lightly.

Ms. Galazka stated that she sees this as an opportunity and that we have a new Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen who see this as a positive for the community and are committed to developing a capital plan going forward.

Ms. McNerney agreed that we should do the design phase first and come to town meeting in the fall for the acquisition.

Mr. Spellios indicated that the kind of design we want to do will include National Grid and they will not participate unless the political issue is resolved. We want to shift from a political debate about should we have it or should we not have it toward a governing debate about how best to go forward with it. In order for every single abutter of the trail to engage in a conversation about mitigation and design, they

need to know that the trail is going to go forward. The appraisal Mr. Dorsey requested in the middle of the process is an appropriate check on the process.

Nancy Maloney states that this is putting the cart before the horse. We don't know how much the trail will cost.

Discussion was held about exactly the steps in which this process would go forward. Several audience members argued that there is not enough financial information available to know exactly how this money will be spent.

Sullivan/Dorsey – Ms. Sullivan argued that as the finance committee role is finances, she feels that the warrant as adjusted by Mr. Dorsey accomplishes the goal of having a successful design process including the abutters but reducing the political upheaval in the fall. This process would give us a stop after the design if things don't look as if they can move forward. Mr. Dorsey concurred that the information we've received about construction costs and grants, it seems very likely that we can get this built. Also he felt that switching to bonding was persuasive to him.

Ms. Titcomb focused on the charge of the finance committee. Encouraged the abutters to address town meeting with their concerns. The amended warrant article makes her feel more comfortable that we have the debt capacity and that we're not pioneers. We are being as reasonable as we can be although there will always be local differences. Ms. Hilario echoes the thought – very hard to take the issue as a whole and take the emotion out of it. From a financial standpoint, this warrant article allows us to move forward with a strong project for the town with financial checks and balances.

Ms. Fletcher feels there is no harm in splitting out the design and that it makes better sense financially. The fact that we are discussing a warrant before all of our needs is troubling. Ms. McNerney also prefers splitting it out. She is not convinced that rail trails add to property values. Wants to have a better sense of total project costs. We don't have a financial vision.

Ms. Fletcher requested that the following prepared statement be incorporated as part of the minutes:

I don't support doing business like this, coming to the towns financial committees at the last minute is a disservice to the community and disrespectful to the volunteer who serve.

We do not have a capital plan even though its been requested year after year. We have a facility director who has publicly stated at past FC meetings our infrastructure is in desperate need of improvement and investment. As of today we still do not know or have a report on what those costs and needs are.

We have schools in deplorable condition. Recently we had a principle publically state she was leaving because of the poor conditions.

We have serious issues with the Stacey Brooke we have citizens complaining about our tax burden.

It is my opinion this would be an asset to the community however it is a want not a need.

Eminent Domain is not something to take lightly, I am very worried about the litigation expenses.

I recommend we do the design and engineer, either by paying for it by the town or by splitting the cost with Spirit, similar to the turf field endeavor. Following the completion of the design work we will have better knowledge and facts to go forward. I don't agree with the BOS position it needs to be kept together and I'm not comfortable with the spending of 610k with out a plan.

All in favor: 5-3

Sullivan/Titcomb motion to indefinitely postpone article 12 as the van has been moved into the capital article 13.

On Article 30 – we're changing the number of additional liquor license we're asking for to 8.

We discussed the amount of retained earnings in the water and sewer enterprise funds. Some additional retained earnings are being kept on to prepare for the Stacy Brook projects. Mr. Fitzgerald argued that next year we will be able to talk better about these funds after some more analysis.

Article 14 and 15 Motion to approve McNerney/Hilario – 8-0

Article 17 –

2MM going to stabilization

175K goes for voluntary separations

177K for capital articles

300K in article 17 for tax rate relief

If the finance committee decides to appropriate more free cash to this article we might keep the average single family tax bill flat.

Mr. Jones made a motion to increase this appropriation to \$1MM. Second by McNerney. 8-0

Article 27 – the Planning board changed some language on the article.

Motion to adjourn: Jones/McNerney at 9:00