

**PRESENT:** Selectmen Joseph A. Sergi, Patrick J. McNabb, and Joseph Hallisey; Robert Hanson, Town Administrator; Peggy Mazzola, Administrative Assistant

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 PM.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:** At 6:40 PM, Mr. McNabb moved that the Board of Selectmen enter into an Executive Session for the purpose of contract negotiations. Mr. Hallisey seconded. Mr. Sergi announced that the Board would return to open session following the executive session, and that Robert Hanson, Town Administrator, and Peggy Mazzola, Administrative Assistant, would be included in the session. A roll call vote was taken as follows:

Joseph Sergi	Aye
Patrick McNabb	Aye
Joseph Hallisey	Aye

At 7:12 PM the Board voted to exit the executive session and return to open session as noted in the Executive Session minutes of June 1, 2009.

**ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES:** On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Sergi, with Mr. Hallisey, abstaining, the minutes of the meetings of April 11, April 13, April 25 and April 27, 2009 were approved. On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, the minutes of the meetings of May 1, May 4, May 5, May 11, May 12 and May 18, 2009 were unanimously approved.

**APPROVE WARRANT/SIGN PURCHASE ORDERS:** The Board signed the warrants. The Board reviewed a purchase order from the Fire Department to Fire Tech & Safety of N.E., Inc., for the purchase of fire hose. On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, it was unanimously voted to approve Purchase Order #6210 in the amount of \$8,700.00.

**PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS:** Mr. Sergi stated this evening's meeting was dedicated to Ann O'Donnell, who recently passed away. The board acknowledged Ms. O'Donnell's commitment to the Town, and expressed sympathy to the family.

Mr. McNabb announced the annual list of appointments to be made; residents should submit a letter of interest or Citizen Activity Form to the Board. Mr. McNabb announced a vacancy on the Board of Health, term to expire at the April 2010 elections; residents should submit a letter of interest or Citizen Activity Form to the Board. Mr. Sergi announced that Rep. Hargraves was holding office hours in Town Hall. Mr. Sergi thanked everyone involved in the Memorial Day celebration. Mr. Sergi announced open houses will be held at the Senior Center, Library and Community Center on Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup> from 6-8 PM. The Selectmen will attend the open houses, and will then hold their meet at Town Hall at 7:30 PM.

Eric Smith asked for clarification on the executive session held earlier in the evening, and whether it was related to a contract for the current or future Town Administrator, or both. Mr. Sergi replied it was related to the current Town Administrator. Mr. Smith asked if the matter had been resolved. Mr. Sergi stated the Board is not able to release that information at this time.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

**Item #1 – Discussion:** with Steve Themelis, re: Army Community Covenant: Steve Themelis thanked the Board for inviting him to the meeting. Mr. Themelis wished to discuss with the Board the Army Community Covenant, which is a partnership between the Town and military. Mr. Themelis

introduced several attendees who are retired military, as well as Col. Steven Nott. Col. Nott stated that Pepperell would be the 7<sup>th</sup> community to become involved in the ACC, which was begun in April 2008 by the Secretary of the Army, and is designed to develop and foster effective state and community partnerships with the Army in improving the quality of life for our Soldiers and their families, both at their current duty stations and as they transfer from state to state. The ACC is tailed at the local level, with leaders at both local and state levels participating in covenant signing ceremonies, planned between April 2008 and the end of the year, recognizing the strength of Army soldiers and their families and the support of their local community. The covenant is a non-binding agreement with no fiscal obligation. Col. Nott outlined the program and distributed an information packet and draft covenant to the Board. Col. Nott stated that the first Community Covenant Board Meeting will be held on July 1<sup>st</sup> and include representatives from all of the towns currently involved.

Discussion ensued relative to the merits of the covenant, and the benefit to military families. Mr. Sergi asked what the process would be. Col. Nott stated the Pepperell town leaders would meet with his staff to schedule a covenant signing event, which can be as large or as small as the Town desires.

Veterans' Service Officer Joe Mazzola asked if it was possible to identify families of soldiers in Town. Col. Nott stated they do not have a housing office, so it would come down to querying the residents. Mr. Mazzola complimented Col. Nott on the website, and asked if there are services at Devens available to soldiers, such as veterans' outreach. Col. Nott stated there is an active ACS office at Devens. Mr. Mazzola stated he refers veterans to facilities in Gardner and Lowell, which are both excellent. Mr. Mazzola stated he is also the VSO in Townsend, and would like to get Townsend involved in the ACC. Col. Nott stated there is no limit to where this program can go. Mr. Mazzola commented that big cities have more to offer to active duty soldiers and veterans. Col. Nott remarked that the most active USO in the country is located in Boston. Tony Saboliaskas remarked there is a lot of support in our community for soldiers and veterans. Col. Nott stated it would be his honor to have Pepperell – and Townsend – sign on. He stated this is an Army Community Covenant, but we would assist all branches of the service. Mr. Themelis asked what the time frame would be. Col. Nott stated he is being transferred in July, but the new commander will pick up where he left off.

The Board thanked Col. Nott for attending the meeting.

### **OLD/NEW BUSINESS:**

Item #1 – Discussion: filling of Town Accountant position: Mr. Hanson stated the Board needs to make a decision regarding whether the Town Accountant will remain a contract employee, or discuss other options. Mr. Sergi stated he felt the position should be moved back into the bylaw. Mr. Hanson stated the position became a contract position at the request of the Town Accountant under statutory authority. The fluid nature of Town government is such that sensitive positions at the top of the scale prefer to not be a victim of political winds, and prefer some security. Mr. McNabb asked when the position became a contract position. Mr. Hanson stated this occurred about five years ago. Mr. Sergi stated there are pros and cons to having a contract for this position, and he doesn't think it's as political as the Town Administrator or Police Chief. Mr. Hanson stated if the Board wishes to move this position back into the bylaw, the job description would need to be changed and sent to the Personnel Board to approve and rate. This probably couldn't be resolved until the Special Town Meeting. Mr. Sergi stated if it is determined that the position doesn't fit within the bylaw, we can always go back to contract. He would like to pursue filling this position without a contract, because the Town is always on the hook for certain conditions of a contract that bylaw employees don't have. Mr. McNabb asked how long it would take for the Personnel Board to slot the position. Mr. Hanson stated he believed it

could be done in two meetings. Mr. McNabb asked about funding the position. Mr. Hanson stated funding is available, but Town Meeting hasn't approved the slotting of the position in the bylaw; there would be no authority to expend money on the position until it is slotted by the Personnel Board and approved by Town Meeting. Mr. Sergi remarked that it appears we can't recruit to fill this position until this is decided, and Mr. Hanson is advising the Board to stay with a contract for this position. Mr. Hanson stated we don't have to specify in the advertisement whether the position is bylaw or contract, and we could go through a good portion of the process before Town Meeting, but there would be some gap. Mr. Sergi commented that the Board doesn't have to make a decision tonight. Mr. Hanson stated the Board has a copy of the current job description, and sample advertisement pulled from the Mass. Municipal site, and a breakdown of salaries in other towns; he advised the Board to review and note any changes it would expect to see in the job description, as well as a reasonable salary range; then the Board can decide how to proceed. Mr. Sergi remarked some budget adjustment will need to be made at the fall Town Meeting. The Board needs to decide whether the Information Systems function falls under the Town Accountant or the Town Administrator. Given where we are, we will need to post the position in July to get someone on board by October 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Hanson stated we have a new software system, and should find someone familiar with this software. Mr. Hanson will prepare a draft job posting for the next meeting.

Item #2 – Discussion: possible Financial Oversight/Efficiency Committees: Mr. Sergi stated he called for this discussion and feedback from Mr. Hanson, which he provided to the Board. Regarding a possible Efficiency Committee, Mr. Sergi stated for the upcoming budget season we should look at a matrix/benchmarking to come up with different ways of providing services. Mr. Hanson stated the financial oversight can be dealt with quite easily, by having the Treasurer, Town Accountant, Assistant Assessor and Town Administrator meet quarterly, or month during the budget season. Different sources of information will come from this group to share with each other, as well as a unified statement for beginning budget deliberations. Mr. Hanson stated he didn't believe we needed a citizen committee to oversee the Town's finances. Mr. Sergi stated we had a failure in our forecasting, and we wouldn't be doing our job if we didn't make sure it doesn't happen again. Mr. Hanson stated we can't get any more oversight than to have these people agree on a number. Mr. McNabb stated he is in favor of some type of committee, because we need to be confident of the numbers. Mr. Sergi stated folks being over-taxed contributed to the failure, and this would be a good step in the right direction. Jeff Sauer asked if the Finance Committee would meet with this group. Mr. Hanson replied the Finance Committee deals with budgeting, not accounting. Mr. Sergi stated he doesn't want to create a sense that the Board is being too directive, and asked how we would move this forward. Mr. Hanson stated some of the individuals are not under the direct control of the Board of Selectmen, but he didn't think they'd object. Mr. Hanson suggested they be given an outline and get their feedback.

Relative to the proposed Efficiency Committee, Mr. Sergi stated there was a lot of discussion at Town Meeting. Mr. Hanson stated he felt the Board would find that benchmarks aren't what they think they are, and in many cases we would be comparing apples to oranges. The Board would be running a potential risk, as the Finance Committee, by statute, is charged with handling the recommendations the Board is proposing. It would be fine to have someone feeding information into the Finance Committee, but if you have a committee making decisions and telling the Finance Committee what to do, it will cause problems. Mr. Hanson asked what the life-cycle of this committee would be – is this a one-time master study committee making recommendations to the Finance Committee, or a standing committee doing the same thing every year. Mr. Hanson stated he believes this will negatively impact relations with department heads. Mr. Sergi stated that going through Town Meeting, it was clear there is not much to cut; we need to be certain we have all information before we make further cuts. Mr.

Hanson asked what the goal of this proposed committee would be, and whether the function is analytical rather than function. Mr. Sergi stated he would like to compare our costs relative to other Towns. Mr. McNabb asked if this task could be passed to the new Town Administrator, but he wasn't sure if it was too much for one person. Mr. Sergi stated he wants to see it get done. Mr. McNabb stated this will be a lot of work, and maybe the new Town Administrator can tell us if it's realistic. He stated he would hate to create another committee that people will perceive as political. Mr. Hanson suggested the Board assign this task to the new Town Administrator, and have him/or her put together a working group to achieve the same end. Mr. McNabb stated the Board has been criticized by department heads for not reaching out to them. He is not totally against this idea, but he's just looking for another way to get the information. Mr. Sergi stated he didn't care who compiled the information, or how, he just wants the information, and asked if the Board also wanted this information and whether it would help. Mr. McNabb and Mr. Hallisey both agreed they did not want a politically charged process. Mr. Hanson suggested each department could contact five other communities to see how we stack up. Mr. Sergi asked if Mr. Hanson could come up with a list of three communities that encompass almost all of our services, otherwise the information would be all over the place. Mr. McNabb stated a short list of communities would be a good starting point. Mr. Hanson stated he would need three weeks to compile this list. Mr. Sergi suggested Mr. Hanson reach out to the Finance Committee to see if they want to be involved. There should be some back and forth with department heads as well, with feedback on the choice of communities, so everyone can come to a consensus. Eric Smith stated that when calculating cost comparisons, we need to do line by line, and make sure the accounting practices are the same, especially with cross-charges. Our biggest expenses are pension and health care, and those are not included in our individual budgets.

Item #3 – Discussion: Grant Application with Board of Fire Engineers: Fire Chief Toby Tyler stated the Board of Fire Engineers applied for a grant last year and were denied in October. Last Thursday we were in the midst of being approved. This grant is for two full-time firefighters. He stated he realizes the Town is not in good financial shape. Chief Tyler stated that per diem hours in the budget totaling \$35,110 would offset the Town's share for the next fiscal year. The grant has a five-year commitment. Mr. Sergi stated a lot has happened since the town applied for this grant; Town Meeting overwhelmingly rejected hiring two full-time firefighters. Now we are in a situation where revenue has falling off a cliff. Mr. Sergi stated he is very leery of supporting this grant at this time. Mr. Hanson asked if these two people could be laid off in the event finances continue in a negative vein and result in possible reductions in the Fire Department. Chief Tyler stated they could be laid off, but the Town would have to reimburse the Federal Government for the grant money used up to that point. Mr. McNabb asked when we had to respond. Chief Tyler stated the deadline was Friday, but he got them to extend it. Mr. Hanson stated this is a second round, so obviously other towns have turned down the grant. Jonathan Kinney stated the likelihood of being approved for a grant in the future would be low if the Town rejects this grant. Mr. Sergi stated we are not in a position to take this on. Mr. McNabb stated he is in agreement, and the timing is unfortunate. On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, it was unanimously voted to decline the Safer Grant.

Item #4 – Discussion: Override: Mr. Sergi stated a sample ballot is on the Town's website, and the referendum vote will be held on June 29<sup>th</sup> at the Varnum Brook School. There is information on the website on the override and impact. Mr. Sergi stated the Board is willing to talk to residents to help them make an informed decision. Mr. McNabb stated he will be going to the Senior Center, and would like a board-sponsored or endorsed presentation. Mr. McNabb will put together a presentation for review at the next meeting. Mr. McNabb commented the initial feedback at the senior center is confusion, and they want basic information.

Eric Smith stated that years ago there was a Finance Committee handbook that contained a simple overview of the override process. Jeff Sauer asked if would be appropriate for the Board to draft something in a leadership way saying what you think should happen. Mr. Sergi stated he didn't think there was any doubt where the Board stands on this issue. Mr. Sauer suggested it should be clearly stated, perhaps in a letter to the editor, stating what the Board things ought to happen.

Item #5 – Any other Old/New Business: Mr. Sergi asked if the Board had given any thought to assigning liaisons to other boards. He stated this could wait until the next meeting.

Mr. McNabb stated he would like to have a finalized Town Administrator job description, and asked whether the Board was in agreement on having the IT position fall under the supervision of the Town Administrator. Mr. McNabb would like to have the job description prior to conducting interviews. Mr. Hanson suggested the committee try to interview no more than three candidates per day.

The Board reviewed an invitation from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Committee to participate in the parade. All three board members will participate.

Mr. Sergi commented that incoming mail addressed to him should be opened by the office and shared with the other members of the Board. Mr. Hanson stated all incoming mail will be put into a wire basket on the counter for review by the Board, and will be tossed every two weeks.

Mr. Smith wanted to follow up on the executive session, and asked if the Board has to go into executive session to release the minutes of an executive session. Mr. Sergi stated that is not necessary; the Board agrees when to release the information. Mr. Hanson remarked the subject matter of the executive session has not been finalized. Mr. Smith asked if the executive session will affect the override vote. Mr. Sergi stated it would not.

**ADJOURNMENT:** On a motion by Mr. McNabb and seconded by Mr. Hallisey, it was unanimously voted to adjourn at 9:22 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Peggy Mazzola, Administrative Assistant

**APPROVED:**

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Joseph A. Sergi, Chairman

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Patrick J. McNabb, Clerk

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Joseph Hallisey