



TOWN OF BERWICK
MEETING MINUTES
February 11, 2014 Budget Hearing

Roll Call:

Board of Selectmen members present included Ed Ganiere, Chairman Bryan O'Connor, Eleanor Murphy and Bart Haley.

Board of Selectmen member(s) absent included Bob Crichton.

Other Town Officials Present:

Staff members present included Town Manager Patrick Venne, Town Clerk Jo Anne Lepley, and Town Planner John Stoll.

Budget Committee members present included Tammy Cole and Chair Christine Dudley.

Planning Board members present included Chairman John Higgins, Judy Burgess, and Paul Boisvert.

First Public Comment:

Christine Dudley of the Budget Committee offered comment from the public on the budget process and implementation of a budget committee.

Budget Hearings:

Planning & Code Enforcement Department

Chairman O'Connor indicated it is critical to maintain a planner.

Ms. Murphy concurred in light of Planning Board comments and those from the Downtown Vision Committee.

Mr. Haley indicated that there would be a relatively small change in expenditure between a required secretarial position and a professional planner, and stated a preference for maintaining a

professional planning position on staff. He also indicated in the future this might be worthy of expansion to a crossover role focused on business development.

Mr. Stoll indicated that if the Town just wants development review, it can get by without a planner.

Motion:

Selectwoman Murphy moved to approve the Town Manager's Planning Department request (\$119,700.00), and Selectman Ganiere seconded the motion.

Additional Discussion:

Selectman Haley suggested holding off on a final vote until the Board could hear a presentation by Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission (SMPDC) related to the provision of contracted planning services.

Selectwoman Murphy stated they [SMPDC] cannot offer what a planner can.

Chairman O'Connor inquired of the Budget Committee members who were present what led them to recommend a reduction in service levels.

Chair Dudley of the Budget Committee responded that the Committee, from her perspective, was not interested in a reduction of service but rather favored service of a different sort, provided by a team of professionals.

Selectwoman Murphy indicated SMPDC had helped the Town before, but the Town has grown since that time.

Chairman John Higgins of the Planning Board suggested the Town needs a professional planner now because it has grown.

Ms. Burgess testified that the tax payers of Berwick deserve to have someone staffing the Planning Department who can answer their questions on a regular basis.

Chairman O'Connor inquired of the Town Manager whether the Board could reverse its position on this budget later if it took final action at this meeting.

Mr. Venne said this would be acceptable so long as it is prior to finalization of the entire warrant.

Dennis Dupuis, a member of the public in attendance, said the position of Town Planner is critical to maintain.

Chairman O'Connor indicated it was good to have a choice.

Selectman Haley proposed a \$250.00 stipend for all Planning Board members for their volunteerism.

Selectwoman Murphy indicated this could be taken from the Selectmen's own stipend.

Chairman O'Connor suggested a revision to the initial motion on the floor may be appropriate, and Selectman Ganiere withdrew his second.

Chairman Higgins of the Planning Board, along with Planning Board members Judy Burgess and Paul Boisvert all indicated they were uninterested in stipends and preferred to remain volunteers.

Town Planner John Stoll indicated he would withdraw his resignation if the Board approved the Manager's budget request while holding wages at \$42,500.00 and shifting the additional \$2,500.00 of that \$45,000.00 line item toward the purchase of GIS equipment.

With the position of the Planning Board stated regarding addition of a stipend to the Planning Department budget, Selectman Ganiere re-seconded the initial motion on the floor, to approve the Town Manager's budget request.

Vote:

The Board voted: 4-0-1 to approve (Crichton absent) the Town Manager's budget recommendation for the Planning Department.

Other:

Mr. Venne accepted Mr. Stoll's retraction of his earlier resignation.

Assessing Department

Discussion, Motion & Vote:

Following discussion about the merits and cost of switching to an in-house assessors' agent, Selectman Haley moved to approve the Budget Committee's recommendation for the Assessing Department (\$76,550.00). Selectwoman Murphy seconded the motion and the Board voted: 4-0-1 to approve (Crichton absent).

Second Public Comment:

Ms. Burgess of the Planning Board informed the Board of Selectmen of the history underlying Berwick's approach to tax mapping and abstracts.

Other / Non-Agenda Items:

Chairman O'Connor informed the Board he would not be present for the next meeting, scheduled for February 18, 2014

Adjournment:

Selectman Ganiere moved to adjourn; Selectman Haley seconded the motion. The Board voted 4-0-1 to adjourn (Crichton absent).

Respectfully Submitted,
Town Manager Patrick Venne.

Signed as approved by vote at the Board's February 25, 2014 meeting:



Bryan O'Connor, Chairman