

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
APRIL 9, 2019**

The meeting took place in the Selectmen's Meeting Room located in the upper level of Town Hall. In attendance were Chairman Carl F. Kowalski; Vice Chairman Daniel L. Salvucci; Clerk Brian J. Bezanson; Member Randolph G. LaMattina; and Town Administrator Francis J. Lynam. Member Scott J. Lambiase was absent. Chairman Kowalski opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Kowalski asked everyone in attendance to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. This was followed by a moment of silence.

Chairman Kowalski announced the meeting is being recorded and televised by WHCA.

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to approve bill and payroll warrants. **Second Mr. Bezanson, so voted 4-0.**

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to accept correspondence in the Read File. **Second Mr. Bezanson, so voted 4-0.**

Chairman Kowalski opened public forum and Mr. Bezanson took a moment to address a social media post where he was called an Islamophobe because of a comment he made regarding Muslim politicians being elected into office. Mr. Bezanson stated that he reads all points of view, politically, in order to try and educate himself to be the best person he can be. He went on to say that his post consisted of five words – “One nibble at a time” – which means one seat at a time. This is the only way that the super-minority party (of which he is a member) can operate. Mr. Bezanson advised that he has no ill will toward anyone of any ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation; and he finds it offensive that anyone would suggest otherwise. This has hurt his family and friends and it is not good for Whitman. Mr. Bezanson finished by saying that he will fight this and has consulted his personal attorney regarding a defamation of character suit.

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to approve the Open Session minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, March 26, 2019. **Second Mr. Bezanson, so voted 4-0.**

**POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

Chairman Kowalski asked the Board to review the Town of Whitman, MA Financial Management Policies & Objectives and to be ready to vote on this issue at the next meeting.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Request to Appoint Checkers for 5/6/19 Annual/Special Town Meeting**

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to approve the request of Town Clerk Dawn Varley to appoint checkers for the May 6, 2019, Annual/Special Town Meeting. **Second Mr. Bezanson, so voted 4-0.**

**Chief Grenno: Request for Out-of-State Travel**

Chief Grenno advised the Board that he will be attending the Executive Fire Officer Symposium on April 26-28, 2019, in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The cost to attend, including fuel, is \$184.00.

Chairman Kowalski reminded Chief Grenno that the Board of Selectmen has placed a freeze on out-of-state travel. Mr. LaMattina stated that he does not want to see Chief Grenno lose his certification over such a small amount of money, and feels the Board should make an exception. Mr. LaMattina **MOVED** to approve the request of Chief Grenno for permission to attend the Executive Fire Officer Symposium R1020 on April 26-28, 2019, at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. **Second** Mr. Salvucci for discussion. During a brief discussion, it was the consensus of all members present that this is a minimal amount of money; and all agreed to make an exception and to authorize Chief Grenno's request. Hearing nothing further, Chairman Kowalski called for a vote in connection with the motion on the floor. **So voted 4-0.**

### **Review of the MSBA Core Program/Statement of Interest Process**

WHRSD Superintendent Jeffrey Szymaniak advised the Board that due to ongoing issues and costs for repairs at the Whitman Middle School, he has asked Facilities Director Ernie Sandland to prepare a Statement of Interest to the MSBA with respect to a new or renovated middle school. If he receives authorization from the Board this evening to move forward, the School Committee will take a formal vote on this issue tomorrow evening. Before turning the floor over to Mr. Sandland, Mr. Szymaniak noted this could be a short-term process or it could be a 5 to 6 year process.

Mr. Sandland advised the Board that the Statement of Interest must be submitted to the MSBA by April 12. He then discussed at length the submission process, the required documentation and the ongoing issues at the school, such as the heating system, mold, termites, mice and bees. He also noted that in the SOI, he has identified the need for a new school as opposed to renovating the existing school because the ongoing costs of repairs is a budget killer. Mr. Sandland stated that the MSBA Board of Directors will make a decision by December. If Whitman is chosen, the cost of a feasibility study will have to be presented to Town Meeting in May, 2020. A feasibility study will take approximately 7 months, after which a preliminary design will be sent to the MSBA, followed by a schematic design. A final decision should be rendered by July, 2022. Mr. Lynam asked what the reimbursement rate is and what the typical cost is. Mr. Sandland stated that the reimbursement rate is 31 percent and the typical cost is \$54 to \$75 million.

Following discussion, Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to authorize WHRSD Superintendent Jeffrey Szymaniak to submit a Statement of Interest Form to the Massachusetts School Building Authority as follows:

*Having convened in an open meeting on April 9, 2019, prior to the SOI Submission closing date, the Board of Selectmen of Whitman, in accordance with its charter, by-laws, and ordinances, has voted to authorize the Superintendent to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April 12, 2019 for the Whitman Middle School located at 100 Corthell Avenue, Whitman, MA, which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority category(s) for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future replacement, renovation or modernization of school facility systems, such as roofs, windows, boilers, heating and ventilation systems, to increase energy conservation and decrease energy related costs in a school facility; and hereby further specifically acknowledges that by submitting this Statement of Interest Form, the Massachusetts School Building Authority in no way guarantees the acceptance or the approval of an application, the awarding of a grant or any other funding*

*commitment from the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or commits the City/Town/Regional School District to filing an application for funding with the Massachusetts School Building Authority.*

**Second Mr. Bezanson, so voted 4-0.**

## **BUDGET REVIEW**

### **Proposition 2 ½ Override?**

Mr. Lynam advised the Board of ongoing discussions with the Finance Committee regarding whether to proceed with a debt exclusion, override or both, noting there have been differing opinions based in part on whether we would get the support we need. He reminded the Board of the in-process development of a long term capital plan and budget model - with the preliminary draft expected to be completed at the end of the month - which will provide information on what type of override we would be looking at in the fall. Mr. Lynam stated that he feels it would be more effective to move forward with a debt exclusion in order to free up capital money and to develop a long term plan based on increased revenue from an override. He then recommended the Board look at a budget that includes only a debt exclusion which would allow Article 2 to be voted with no operational override, and previously defined obligations funded with free cash, with stabilization used for capital needs. This would leave a balance of \$342,471 in free cash and \$178,682 in stabilization. This would allow the first 29 articles on the current warrant to be funded. Town Meeting could then be adjourned until June 3 and, if the debt exclusion is supported by the voters, the remaining articles can be funded. If the debt exclusion is not supported, cuts will have to be made to the budget. In addition, if the debt exclusion is supported, it will allow us the opportunity to work through the capital planning process over the summer in order to present a well-defined request for an override.

### **Joint Meeting with Finance Committee**

Finance Committee members present were Richard Anderson, David Codero, Charles Colby, Justin Evans, Christopher DiOrio and Rosemary Connolly.

Finance Committee Chairman Richard Anderson reviewed the activities of the Finance Committee since the last joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen on March 19, 2019. They have continued to discuss and modify the Article 2 worksheet that was discussed with the Board of Selectmen in March. They have allocated a 4 percent increase to the operational budget of the school district, and the Town Administrator was asked to recalculate Article 2 based on that assessment. The figures were recalculated and forwarded to the Finance Committee by the Town Accountant. Mr. Anderson advised the Board that this is the document the committee has been using since it was received and the document that he has provided to the Board this evening. He went on to say that the biggest concern of the committee is the elimination of an override, as they feel it is a critical component of a sustainable budget recommendation this fiscal year. Vice Chairman David Codero stated that the budget developed by the department heads is not a sustainable approach. The department heads will say that this budget avoids layoffs, absorbs anticipated increases to salaries and incentives and increases the assessment to the WHRSD to 6.5 percent. Mr. Codero commended the department heads for that; however, they did this in the shadows of an opening meeting and excluded representatives from the school district from being present at the first meeting they held. A second meeting was held outside the realm of the Finance Committee and it is his understanding that the Board of Selectmen are considering voting the recommendation of the department heads. He went on to say that we just heard from the district regarding a new middle school; and then asked where that money is going to come

from. Mr. Codero stated that he feels we are no closer to solutions than we were last year, and using the budget prepared by the department heads is equivalent to kicking the can down the road.

Mr. Lynam took offense to Mr. Codero's comment about meetings being held behind closed doors. Mr. Codero stated that he did not use those words. Chairman Kowalski stated that he would like to hear what Mr. Lynam has to say, and asked Mr. Codero not to interrupt him, noting that Mr. Lynam did not interrupt Mr. Codero while he was speaking. Mr. Codero stated that Mr. Lynam is mischaracterizing what he said. Chairman Kowalski advised Mr. Codero that he interpreted his comment in the same way Mr. Lynam did. Mr. Codero stated that he did not say "behind closed doors", he said "in the shadows of an open meeting." Mr. Lynam stated that at the last meeting, allegations were made regarding closed door meetings and tonight Mr. Codero commented on meetings being held "in the shadows". He then stated that if the department heads chose to meet, it is not a public meeting, it is not a public forum and it is not a posted meeting. Government bodies operate under the Open Meeting Law. Mr. Lynam went on to say that the department heads holding a meeting that he was unaware of and not invited to, did not cause him to think that something inappropriate was going on. There was nothing inappropriate about the meeting held by the department heads because they are not obligated to post it and open it up to the public. The meeting taking place right now is an open meeting, and the meeting held by the department heads should not be characterized as a "shadow" meeting or a "secret" meeting. With respect to the schools not being invited, Mr. Lynam stated that was a decision made by those that organized the meeting. Representatives of the school district were invited to the second meeting by Mr. Lynam. With respect to the budget, Mr. Lynam advised that the budget that has to be prepared for Town Meeting has to be one that will allow the town to function. The budget that's been prepared does not include an override and basically leaves us in the same circumstances we were in last year. It also allows us time to develop a plan for seeking an override in the fall. This budget also provides a 6.5 percent assessment to the schools as opposed to the 4 percent placeholder that has been recommended. Mr. Anderson stated that he feels everyone is committed to working together to create a budget. However, the budget that the Finance Committee has been working on assumes no override and no debt exclusion. What we hoped to do here was to develop that second Article 2 that includes an override, a debt exclusion or neither. He went on to say that the budget they have been working on assumes the worst case scenario where the town cannot afford to support more than 4 percent for the schools and cuts are being made to other departments.

Mr. Salvucci stated that the department heads were originally asked by the Finance Committee to prepare a budget for their department that reflected a 3 percent decrease and a 6 percent decrease. When they were asked to do that, it became clear that employees within their departments would be facing being laid off, resulting in employees who were in fear of losing their job. This caused the department heads to come together and cut their budgets in other areas in order to avoid having to lay off employees. They then held a second meeting where he, Chairman Kowalski and Mr. Lynam were invited to attend. At that meeting, Mr. Salvucci asked the department heads if there was a way for them to come up with 6.5 percent for the schools. They agreed to take another look and were able to come up with it by making even more cuts without losing employees. Mr. Salvucci went on to say that he commended the department heads for doing what the Finance Committee had originally asked them to do, which was to cut their budgets. He also said as an elected official, it is his job to make sure that town employees maintain their jobs.

School Committee member Fred Small took exception to Mr. Salvucci's comment and asked him if he feels the schools are not part of the town. Mr. Salvucci said that the schools are part of the town and, at the department heads meeting he told the superintendent that the easiest way to cut a budget is to cut staff. Mr. Small outlined ways the school district has cut its budget in the past, such as busing, and an in-house copy center; and stated the only thing left for them to cut is bodies. He then questioned Mr. Anderson with respect to a 4 percent assessment to the schools. Mr. Anderson advised Mr. Small that this is a working document and he would be hard pressed to find anyone who would vote in favor of a 4 percent assessment. Mr. Small stated that he understands the constraints of the town; and commended the department heads for coming together.

Rosemary Connolly stated that the Finance Committee makes decisions that consider our demographics. She went on to say that she appreciates that the department heads came together, but they did it in a bubble – they did not do it in a holistic financial way – making the job of the Finance Committee more difficult. She finished by saying she does not think this was properly done and she hopes not see this happen again in the future.

Chairman Kowalski said that for a number of months he has been saying that if the taxpayers want to keep the services they have become accustomed to, they will have to pay more and an override will be necessary. He has also talked about an override and a debt exclusion being necessary this year in order to allow the town to become sustainable for the future. When the department head meetings took place, a budget was designed to sustain us for a while and allow us to start building, if only in increments, towards a future that we can handle. Chairman Kowalski went on to say that there is a fear that an override won't pass. When he saw the budget prepared by the department heads and realized it closely resembled a budget that Mr. Lynam was working on, he decided to go along with Mr. Lynam's recommendation to go with a budget that includes a debt exclusion only and to hold off on an override until the fall. Chairman Kowalski also stated that he considers the schools to be a part of the town. This year they asked for a 15.1 percent increase. Last year they received a 9.5 percent increase over the previous year, which was more than some members of this Board wanted to give them. Approving 9.5 percent is probably part of the reason we are in the state that we are in. He went on to say that he was stunned when they asked for a 15.1 percent assessment this year. He also said he does not want to suggest that we should give the schools 6.5 percent because that is what Hanson is giving them, but there is some practicality there. Chairman Kowalski stated that he feels the best course of action is to go with the budget prepared by the department heads in addition to a debt exclusion, and to come back in the fall for an override. He also stated that he's embarrassed by the fact that our schools are 10<sup>th</sup> from the bottom out of 351 cities and towns in the state. We have a police and fire department that are well funded and we can't say that about our schools. Rosemary Connolly provided the Board with a comparison on property taxes, and stated that Whitman has the lowest taxes in the Boston area making it the bargain of the century, even if taxes were to be increased by \$500.

Superintendent Szymaniak advised that he appreciates the police and fire departments. He agreed that the schools are at the bottom. He then outlined the positions that would be lost with a 6.5 assessment, and advised Mr. Salvucci that he cannot make cuts in certain areas of his budget. Dawn Byers, 20 Russell Road, advised the Board that the South Shore Charter School budget went up 15 percent and South Shore Voc Tech increased by 3.1 percent. She feels this is similar to the increase in the budget of the WHRSD. She also discussed the out of district special

education students, noting South Shore Charter School and South Shore VocTech do not have any out of district special ed students and their budgets increased just as much.

Chairman Kowalski stated that the version of the budget prepared by the department heads has each of the departments saving their personnel and cutting their budgets in other areas. On the other hand, the schools are getting an increase while every other town department is being cut.

Mr. Anderson stated that he feels the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee agree on what needs to be done, it's just a matter of when it gets done. The last direction the Finance Committee received from the Board of Selectmen was to move forward with an override, yet somehow since that last meeting the direction has changed. Mr. Anderson went on to say that the only way our financial issues can be addressed is with an override; and he is not comfortable putting this off until the fall, particularly after waiting for a year to fix the problem.

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that the deadline to put a question on the ballot is April 13. It will have to be voted by this Board and presented to the Clerk's office by April 11.

At Mr. Anderson's request, Mr. Lynam outlined his recommendation again.

Mr. Colby stated that he feels we need to go for the override now because everyone knows we need more revenue.

Mr. LaMattina stated that last year, members of this Board voted to make sure that every department got funded and all were aware that we would need to go for an override this year. He expressed his disappointment in the fact that a year has passed with very little being done to solve our financial issues. He also stated that he was present for a meeting of the department heads on Monday where he was presented with a budget that works somewhat, but it does keep everyone employed which is important to him. It does not however, keep layoffs from happening within the schools and that is disappointing to him. He then discussed the debt exclusion and the possibility of completely stripping capitalization and free cash if it fails. Mr. LaMattina feels that an override will be supported but a plan needs to be presented to show exactly where the money will go. He also feels that a debt exclusion will pass because people understand that it has served its purpose and something was gained from it.

Chairman Kowalski asked for a motion to place a debt exclusion and a Proposition 2 ½ override on the May 18, 2019, ballot.

Mr. LaMattina **MOVED** to place a question in connection for a debt exclusion and a question in connection with a Proposition 2 ½ override on the May 18, 2019, ballot. **Second** Mr. Salvucci for discussion. Mr. Salvucci stated that he feels the taxpayers should be given a choice. Mr. LaMattina stated that we need to do both but it's now a question of when. Rosemary Connolly suggested going for an override now and a debt exclusion later. Mr. LaMattina stated that people should know where the money is going to be allocated and putting a plan together is going to take time.

Mr. Anderson said that it's not a question of what needs to be done and he is of the opinion that an override will pass now if cuts to the departments have been taken. The department heads have done the work which gives the Finance Committee a place to start.

Mr. LaMattina stated that he was taken aback when he heard about the first meeting of the department heads but, when he was invited to attend the second meeting, he was impressed with what they had come up with.

Discussion took place as to where the funds would be allocated should an override pass and if it would increase the assessment to the schools. Mr. Small noted that if Whitman were to increase its assessment, Hanson would have to do the same which would involve an override for them.

Mr. Bezanson agreed with Mr. Small. He also agreed with postponing an override until the fall.

Mr. Anderson advised the Board that the Finance Committee voted last week to recommend moving forward with an override at this time. He also suggested holding off on a debt exclusion until year 3 or 4 of a 5-year capital plan.

Mr. LaMattina said he has spoken to a lot of people and he feels the best way to move forward at this time is with a debt exclusion only.

Mr. LaMattina **MOVED** to amend the original motion and to place the following question on the May 18, 2019, Annual Town Election ballot:

*Shall the Town of Whitman be allowed to exempt from the provisions of proposition two and one-half, so-called, the amounts required to pay for the bond issued in order to construct and equip a Police Station, and make repairs to the Town Hall and Fire Station?*

**Second** Mr. Salvucci.

Mr. Anderson asked Mr. LaMattina how he came to this conclusion after discussing this issue for the last hour. Mr. LaMattina said he came to this conclusion because he has seen a budget that works with a debt exclusion. He also expects to move forward with an override in the fall and to present a clear picture of what it will be used for. Mr. Bezanson and Mr. Salvucci agreed.

Assistant Superintendent George Ferro asked for clarification on whether or not the schools would benefit from and override. Mr. Lynam stated no, not unless Hanson goes for an override. Also, \$600,000 of the \$900,000 in capital expenditures included in the warrant for Town Meeting is for the schools; therefore, it is not just operating expenses that are being requested. In the last 5 years, 70 percent of our capital has been spent on the schools. Going forward, the schools are going to be asked to limit their request to a percentage of what we bring in.

Chairman Kowalski asked for a vote in connection with the motion on the floor. **So voted 4-0.**

Mr. Lynam announced that the original date set for the informational pre-town meeting was not feasible for some and asked to reschedule it to April 17, 2019, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. All were in agreement.

At 8:51 p.m. Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. **Second**, Mr. Bezanson, so voted **4-0.**

---

Brian J. Bezanson, Clerk