

**MINUTES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
JANUARY 3, 2008**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Wilson. Those in attendance included Nick Thomo, Bob Barnes, Beverly Lund and Ross Ackerman. Guest included Ronald Dackson, James Allen and Rudy Heller.

MINUTES

Mr. Thomo moved; Ms. Lund seconded to accept the minutes of November 13, 2007 as printed; so voted.

RESIGNATION

Ms. Lund advised that Liisa Holm has submitted her resignation from the Committee effective immediately due to her increased work responsibilities and lack of time to devote to the Committee to be an effective member.

Ms. Lund moved; to accept the resignation with regret and to send Mrs. Holm a letter thanking her for her service; so voted. This resignation brings the Committee down to six members and one alternate. A full Committee consists of nine members. The Selectmen were asked to announce the need for members at their next meeting. Anyone interested should contact Barbara Wilson.

ALTERNATE STATUS

It was suggested that Ross Ackerman be appointed to the Committee until the next annual town meeting as required in the by law. Chief Ackerman stated that he would rather not be appointed on a full time basis but would like to continue as an alternate.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Thomo moved; Ms. Lund seconded to take this matter on a night to night basis. If a quorum is not present and Chief Ackerman is, the Committee will take a vote to consider appointing him as a voting member for the evening. The motion was then voted favorably.

DISCUSSION MEMBERSHIP

Mrs. Wilson expressed her concerns regarding the membership on the Board and what she felt were some of the problems. A general discussion followed. The Selectmen advised the Committee that if there are problems with departments under its jurisdiction, the Committee should send a letter to them and they will contact the department to try to resolve the problem.

BUDGET REVIEW

It was noted that the Selectmen have reviewed all the departmental budgets under their jurisdiction and have asked questions and have received answers to their questions. The Selectmen will forward these responses to the Committee. The Selectmen advised the Committee that they would like all requests in writing and not verbally.

The following budgets were reviewed:

Town Hall Expense - This budget includes an increase from \$9,715 to \$10,015 (\$300). The increase is in electricity. The Selectmen are looking into an energy audit of the Town Hall, Library, Police Station, Fire Department, Highway Department, School and Ambulance Barn. They have had work done on the boiler, repaired the windows in the basement and are looking into the repair of all windows in the Town Hall. They have received an estimate in the amount of \$76,000. A decision as to whether or not to do this work all at once or to set up a plan over time has yet to be made.

As a result of the Committee questioning what was covered under contracted services and equipment, Mr. Heller will look into and get this information to the Committee.

Mr. Heller advised the Committee that the Selectmen are looking into double sided printers which would be networked and reduce the amount of paper purchased throughout the year.

Encumbered Funds - Mr. Allen advised the Committee that there is a considerable amount of money that has been encumbered and has not been spent. They are looking into the possibility of using some of these funds for the windows in the Town Hall.

A letter will be sent to the Town Accountant asking for a breakdown of these encumbered funds.

Municipal Telephone, Utility Contract and Leases - This budget has been increased by \$3,000 and includes Verizon, Charter Internet and alarms for the School, Highway Department and Library. The Selectmen are writing to Charter to see if the Town can receive a reduced rate and they are meeting with alarm vendors to include burglar and fire alarms for the Town Hall and will forward the estimates to the Committee.

Ms. Lund brought of the fact that last year the school was asked to add a sum of money to reimburse the Town for their telephone expenses but it was too late in the year. They had indicated they would do it this year. The Selectmen will contact the school to remind them of this process and advise the committee of the response.

Selectmen's Wages - These accounts have been level funded (\$54,388) as requested by the Advisory Committee. The Committee indicated that they would like to fund all the budgets and then look at cost of living wages after and base the increase on what was available after funding the operation of the Town.

Town Website - This account is being level funded (\$2,500). However, the funds appropriated to date have not as yet been expended. The Cable Committee is working with an individual to get the website up and running.

Selectmen's Expenses - This account shows a \$200 (\$6,300) decrease due to the fact that the Selectmen have removed medical exams (\$250) from this budget and the postage has increased by \$50.00 (\$450).

The Selectmen are looking into pooling the postage budgets of all departments and purchasing a number of "Forever" stamps that can be bought for \$.41 and used even if the postage increases. Once they are gone the increased price will have to be paid for the stamps.

The Selectmen have removed the medical exam line item and put the funds into the physical exam account.

Print Town Report - This account is level funded (\$1,800) and it was noted that there were funds left over this past year.

Physical Exams - Due to the fact that the Selectmen have been made aware of a by law that states that new employees and employees who are promoted need to have physicals which are to be paid by the hiring department, they increased this account to \$3,000, an increase of \$2,600. This by law needs to be reviewed as it is ambiguous and the accounts may need to be changed. The Selectmen are now looking at \$400 for those employees under their jurisdiction. The individual departments will need to fund physicals in their individual budgets.

Ms. Lund questioned whether or not this is enough money as the Selectmen are the hiring authority for a number of departments including, Accountant, Highway, Police, Treasurer, Selectmen, all departments that are not covered by other Mass. General Laws. They plan to refer this by law to the by law committee. It was also noted that the Police Department has to use doctors that are approved by the Criminal Justice organization.

Mr. Heller will check on this matter and report back to the Committee.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes - This account is level funded (\$750). Ms. Lund questioned why it was level funded. There is the possibility that the taxes for the other Towns may have increased and this should be checked. If more funds are needed the budget should be increased.

Mr. Heller will contact East Brookfield and North Brookfield to see if the taxes have increased.

Computer Repairs/Maintenance - This was level funded for contracted service (\$4,000). The Committee questioned whether or not these funds have been spent and will check the expenditure report for this information.

Consultant Expenses - This account is level funded (\$2,500) and no funds have been expended at this time due to the fact that they have been no grants for which the Town could apply. Central Mass Regional Planning has been doing the grant writing.

There is the possibility that funds will be needed for the master plan. Ms. Childress has committed herself to raise funds total \$11,000 for the open space and recreation portion of the master Plan at no charge to the Town.

General Insurance - This account has increased by \$10,000 (\$110,000). There was no back up material to show estimates for the various types of insurance covered under this budget. It was stated that the Police Department is on a fleet coverage plan and the addition or deletion of vehicles does not change the premium. Mr. Heller will look into whether or not the Highway and Fire Department have a fleet charge. The Selectmen will also provide the Committee with information showing what policy premiums have increased for the upcoming year. He will also find out if claims increase the premiums.

Legal Expenses - This budget has been increased by \$5,000 (\$50,000). There are a number of court cases that are open at this time. This account is used by all the departments in town and there have been legal opinions for the Planning Board, ZBA, Cemetery, etc.

M.O.R.E. - This account has been level funded (\$930.00). This allows the Town to purchase in bulk. However, a determination must be made as to whether or not the Town purchases enough supplies, etc. to recoup the funds expended.

Mr. Heller will look into this and report back to the Committee.

Municipal Heating, Fuel & Maintenance Expenses - This account is level funded and covers the heating fuel for all the town buildings that have this type of fuel. The Town currently has a service contract with MacDonald at the cost of \$5,000. The fuel is purchased under the state bid contract at a very reasonable price.

Street Lights - This account has been increased by \$1,000 (\$15,000.00) due to the increase by the electric company.

CONTINUATION OF MEETING

Chief Ackerman moved; Mrs. Wilson seconded to continue the meeting beyond 9:00 pm for approximately ten minutes; so voted.

SCHOOL SUBCOMMITTEE MEETINGS

The School is asking that a member of the Advisory Committee attend their meetings which will be held on January, 7, 14 and 28; February 4 and 13. Members will make every attempt to attend the meetings.

NEXT MEETING

The next meetings for budget reviews will be as follows: January 9 – Assessors, Animal Control Officer, BEMA and Conservation Commission; January 16 – Tax Collector, Treasurer, Accountant and Town Clerk.

Mr. Thomo moved to change the meetings nights to Wednesday until further notice; Chief Ackerman seconded; so voted. Copies will be provided to Selectmen.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Thomo moved; Chief Ackerman seconded to adjourn; so voted. Meeting adjourned at 9:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverly A. Lund
Secretary

Date approved by Committee: January 16, 2008
Date submitted to Selectmen: January 17, 2008