

December 17, 2012

Chairman Michael Jackson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Present:

Members: Jack Boyer, Michael Jackson,

Alternates: Liddy Adams, Ted Bent, A. J. Dubois

Selectmen: Mark Lyon, Richard Carey

Treasurer: Linda McGarr

Guests: Addie Roberts, Planning Commission Chairman, Kevin Smith, Highway Director, Peter Talbot

Appointment of Alternates:

Alternates Liddy Adams, Ted Bent and A. J. Dubois were seated for the meeting.

Cell Tower:

First Selectman Mark Lyon reported he has been in contact with Homeland Towers and Murtha Cullina regarding the proposed cell tower agreement. Murtha Cullina will review the agreement on behalf of the Town.

Tax Collector's Report:

Reviewed and accepted.

Treasurer's Report/Financials:

All accounts were reviewed. It was noted the Treasurer's Report shows the actual cash balance for all accounts while the QB Report shows the accrued balances. All items are reviewed with the Town's auditor.

Minutes:

Minutes of the November 19, 2012 were not addressed.

Town Garage Fire:

The status of the town garage buildings and vehicles was discussed. It was felt the insurance received for the estimate on the building, as well as the funds approved at the town meeting, should cover replacement costs. There remain outstanding claims for the building contents.

Financials:

Michael reported on the unusual expenses the Town has faced during the past year due to the storms, the garage fire and the town hall propane explosion. These expenses were in addition to the general and capital budgeted costs for the Town and for Education. He noted he does not remember the Town having to face expenses of this magnitude and we must be very cautious before committing further funds to further projects, including the Region, at this point.

Education:

Michael noted discussions regarding Education have been more clear and there seems to be more agreement among the towns as to their financial responsibilities for their own buildings. The

Northwestern CT Council of Government is in contact at the State with regard to Regional School Districts. This is a real issue for the State as the Regions have lost their young population. If this decline continues, alternatives may have to be considered; i.e. merging or sending children to other school districts. There is much work to be done. Some residents feel building a new school within our own Region is the way to go. This could be very expensive and would be difficult to do so for a school population that is declining. The future of the Region must be reviewed in many contexts and all possibilities must be considered.

Town Plan of Development – Town Garage Site:

Peter Talbot explained a concept he had presented to the Selectmen regarding the future of the Depot area in relation to the town garage property on Blackville Road. Looking ahead financially, Mark noted his concern about the future finances of the Town; but, since Peter had presented a legitimate option, he felt it should be examined.

Peter recognized how the Board of Finance may initially view this concept and that it has been unfortunate that so many things have occurred during this past year; however, he felt the Town may wish to consider a broader context moving forward than had not been considered in the 1992 revision of the Town Plan of Development.

Due to the town garage fire and the removal of the private building situated adjacent to the town garage property on Bee Brook Road, discussion had been held between Peter and the owner of the adjacent property to determine if the Town might be interested in developing both properties to create an extension of the village center. While Peter realizes the Town is in need of rebuilding the town garage as soon as possible, he assumed if the Planning Commission agreed, consideration might be given to this proposal. Peter recognized that additional resources may be needed and that perhaps he could find someone to fund the project. The extension of the village center could inspire private investment in the Town by those who may not currently be interested according to Peter Talbot.

Question was raised if there would be an issue with the proposed cell tower location which is being considered for property adjacent to the current garage site. Mark noted it is important not to slow the cell tower process down. Peter suggested the Selectmen and Finance Boards consider the best long-term interests of the Town rather than using a band aid approach to cover what he considered the initial mistake of placing the town garage at the current site.

Peter suggested items for consideration of this proposal would include:

- * Moving the current town garage to a different location and combining that parcel and the private parcel to expand the town center for housing and retail. Peter estimated a cost of \$4,000,000 to purchase additional land for the garage and move the current garage facilities. He did not anticipate the Town purchasing the adjacent property; rather, that the garage parcel would be purchased from the Town. It was noted a new septic area may have to be constructed at the current site.

- * Peter suggested another proposal would be that the current two 50-acre parcels could be used for a new ambulance garage and recycling transfer station. He suggested looking at all options to plan for the future.

- * Through borings and test soils, the number of commercial businesses could be anticipated. If the Town continues to expand the business area, it was suggested other nearby businesses would

love to have more anchorage.

* Peter noted it would take political will, the interest of the Planning Commission and a binding force. He felt there are people who have the resources who may be interested in doing something on the Town Garage site and felt it is well worth giving the time to study this.

* Michael **first noted his concern that we would need some resolution of regional school issues before considering an expense of this scope; Jack Boyer felt we should not be held hostage to the resolution of the Region's issues, which could be 10-15 years. He thought this proposal should be considered on its own merits, independently of the Region's issues.** Michael noted his concern of what the economic miscue would be - that anyone looking at it would say "Why is the Town moving the garage site to benefit the seller?" There would be a lot of speculation. He felt it may be short-sighted and that someone must answer the questions as to why it would benefit one person and what would be the benefits to the Town.

* Mark Lyon estimated costs are approximated at \$150,000 to continue all Town operation at the current site. Peter's planning idea of extending the village center as one of the last parcels available will be reviewed.

* Peter suggested now is the time for the Town to consider this before investing more money at the current site. An analysis must be done on where the resources would come from so that they are received and are donated to the Town. There are many issues to be analyzed and the Town must hold onto the center.

* Addie Roberts felt the Town missed the original opportunity several years ago to obtain property further west on Bee Brook Road. She felt funds should be spent to figure out what is the best course. Michael noted he didn't disagree. He didn't think if you take the insurance money to build building, it will not happen quickly. The two actions do not obviate each other.

* Michael noted there are many things that are in a significant economic decline and the Town has lost a significant number of young people and their children. He questioned how much does the Town want to devote to that end and who will have that information? The State? COG? the Town? How do you change the demographics?

* Ted Bent questioned the concern over the mill rate knowing that it is a variable that must be addressed. He suggested this could be an opportunity for the Town to develop itself and suggested the real issue is "how" it would be developed. Long-range and thoughtful planning that was not done in 1993 or 2003 is now being done and he suggested someone needs to be given the ability to feel that their suggestions would be considered.

* Jack Boyer felt we are held hostage to the resolution of the Region, which could be 10-15 years. He thinks this proposal should be considered on it's own merits, independently of the Region.

* Peter noted there is a March 1st deadline and a commercial and financial analysis would be needed. How the Town is positioned in the whole process and will it benefit to the Town are questions that must be answered. He suggested putting it off will generate practical problems.

* An analysis is needed to answer the following questions:
Is there a site available for the town garage?

What costs would be associated with it?

Should the reconstruction of the garage be held up?

Will we get more information about the Education problem?

Will there be State help?

Perhaps the Town Depot area will not expand?

It was noted there are three potential sites for the garage. It was suggested this issue should go to the Planning Commission. The Selectmen are willing to work and spend two months to see if it is practical project and get some idea of the financial implications. It must be in the context of the Plan of Development. The Board of Selectmen must determine what to do first and how as best to proceed.

New Business:

New Preston Cemetery:

A letter was received from the New Preston Cemetery noting their appreciation to the Board for their budgeted funding.

Judea Cemetery:

Mark reported on the State Statute regarding the Judea Cemetery Perpetual Care Funding. According to the Commission's by-laws, 75% of the receipts from the sale of plots must be deposited to the Perpetual Care account, while 25% is used for the maintenance of the cemetery property and burials. Maintenance of the property has become more costly, especially this past year due to the additional tree removal and maintenance required from the storms. The Town also budgets funds annually for this maintenance, which has become a short-term solution to their cash problem. The Commission's by-laws may be changed by the Commission. It is becoming more of an issue to maintain the Cemetery. This will be addressed in the coming year's budget.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Gollow, Finance Secretary