

# April 30, 2003

**Present:**

Board: Jack Boyer, Michael Jackson, Craig Schoon and Rex Swain

Alternates: Mark Lyon, and Liddy Adams

Selectmen: Elaine Luckey, Nicholas Solley

Guests: Tanya Wescott, Tax Collector; Sheila Anson, Tim Cook and Joe Fredlund, Parks & Rec Commission

**Tax Collector:** Tanya reported on the status of delinquent taxpayers, noting \$187,000 is currently outstanding for last year's Grand List. Approximately \$51,000 of this will be reduced if particular properties are sold and various additional payments are forthcoming. She noted she has a few accounts that she would like to forward to the town attorney for foreclosure. If the equity in these properties is enough to cover taxes due, the Board agreed to approve additional attorney's fees to get them off the books. In the case of foreclosure, the Town would be third in line to collect liens, following the federal and state governments. It was agreed that a foreclosure policy should be formulated and public notice be given of this policy. The Tax Collector's current policy allows two years for land or a second home. For a rental property, she has the option of going to an attorney or the Court to ask them to appoint a receiver of lands, who would pay utilities and the taxes. Any fund remaining after these payments would be returned to the homeowner. She has allowed four years on a primary residence if a payment plan has not been established. Tanya reported there has not been a policy in writing. It was suggested she write a policy for review by the Board of Selectmen that should apply to all past years, however, that would not supersede any prior agreements the tax collector has made with taxpayers. Tanya will review only those accounts for which payments have not been made. It was noted additional attorney, legal and auction fees would be required for review of this policy. These costs could be applied against a lien and would be recouped by the Town once the account is cleared. Tanya noted that a property owner has thirteen months to make good on a foreclosure before it could be sold.

**Parks & Recreation - Proposed Bathroom & Storage Facility - WPS field:** Members of the Parks and Recreation Commission reported they will embark on a fund-raising program with the assistance of Linc Cornell and Susie Payne. Costs anticipated for the building, septic and well are approximately \$158,000. They would like to begin the building July 1 and complete the project by the Fall. Mrs. Payne will provide assistance with a fundraising letter. In addition, Mr. Cornell has indicated he will seek funds from private donors to be paid over the next three years and guarantee \$75,000 toward the project this year. Wyant & Company has offered to contribute their labor for the site work and the septic system, which is estimated at \$12,000. Septic material costs would be approximately \$7,000. The Commission would be responsible for mailing costs, etc. With the indicated contributions, it is estimated remaining costs would amount to \$71,000. If the \$50,000 that has been proposed in the capital fund is approved, \$21,000 more would need to be raised through the fundraising letter. The Parks & Rec Commission would serve as receiver for the funds in order that donors may be eligible for tax deductions for their contributions. A separate account would be established for this project. Other will be encouraged to provide their services for volunteer labor, etc. It was also suggested that grant funds could be sought.

**Proposed Capital Budget:** The Selectmen discussed individual capital items. While the need for funding to acquire property to complete the upgrading of the new town garage area had originally been anticipated, it was felt a transfer of properties might be made instead. The Selectmen noted items in the proposed plan did not reflect work in the New Preston area in conjunction with the anticipated STEAP grant. It was felt the Town would provide the initial engineering for drainage, while the Housing Trust and the Water Company would complete the initial digging and installation of water pipes prior to the Town's paving and sidewalk repair work. In the Depot, the plan to remove the remaining garage building

at the Titus Road site will be put on hold due to a lack of storage space. The Senior Center siding was reduced to \$25,000. Reimbursement will be made to the fire company in the amount of \$45,000 for their costs to upgrade fire truck #3. These costs had been anticipated for the coming year but were done at the same time repairs were made to the vehicle, which had been covered by insurance. Rather than come to the Town for an emergency appropriation, the fire company had paid for the work themselves at a probable savings between \$8-15,000. They are also building an additional storage building at their own cost at the New Preston firehouse. The Boards were invited to visit the firehouses to review their improvements. It was noted the 1990 sweeper needs to be replaced; and it was estimated if we had to contract for these services in the Spring and for chip-sealing, it would cost the Town about \$35,000. The current sweeper will be put out to bid. The Police Crown Victoria will be replaced at an estimated \$35,000. Bridge repairs are anticipated on the Nettleton Hollow Road Bridge and the Town will apply for partial reimbursement from the Local Bridge grant for 2004/2005. Application is due 5/15/2003.

**Assumptions:** Various assumption sheets were reviewed. Michael suggested increasing the anticipated Grand List increase from 1.4% to 2%. The General Fund budget will be presented for consideration at the budget hearing at \$3,202,816, while the Nonrecurring Capital budget will be presented at \$890,025. Both budgets in their entirety will be available at the Town Clerk's office prior to the hearing. The Board was asked to think about the appropriate way to handle the mill rate. By changing the Grand List assumptions the numbers look better than originally anticipated. A one-half mill increase was suggested. Rex felt it would be more realistic to maintain the rate that is needed. He felt we had no increase last year and are still fine. Michael felt in order to keep the mill rate on an even keel so that people on the lower bracket do not get hurt it is also best to have a slight increase to avoid spikes. He felt the Board has been trying to do this for the past 6-8 years and that we have been saved by revaluation and decreasing pupil population.

The budget hearing is scheduled for May 8th at 7:30 p.m., with the Town budget meeting scheduled for May 22nd, also at 7:30 p.m.

**Suspense List:** The Board approved the Tax Collector's Suspense List in the amount of \$8,600.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Gollow, Secretary