**Board of Finance**

**October 20, 2014**

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

 **Present:** Members: Jack Boyer, Barbara Brown, Michael Jackson, Craig Schoon, Rex Swain

 Alternates: Reginald Templeton, Ted Bent

 Selectmen: Mark Lyon, Richard Carey

 Treasurer: Linda McGarr

 Guests: Tony Bedini, Board of Education and Linda Kennedy Gomez

**Minutes:** Barbara Brown made a motion to approve the minutes of the June and September meetings. Ted Bent seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously passed.

**Audit:** Treasurer Linda McGarr noted the 2013-14 Town Audit is essentially 90% complete.

**Tax Collector’s Report**: The Tax Collector’s Report dated 9/30/2014 was approved as submitted.

**Treasurer’s Report**: The Treasurer’s Report dated 9/30/2014 was approved as submitted.

**Education:** Tony Bedini reported the Region 12 Education Committee has been discussing possible solutions with regard to the declining school population. The hiring of a consultant to market the Region may be considered. The cost is anticipated at $4,500/month to be paid per each Town’s percentage of the school population; however, this has not been formally decided. (Washington’s % is 46%). Costs may be set at a “not to exceed” number. The Board and the Superintendent are currently exploring this to determine what is in the best interest of the Region. Other possibilities could possibly include having talented and gifted students from other towns or sending our students to another Region. This is an ongoing problem in many small towns. Bridgewater has set up a small committee that will look into solving this.

Tony reported the Shepaug schools will be inspected for certification in the Spring. The Board feels that changes would be necessary in order to make the grade. Reinstating previous classes that are not currently available may be required (i.e. shop courses, etc.), which could become very costly since the purchase of tools, etc., could be required to meet OSHA standards. Part of the marketing situation is that it would require another referendum. If beautifications are added, (i.e. the lobby, etc.) it could be an additional $2-5 million. If we go to referendum with $4-5 million, it is not really telling the whole story. He also noted we use a lot of resources doing surveys in the school over and over again. We need an architect to tell us what the real numbers are and the costs.

Jack Boyer questioned if the towns are interested in closing the elementary schools rather than promoting general growth of the towns. Tony noted the problem of the declining population is not a School Board problem. Tuition for out of Region students has been dropped to $7,500/year, which does not cover the costs. Many of the surrounding towns have the same problem. He suggested if this Board has any interest in sharing their views with the School Board, they should go on record.

Mark Lyon reported he had met with Barbara Henry and Curtis Read. Their focus is on a realistic way to approach the capital work that needs to be done and to encourage the School Board to put together an accurate capital plan that would examine the critical physical areas that need to be addressed. If we are going to support the middle-high school, it seems no one wants to take on long-range bonds. It is important that the Boards of Finance determine if this would be a good idea with taxpayer’s money.

Mark Lyon reported the Council of Governments met with Jonathon Costa of the Education Connection, which covers 21 towns. He noted they have only two towns that are not forecasting a decline in population - New Milford and Danbury. Many towns want to attract students, but there are also many private schools in Litchfield County. It was suggested that private schools will continue as they have the ability to draw from the world, which is a whole different story from the public schools. The idea of marketing ourselves is not going to change the outcome. It is an issue of the demographics of the northeast and it is not changing. The question remains “How do you address it?”

Mark suggested the towns meet to address the short-term problems without addressing the long-term problem that would require a 10-15 year note. He also suggested encouraging the District to consider working with neighboring districts. It was also suggested the Boards of Finance may suggest that a public relations campaign is a waste of money due to economic circumstances. All agreed.

Tony suggested the question be raised if the towns want to convert this system to an individual learning situation rather than develop learning. He noted Dimitri Rimsky went to a Smart Grown meeting that suggested having the townspeople tell them what they would like to do; not only with the schools, but with growth in the Town itself. Michael Jackson questioned if the Council of Governments is addressing the regional growth issue.

Mark noted NWCOG is working with the Northwest Collaborative, a new organization that has been somewhat successful in doing things on a smaller scale to help smaller towns. Jocelyn Ayer, the Director of the Northwest Council of Governments, has a background in housing development and is involved with this organization. They have also initiated a 5th Tuesday, mostly for economic development.

Tony reported three members of the Planning Commission had attended Jocelyn Ayer’s presentation on “Growing the Towns.” He also proposed $750,000-$1,000,000 be budgeted annually to make repairs. Rex Swain suggested it reminded him of the Town’s Road Program that had been put into effect a few years ago. If it were self- financed and combine it with a five-year plan, it probably would work out better and would be more palatable to the voters.

**Financials:** The Board reviewed the financial reports, which seem to be going along well. The Town Garage replacement program is still on track and it is anticipated the garage will soon be occupied. Work is being done on the staff area to put in a conference room, and it is anticipated it would be completed by January. This is insurance reimbursable.

Mark also noted Engine 5 of the WVFD is in need of repairs. The anticipated expense has been included in the Town’s Long-Range Capital budget and funds have been put aside for this project over a two-year budget period. He also noted the construction of the cell tower is nearing completion. AT&T should be up and in operation within the year and the surrounding site work is proceeding. AT&T will be the first carrier installed, which should provide approximately $2,000/month to the Town. It is anticipated additional carriers would follow AT&T. Ted Bent noted there may be a fair amount of negotiating due to the specific area. There is currently a tower in Marbledale servicing AT&T and Verizon.

**CHANGE IN PERSONNEL:** Mark reported changes in personnel in the Selectman’s and Financial offices will occur at the beginning of January. These are due to the upcoming retirements of Kathy Gollow and Phyllis Allen on December 31st. The replacement for Phyllis’ position will be advertised.

Mark reported Linda Kennedy Gomez has been working on the Town’s Policies and Procedures as well as reviewing current accounting procedures. She has a well-qualified accounting background with nonprofits. She is working on the functions in the accounting area and will provide an accounting manual, which should be completed prior to the Town’s audit. She has been reviewing the upcoming State Chart of Accounts and will be working two days/week in the Selectman’s Office as the Selectman’s Ass’t.

Town Treasurer Linda McGarr will be working three days/week. In addition to her position as Town Treasurer, she will take over some of the responsibilities in the Selectman’s Office. The additional responsibilities have been reviewed with the Town’s auditor to insure that there are no conflicts and that checks and balances remain in pace.

Michael Jackson suggested these changes in personnel should be reviewed with Town Attorney David Miles to insure that there is no legal conflict and suggested this be put in writing.

**Resignation:** Rex Swain reported he is resigning from his position as a member of the Board of Finance. He noted he felt he had been out of step with some of the Board and he believes in term limits.

As well as being a member of the Board of Finance for over 18 years, Rex has served the Town well on the Pension Committee and has made great strides with the Town’s Pension Plan, as well as the Retirement Plan for new employees. The Board noted their appreciation for Rex’s many efforts on behalf of the Town.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

 Respectfully submitted,

 Kathy Gollow, Secretary