

April 29, 2010

Minutes are subject to the approval of the Board of Selectmen.

Present:

First Selectman Mark E. Lyon, Selectmen James L. Brinton and Nicholas N. Solley.

Call to Order:

First Selectman Lyon called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m. and the selectmen immediately entered into Executive Session for a personnel discussion.

The Selectmen re-entered the Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen at 5:30 p.m.

Present at the Regular Meeting:

The Board of Selectmen.

Press: Ann Compton – VOICES

Public: Valerie Friedman and Chris Charles.

Approval of Minutes: Motion:

To approve the minutes of the April 15, 2010 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with the following correction:

Under First Selectman's Report – it should read Planning and Flood Plain Study.

By Mark Lyon, seconded by Jim Brinton and unanimously approved.

Communications: None.

Appointments/Resignations: None.

First Selectman's Report:

First Selectman Lyon reported the following:

Bryan Plaza Trees:

Thank you, again, to Mrs. Jan Poskas for her donation to purchase the new American Elm trees that have been planted in the Plaza under the direction of Tree Warden Tom Osborne and the Town Highway Department.

Boat Launch:

Has opened for the season. The new inspection procedures appear to be working well.

Town Beach House:

Work is just about completed on the landscaping phase, tenants will be moved in as of May 1st.

Titus Road Property:

Steps have been taken to address the Inland Wetlands violation. Materials have begun to be hauled out and/or moved.

Budget:

Figures to be presented at the Budget Hearing are posted on the Town's website.

School Budget Vote:

May 4, 2010.

Budget Hearing May 6, 2010 7:30 p.m.; Annual Town Budget Meeting May 20, 2010 7:30 p.m.

Long Range Plan for Bryan Plaza:

Following the Public Hearing on the taking down and planting of trees in Bryan Plaza, several residents voiced the opinion of there being a long range plan for the Plaza – plantings, sidewalks, etc. Jim Brinton suggested that a committee, made up of interested business owners, members of the Garden Club, Planning Commission, would be beneficial.

OLD BUSINESS:

Cell Tower on Town Garage Property:

Mark reported that there was no more information at the present time. A draft of the lease between Verizon and the Town has been sent to the Town Attorney for his review. The question was asked if someone who has dealt with municipal cell tower installations should also review it. Jim Brinton felt that the lease was quite straightforward and we should wait for Attorney David Miles opinion before hiring anyone else at this point. Valerie Friedman asked about the rental fee that would be paid to the Town if the tower were installed. Mark explained that \$1800/month has been offered but this could vary depending on the number of “co-locators” on the tower and may be somewhat negotiable. Jim offered the opinion that the Town was not considering this as a way to generate revenue but as a way to improve communication services.

NEW BUSINESS:

None.

Visitors:

Valerie Friedman read and asked that the following letter become part of the minutes:

Washington is a small town, and because some people wear many hats, it is critical that their objectivity and honesty not be called into question. Decisions should always be based on what is best for the town, and never about personal gain. Personal gain can be financial but it can also be about loyalty to outside interests. Neither of these is acceptable, and the leadership of the town should bend over backwards to make sure its integrity is not compromised.

Two events have come to my attention that concern me and raise questions about whether these standards have been met.

The first event involved information mentioned at the IWC show cause hearing regarding the dumping of material at the old town garage site. It was stated that some of the material came from the Rumsey ice hockey rink excavation. An obvious question is why the town became responsible for this material. What was the agreement between Rumsey and the town leadership that caused the town to take on the burden of disposal for a private institution in town? If, as the Voices article on this subject states, the town needed the material, why – years later – is the material still sitting at the old town garage site?

The next event involves the choice of the son of the First Selectman to reside in the town’s recently constructed beach house on Lake Waramaug, paying a modest rent with some seasonal duties. Although Park and Rec Commission minutes state that David Lyon and his girlfriend were selected from among

several qualified applicants, the choice raises questions about the objectivity by which the process was conducted. Why should the son of the First Selectman – who I admit not to know, and is probably a fine young man – be an applicant for what could be considered a patronage position when bestowed on a family member? If this happened in a larger municipality, questions would be raised about preferential treatment; why should the situation be any different in Washington?

These are just a few examples of actions that confirm my belief that the town needs an Ethics Code to provide leadership and oversight direction. The goal of an Ethics Code is to provide guidelines so that elected and appointed town officials operate in ways that do not compromise the standards of objective and honest leadership. An Ethics Code would require that actions such as these and others undertaken by the Board of Selectmen and the town's appointed and elected officials take place in public and with full disclosure. If the leadership is operating properly, they have nothing to fear from an Ethics Code. If not, that is exactly why an Ethics Code is necessary.

Small towns need to hold themselves up to the same level of scrutiny as larger municipalities. Just because it has always been done this way does not mean there is not an opportunity to eliminate any question about the process by which business is conducted in our town. An Ethics Code would provide a valuable tool in that direction.

- Valerie Friedman

Discussion:

Mark explained that several years ago the State of Connecticut had initiated an effort to have Towns adopt Ethic Codes but was felt to be cumbersome, too involved, etc. and never went anywhere. Recently the Northwest Council of Governments began working on a more user friendly, shorter version. This has not yet been completed. Jim Brinton voiced the opinion that in a town such as Washington, volunteers, people with concerns, etc. should be able to talk about matters they have questions on openly and deal with the subject matter directly with those involved and be able to do so immediately without going through a process that would be necessitated by a written Ethics Code. Mark explained that the materials from the Rumsey Hall School project were accepted at our site on Titus Road because it was an opportunity to get needed materials for the completion of Titus Road grading at no cost. In the meantime, more materials were generated by the Town than had been expected and therefore the overage. Jim explained that a committee made up of himself, Nick Solley and several members of the Parks and Recreation Commission did the selection of David Lyon and his girlfriend as caretakers and tenants at the Beach House. Mark Lyon was not involved in any way in the process and several applicants were interviewed. He agreed that David should not be given special attention and that he also should not be denied the opportunity to apply. Valerie felt that most volunteers would be in favor of signing a Code and would not diminish people's interest in serving the Town. Jim felt it might. Nick Solley voiced his opinion that he felt that there are standards – written and unwritten – that commissioners must abide by. Mark explained that should the NW COG put together a code that Town's sign on to, a Regional Ethics Board would be established that would review matters brought before it. This would keep it from being judged by someone in the same Town.

Chris Charles stated that he has worked in many towns and has seen corruption. For the most part, he feels Washington is fortunate to have commissions that work effectively and has seen examples of commissioners recusing themselves if there is a possibility of a conflict of interest, etc. However, he does feel there are instances where he has requested information or brought up an issue that has either been dismissed or has received no response. He suggested that meetings with the various commissions and the Board of Selectmen be held more frequently to discuss matters of importance and to define roles clearly.

Adjournment:

Motion:

To adjourn the meeting at 6:00 p.m. as there was no further business for discussion.

By Mark Lyon, seconded by Nick Solley and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Anne Greene

Selectmen's Secretary