

• September 8, 2005

Present: First Selectman Richard C. Sears, Selectmen Nicholas N. Solley and Harry H. Wyant.

Visitors: Judge James Lawlor, Betty Mullen, Janet Wildman, Ruth Alex, Victoria Cherniske, Pam Osborne, Sheila Anson, Valerie Anderson, Liddy Adams.

Press: Dan D'Amborsio, Waterbury Republican

Minutes:

- **Motion:** To approve the minutes of the August 25, 2005 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with the following correction: paragraph two: "Valerie Friedman..." should be "Betsy Manning...". By Dick Sears, seconded by Nick Solley and unanimously approved.
- **Motion:** To approve the minutes of the August 31, 2005 Emergency Meeting of the Board of Selectmen (awarding of Church Street improvements bid). By Dick Sears, seconded by Harry Wyant and unanimously approved.

Visitors:

- **Judge James Lawlor, Probate Administrator for the State of Connecticut:** Judge Lawlor thanked the Selectmen for the opportunity to speak and explained he was the Administrator for 123 Courts in the State. His office provides administration services, a relationship with the Legislature, etc. The individual Courts collect revenue as services are provided. From 1998-2002 the amount of revenue was very good. Expenses also increased in this period. After 2002, income inexplicably decreased, however expenses continued to increase with cost of staffing, operations and insurance. Expenses such as health care cannot be controlled. The Judge went on to report that four studies have been done of the Probate system over the last ten years which resulted in the suggestion that the number of courts be reduced. Towns would contribute to the cost of the Courts. Some Towns were not in favor of this and suggested a capping of expenditures. A bill was introduced in the Legislature that would cap spending and have the State contribute to health care costs. Judge Lawlor feels there could be new fees paid to the Probate Courts that would result in an increase in revenue and there should be a program review process. The latter has been established by the Legislature with a committee being formed. The Judge feels that if the State took over the health care costs from the Probate Administration, and spending is capped, the current financial problems may be resolved - at least for the time being. There was general discussion which included some of the services that are provided by the Courts - estate and social service issues. There has been the suggestion of consolidation of the smaller Courts and some Towns (Northwest Connecticut) have begun to do this. Judge Lawlor feels that this has worked in some cases but feels that bottom line is to wait and see what the program review provides before making any decisions in regard to Washington's Probate Court. He complimented our Court for a fine job. The Selectmen also asked that the Administration know that the Town of Washington is very pleased with our Court, our Judge, clerk etc. and would like to preserve it as it is presently. Judge Lawlor's advice" "Sit tight."
- **Valerie Anderson** Asked for clarification of awarding of the Church Street improvements bid to Stone Construction. Dick explained that the lowest bidder did not provide a Bid Bond in their package as was required. This automatically disqualified them. Stone was the next lowest bidder. Valerie asked about payment of the \$253,000 and why Church Street was in need of the work in the first place. It was explained by the Selectmen that payment would come from the STEAP grant which had been approved for this project and Church Street has had drainage issues needing to be addressed for several years. Also,

a new water line has been installed. Valerie asked if this was because of the affordable housing project at 16 Church Street. There was discussion of the time line - it was felt best to wait until after the project at #16 Church Street was completed and the new water line installed. The New Preston Water Company authorized the improvements. It was noted that the Town of Washington is not paying for any work, repairs, etc. created by the Washington Community Housing Trust.

Communications: None.

Appointments/Resignations:

- **Betsy Corrigan, member of the Conservation Commission,** at her request, will move from a regular member of the Commission to an alternate member. **Linda Frank,** alternate, has agreed to move to a regular member. **Appointed:** The First Selectman appointed Betsy Corrigan as an alternate member of the Conservation Commission and Linda Frank as a regular member. Both terms will expire January 1, 2008.

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Housing Commission appointments:** Dick Sears reported he has written to the Republican and Democratic Town Committees reminding them he would like names submitted for this new commission. He has offered several suggestions and would like to make the appointments at the October 20, 2005 Selectmen's meeting. Ruth Alex asked for clarification of the duties of this commission. Dick explained that the Housing Diversity Committee felt if public funds were going to be used - a public entity should be involved in the decision making - not a private group such as the Housing Trust. Betty Mullen expressed her thought that it may be more than is needed.

- **Draft Ordinance - Tax Exemption for Farm Machinery & Buildings:** The agenda for the Town Meeting, October 3, 2005, needs to be set at the next Selectmen's meeting. If this ordinance is to be on the agenda, should it be discussed more by the Selectmen? Nick Solley suggested that the Board of Finance needs to have input on this before it can be put on the call. The fiscal implications are important in the consideration of this ordinance.

- **Draft Ordinance - Open Space Tax Benefits:** Dick Sears announced this will not be on the agenda for the Town Meeting. The Open Space Committee feels the public needs more time to review the information.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Referendum question regarding four year terms of office.** Dick Sears explained that a draft ordinance was put on the May 2004 Town Meeting that would increase the terms of office of Selectmen, Treasurer, Town Clerk and Tax Collector to four years. The Republican and Democratic Town Committees did not feel enough information had been made available and at the Town Meeting a motion was made to table the matter indefinitely. Both Committees felt that it was something that should be voted on at a referendum rather than a Town Meeting. In May 2005 Jack Boyer again addressed the subject and proposed that it be discussed at the October Town Meeting and if the public agreed, it should be on the ballot in November. Dick has spoken with the Secretary of State's office and there would not be the needed length of time to do this this fall. There was thought that it could still be discussed at the Town Meeting and placed on the May referendum.

- **Review of Land Use Fees:** The Selectmen have received some input from the Land Use Commissions and will study this further.

- **Hiring Policy:** Dick Sears distributed a draft of a Hiring Policy. It is essentially the same policy that has been in effect for several years with some minor changes and additions. It will be discussed again in two weeks.

Adjournment: Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 5:45p.m. as there was no further business to discuss. By Dick Sears, seconded by Harry Wyant and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Anne Greene

Selectmen's Secretary