

**TOWN OF SOMERS
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES - SPECIAL MEETING
AND PUBLIC HEARING
Wednesday, March 8, 2006
7:00 p.m.
Town Hall Auditorium**

1. Call to Order:

First Selectman David Pinney called the public hearing to order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Members Present:

Selectmen David Pinney, Kathy Devlin and Ernie Allsup

About 100 citizens including representation from the Library Board, Housing Authority, Design Review Study Committee and Cemetery Committee. State Representative Penny Bacchiochi was also present.

First Selectman David Pinney briefly discussed the four topics on the agenda tonight. He said the public hearing was scheduled in order to gather public opinion on these items. Nothing will be voted on this evening. He said the two items that are the farthest along towards a resolution are the establishment of a Design Review Committee and expansion of the Somers Library. The Library Board has a power point presentation all set to roll, so item (b) will be discussed first.

b. discuss a recommendation to proceed with developing a detailed plan for expanding Somers Public Library

Shirley Warner, Chairman of the Library Board, stated that the Somers Library is twenty years old and the town has outgrown it.

Francine Aloisa, Library Director, showed a series of slides that illustrated the need for expansion in most of the major areas of the Library. As the slides were shown, Francine explained in detail why these areas need expansion and modernization.

Shirley Warner said preliminary plans have estimated the cost of renovation to be between 1.5 and 2 million dollars. This money could be borrowed over a 20-year period.

The State's maximum library grant is \$500,000 and this could be used to keep down the cost to the town.

A citizen asked if expansion upward had been considered - adding a second floor. Shirley replied that the entire area is town land so outward expansion is not a problem. A second story would be

more expensive and require additional staffing.

There was a general discussion about the library being used by just about everyone in town encompassing all ages. Other towns also use the library when reference materials are not available in their own libraries.

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The next step would be to hire design professionals to review the needs and to develop a plan for the expansion and make a model of what will be added. Also, funding sources will be researched as well as coming up with a more definitive cost for the proposed renovations. This professional service would cost between \$40,000 and \$50,000. A committee would be appointed to go to the Board of Finance to appropriate the money needed for preliminary design work.

By a show of hands and lack of negative comments, the people present were favorable to proceed with the next step towards the goal of library expansion.

a. discuss a recommendation to establish a Design Review Committee to review commercial and business construction proposals

- David Reed, Chairman of the Design Review Board Study Committee, stated their committee recommends the creation of a Design Advisory Board with 5 members and 2 alternates comprised of professional engineers, architects, developers and the like. This board would work closely with the Planning and Zoning Commissions concerning commercial and business construction proposals. This board would be created by ordinance and would make their construction recommendations to the Board of Selectmen. This board would develop a guide line for commercial construction geared towards preserving the character and historical nature of a commercial area.

Shirley Warner asked if this board would have any clout and was told that the board would be strictly advisory and another sounding board for appealing business construction that would be compatible with the businesses in the same area.

The audience had no objection in proceeding with the ordinance for presentation at a town meeting for approval.

c. discuss a recommendation to dedicate a portion of the site of the Somers Center Cemetery to be used for senior income-assisted housing

Len Slaga, Chairman of the Housing Authority, said there is a real need for low income housing for the elderly and seriously disabled. The proposed units would be similar to Woodcrest - a little larger and more modern. There is a significant interest from Somers residents in providing more housing in this category. Funding is available for this type of construction if town land is available. The Housing Authority is proposing to split up the town land currently partially occupied by the Somers Center Cemetery into two portions, 21 acres for senior housing and 20 acres remaining for cemetery plots. The pre-development study would take about a year and units could be available for occupancy within 5 years. The State will give us the money to do the study.

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Tony Pellegrino, Housing Authority, who also handles Woodcrest for the State said the State will help us build the new units provided a Housing Authority remains in place.

Tony said he always has a list of about 20 people waiting for a Woodcrest unit. The town does not provide any services to Woodcrest except for Fire Department and ambulance service and plowing from Public Works during severe storms.

State Representative Penny Bacchiochi said the State is encouraging all types of housing for the elderly but they are not funding many of them.

A citizen asked what establishes priority occupancy, and would occupancy be limited to Somers residents. He was told that anyone could apply, even from other towns, and occupancy could not be limited to Somers residents.

Jan Warnock remarked that she hopes someone helps out the middle income gap - otherwise, this group will be moving out of town because they can't afford to stay.

Irene Percoski of the Cemetery Committee said that while she appreciates the need for elderly housing, she is not in favor of giving up any of the land that was purchased in 1961 for use as a cemetery.

George Warner said the purchase of 40 acres in 1961 was a good buy. Eight acres were used for Woodcrest and there are only 33 acres left. A study was made that would dedicate 12.8 acres for roads and landscaping, leaving only 20.2 acres for additional burials. If the town uses this for low income housing, nothing will be left for cemetery plots. He feels the town should look for

other sites including private property that the owner might donate or sell to the town at a low price.

Ken Anderson of Public Works said the land in back of the cemetery has been used over the years for gravel for town roads. Taking the gravel out does not hurt the land and it saves the town money.

Tony Pellegrino said this is town property - it does not belong to the Cemetery Committee. The present cemetery is between 2 and 3 acres and is only about half full. There is enough space left for at least 140 years.

Jan Warnock asked if there were other options - other town land that would be available. David Pinney said it does not appear that there is any other town land that is available and appropriate for this use.

Carol Pyne, Chairman of the Cemetery Committee, asked what part of the cemetery land is useable for burials. Not all of the land is suitable.

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Ed Sullivan from the Cemetery Committee said this property was set aside for the cemetery and he wants it left as it is. A lot of the land is not usable for cemetery plots.

Len Slaga said no decision would be made tonight. The Housing Authority just wants to proceed with its study on the feasibility of the low income elderly housing project.

Tony Pellegrino said that 74% of Woodcrest residents are former residents of Somers. He said let's move on - the town needs affordable senior housing.

Fred Meyer said he does not see the need to plan for cemetery plots for the next 300 years. The land should be shared and the town should get on with providing low income housing for the elderly and severely handicapped. This statement received a round of applause from the audience.

Len Slaga said the Housing Authority would like to proceed with a feasibility study which would be State funded.

David Pinney said the Board of Selectmen could make a formal motion to appropriate some part of that property to be used for low income senior and severely handicapped housing.

d. **discuss the desirability of adopting a town ordinance prohibiting the use of alcohol by minors on private property**

Geralyn Laut from the Coalition to Stop Underage Drinking and a Glastonbury resident spoke at length about the dangers of underage drinking. She said Glastonbury had a lot of problems in this area with many house parties when parents were away or sometimes with parental permission. She thinks the only way to decrease this problem is to have a town ordinance. The Town of Cheshire enacted an ordinance in 1986 and Glastonbury followed in 1999. The Town of Enfield is considering enacting such an ordinance. It is felt this would let the community know that the town is taking a stand on underage drinking.

A citizen asked why has this not been done before now.

Sergeant Jose Claudio of the town's Police Department said an ordinance would be an extra tool to stop underage drinking on private property.

Judy Mehl, a Somers resident, said the idea of an ordinance was voted down in 1998 because parents resented infringing on their privacy rights and their parental rights.

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Another opinion expressed was that parents who are allowing underage drinking on their property should be fined.

Fred Meyer said the use of alcohol by those under 21 is and has always been a problem. This is really about parenting - punishing a child who is caught drinking alcohol. Fred said his father would certainly have punished him if he were caught drinking.

Several citizens agreed that a \$100 fine for underage drinkers would be a deterrent to others that might try it.

A show of hands indicated audience approval of establishing such an ordinance in Somers. Approval of such an ordinance would have to take place at a town meeting.

4. **Adjournment:**

The meeting adjourned by mutual consent at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Connie Carenzo, Recording Secretary
TOWN OF SOMERS

MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVAL AT A SUBSEQUENT MEETING

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