

**TOWN OF SOMERS
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES – SPECIAL MEETING
Monday, January 7, 2008, 7:00 p.m.
Town Hall Auditorium**

1. Location of emergency exits – fewer than 50 people in attendance
2. Call to order at 7:03 p.m.
3. Members present – Kathleen Devlin, David Pinney & Joseph Tolisano. Also present were Bob Cafarelli, Director of Public Works; Ann Marie Logan, Town Clerk; Marcia Mitchell, Exec. Asst./Ops. Mgr. as recording secretary; Ed Pagani, Fire Chief Elect; Greg Simmons, Director of Finance; and several interested citizens.
4. Pledge of Allegiance – not said, as there was no flag in the room.
5. Budget Forum – public input for town budget priorities. Mr. Pinney began the conversation by providing a brief outline of major variances, year-to-date, from the current year's budget. He also encouraged the citizens in attendance to provide feedback and input at any time throughout the meeting. The largest unfavorable variance is -\$58,000 in the Vacation/sick day payouts line. The explanation for this is that there were two separations from service (retirements) by long-term employees. Mr. Pinney commented that this amount was kept separate from the annual budget in the past, and that for the past several years the funds in this line had not been fully spent. Ms. Devlin wanted to know how we could contain this expense given that it was so significant, and proposed that we somehow revise the benefit so that it would be less expensive for the town. How long would this take? Mr. Pinney responded that the benefit could not just unilaterally be taken away, and that a plan for somehow compensating current employees, while discontinuing the benefit to new employees had to be explored. Mr. Tolisano commented that Mr. Simmons should take this to the Board of Finance (BOF) and ask for their input.

Mr. Pinney returned to his recap - other variances reviewed were:

Proposed Salary	unfavorable	\$-15,000
Temporary Salaries	favorable	20,000
Health Insurance	favorable	45,000
Heat	unfavorable	-15,000
Gas & Diesel	unfavorable	-40,000

Total excluding vac/sick days	unfavorable	\$ -5,000
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Overall, Mr. Pinney believes the budget will be met for the full year. Significant conversation took place about fuel costs – both for heating oil and vehicle fuel – being difficult to anticipate and to budget for. Mr. Pagani commented that he is not sure the Fire Department can cover the fuel (heating and vehicle) overages within this year's budgeted lines. Bob Pettee said that he regularly observed all the garage bay doors being opened during equipment testing while all the vehicles were outside of the building. He commented that the Fire Department might be able to save some fuel costs if the garage bay doors were closed during equipment testing. Mr. Pagani commented that there had been problems with the Fire House heating system since the building had been built, and that the maintenance/repairs were costing in excess of \$5,000 per year. Joseph Iadarola wanted to know what it would cost to replace the system, and why the replacement should not be made part of the capital budget (CIP) request. Mr. Pagani commented that the system could be replaced for about \$45,000, based on his knowledge. Mr. Pagani also commented that the Fire Department budget had been frozen for the remainder of the year. Ms. Devlin wanted to verify that we were participating in a group-purchasing program, and Mr. Pinney confirmed that we are. Mr. Tolisano commented that we should budget fuel on the high side next year, probably \$3.60/gallon, and that we should probably publish a policy on heating within town buildings. Mr. Pinney and Ms. Devlin commented that the larger the fuel budget was the more the other lines would be restricted based on the (BOF) guidelines for overall annual budget increases. Concerns were raised about the Town's ability to do business given that fuel cost increases were outpacing the general economy, and the pressure this would put on other areas of the budget. Mr. Pinney said that the Selectmen would need to have discussions with the BOF regarding fuel pricing issues.

Other issues discussed in relation to the current year's budget situation: Mr. Cafarelli reported that Public Works overtime is in check despite an already active winter season. Salt supplies are locally non-existent; however, they are being brought in from a Taunton, MA vendor under a state contract with little unfavorable impact. Mr. Pinney commented that there has been a long-term open position within the Public Works Department that the staff had decided they could manage without filling as long as the Part-time list of employees could be maintained for filling in during seasonal peak needs.

Ms. Devlin asked if ½ of this position could be allocated to filling a full-time Social Services position. Mr. Pinney commented that the ACCESS Agency had made a proposal to subcontract Social Service personnel, that would need to be considered, and that the Hartford Foundation would be the first choice for obtaining at least partial funding for full-time Social Services staff.

6. Selectmen's budget priorities:

Ms. Devlin*For 2008:*

- Revision of pension plan-
budget impact TBD

- Full-time Social Services staff
person

Mr. Pinney*For 2008:*

- Full-time HVAC staff person
to be shared between Town &
School

- Supports all requests from
other two selectmen

Mr. Tolisano*If possible in 2007:*

- Financial Software; otherwise
in 2008

For 2008:

- Replace Phone System
- Town Website

Mr. Pagani commented that the phone system at the Fire House needed to be upgraded/replaced. Mr. Pinney advised him to work with Ms. Mitchell, as she was working with vendors to determine necessary equipment for the town's phone system.

Ms. Devlin & Mr. Tolisano wanted to know if it was possible to get the financial software installed in this fiscal year. Mr. Simmons commented that he and the School business office were waiting for a revised proposal, and that the total cost to the town would be quite high. The School has been budgeting through CIP and they have accumulated \$42,000 of a \$63,000 total CIP budget for this project. The Town has not had this item in the CIP process previously. Conversation as to how the total would be allocated between the Board of Education (BOE) budget and the Town budget, and Mr. Simmons replied that he had not had that conversation with Mr. Boutwell, as they were awaiting a revised proposal that met both the Town and the BOE requirements.

Mr. Pettee commented that a shared resource for HVAC would probably be a good idea.

Mr. Pettee and Fred Meyer then began a conversation regarding what it would take to split the budget vote for the town into two parts – a vote for the Town budget and a vote for the School budget. Mr. Pettee commented that he was concerned about the amount of waste at the school, and he thinks that people should be able to choose where the money should be spent. Mr. Meyer explained why he believes the budget vote should be split – if the budget as a whole fails to pass, everyone – town and school – are asked to cut the same amount, even though the school budget guidance was set to a 5% increase, and the town budget guidance was set to a 3% increase. It seemed to him that it was unfair to the town to be asked to cut the same amount when a budget failed given that the town was being held to tighter increase requirement. Mr. Pinney explained that doing this would require a charter revision. Mr. Pettee asked what it would take to revise the charter, and Mr. Pinney explained that a Charter Revision committee must be appointed either by the Board of Selectmen or by a petition. Either way, it would take a significant amount of time. Ms.

Devlin asked if instead we could do a non-binding referendum question, specific to each year's budget, to gather information regarding what voters thought about the budget in whole – whether Town or School amounts were too high, or too low. Ms. Logan commented that yes, a non-binding referendum could be taken, and that the new voting machines would accommodate such a referendum question. Mr. Pinney then asked for any other budget input from the audience. There being none, the next agenda item was taken up.

7. Approve scheduled payments. Ms. Devlin moved the approval of two scheduled payment reports dated January 2 and January 7, 2008, for a total of \$239,897.98. Mr. Tolisano seconded, and the motion unanimously carried.

8. Adjournment – 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia L. Mitchell
Executive Assistant/Operations Manager
Recording Secretary

MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED AT A SUBSEQUENT MEETING