

MINUTES

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2006 @ 7:15 pm

RICHARD E. MASTRANGELO CHAMBER

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

1. ROLL CALL: A regular meeting of the Town Council was called to order at 7:15 pm in the Richard E. Mastrangelo Chamber, Administration Building. Present for the meeting were Councilors Stephen Corbett, Marilyn M. Petitto Devaney, John A. Donohue, Angeline B. Kounelis, Jonathan Hecht, John J. Lawn, Jr., Stephen E. Romanelli, Vice President Mark S. Sideris, and Council President, Clyde L. Younger. Also present for the meeting were the Town Manager Michael Driscoll, Town Attorney Mark Reich and Council Clerk Valerie Papas.

The Chair called for a Moment of Silence for the passing of the father of Town Treasurer Phyllis Marshall.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. EXAMINATION OF MINUTES: September 12th & September 26th. Councilor Romanelli moved to approve the minutes of September 12th as amended, seconded by Councilor Sideris and adopted by voice vote. Councilor Devaney moved to Table the minutes of September 26th, seconded by Councilor Corbett and adopted by voice vote.

4. PUBLIC FORUM – none noted.

5. COMMITTEE REPORT:

A. Committee on Economic Development & Planning report on parking in Watertown Square – Stephen Corbett, Chair. The Chair recognized Councilor Corbett who provided a written report on parking issue in Watertown Square (attached). Various ideas were raised including a parking structure, a 3 hour parking limit, looking into the MBTA car barn and surface parking only. Several key parking issues were referred to the manager to be

addressed including library parking needs, the MBTA property, use around the river area and the boys and girls club parking lot. Councilor Devaney moved to approve the report, seconded by Councilor Sideris and adopted by voice vote.

Councilor Devaney provided a history of the MBTA car barn and stated that when the site was being offered, the former planner declined to bring it forward to the council.

6. PRESENTATIONS AND REPORTS BY TOWN OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES:

A. Informational Presentation on Property Assessments – Daniel Loughlin, Town Assessor. The Chair recognized Mr. Loughlin who provided a hand out (attached) which included Boston Globe articles regarding the declining real estate market and current sales analysis. Mr. Loughlin noted that the market is constantly changing and shifting and there is often a lag time in computing shifts in the market. An over reliance in property taxes are due in part to cuts in state aid and growing budgets. Mr. Loughlin lastly noted that although there may be growth in new construction, that has not lead to cut in taxes, but goes into the general budget and that taxes will not decrease unless there is a tax revolve similar to proposition 2 ½.

Councilor Devaney stated that the town has lost businesses over the years which put more of the tax burden on homeowners.

Councilor Kounelis stated that even with the sale of the Arsenal and increase in tax revenue from the property, taxes did not go down for homeowners.

Councilor Corbett spoke in support of new growth assessments going toward a tax break for homeowners.

Councilor Donohue spoke in concern over the lost commercial revenue for the community.

Councilor Devaney stated that years ago the town lost its opportunity to have a hotel at the arsenal site, stating that our zoning laws didn't allow for the construction of one.

The Chair stated that the town has to look at the challenges ahead of us in turning things around.

Richard Hoover, Irving Park – stated that taxes are too high in Massachusetts and asked where is the money going to.

Peg Cassidy, Prentiss Street - stated that there is some waste in the budget and that the town council has to look to limit the increases.

The Council thanked Mr. Loughlin for the concise report.

B. Informational Presentation on a web based economic development tool – J.4.B, Inc., Mr. Peter Crosby.

The Chair recognized Mr. Crosby, J4.B, Inc. which specializes in a web based tool in helping businesses find grants and funding by placing portals on the town's website which is updated every 24 hours.

Councilor Corbett spoke in support of the modest expenditure of \$10,000, one year trial basis. He noted that the tool can be reevaluated after one year to see how effective it has been rather than adding staff to the planning department.

Councilor Donohue stated that this would be a great asset and concurs with Councilor Corbett with respect to a wise investment in our future.

Councilor Devaney spoke in support of the trial period and noted that Watertown is 9th in density but needs to add to its commercial base.

Councilor Kounelis stated that the idea has some merit but that Watertown is not similar to the more industrial areas of Somerville and Gardner, which currently use this tool.

Councilor Hecht asked, what will draw businesses to Watertown and noted that we are putting the cart before the horse.

Councilor Sideris agreed and stated that the town has to first address basic issues like parking in the square before we start marketing ourselves to the business community.

Councilor Devaney stated that Cambridge is a hub of business and they have no parking available. She noted that we have to strive to do better.

C. Informational Update on Coolidge School – Gregory P. Watson, Planning Director.

The Chair recognized Mr. Watson who provided a brief update on the Coolidge School project. He noted that a housing agreement has been negotiated, zoning and funding have been obtained and that the project is ahead of the curve. The lease, Mr. Watson indicated, is substantially complete.

Councilor Sideris questioned what if there is no funding. Mr. Watson stated that there are no guarantees, but that historical tax funds are readily available.

Councilor Sideris noted that there are too many question marks.

Mr. Watson stated that the commitments, financing are in hand.

Councilor Kounelis stated that she supported the Mitchell proposal with the 29% affordability but at the last moment that was raised to 40% which she could not support. She noted that the Brigham House received a \$29,000 tax rebate from the town because the numbers didn't work for them and that she wants to make sure that this project is revenue generated.

The Chair asked for a copy of the commitment letter.

Councilor Corbett asked how much money in grants the project has secured. Mr. Watson noted that the project has \$600,000 and an additional \$500,000 in historic credits for the \$10 million project.

Councilor Devaney stated that it seems that the project has been kept in limbo because of the 4 affordable units and asked that the 4 units be withdrawn so that the project can go forward.

Councilor Hecht asked Mr. Watson if the 4 affordable units are putting the project at risk. Mr. Watson indicated, no.

Councilor Hecht asked for something in writing, chapter and verse, with respect to where this project stands in the process, noting that he is sensing an unjustifiable panic.

The Chair noted that he is sensing that some Councilors are concerned and that it is reasonable that Councilors ask questions.

Fred Zartarian – stated that he has an apartment that he has tried to rent for two months with no luck. He questioned the strength of the rental market.

Mr. Hoover, Irving Park – asked if this project goes belly up, with the tax payers be liable.

The Manager stated that the town retains ownership of the property and that the tax payers will not be liable.

7. MOTIONS, ORDERS AND RESOLUTIONS:

A. Acceptance of Proclamations: Japanese Peace Delegation – Jonathan Hecht. Councilor Hecht read the proclamation. Councilor Sideris moved to accept the proclamation, seconded by Councilor Romanelli and adopted by voice vote.

B. First Reading: On an ordinance amending the Town Manager's Compensation. The Chair provided a first reading of a proposed ordinance amending the Manager's compensation and a break down of the compensation package which includes a one time longevity payment, a 2% retroactive raise and exclusive use of a town vehicle (attached). The Chair noted that the ordinance and contract will be placed in the local newspaper and a public hearing and vote will take place on November 14th.

8. PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Chair stated that he has asked Police Chief Deveau to make a presentation on October 24th on school safety in light of recent events around the country.

The Chair asked for a motion to forward correspondence from the town of Natick to the Manager. The Town of Natick is soliciting assistance and information on how we formulate water bills. Councilor Kounelis made the motion, seconded by Councilor Sideris and adopted by voice vote.

9. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE TOWN MANAGER

A. Presentation of the Fiscal Year 2008 Preliminary Budget Overview. The Town Manager provided a power point presentation on the Fiscal Year 2008 Preliminary Budget (attached).

10. REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Councilor Kounelis asked the Manager for documentation on what is needed for a private way to become public.

Councilor Sideris asked the Manager to provide utilities information for the Browne School.

11. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councilor Hecht announced that a meeting regarding Nonantum Road will take place on October 12th at 6pm in the Main Library.

12. PUBLIC FORUM – none noted.

There being no further business to come before the Town Council, Councilor Sideris moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:15 pm, seconded by Councilor Donohue and adopted by voice vote.

I hereby certify that at a regular meeting of the Town Council for which a quorum was present, the above minutes were adopted as amended on November 14, 2006.

Clyde L. Younger, Council President