

Selectmen's Meeting – January 18, 2006

Present were Selectmen Robert A. Beauregard, Francis W. Faulkner, Jr. and Deborah J. Davis. Also present was Town Administrator Elizabeth Fox.

Chairman Beauregard called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Financial Matters. Selectmen reviewed and approved accounts payable and payroll manifests.

Information items. Information items including the School Board's action to appoint Kenneth P. Colby, Jr., a board member until the March election, discussions regarding regionalizing the RPA program and the monthly report of the fire chief were reviewed.

Fire Department. Selectmen were advised of a call received from a department member advising that some members had formed a committee to address members concerns and its chair wished to meet with Selectmen. Selectmen felt department personnel should work within the department's chain of command before meeting with the board requesting Fox contact recommending they need to work within the department initially.

Page Court. Selectmen reviewed a map and warrant article draft proposing discontinuance of a section of Page Court at the intersection of Route 32 when the new Safford Drive is complete.

Homestead Woolen Mill Dam. Section of the report containing reconstruction cost data and an estimate to repair the dam were reviewed by board members. Selectmen requested staff arrange a meeting with DES personnel to discuss repair of the dam versus reconstruction.

Draft Town Meeting Warrant. Selectmen reviewed and made modifications to the draft warrant prepared to date. Review with DRA and town counsel needs to be completed as well as finalization of several articles before the warrant for the 2006 Town Meeting can be finalized. The last day to post the warrant is January 30th.

Nominations. Selectmen discussed pending appointments posting notice of vacancies after Town Meeting 2006 on the Conservation Commission. The filing period for elected town officers begins next week.

MRSD Payment Schedule. Selectmen approved a payment schedule for the district for the balance of its fiscal year through June 2006 – Attachment #1.

Default Budget 2006. Selectmen approved and executed the proposed default budget for 2006 – Attachment #2.

Approval of minutes of previous meetings. Selectmen reviewed and approved as written the minutes of their meetings of December 28, 2005 and January 4, 2006.

Public Hearing – Petition warrant article considering rescission of SB2. Chairman Beauregard called to order at 7:30 p.m. a public hearing to accept testimony on a petition received considering rescission of SB2 official ballot voting which was adopted at Town Meeting 2005. The floor was opened for comments from the public on the question which will appear on the ballot on March 14th.

Alan Collette advised he had initiated the petition. He advised town meeting was a New England tradition dating back to 1630 to the first town meeting in Dorchester Massachusetts. Swanzey has been holding town meeting for more than 200 years as it was founded in 1733. It is a pure form of democracy providing citizens with an opportunity to question departments, debate, amend and act on warrant articles. He feels that SB 2 removes choice providing opportunity for a minority at the deliberative session to limit choices of the voters at the ballot session 5 weeks later. Statistics from a UNH study regarding fiscal impacts of SB 2 were reviewed that concluded that budgets in SB 2 communities climbed more rapidly than non-SB2. Turn out state wide for deliberative sessions is 2.3% of voters versus turn out for traditional town meeting set at 9.2% of voters statewide. More voter interest and education is generated based on these statistics and more fiscal restraint at a traditional town meeting.

Polly Glidden spoke advising that she was proud she had initiated the petition resulting in adoption of SB 2 last year. She advised that if voters were smart enough to pay taxes they were not too ignorant to vote and asked that Town Treasurer Conway apologize to her.

Pat Bauries asked about the numbers participating in Town Meeting in Swanzey in past years expressing her opinion that town meeting can be impacted by minorities and that the deliberative session provides opportunities for discussion and amendment and then an opportunity to cool and consider the issues before voting. She referred to a letter to the editor appearing in that day's Sentinel and expressed her view that the town should try SB 2 before considering its repeal.

Roger Conway spoke of his experience with Town Meeting which has been longer than most. He opposed SB2 for the town and felt it has been a disservice to the school district.

Joan Hagar spoke in opposition to SB 2 expressing her desire to return to Town Meeting. She doesn't want to go to multiple meetings and has enjoyed the sense of community that coming together discuss and work to solve problems brings.

David Krisch expressed his support for the traditional town meeting. He advised he felt that many in the community may not realize that Town Meeting has been changed. He expressed disappointment that so seem to feel that town employees do not have the same right to participate and vote on issues as other citizens. They, more than many, have lots of knowledge about the issues facing the town.

Mike Koski expressed concern that people may not get much good information on the issues facing voters with limited media outlets available through the local paper.

Lee Dunham expressed his concerns about the SB 2 which limit is flexibility relative to winter expenses.

Chairman Beauregard closed the public hearing at 7:55 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Submitted by,

Elizabeth A. Fox
Town Administrator