

**Board of Selectmen
Meeting Minutes
4/27/09**

The Board of Selectmen met this evening at the Easton Town Offices, Selectmen's Office, 136 Elm Street, with Chair Colleen Corona presiding.

Members present: Colleen Corona, John Haederle, Chuck King, Ellen Barlow, Irwin Cohen and Town Administrator David Colton.

Corona called the meeting to order at 7:00pm

EPA's Environmental Merit Award to the Town of Easton

Colton announced that the Town of Easton recently received an award from the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It was a nomination made by our Land Use Agent and subsequently accepted by the EPA. Corona spoke of the various awards and noted that Easton was the only community to receive the award for the town's environmental contributions. There were individuals receiving awards but no other community. Colton spoke of the Water Department's efforts as well as the Canoe River Advisory Committee who have worked many other town organizations, departments, boards and committees to preserve the environment. Colleen, Corona David Ames, John Grant, Tom O'Brien accepted the award on behalf of the Town.

Easton Chamber of Commerce Presentation of the "Buy Local" Campaign

Tom Reardon, Easton Chamber of Commerce Vice President Michael Asack, Easton Chamber of Commerce President were present. Reardon spoke of the past Chamber of Commerce Taste of Easton events and how the Chamber decided to promote all businesses in Easton, not just restaurants by promoting a new coupon book as a fundraiser. "Easton Rocks" is the new initiative that will benefit the entire community. Asack spoke of the new campaign and the stated that the book will be specifically designed for the Town of Easton. Businesses can choose to offer a discounted coupon on place an ad in the book.

Corona referenced a promotional statement regarding the campaign prepared by Citizen Business Advocate Kit Minsky. Corona suggested that this new campaign will promote businesses that we can shop at locally. Barlow asked the cost of the book. Asack confirmed \$25. More information will follow as far as where to purchase the books. The website is www.eastonrocks.com.

Corona noted that this replaces the Taste of Easton event and the coupons will give the value back to the customers. The Easton Chamber of Commerce has always supported the Town and we want to support the businesses in Easton.

The Board wished the chamber well with this new fundraiser.

One day liquor license requests – Stonehill College, Inc. (3)

Colton referenced the three license requests as follows:

An all alcohol license for the Executive Committee Development event on April 28, 2009 from 4-6 at Donahue Hall

A beer and wine license for the Faculty Recognition Dinner on May 8, 2009 from 6-10pm at the Martin Institute

An all alcohol license for the Outstanding Alumnus Award Ceremony and Dinner on

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May 18, 2009 from 6-10pm at Alumni Hall

No Easton Police Department detail is required for any of the events.

Voted: (Haederle/Cohen) voted unanimously to approve the one day licenses as requested

FY08 Analysis of Ambulance Services

Fire Chief Tom Stone was present.

Colton referenced the analysis copy provided by the Town's Auditors, Melansen Heath. Colton explained that the Fire Department operates the ambulance service for the Town of Easton. We cannot separate the ambulance service from the Fire Department. In 2008, the report of the auditors concluded that the ambulance services operated in a deficit in the amount of \$139,000. This means that the general fund supported the service in this deficit amount. Easton does very well in collections from our insurance companies and we drop off when we have to bill patients directly. Many Massachusetts health insurance plans do not cover ambulance services. We collect almost 90% of what is allowable. We collected almost \$600,000. We had a few areas of problems and the most notable, problems collecting money from Stonehill College students. We have had problems getting health insurance information from the students. Often, they don't carry insurance cards. We have tried on many occasions to get information from the college.

Barlow asked if this is part of the privacy issue. Colton explained that this should not be a privacy issue. Comstar has noted that other colleges are better about providing information.

Cohen asked which individuals from the college typically call for the ambulance. Colton explained the many ways that the ambulance may receive the call. Cohen suggested that we bill Stonehill College directly. Colton replied that he is not sure if this can be done. Colton noted that last year, we tried to negotiate with Stonehill and noted that this is the biggest expense with the college.

Chief Stone noted that the billing company may not be able to bill the college directly. He confirmed that the Fire Department receives most of the calls from the Stonehill College Police Department. The other issue is trying to get insurance information up front from Stonehill College. He has started to get information from the Police Department, not insurance but home address information and this seems to have helped. Colton clarified that although we may be getting home address information, it doesn't assure us that we'll get paid.

Corona asked about MassHealth and asked if they cover ambulance services. Colton noted that some of the better MassHealth plans pay but not all.

Barlow spoke of the uncollected balances and asked if it is correctible. Colton explained the deficit is really the difference between what we collect and what we bill. Colton noted that just because there is a deficit doesn't mean it's a problem. Colton feels overall we are doing very well and the Fire Department runs the program very well. We need to improve our collections and get our collections from Stonehill College students into the 90%.

Corona noted that it's more the issue that we should be able to collect the insurance information from Stonehill College.

Haederle asked about private entities like Stonehill College having full access to our ambulance service and if we are obligated to respond. Colton noted we are obligated to respond to any call we get in our area.

Corona noted that they have had functions where they have hired their own ambulance service and they were using service that didn't have the expertise that our department had. Corona reiterated that we are trying to get the college to respond.

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In summary, Colton suggested that we will continue to monitor the situation to see if getting the home addresses are helping with the collections at Stonehill College.

Contract approval - Life Fitness – fitness equipment for the Easton Middle School

Voted: (Barlow/King) voted unanimously to approve the contract with Life Fitness in the amount of \$82,945

Budget update

Colton noted that the budget is far from being ready to go to Town Meeting. Town Meeting will take place on May 18th however the plan is to deal with all the articles except the budget. The budget will be discussed on Monday, June 8th. The House/Legislature is debating the budget this week. The Senate will receive the budget in May and then it will go to the Governor. Local Aid has been reduced and reimbursement money for the Quinn Bill has been eliminated. They are looking at a possible sales tax increase, gas tax increase and reforms in the area of transportation. We are at a budget standstill right now. We may not have a safe budget until sometime in June. We know that the budget picture will not get better from the February 9th projections and it could be worse with the budget he presented on April 6th, plan B.

Colton thanked the Steelworkers Administrative/Profession, DPW and Clerical Unions for agreeing to the concessions as proposed as well as a furlough for the Clerical Union. They have stepped up to the plate and it is appreciated. He explained the cutbacks proposed for these unions.

The negotiations with the Police and Dispatcher Unions have been moving forward and they have been positive; they continue to talk and negotiate. The Fire Union negotiations have broken off. Colton suggested that we are at impasse and therefore he will not be implementing a wage freeze unless something changes. He has a few new proposals to introduce to the Board tonight although he will not ask for a Board vote.

He spoke of the February 6th Board of Health (BOH) reorganizational proposal. There has been a lot of misinformation since this proposal that he has eliminated the BOH. He stated we will have a BOH July 1st and he has not proposed to eliminate the Health Department but instead proposes to merge the Health Department with the Inspectional Services Department. He is not trying to get the Building Inspector to be the BOH. The BOH office will be open 40 hours a week. This will allow a better day to day operation of the Health Department. He has heard from the BOH and their concern that they would be without a full time Health Agent so he has amended his plan to eliminate the Director of Public Health and replace it with a Public Health Agent. We would maintain the contract for a public health nurse. We have a half time Health Inspector who does a great deal of restaurant inspections and this position will be retained. This proposal will eliminate a half time secretary and a half time Assistant Director of Public Health. The BOH will have adequate staff. Colton agreed that this is not good or desirable but it is what we have to do to balance the budget and do the best job we can. The new proposal saves the same amount of money but it changes the organization.

Haederle asked about the cost implications. Colton noted it would save the same amount of money but this new plan affects more people; it affects the Director, the Assistant Director and the secretary.

Colton spoke of a "draft" Health Insurance Opt Out Program. He will propose this as they did in the City of Worcester. This program saved them money. As proposed, we will pay a bonus next year, equal to the amount of money the employee pays for health insurance if they find health insurance somewhere else. He gave examples of employees using their spouses plan. This is completely voluntary and they would have to provide proof they are insured by someone else before they switch from the Town plan. You could get back in the Town's plan if you had a qualifying event. This would only be available to 10% of the subscribers on each plan. If 10% took this; it would save the town over \$360,000. We would pay the

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employee contribution rate and the employee would save that amount. We would offer this during open enrollment which begins May 18th.

Retiree Health Insurance

In the proposal of February 6th, he asked all the unions to accept the Blue Cross blue Shield Value Plan and that we change the way we contribute to the cost of the PPO plan. The PPO plan allows you to get wherever you want without a primary care doctor referral. The PPO is more expensive but it gives people a choice. If you don't live in New England and our outside the New England network, the PPO is good. However it costs the Town \$1,500 per employee to have the PPO. Colton asked that the Town's contribution to the PPO be the same dollar to dollar as to what you would pay for the HMO Plan.

Essentially, he is asking tonight to ask retirees to do the same thing. We are going to make the Value Plan available to the employees. We are adding two plans to the plan that are offered by Tufts; they are at a much lower premium. We are asking the retirees on the PPO to pay the same as what the current union employees are going to pay. This change will require a vote of the Board of Selectmen. We will be notifying employees that this is what we will want to do. The savings is substantial. Staying on Blue Cross and moving into the Value Plan is the same coverage but it increases the employee co-pays.

Corona asked the cost implications to the subscribers. Colton noted the cost for the people on the PPO would go for individual from \$218 to \$348 month; see the attached spreadsheet. The people who go from Blue Cross PPO to the Tufts PPO would save \$250 a month based on what they are paying now. We understand the Blue Cross plan is expensive so we are offering an alternative.

Cohen asked about future retirees just going to Medicare. Colton noted that we have put a warrant article on the Town Meeting warrant requiring retirees and their spouses and dependents who have Medicare Part A to enroll in a Medicare health benefit plan offered by the Town. The problem is that some of the retirees are not eligible for Medicare; prior to a certain year, there are employees who did not pay into Medicare. At this point in time we do not have a good handle on how many retirees are not eligible. If you are a retiree and you live out of state and not eligible for Medicare, your only option is the PPO. Currently, 50 retirees take the PPO, some individual and some family plans. Cohen spoke in favor of the Medicare plan. Again, Corona and Colton noted that some retirees do not qualify for Medicare.

Retiree Dave Brown was present and noted that he is on the Town's Insurance Advisory Committee and this is the first time he's heard of this. Corona noted the Board has to hear the proposal first before we propose it to the retirees. Colton clarified that this information will be provided to the Insurance Advisory Committee at the next meeting. Brown felt that there should be representatives at the Blue Cross meetings to see and understand the proposed changes. Brown asked for the total number of retirees. Colton noted that we can get that information. Brown suggested that he feels responsible for the retirees as their representative on the Insurance Advisory Committee and spoke of the financial loss that the retirees have seen in these times. Colton noted we will have a separate meeting just for retirees and the Benefits Fair is coming up soon where more information will be provided.

Fire Union President Brendan McCarthy and Fire Union Vice President David McRae were present and proposed a plan to take the budget deficit and divide this amount amongst all town and school employees possibly asking each employee to share in the cut. Looking at all the town employees, each employee could take a two hour reduction in pay each week. They suggest this as option C. Corona specifically asked what happens in the Fire Department, what is the impact if you have to bring someone to bring someone in under overtime. McCarthy stated that they would continue to work 42 hours only. Corona noted that the Fire and Police Departments have the ability to work overtime.

McRae commented that with their proposal, there are no layoffs. Again Corona noted that the firefighters have options to make up the lost money. She asked how Town would be guaranteed that the overtime money will be reduced under their proposal. McCarthy noted that there is no guarantee; there is no way

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to know if there will be a fire at any time. Corona noted that there is no equity in this proposal. There was discussion about overtime and that the other workers do not have the option to make overtime. McCarthy suggested that the savings would be over a \$1 million if everyone did this.

King asked if this is something that should have come through the Town Administrator instead of proposing this at a Selectmen's meeting. McCarthy noted he tried to bring this up to the Town Administrator but he wouldn't put this forward.

Corona suggested that they continue to work with the Town Administrator on the negotiations. McCarthy asked that they consider this option and move forward from here.

Colton noted for the record that this proposal was made to him last week after he made his proposal on February 6th to the union. Ten weeks passed and then this was put on the table. Colton suggested that what they were asking for was not within the law. We are in a union environment and we have to deal with each union separately. Colton suggested that his proposal was fair and everyone would give up the same. The long term costs of providing health insurance are what will put this town deep in the hole; we need to control this cost. It is out of control everywhere. Everyone has to take a piece.

Haederle asked what it would take to open negotiations with the other unions. Colton noted we have agreements with three unions and they would have to reopen all of these negotiations to propose a change as the Fire Union representatives have suggested.

Haederle suggested that their intentions may be good but it's over simplistic. Colton noted that they had the option to make proposals at the table for their union but not for every other union. The law on collective bargaining is clear.

There was much discussion on how to bargain, especially over health insurance.

Public Hearing with the Finance Committee to discuss the FY'10 Budget

Finance Committee Chair Donna Lopolito and other members of the Finance Committee were present. Lopolito spoke of recent override at the end of FY'06 which helped restore and improve services. We limited the operating budget increases and improved critical services. We put money in the Stabilization Fund to cover what we had borrowed and also some for savings. For FY'10 we put some money into Stabilization. If we could continue to do this we would be in good shape.

In the current environment, are expected revenues are relatively stable. If we look at anticipated expenses for 2010, there is nothing drastically different. Going back to State aid, using the Governors Budget, we are looking at a 9% decrease just for State Aid; this is happening everywhere. Our pension contribution has increases greatly this year, on top of the snow and ice expenditures. Facing that, we are proposing to use \$1million +. These are not normal times and we need to develop ways to balance the budget. We have to look beyond this year. Unfortunately, even with the use of Stabilization Fund, we still have a gap.

The Finance Committee has been conducting departmental reviews based on the February budget before the state cut again. What the Finance Committee found is that Colton made tough decisions and every department is chipping in. The Police Department, Fire Department and the DPW, were especially noted. Other Town Office departmental budgets were noted as decreases. Even the Southeastern Regional School budget has decreased. The Easton School Budget has only increased by 2%. The Finance Committee has not voted because they don't have the bottom line yet. At this point in time, we don't know if we will have to vote on Plan B.

Lopolito explained that the taxpayers need to understand that we need time to focus on unionized workforce. Most of the budget is personnel. Unions need to be part of the solution. She applauded the

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unions that have come forward to date. School unions are still in talks. The unions have the ability to save jobs and save fellow workers. She suggested that we all value the firefighters.

Lopolito suggested that the second message is to State Legislatures and ask them to drop the politics and make tough decisions. Give the money back to the towns or the means to raise revenues.

We need to know where are revenues are to vote the budgets. This all impacts our citizens, employees. Everything should be fair game. In the coming weeks, the Finance Committee trusts there will be a budget.

Colton reiterated the confusion and disarray is external; she spoke of meeting at the State House with some Mayors. Haederle spoke of the lack of leadership at the state level.

Corona thanked Lopolito for the presentation.

Hicks spoke of FY' 11 budget and suggested that it will be very difficult and we must consider this when looking at our Stabilization Fund now.

Review of departmental budgets

COA Budget

COA Director Dolores Kent was present and gave a brief budget presentation.

Colton noted that the office supplies have been taken out of each department and then cut by 15%. The Town Clerk has volunteered to be responsible for the ordering and distribution of all office supplies.

The Board thanked Kent for coming in and explaining the budget.

Planning & Community Development

Acting Director of Planning & Community Development Alice Savage was present and gave a brief summary of the budget.

Colton noted that as of July 1st she will become the Planning Director. The Staff Planner position will no longer exist. Colton explained the proposal for a new ¼ time person which will replace the recording secretary position for the Conservation Commission.

The Board thanked Savage for the presentation.

Town Accountant

Colton gave a summary of the Town Accountant's budget.

Annual Town Meeting warrant

There was no action taken on the warrant. At the next meeting, the Board will begin reviewing warrant articles.

Chief Stone was present to further discuss the firefighter proposal. He spoke of the equity issue and understands both sides. He wishes the firefighters could see the light and that the Town Administrator didn't have to propose cutting six firefighters. He spoke of the recent hires and suggested that we have seen a decrease in overtime. One firefighter is at the academy right now. The full impact of the people we added during the override is not here yet. If we cut six firefighters, we step back beyond. In the past we had to close fire stations, this will affect the whole town. This will lead to delays for people waiting for ambulances; the number of calls is increasing. We are giving up a 16-18 percentage of calls to mutual aid. This will be an extremely dangerous situation if we cut the firefighters.

Corona stated that she understands the situation but feels that the employees need to consider the impact of the entire community. We do not want to be in this situation. Other towns are laying off firefighters.

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Corona noted that she disagrees with the firefighter's proposal and noted that it doesn't address health care at all.

Colton noted that the first plan on February 6th was designed to protect layoffs. It was entirely within the unions control to stop it.

Haederle agreed that these are unprecedented times. Nobody likes to give up anything but they need to look at the big picture.

Barlow asked if he had any creative ideas about eliminating chase vehicles. Stone felt that a good size city could do that.

The board thanked Stone for his thoughts.

Review of BYOB Regulations

Corona explained the request to allow BYOB in Easton's restaurants. After research, it was found that the Town can impose regulations. Different options were discussed. Corona asked the Board to consider this option, pending an active liquor license proposal. The Police Chief agrees with this concept but not BYOB as a rule. Corona would like to make it conditional and if there were any problems, it would impact their license. She would ask that the Board considered this as an option, Town Counsel could help finalize a policy and regulations.

King questioned what would happen if they had an incident during this BYOB timeframe, specifically if the Town is liable. Corona suggested no, they can have the BYOB but the Town is not responsible.

Barlow suggested that TIPS Training must be done prior to BYOB. After discussion, it was agreed to move forward with this concept as proposed.

Contract amendment #14 between the Town of Easton and the Gilbane Building Company

Voted: (Cohen/Barlow) voted unanimously to approve the contract amendment for a *credit* amount of \$54,152

Contract amendment #42 – Oliver Ames High School Project

Voted: (Barlow/Haederle) voted unanimously to approve the Contract Amendment #42 in the amount of \$35,000

Special Act Charter Committee resignation – Alexander Maller

Corona referenced Mr. Maller's resignation from the Special Act Charter Committee.

Voted: (King/Haederle) voted unanimously to accept the resignation

A certificate of appreciation will be issued.

Election worker appointment

Voted: (Cohen/King) voted unanimously by roll call to appoint Albert Roza of 22 Poquanticut Ave as an election worker

Selectmen's meeting schedule

Corona noted that additional meetings may be required during the upcoming town meeting. The Board agreed to meet on May 11th if necessary.

Town Administrator's notes

None

Press notes

None

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Selectmen's notes

None

Public participation

None

Voted: (Corona/Barlow) voted unanimously to adjourn (9:25pm)

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Southworth