

**TOWN OF PROVINCETOWN
FINANCE COMMITTEE**

FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2006

JUDGE WELSH MEETING ROOM

Chairman Ruth Gilbert convened the meeting at 1:00 p.m. noting the following attendees:

Members present: Ruth Gilbert, Chairman; Mathew Clark; Gary Delius; Robert Vetric; Edward Gage, Alternate; Walt Winnowski, Alternate

Absent FinCom Members: Sue Buerkel; Mark Leach; Thomas Thurston; (excused absences) Alice Foley; Virginia Ross

Other Attendees: Keith Bergman, Town Manager; Terese Nelson, School Committee Chair; Burt Wolfman; Molly Perdue; Debra Trovato; Betty White; Barbara Rushmore; Police Chief Ted Meyer

Recorder: Cynthia Curran

The following are meeting minutes, in brief:

REVIEW ANNUAL TOWN MEETING ARTICLES

Chairman Ruth Gilbert noted that members of the School Committee were present and said that they would go out of order and talk with them first. She said that they had reserved recommendation, because they were waiting for word from the BOS about a possible Proposition 2 ½ override.

Terese Nelson said that the budget was now level-funded. Mathew Clark asked about strategic planning. Ms. Nelson said that they are in the infant stages. She said that they have met with Janice Williams, a facilitator, to help give them direction. Burt Wolfman said that they are aware of declining enrollment throughout the Cape. They want to make a viable program for the children given the declining enrollment. He said that they could not close the high school without also losing the middle school. Molly Perdue said that they are at the beginning of the process. She said that they need community input and that viability would come out of the process. Mathew Clark said that the schools may lose critical mass and asked if the School Committee would have a plan by next year. Molly Perdue thought that they would. Bob Vetric asked why the middle school would go if the high school went. Burt Wolfman said that they would not have the critical mass. Terese Nelson said that children from Truro make the choice for Provincetown or other schools in 5th grade. She said that parents don't want their children to switch from school to school. Both Provincetown and Truro parents would choose other schools in 5th grade, if they knew that the children would not have Provincetown High to go to. Gary Delius said he did not think the declining enrollment would change and that they needed a long-term plan. He said that the needs of the children were first, but that they also had to consider the needs of the community. Mr. Delius said that everyone must work together to make a smooth transition. Debra Trovato said the Town also needs a strategic plan about who they are attracting to the town with affordable housing, etc. Molly Perdue said that the School Committee has the expertise to work on the problem, but they want to include everyone. She said that right now there is no trust between the groups, but there needs to be trust. They need to take everyone's concerns in to account. Terese Nelson said that they need to identify where they are and where they need to go. She said that charter, tech or magnet schools are possibilities. Mr. Wolfman said that there are many factors involved with the school finances including the collective bargaining process and teacher certification and turnover. However, they are concerned not just with fiscal, but social policy.

Mathew Clark agreed that the School Committee had the expertise to work on the problem. He

said that there should be some mutual agreement in the beginning on what they should be looking at, so that in the end the questions will be answered. Molly Perdue said that regionalization was one possibility, but not where they should start. Gary Delius said that they should bring the polar sides back together into center ground. Terese Nelson said that she agreed. She said that what has happened in the last six months has not been appropriate and has been very emotional for the children. She said she was not blaming the Finance Committee. Mr. Wolfman said that all stakeholders should be involved in the beginning process and that certain task forces would emerge. Gary Delius said that the cost per child was \$19,000 and continues to rise. Terese Nelson said that she questioned that figure. Mr. Delius said that it was the total cost divided by the number of students. Ruth Gilbert said that the number of different types of students must be defined. She said that she was impressed with Janice Williams. Ms. Gilbert said that one group that should be looked at was the Truro parents and students who used to live in Provincetown, but have moved to Truro. They still look at Provincetown High as their school. She thought that they should consider whether this subgroup should be included in the process.

Bob Vetrick brought up the demonstration by the high school students. Terese Nelson said that it was instigated by the students themselves and started before the opening of school. Molly Perdue said that the School Committee would not have organized a demonstration by the students. Gary Delius said that Ms. Nelson had given awards to the students who had organized the demonstration. Ms. Nelson said that she gave them awards in recognition of their leadership skills and that they did not sanction the students' leaving school.

Burt Wolfman said that the Truro parents are part of the community and often have relatives still living in Provincetown. Ms. Gilbert said she understood that and did not think that they should be excluded, but they should be analyzed. Mr. Wolfman said that Truro residents pay 86% of the cost per student. Mr. Vetrick said that Provincetown residents feel that they are subsidizing Truro students. Molly Perdue said that they should start to realize the give and take between Truro and Provincetown. She did not like the language of "subsidizing." Mr. Vetrick said that they must meet rationally or they will not make progress. Ruth Gilbert asked that they wind down the discussion and a motion was made regarding the budget.

MOTION: Move to accept the School Committee Budget #300 as presented in the amount of \$4,152,958.43.

Motion by: Bob Vetrick Seconded by: Ed Gage Yea 6 Nay 0

Regarding the warrant article asking for an audit, Terese Nelson said that they had not had a formal meeting on that as yet, but thought that they would use the previous audits. She said she would like a breakdown of costs by age of the students. Ms. Nelson said that there was not money attached to it. Mr. Wolfman said that the warrant article called for an "independent" audit, not a new one.

Ruth Gilbert said that they should also vote on the Cape Cod Tech budget.

MOTION: Move to accept the Cape Cod Tech Budget #310 as presented in the amount of \$140,935.00.

Motion by: Gary Delius Seconded by: Bob Vetrick Yea 6 Nay 0

Gary Delius said that he would commend the School Committee on the fact that the Provincetown Schools are in the top 15% in the state. Terese Nelson said that they are rated the highest on the Cape. Mr. Delius thanked them for doing a good job. The School Committee members then left.

Ruth Gilbert said that they would continue with the budgets.

#171 Conservation Commission

Keith Bergman said that they were able to lower the budget to \$1,530.00. They learned that there were remaining county surplus funds to pay for the salary of the conservation agent.

MOTION: Move to accept Budget #171 as presented in the amount of \$1530.00.

Motion by: Gary Delius Seconded by: Mathew Clark Yea 6 Nay 0

#482 Airport Commission

MOTION: Move to accept the Airport Commission Budget #482 as presented in the amount of \$77,800.00.

Motion by: Mathew Clark Seconded by: Walt Winnowski Yea 6 Nay 0

#192 Buildings and Grounds

Keith Bergman said that this had been delayed because the BOS needed the Tourism budget. \$34,326.00 of that budget is used by the DPW. Comfort station hours during January, February, and March have been cut back. The largest expense cut was for beautification at \$14,000.00. Keith Bergman said that this was for maintaining plantings, not for new plantings. The members felt that it would be a shame if plantings died due to lack of water. They discussed other ways watering could be done, including volunteers and "Adopt an Island" type programs. Mr. Bergman said that he would have preferred getting \$54,000 from the VSB. Ms. Gilbert thought that they should try to talk to the VSB about this.

MOTION: Move to accept Budget #192 as presented in the amount of \$636,125.00.

Motion by: Gary Delius Seconded by: Mathew Clark Yea 6 Nay 0

The Beautification budget was tabled after a short discussion. Keith Bergman suggested that they may want to invite the Visitor Services Board to come and discuss Article 31. Ms. Gilbert said that she would invite Lynne Davies to come and discuss it at the meeting next Wednesday.

Warrant Articles with Financial Implications

Ruth Gilbert said that they would then move on to articles with financial implications.

Article 30 – July 4th Celebration

Keith Bergman said that after looking into possible alternatives, they had been told that they could have the fireworks done by the same company for an additional \$5000. He said that they would need \$30,000 in private donations. Mr. Bergman said that this was the first year that they had felt so clearly how important the fireworks are to the business community.

MOTION: Move to reserve recommendation on Article 30

Motion by: Bob Vetrick Seconded by: Gary Delius Yea 6 Nay 0

Barbara Rushmore arrived to speak for several articles. Ms. Gilbert said that the Committee would decide whether or not the articles had financial implications.

Article 14 – Ticketing for Marijuana Possession

Ms. Rushmore said that making possession of marijuana a ticketable offense would make the police more efficient and save money. She said the article would not be legally binding, but would give the option. Members of the Committee questioned whether it was legal under state law. Ms. Rushmore said she had not spoken with Chief Meyer yet.

MOTION: Move to reserve recommendation on Article 14

Motion by: Bob Vetrick Seconded by: Mathew Clark Yea 6 Nay 0

Police Chief Meyer arrived [at 2:50 p.m.] and he was asked to comment on Article 14. He said that it was not allowed by state law. Ruth Gilbert said that it was not wise to recommend if it went against state law. Mathew Clark suggested that the article be amended to ask that the

state change the law.

MOTION: Move to make no recommendation on Article 14.

Motion by: Gary Delius Seconded by: Bob Vetrick Yea 6 Nay 0

Article 15 – Tax Relief for Income Eligible Seniors

Ms. Rushmore said that it did not shift the tax from residential to commercial, but to other residential. Mathew Clark made a motion to not recommend this article, because he thought that it was a policy decision for the BOS. There was no second.

MOTION: Move to reserve recommendation on Article 15.

Motion by: Gary Delius Seconded by: Bob Vetrick Yea 6 Nay 0

Article 18 – Lock in Real Estate Taxes

The memo from the Town Manager was read. Some members thought that it should be handled at the state level. Walt Winnowski said that it might lead to lawsuits from non-residents. Ruth Gilbert thought that the Town cannot afford to do this. She said that it would be devastating to the income stream. Gary Delius said that a lawyer should look at it to see if it was legal.

MOTION: Move to not recommend Article 18.

Motion by: Gary Delius Seconded by: Ed Gage Yea 6 Nay 0

Article 36 – MacMillan Pier Transportation Center

Barbara Rushmore said that this would cost the Town too much money and was not needed. Ruth Gilbert said that Provincetown is not a hub and that people don't transfer to other busses.

MOTION: Move to approve recommendation of Article 36.

Motion by: Gary Delius Seconded by: Bob Vetrick Yea 6 Nay 0

Before she left Barbara Rushmore said that she thought that the Finance Committee should encourage people to come forward with ideas for the Town to save money. She said that she did not mean by cutting services, but by doing things more efficiently.

Article 3 – School Committee Request for Another Audit of Town Finances

Ruth Gilbert noted that this article was in limbo at the moment.

MOTION: Move to not recommend Article 3.

Motion by: Bob Vetrick Seconded by: Ed Gage Yea 6 Nay 0

Article 6 – FY2007 Enterprise Funds

Ruth Gilbert said that they would have to revisit this because they don't have all the numbers yet.

Article 8 – Shellfish Grants

MOTION: Move to recommend Article 8.

Motion by: Bob Vetrick Seconded by: Gary Delius Yea 6 Nay 0

Article 9 – Cape Cod Greenhead Fly Control

MOTION: Move to recommend Article 9.

Motion by: Bob Vetrick Seconded by: Gary Delius Yea 6 Nay 0

Articles 10, 11, 13 & 15

These were tabled for this meeting.

Other Business

Ruth Gilbert said that she would like to publicly thank Pru Sowers of the *Banner*, who was present, for her article last week. She said it was very accurate.

Ms. Gilbert said that several members' terms were about to end, including her own. She said that she had not decided whether or not she would like to be reappointed, but, in any case, she would not continue as Chair. Sue Buerkel cannot be reappointed, but four others could be.

The discussion returned to the School situation. Gary Delius said that it would take 3 to 5 years to integrate the children into the Nauset school district. He said it was imperative to let the voters know what is involved, although he did not want to pre-suppose the solution. Mathew Clark said that the challenge was not going away. He said that unless something changes dramatically, it is not a question of if, but when. Mr. Clark said it was a mistake that the conversation does not take place between the parties, but elsewhere. Ruth Gilbert said that she does not want to blindside the School Committee. She said it is not an attack, but giving information to the voters. Mr. Clark said that it was a risk to students in the future if they don't look at the problems now.

Pru Sowers of the *Banner* asked if she could ask the members some questions for an article she is writing about the School issue. She wanted to know the history of how we got to this point and how the Town has changed.

Bob Vetrick spoke about the Tourism industry which at one point was growing, but has been in decline. He said that the Town got used to the money coming in, but that things have changed. Mr. Vetrick said that the acceptance of gays and lesbians in mainstream society has meant that they feel comfortable going to other places for vacation.

Ed Gage said that fifty years ago the town was very different. There were both public and parochial schools. The fishing industry was very big. He said that there were more places for families to stay. Mr. Gage thought that some businesses now were anti-straight people. Walt Winnowski said that when the economy was good, all people were more accepting. Ruth Gilbert said that she has never been as depressed during budget hearings as this year. Mathew Clark said that the gay/straight issue was a red herring. He said that real estate speculation has been the real issue. Mr. Clark said that there used to be more places to stay here. He said prices are high because mortgages are high and there was good reason to help people to stay here.

Pru Sowers asked what part of the Town budget is the School budget. Ruth Gilbert said that she would have to look into the figures, but she thought it was about 20%. Bob Vetrick said that the Town waited too long to do something about the Manor. Ms. Gilbert said that the passion for the Cape End Manor was like the passion for the schools. Mr. Clark said that he hoped that they could find a win/win situation and that it was important to keep talking. Ed Gage said that the Town had put off things like the sewers until they were forced to do it and it cost millions. Bob Vetrick said that the Town missed out on government grants. Ruth Gilbert said that in 1973 people were adamant about not paying twenty percent for the Town's portion.

Ruth Gilbert said that people are fascinated by what is going on and she is getting fifteen to twenty emails a day. She said that when she is showing properties to non-residents, the tax

rate does not surprise them. It is cheaper here than many other places. Gary Delius said that many residents have had to leave because they could no longer afford to live here. Ms. Gilbert said that the high property values make it hard to inherit family homes. She said that the Town has spent too much money on big capital expenses. Gary Delius said the whole economy of the Town has changed.

Ruth Gilbert said that the School budget continues to grow while the enrollment is declining. Mathew Clark said that no matter how good a job the School Committee is doing. It will be impossible to continue the way they are going due to declining enrollment. He asked if the town voters were willing to pay anything to keep grades K-12 open. He said the decision is easier to make if you know where you are going. Walt Winnowski said that they need "what ifs" for the economic model. He said that they are just starting to develop this now. Ms. Gilbert said that while they were dealing with the Manor, they could not deal with the schools. Bob Vetrick said that Nauset is a good school. He said that if there are too few students, the quality of education suffers. Mathew Clark says that he does not regret that they brought up the issue. He said that the biggest issue at the moment is economic development. Gary Delius said regarding tourism that perhaps the Town needs to find a new audience.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 p.m..