

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

* MINUTES *

November 28, 2007

7:00 p.m. A special meeting of the Board of Selectmen was convened by Chairman Jerry Wasserman at 7:00 p.m. at the Stephen Palmer Senior Center for the purpose of meeting with the Council on Aging. Also present were Mr. Jim Healy, Mr. Dan Matthews, Mr. John Bulian, Mr. Jack Cogswell, Assistant Town Manager Chris Coleman, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick.

7:00 p.m. **Senior Center Project:** Members of the Council on Aging expressed opinions and concerns about the Senior Center project. These included: whether a study group without relevant experience should guide the project; disappointment about the decision to withdraw the promised \$4 million funding; concern that the opposition to the Ridge Hill site represents a minority, questions about whether a poll would be useful; disappointment that the COA spent \$60,000 of its own funds that may have been wasted; the value of another round of site evaluation and elimination; the value of a smaller building with no open space; concern about funding through an override; and concern about communication between the Selectmen and Council on Aging.

Mr. Matthews stated that the Senior Center is a priority of the Selectmen, but getting there is complicated. He said that in his opinion what the public is willing to pay for is less than the COA would like to create. He said that if the COA could build a senior center for \$4 million, the Town could probably finance it without an override. He said that in his opinion the override on the project would have failed. In his view the public is not willing to support the Ridge Hill site, and that the COA should consider the notion of scaling the project back and finding a location that will support future expansion.

Mr. Cogswell agreed that the Senior Center project is a high priority. He noted that if it is to be located outside the downtown, the COA and Board of Selectmen would have to provide a significant amount of education on the value of the center and the demand for services. He stated that he strongly supports the Ridge Hill site.

Mr. Bulian said that he did not believe the 2/3 vote for the design would have been achieved. He said that he likes the Ridge Hill site, but that based on the feedback, it will be important for the COA and the Board of Selectmen to review all the ideas that have been presented. He noted that the Senior Center needs to offer something to all generations.

Mr. Healy said that the Board of Selectmen must take responsibility for not getting the project funded. He said that he personally was not content with the investigation of other sites. He said that in his view the public does not support the Ridge Hill site. He noted that a smaller facility with room for expansion could be located in the downtown, perhaps at the YMCA. He said that he needs more information about the trade-offs of having a small building and the impact on programs. He said he felt he needed assistance in understanding the issues. He also said that he continued to support an override for the project.

Mr. Wasserman said that he would oppose the construction of a facility that is too small at the outset. He noted that with education and mobilization, the project can move forward. He said that he would prefer to complete the project without an override. He said that the Board will consider the feedback of the Council on Aging in developing the process moving forward.

Members of the Council on Aging left the meeting at 9:15.

Home Rule Petition: Mr. Wasserman updated the Board about the meeting of the Town Manager and Chairman with representatives of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Mr. Wasserman recommended that the Board approve a letter developed by Town Counsel and Counsel for the EOEEA which commits the Town to use all feasible means to acquire for open space and/or recreation a parcel or parcels of land equal to or greater than the 3.04 acre transfer envelope for the Senior Center Project. Mr. Healy said that he would have voted against the home rule petition if this matter had come up initially, and that he is absolutely opposed to the letter. The Board discussed the idea of having the legislation vetoed and override by the House and Senate. The Board also discussed whether the matter should be pursued given the delay in the Senior Center Project.

Motion: Mr. Matthews moved that the letter be approved with the words “unless otherwise voted by Town Meeting” be inserted at the end of the second paragraph. Mr. Cogswell seconded the motion. The vote was 4 – 1 with Mr. Healy voting no.

9:35 p.m. **Motion:** Mr. Bulian moved that the meeting be adjourned. Mr. Healy seconded the motion. Unanimous: 5-0.