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Finance Committee Meeting
May 21, 2013
Acton Memorial Library

TOWN CLERK, ACTON

Members Present: Steve Noone, Doug Tindal, Mary Ann Ashton, Margaret Busse, Bob Evans, Pat Clifford, Mike Majors, Bill Mullin, Herman Kabakoff, Brian McMullen (Assessor)

Chair Clifford called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

- I) Public Participation – n/a
- II) Approval of Minutes
 - a. March 26, 2013 – approved unanimously
 - b. April 1, 2013 – approved unanimously
 - c. May 7, 2013 – approved with 1 abstention (Kabakoff)
- III) Consideration of Warrant Articles for June 3, 2013 Special Town Meeting
 - a. Doug Tindal moved to approve the following Consent articles;
 - i. *Articles 5, 6, 7, 11 and 12.* Approved unanimously.
 - b. Tom Tidman, Conservation Director, Open Space Committee, led a discussion regarding *Article 8 – Relocation of Kennedy Right-of-Way*. Mary Ann made a motion to approve. Motion was seconded. Article was approved unanimously.
 - c. Pat Clifford asked Bob Evans and Steve Noone to lead discussion of *Article 1 – Amendment to Regional School Agreement*. There was a lively and spirited discussion of the merits of this warrant article with each member stating their views and concerns.
 - i. Steve indicated that we have not developed an alternative case for or against regionalization, including a base case position. Financial and educational benefits are not clear. We are asking Town Meeting to make a choice when the choices are not clear.
 - ii. Bob made a motion that the Finance Committee recommend the Regionalization Agreement. Motion was seconded by Mary Ann. Bob stated that the base case for Acton hides savings that should be clear. Educational benefits, however, are unclear. The education committee in the future needs to be cognizant of the needs of the Acton taxpayer.
 - iii. Mary Ann is in agreement with Bob's arguments. Other savings can and should be achieved. The existing regional school system is the pride of both towns. The agreement is not perfect, but the opportunity is there to fix what does not work. This is a good deal for Acton to continue the regionalization model.
 - iv. Herman reminded the group that we are the Finance Committee, not the School Committee. He is of the opinion that we are not in the position to critique the agreement. It is not a good deal for Acton. He is confident that the School Committee will act in the best interest of the town of Acton, but that is not what the agreement states. He is concerned by our lack of control of some of the details in the agreement.

- v. Mike appreciated all the effort that was put into the agreement. He is of the opinion that regionalization is generally a good thing, included educational systems, water distribution, highways and sewer. However, he indicated that, in his opinion, this agreement financially favors Boxborough at the expense of Acton and that significant savings have not been demonstrated.
- vi. Margaret stated that the initial case appeared to be a no-brainer, but as you dig into the analysis, the benefits are just not compelling. Risks include the loss of control, no structural checks and balances and may also have an impact on Acton's real estate values. The robustness of the regionalization agreement does not out way the risk.
- vii. Doug indicated that there are important questions that must be considered, including what is the educational benefit for our children? What is the cost to achieve? He believes the benefits are slight. Other concerns include systematic improvements and downside risk. Is it a good deal for Acton?
- viii. Bill indicated that we have been extremely bad at predicting the future. He believes that the regionalization plan is common sense with identifiable savings. It doesn't make sense to have three school systems when all we need is one. We are not two communities; we are one – Acton/Boxborough. He is also predicting a baby boom in the future that will negate the declining school enrollment.
- ix. Pat stated that we have struggled and worked very hard to put in place a 5-year plan, and she is very comfortable with the long range plan. She acknowledged that the plan has received a great deal of support in the community and believes that the community can take the challenge and make it work.
- x. The motion was voted on by the committee and failed by a 5 to 4 margin. Clifford, Evans, Ashton and Mullin voted FOR. Tindal, Kabakoff, Majors, Busse and Noone voted AGAINST.
- d. Motion was made by Herman and seconded by Steve that *Article 2 – Amend Town Charter (School Committee) and Article 3 – Terminate Office of Local School Committee*, be deferred to Town Meeting. Motion passed (9-0).
- e. Steve had questions regarding the sale of school properties. Peter Ashton indicated that this was covered in Section 4B of the Regionalization Agreement. The article was dropped from the Warrant because the Boxborough School Committee did not have enough time to get it done.
- f. Bill Mullin had questions regarding *Article 4 – Community Preservation Program – Open Space Acquisition*. Should we bond it? He is concerned that the CPC is paying more than the appraised value. He believes it is a good deal for the town. He made a motion, seconded by Doug, to approve the article.
 - i. Peter Ashton from the CPC and Open Space Committee discussed the advantages of Article 4 as a strategic parcel for the Open Space Committee.
 - ii. Tom Tidman discussed the "Anderson Purchase". This parcel is the head waters of Grassy Pond Brook and is a great habitat for the environment. It ranks high as a diverse habitat.
 - iii. The funding for the Anderson Purchase is as follows:

Total Purchase Price	\$ 1,320,000.
Other costs	50,000.
Total cost	\$ 1,370,000.
CPC Set Aside Funds	\$ 1,060,000.
Free cash for purchase	260,000.
<u>CPC funds for stewardship</u>	<u>50,000.</u>
Total CPC funding request	\$ 1,110,000.

Motion passed (9-0)

- g. *Article 9 – Amend Zoning Bylaw (Citizens Petition).* Margaret asked if the Finance Committee should take a position?
 - i. Pat indicated that if the Planning Board does not dispense before Town Meeting, what happens?
 - ii. Doug proposed a joint meeting with Planning Board and EDC to discuss.
 - iii. No vote taken
- h. *Article 10 – Amend Zoning Bylaw – Two-Family Dwellings in the VR District.* Doug indicated that the purpose of this bylaw is to correct a zoning oversight to include two-family dwellings in the same zoning as three and four-family permits. There is no FinCom impact and suggested we defer to Town Meeting.

- IV) Mary Ann Ashton led discussion to report on year-end spending proposals for APS and ABRSC.
 - a. Bob suggested that “furniture” should be in the regular school budget rather than year-end spending.
 - b. Motion was made by Bob Evans and seconded by Steve Noone that we don’t spend year-end money for these items:

Science room replacement tables	\$65,000.	ABRSD
Desk and chair replacement	\$60,000.	Gates
Desk and chair replacement	\$80,000.	Douglas
Cafeteria tables, chairs, dolly	\$28,000.	Conant

- c. Please note that we fully support all security related items.
- d. Motion passed 8 in favor, 1 not in favor (Mullin)
- e. Pat Clifford and Mary Ann Ashton will send a letter to the School Committee addressing FinCom concerns addressing Y/E spending issues.

- V) Finance Committee Organization. Pat distributed a proposed Finance Committee Meeting Calendar through the end of the year.
- VI) Committee Updates were deferred to next meeting
- VII) Meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm.