

Dover Warrant Committee Open Hearing on the Warrant

March 23, 2009

Members in attendance: Caroline White, Chair; David Stapleton, Vice Chair; Peter Smith, Secretary; James Dawley; Robyn Hunter; Scott Seidman; Andrew Waugh

Dr. White called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm

1. Introductory Remarks

Dr. White welcomed those attending, explained the Warrant Committee's procedures for developing the Warrant, and laid out the ground rules for presentations and discussion.

Articles 1-3 were noted without comment.

Mr. Smith presented an overview of Article 4, its relation to the rest of the budget, revenue estimates, and the funding gap.

Bob Springett of the Dover School Committee presented the accomplishments made in the last year and the cost-saving measures taken. He stressed that a level-service budget philosophy will not long suffice if the school is to meet ever-growing requirements. He asked the Town to carefully consider what its spending priorities are, what caliber of school is expected, and how to fund it.

Beverly Madden of the Regional School Committee addressed their budget, which strives to achieve level services and fiscal responsibility while managing labor costs. Allowing for level State Chapter 70 funding and reduced transportation aid, the operating budget increased 2.05% over the previous year. Dover's share of the combined operating budget and debt service increased 3.14%.

David Melville of the Capital Budget Committee explained this year's Article 5 requests.

Articles 6-10 were noted without comment.

David Ramsay, Town Administrator, introduced Article 11, repairs to the Caryl School Building. He outlined the history and summarized the planned repairs. Next, Ford Spaulding of the Dover Community Center Building Committee presented the Committee's investigations and recommendations.

Article 12, funding for a Dover Community Center master plan, was withdrawn.

Joseph Melican, Selectman, and David Ramsay, Town Administrator, presented Article 13, which would authorize and fund an Other Post-Retirement Benefits Liability Trust Fund in accordance with Governmental Accounting Standards Board statement 45. The Town faces a substantial future liability, and front-loading the funding process will greatly reduce future annual contributions. The Selectmen recommend that this be accomplished by using the settlement from the MTBE class-action lawsuit.

Article 14 provides for monitoring at the former Powissett St landfill. Asked what the Town would do if the monitoring turned up problems, Mr. Ramsay said that the town's civil engineering consultants would be contacted, the problem isolated, and a remediation plan proposed.

Articles 15 was noted without comment.

Article 16, which would forbid the consumption of alcohol in public buildings and outdoor spaces, provoked several questions, which Joseph Griffin, Chief of Police, addressed. The genesis of this bylaw was the decriminalization of marijuana effected by Ballot Question 2 last November. Like many towns, Dover envisioned a bylaw that would forbid public marijuana consumption, and initially the Chief hoped to harmonize that prohibition with a similar ban on public alcohol consumption. The matter of marijuana is on hold, pending action by the State Attorney General's office; the alcohol provision remains. Asked to clarify if this bylaw would forbid serving alcohol at various town fund-raisers, as has been done in the past at the Library and elsewhere, the Chief said he thought not. However it was pointed out that the bylaw's prohibition includes "any public grounds within the Town, or in any area accessible to the public". Further, the bylaw's prohibition "upon any private property exposed to public view from a school, playground or park" drew questions. The Chief cited the example of tailgating on private property near the High School before the Thanksgiving football game; he wanted the police to have the authority to insist such gatherings be well back from the street.

Asked if the Caryl House preservation plan (Article 17) would include the Historical Society's input, Mr. Ramsay stated that their collaboration would certainly be solicited.

Ford Spaulding explained Article 18, which would authorize a Stabilization fund for the Miniteman Regional High School. He noted that the building dates to 1973, and it is prudent to have a mechanism in place to deal with problems that might arise.

Articles 19-25 were noted without comment.

Finally, Justine Kent-Uritam addressed the meeting. She expressed dismay about tax and spending levels. More specifically, she objected to the opacity of the process by which wage and salary increases were set. She submitted an accounting of minutes of the various town boards and committees, noting that the Personnel Board has been particularly deficient in posting its minutes.

*Mr. Stapleton moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Seidman;
the motion was agreed by consensus at 8:55 pm
the next meeting will be March 25 at 7:00 pm*

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Smith, Secretary

approved April 1, 2009