

# Dover Warrant Committee

September 16, 2009

Members in attendance: David Stapleton, Chair; James Kinder, Vice Chair; Peter Smith, Secretary; Kate Bush; James Dawley; David Melville; Andrew Waugh; Jane Wemyss

Others in attendance: David Heinlein, Selectmen Liaison; Peter Mitchell, Capital Budget Committee

*Mr. Stapleton called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm*

## 1. Review of minutes

Mr. Melville moved that the minutes of September 9 be approved, seconded by Mr. Waugh. The motion was approved by a vote of 8-0-0.

## 2. Prior Notices and Reserve Fund Transfer Requests

Prior Notice from Highway Department dated 9/8/09 for \$6,317.00 to “Repair hydraulic leak on compactor at the transfer station”. Mr. Smith moved that the Committee acknowledge the Notice, seconded by Mr. Kinder. The motion was approved by a vote of 8-0-0.

## 3. Town Financial Education Presentations — The Warrant Committee’s Role

Mr. Smith outlined the Warrant Committee year and handed out examples of the master budget report, the salary details, and the template.

In the fall, the Warrant Committee consults with the Selectmen to create budget guidance for the various departments and circulates a memo to all department heads. Certain explicit guidelines are produced, including the prices to use for energy where not already locked in. More importantly, the Committee decides, based on the probably state of the economy and demands for Town services, how many budgets the departments should develop. Last year they were asked to produce a level-service and an added-service budget. Other possibilities would include level-funding or percentage reduction-funding. The decision as to what scenarios to pursue depends in large part on whether a Proposition 2½ override is anticipated; if so, departments will be asked to be ready with a non-override budget should the override be rejected by the voters. The Warrant Committee creates a budget template spreadsheet covering that year’s scenarios for the departments to fill out.

Departments begin filling out budgets in December. The template, containing just totals, is returned to the Warrant Committee. Detailed data is entered directly into the budgeting software by the departments themselves. From this, the Town Accountant produces the master report. Accompanying this are spreadsheets listing all wages and salaries, by employee. Departments also produce a narrative, explaining the details of their requests, especially with regard to additional services. Starting in January, departments with independent budget authority make presentations to the Warrant Committee; the Selectmen present the remainder in an omnibus session. The Capital Budget Committee presents the “big ticket” items that will be requested in Article 5 or as

stand-alone articles. Committee liaisons should meet with their departments and become as familiar as possible, so as to be able to answer questions during Committee discussions.

At the same time, revenue predictions begin to firm up. The Assessors calculate the levy limit and estimate the Overlay and New Growth figures. The Accountant and Treasurer/Collector fill in the remaining estimates, including the preliminary Cherry Sheet data.

With the revenue projections and budget requests in hand and a consensus on how much Free Cash can be prudently applied, the budget gap, if any, can be calculated. If it is larger than can be closed using Free Cash, departments will be asked to scale back their requests, as was the case last year. Several iterations may be necessary until balance is achieved.

The Open Meeting on the Warrant is held in late March. The Warrant Committee presents the Operating Budget (Article 4), and the Capital Budget Committee presents Article 5 and any stand-alone capital requests. The other articles on the Warrant are presented by their sponsors.

After the Open Meeting, the Warrant Committee must vote to support or not support each article on the Warrant. Members are assigned articles to write the supporting or dissenting text for each, to be reviewed and edited to the satisfaction of the Committee. If the Committee cannot reach unanimity on an article, texts pro and con go into the Blue Book.

The printing of the Blue Book is also the Warrant Committee's responsibility. The Blue Book must be mailed to all households two weeks before Town Meeting.

Town Meeting itself occurs the first Monday in May. Each article on the Warrant is moved and seconded by assigned Committee members. Further, members are expected to be able to answer questions from the floor on the articles or budgets they have covered.

#### **4. Town Financial Education Presentations — The Capital Budget**

Mr. Mitchell, Chair of the Capital Budget Committee, explained his committee's role in the budget process. Appointed by the Town Moderator, they review requests for large items, generally those over \$4,000. Each fall, the departments submit their requests for the coming fiscal year and the following four years. This allows the Capital Budget Committee to plan ahead and move requests in and out on the time-line to maintain a fairly steady level. For very large items, the Selectmen and Warrant Committee may decide to move the items out of the general Capital Budget (Article 5) and put them on the Warrant as stand-alone articles. The Capital Budget Committee ranks requests as to necessity and immediacy, and may move items from the current year to the future to assist in achieving budget balance.

Mr. Heinlein explained the Proposition 2½ consequences of operating budget versus capital budget overrides; the former, if passed, increase the levy limit basis for the following year, the latter do not. He further discussed the plusses and minuses of overrides: that however unpleasant, overrides are explicitly in the hands of the voters, while pre-emptive budget cuts to avoid an override are government decisions.

#### **5. Discussion on Board of Selectmen Revision of COLA Process**

Mr. Dawley summarized the process for setting the non-contract employee cost of living adjustment (COLA) as it played out last year. He also handed out a summary of contract versus non-contract employee counts and dollar amounts involved. Mr. Heinlein explained the step plan that

was implemented a few years ago, stressing its remedial nature, and showing that the plan phases out when all employees achieve the top steps, which are targeted at the median for comparable towns. He further noted that the Selectmen have the authority to withhold the step in a given year if budget pressure requires it.

## 6. Setting the Date of the Open Hearing

Mr. Stapleton proposed that the Open Hearing on the Warrant be held on March 22, 2010. Mr. Smith moved to accept that date, seconded by Mr. Kinder. The motion was approved by a vote of 8-0-0.

## 7. Liaison Updates

Mr. Dawley (Sherborn Advisory): Made contact with Chair.

Mr. Dawley (Personnel Board): They are recommending a 1.9% cost of living adjustment for non-contract personnel for fiscal 2011. This is the median of the Consumer Price Index and Employment Cost Index through the latest available figures.

Mr. Smith (Finance Committee on Roads): The capital budget request has been submitted to the Selectmen: a new pickup truck and a slide-in sander are being requested this coming year. The Haven St / Dedham St. intersection re-design is being simplified. New raised crosswalks at the Caryl fields have been well received. The Willow St. bridge rebuilding by the State will begin in April 2011. The State is performing emergency repairs to the pilings of the Chestnut St. bridge, which date back to 1927.

Mr. Kinder (Regional Schools): There is a new business manager.

Mr. Stapleton (Dover Schools): The Warrant Committee will request details on special education enrollment, broken down by age, to assist in projecting future costs.

*Mr. Smith moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Dawley;  
the motion was agreed by consensus at 8:30 pm  
the next meeting will be September 30 at 7:00 pm*

Respectfully submitted,  
Peter Smith, Secretary

*approved September 30, 2009*