Finance and Warrant Committee

11/6/2017

Kevin Hughes, Liz O’Donnell, Dave Roberts, Cecilia Emery Butler, John Heffernan, Susan Fay, Sue Carney, Kevin Preston present. Marty Lindemann arrived at 6:15.

Meeting began at 6:05. Mr. Preston gave the opportunity for public comment. There was none.

Mr. Roberts suggested that Article 7 be indefinitely postponed. They were unable to bring sufficient figures to bear to provide enough analysis to make a decision at this time. He requested an indefinite postponement with the understanding that this article will come back at the next Town Meeting.

Ms. Fay asked if this would impact the construction schedule on the new town hall. Mr. Roberts answered no, it is all off-site work and the on-site construction is on-schedule and on-budget.

Mr. Preston asked if the school were prepared to open before Article 7 is finalized and if it would create any delays. Mr. Roberts answered that they are still awaiting a decision by the planning board. He thanked the committee for their patience.

Mr. Heffernan motioned to indefinitely postpone Article 7. Mr. Hughes seconded. It was voted 7-0-1, Cecilia Emery Butler abstaining.

The committee moved to discussion of Article 13.

Ms. Carney asked Attorney Jon Eichman to join the committee to speak on the legal ramifications of Article 13. She asked Mr. Eichman if the committee could make Article 13 a binding referendum(instead of a non-binding), as well as change the language “support” to the language “approve.”

Mr. Eichman said that he thinks the Town Legislature has the ability to create special legislation to create a binding referendum. He suggested that with the correct approval, he believes this could be done. However, he said that there are limits on the scope of the Town Meeting and Finance Committee decision making. The final say on whether this is their purview comes down to the town moderator.

Mr. Preston asked Mr. Driscoll if the change that Ms. Carney asked about could be written into the proposal. Mr. Driscoll answered that this change to the Article would be too large a change in scope after the Article had been created.

Ms. Baker said that the decision for financial projects falls onto the legislative body of the Town Meeting. The general voting populace cannot bind the legislative body to financial spending decisions as they do not have oversight over that aspect.

Mr. Eichman said that this is correct as the laws currently operate, but the town legislation has the ability to change town laws.

Ms. Carney said that she was willing to accept an indefinite postponement on Article 13. She said that she would like to work towards making a binding vote part of major financial projects, and would like to spend time rewriting the article. She believes that major spending decisions need to be put in front of the general voting public. She is willing to work to see this project through.

Marty Lindemann arrived at 6:15.

Mr. Driscoll reminded Ms. Carney of some timing issues in the timeline of the article as it currently stands.

Mr. Preston said that he is opposed to this article as a central issue. He said that he too is frustrated by the many discussions on the minutiae of this article, and would like to see a clean vote occur on it independent of the minutiae.

Mr. Lindemann agreed that he wants to see the issue dealt with independent of these process issues.

Ms. Carney motioned to indefinitely postpone Article 13. Mr. Roberts seconded. It was voted 8-1. Ms. Emery Butler against.

Mr. Roberts asked for clarification on how Article 13 would move forward.

Ms. Carney clarified that while this article coincides with a major project, the combined public safety building, it is not a reaction to that project and she herself favors the combined public safety building.

Ms. Carney motioned to reconsider their vote to approve Article 3. Mr. Heffernan seconded. Ms. Carney said that she does not feel comfortable with her vote and would like to change it to opposed. Mr. Heffernan asked what prompted Ms. Carney’s decision to ask for a reconsideration. She said that she feels that there have been times that the committee was not in favor of aspects of collective bargaining and voted in the affirmative anyway. She also has significant concerns about the town employee insurance plans. She thinks that the committee may feel that the employee contribution should increase for insurance, but they never seem to actually take a stand on it. She feels the employee insurance costs are not sustainable and represent a major issue.

Mr. Roberts said that he agrees that these insurance cost increases are a major budget issue. He acknowledged that the Finance Committee is not involved in collective bargaining but can send a message to those parties responsible for collective bargaining negotiations.

Ms. Baker explained that the selectman voted to allow the Town Manager to negotiate and bargain with the unions. In June 30th, there will be a major shift in insurance benefits among Dedham town employees where everyone will be forced to join a new insurance plan.

Ms. Carney expressed that she feels the committee needs to take a firm stance to the negotiators in the town. Mr. Lindemann asked if the best way to do that was through this vote on Article 3, or if they could pass a resolution or send a letter, or something to that effect.

Mr. Preston expressed optimism about making changes in collective bargaining agreements because of the benchmarking data the town would soon have access to. He believes the town needs to get an idea of where our benefits and salary levels should stand. He wants to get the bulk data they need to figure out what towns they feel they should be in the area of in terms of salaries and benefits.

Ms. Carney said that she feels the town cannot sustain its current benefits trajectory. She expressed distrust in the town based on times in the past when she has asked questions of management that she feels have not been sufficiently answered.

Mr. Heffernan clarified that the Finance Committee has requested to meet with the Selectmen on the subject of contracts that were not approved.

Mr. Lindemann suggested that because of the private nature of contract negotiations, there is not much the committee can do on the subject.

Ms. O’Donnell expressed her intent to abstain from the vote on Article 3 because she was not present when it was presented to the committee.

The vote to reconsider Article 3 was voted 9-0.

Mr. Lindemann motioned to approve Article 3, Mr. Roberts seconded. It was voted 5-3-1. Ms. Emery Butler, Ms. Carney, and Mr. Lindemann opposed. Ms. O’Donnell abstained.

Mr. Heffernan motioned to adjourn, Ms. Carney seconded. It was voted 9-0.