

## Ashburnham Focus Committee Meeting, May 4, 2006

**Present:** Bob Fichtel, Chair; Pat Frederick, Christina Sargent, Sallie Thoma; also, Eric Smith, Town Planner, and Christopher Gagnon, observer.

Bob Fichtel called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM

Committee members read the minutes of the April 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. One correction: spelling of Jim Zarozinski's name. Sallie moved to accept the minutes, Bob seconded, all in favor.

Bob had asked Town Administrator Kevin Paicos about using MGL Chapter 90 funds for building a salt shed for the Highway Dept. when it is relocated. Mr. Paicos told him the funds would be better spent on roads. He also said the Water & Sewer Dept. will stay with the Highway Dept., rather than Parks & Recreation being relocated with the Highway Dept.

Eric Smith will look into the town of Brookfield's plans for their new highway department facility, to see what we can learn from them.

On Tuesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, the Committee will meet at Town Hall at 10:30 AM, to walk several properties under consideration for relocating the Highway Dept. The schedule for walking each property will be decided at that time.

Christina will arrange a time with realtor Donna Brooks, agent for Val Daigle's 45-acre property off the Fitchburg Road, near the Puffer Street ball field. Access to this property is limited, and some wetland is involved. Christina says Ms. Daigle may be interested in negotiating with the Town for public use of some of her property (playing fields?) in exchange for more access. While watershed protection requires a 200 foot buffer area each side of a stream, such harmless use as a ballfield might be acceptable closer to the water.

Another property to be walked is Kevin Lashua's 10-acre site, open land without trees abutting a Town-owned parcel on the Winchendon Road. Mr. Lashua is unsure where his property's boundaries are, having taken over the use of the land from his father.

The third area is around the Town Transfer Station.

Chris Gagnon called attention to an article on the warrant for the upcoming Town Meeting that seems to undermine another article: After voting on Article 33 to change the zoning in the Murray Road area from Light Industrial to Residential; voters would decide on Article 35, about hiring a consultant "to prepare an Industrial and Economic Development-related Land Siting Study". Why deliberate on giving up one of the few pieces of Light Industrial property in town before hiring a consultant to tell us if this is a good idea? At Town Meeting, Bob Fichtel will move to pass over Article 33.

Bob Fichtel had asked Kevin Paicos about enforcement of Town Bylaws, such as the signage bylaw (in relation to Cumberland Farms and Athol Savings Bank), and the bylaw on earthmoving (in relation to Richie Wright's property in the Downtown.) Mr. Paicos said the matters should be brought to the attention of Town Building Commissioner/ Zoning Officer Mike Gallant, in writing. If Mr. Gallant does not enforce the bylaws, such concerns should then be brought to the Town Administrator. Enforcement in the case of civil issues is the purview of the Police Department. The Committee would like to recommend that the position of Town Building Commissioner/Zoning Officer should properly involve more work hours at higher pay.

The Committee then turned its attention to the matter of Town Hall renovation. It was agreed that the community kitchen/meeting room downstairs should be upgraded, remaining at Town Hall, rather than being relocated to the proposed Public Safety Building. A

Selectman, and Chairman of the reorganized Public Safety Building Committee, Chris Gagnon will meet with Town Hall Renovation Committee Chairman Dave Sargent, to discuss some of the options for Town Hall renovation. Chris recommends that all Town Land Use offices be moved to the VMS Building as soon as the Public Safety Building is completed, making use of the office space currently occupied by the Police and Fire Departments.

Last Tuesday, during the North County Historical Society's visit to the Ashburnham Historical Society Building, it was discovered that part of the ceiling had fallen, damaging Society holdings. Christina is afraid the building will be lost. The Community Preservation Act, which would bring the town State money for the repair of the building, requires a small raise in taxes. Chris Gagnon pointed out that a 1.5% raise in taxes would qualify Ashburnham for matching funds from the State. Currently many cities and towns in the Commonwealth take advantage of this resource. Bob Fichtel proposed that the Focus Committee present this matter at the Fall Town Meeting.

We should have a SWOT meeting to discuss plans for the many projects facing the Town. Such a meeting is for considering Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Ashburnham Rail Trail surveys are being mailed with Municipal Light bills. Eric Smith has already received the first completed survey. The Committee looked at a couple of possible Rail Trail routes.

Bob Fichtel brought up the question of the value of Nell Farrand's house if Foster Insurance opens its office in the old Harness Shop and splits the property in two. It was suggested that someone might want to live in part of the house, using other space in the house for business.

Bob Fichtel will make a motion at Town Meeting "to remove self-storage facilities from the Green Business Zone".

The next Focus Committee meeting will be on Thursday, June 1<sup>st</sup> at 7:00 PM. We want to meet jointly with the Public Safety Building Committee.

Bob Fichtel's motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 was seconded by Sallie Thoma, and accepted by the other members.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia H. Frederick