

CFPB - 4-23-14

Members Present: Sterling, Gray, Fulton, Goulet, Leinoff, Rotman, Pierce

Members Absent: Stucker

Others Present: Heidi Moran, Ernie Ciccotelli, Steve Flanders, Ed Childs, Fire Chief Steve Leinoff, Police Chief Doug Robinson, Public Works Director Andy Hodgdon

Review and Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved without objection.

Public Comments

Heidi Lang Moran commented that the Committee's minutes are not on the Town website—they were posted through last October, but there has been nothing since. Fulton said that would be corrected.

Results of April 10, 2014, Public Forum

Sterling said he appreciated Gray's typing up a summary of comments from the recording of the Public Forum.

Rotman suggested that it might be beneficial to a lot of people in Town if there were an open house where people could tour the Police, Fire, and Public Works facilities. Pierce said he also thought it would be effective. Sterling asked about the possibility of a virtual tour. Leinoff said a good voice-over would be needed for that.

Sterling suggested two additional potential resources: a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document and a survey to "test the temperature of the Town." Fulton said the possibility of a survey is on an upcoming Selectboard agenda.

Lawe said his observations from the forum were:

- 1) While there is a group of people who don't want to spend anything, most other people seemed to think the expenses outlined were reasonable—the issue of money did not seem to be particularly decisive.
- 2) When he specifically asked people at the forum about the location, there seemed to be a very small tilt. He didn't gain a clear feeling.

Goulet said he thought there was a decisive feeling that most people thought the facilities should be in Town. Gray disagreed, saying he thought some of the comments about having to maneuver fire trucks onto Main Street indicated concern. Goulet said he thought that could be solved easily by adding a traffic light to tell drivers to stop.

Pierce said he wondered whether people understood the information that had been presented on the tax rate impact of the various options for replacing/moving the facilities. Fulton said he thought it had been counterproductive.

Goulet said projections for the ABC Dairy (Agway/Church Street) site were contingent on the rent from Grassroot Soccer. He said that rent is variable, rather than being a constant—if it went away, the tax rate impact would drastically change. Projections should assume the worst case. He also noted that Grassroot Soccer’s sign is the first thing visible. Fulton said Grassroot Soccer has indicated interest in continuing to rent the space. He added that he has done public-private partnerships before, and that the Grassroot space would be prime rental space.

Sterling asked whether the 2.5 cent tax rate impact is “unasterisked.” Fulton said it is. Gray said he thinks it would be good to have both cases of potential tax rate impact presented—that is, one in which the impact is combined with the reduction in taxes resulting from the retirement of other Town debt and one in which it is shown on a stand-alone basis.

Fulton said it would be helpful to Bread Loaf if the set of options could be narrowed to one for each site.

Sterling asked how to best get people to know about the information being presented. Fulton said it’s a difficult question, but one way is through as much advertising as possible. He said there will be another public forum on June 4, and there may be a high level of interest, adding that he thinks the Committee needs to have as many forums as necessary. Sterling asked whether advertising would include a sandwich board, and Fulton said it would. He said that while there was a full house at the forum, there were still only 30-35 people in attendance, versus 1,200 or so who would vote. He added that an issue of this type should be voted on at a regular Town Meeting.

Goulet asked whether estimates for solar power would be included. Fulton said adding LEED (energy efficiency) into the design increases its up-front cost, but that the payback begins right away.

Pierce said it’s important to keep in mind that the market is good right now for municipal bonds because of prevailing low interest rates.

Gray asked whether there was agreement on an open house. Leinoff said he’s found that if it’s held in conjunction with some other event, such as Saturday breakfast at the Grange, it draws better. Fulton said Mink Brook (the consulting firm that did the initial report on the facilities) took quite a few photos, and that perhaps a collage or video could be prepared.

Discussion of Bread Loaf’s Public Facilities Options

Fulton said he is not suggesting that the Committee pick one of the sites, but rather, for each site, pick one option. For each, Bread Loaf can then provide detailed alternatives (LEED, plain vanilla, etc.).

Rotman asked about the possibility of including a basement in the plans. Fulton said the cost estimate was \$230,000. Gray said he spoke with Chris Huston from Bread Loaf about that after the meeting and asked about Richard Stucker’s thought of putting some functions down there. He said Huston’s response, essentially, was that there was not enough bang

for the buck. Rotman said he doesn't know anyone who's regretted putting a basement in their home. Fulton said he was concerned about cost creep.

Goulet asked why there wasn't an option presented for just meeting the needs of the Police Department, which is in a dire situation. Pierce said part of the Committee's job is to look not just at immediate needs, but longer-term needs as well. If the Fire Station needs to be moved in 10 years, it may be better to do that now. Gray added that the Committee in general has been concerned with long-term planning for the Town's capital needs.

Goulet said he thinks Police should be separate from Fire. Fulton said Hanover and Hartford both have Police and Fire departments that jointly use space because it's more cost-effective—conference rooms, training spaces, heating plants, etc., can be shared. He added that the Town Fire Chief's office is currently located in the Police Station. He said that dealing with the Police on the existing site would require a two-story building. It could be just Police, but that would not be his recommendation.

Sterling asked whether the ABC Dairy site could be used just for Grassroot Soccer and Police. Fulton said yes, part of the existing structure could be used. Goulet said the public doesn't have enough information about the options, and that \$8 million might be too much for them.

Sterling asked how the bond interest rate works, and whether there is a 5-year window before the Town bonds. Fulton said that since about 2008, the Federal Reserve Board has essentially been printing money, and the money supply has increased, which has kept interest rates low. The new Fed Chair has indicated it will begin to back off as the economy recovers. Right now, the Town is getting 0.05% interest on its bank accounts, but at some point, rates will increase.

Sterling asked if interest rates double in the next five years, what would be the cost? Pierce said one of the frustrating things is that the money can't just be borrowed now—if the Town decides not to proceed, there should be backup options. Goulet said he is trying to save Norwich from being unaffordable. Fulton said the Town tax rate has been pretty level for the past 10 years, and he thinks the Selectboard has done a good job of controlling costs—there is a big cost for schools, but Town residents get quite a bit back from income sensitivity provisions of the state education funding law. Lawe noted that Option 4B incorporates the existing fire station, and suggested that might ease some concerns about cost. Rotman said current tax rolls are almost totally based on residential taxes, and that seems to be the way residents like it—as long as that is the case, the burden of any expense will fall on homeowners.

Fulton asked whether the Committee had any interest in reducing options. Sterling said he thought stand-alone options with Police at either site should be looked at. Fulton said Police-only on the ABC Dairy site is easiest to do—he's not sure how Police only and Fire later on the existing site would be done. Leinoff said he agrees, the Police situation is worst, but while fixing it solves one problem, it also creates future capital needs. Sterling said the Police-only design should assume that Police and Fire would eventually be combined, with shared space and shared parking. Goulet asked whether the Police and Fire

Departments would be happy with shared space, and Leinoff and Robinson both said yes. Pierce supported the idea of a Police-only option on ABC. He said with the communications tower, the Town had shown it could make a decision even if more money were required.

Sterling suggested that for people in Town who want to keep the facilities where they are, it might be possible to use Option 5 and move the two-story building north. Fulton said that would be equivalent to Option 1.

Fulton said the options for further examination at this time appear to be Option 5 at existing site, Option 1 at ABC Dairy with Police only, and Option 2 for Public Works.

Flanders then presented some thoughts as to how to look at the Facilities issue. He offered a matrix, dealing with the 3 structures and 3 scenarios (one with no money available, one with the Police and Fire facilities remaining downtown, and one with them moving to the ABC site). He noted that additional possibilities exist, such as moving the Police department somewhere else for a period of time.

Rotman said he thought the framework presented by Flanders was very helpful. He asked Leinoff whether a new fire station would help attract new volunteers, and whether that is a problem for the department. Leinoff said yes, recruitment and retention of volunteers is the #1 challenge for volunteer fire departments—“people see the building, and that makes an impression.” Rotman said that benefit should be included, and added that he thinks response time from the ABC site may be slightly longer. Leinoff said that’s true if just the location of the buildings at the sites is considered, but if a volunteer has to park on Main Street and jog down the alley where a fire truck may be coming out, the difference may not be as great.

Pierce commented that for him, the key issue is, what do we want Town to look like, how do we see? Affordable housing, reducing energy use. What are the costs associated with each of the options. The Committee is not just choosing locations; it’s choosing a lot of things that have impacts down the road. Sterling said that if the ABC site is selected, they should know that site is contaminated. Fulton said a Phase 2 analysis has been done on the site—storage of liquid fuel was on the other side of Church Street.

Future Meetings

Gray noted that another Public Forum is scheduled for June 4.

Adjournment

The Committee then adjourned.