

BEACON FALLS JOINT BOF/BOS
Special Budget Workshop
May 17, 2011
MINUTES
(Draft Copy-Subject to Revision)

First Selectman S. Cable called the Special Budget Workshop to order at 7:30 P.M. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

PRESENT: BOS: First Selectman S. Cable, Selectmen D. Sorrentino and M. Krenesky
BOF: Chairman C. Bielik, Board Members J. Dowdell, B. Ploss, R. Doiron and Finance Manager M. Gomes. W. Hopkinson arrived at 7:40.

ABSENT: L. Krepinevich – holding paving machine meeting next store

ALSO PRESENT: Approximately 3 town residents

STREETSCAPE

The meeting began with Peter Byrnes giving a presentation on the current grant for the Beacon Falls Streetscape project. P. Byrnes explained that this grant was earmarked by the Federal Highway Administration passed through to the DOT then to Beacon Falls. It's an 80/20% grant meaning that Beacon Falls would be responsible for the 20%.

He noted that the over-all plan for downtown, which had been worked on for 9 years, calls for lots of improvements that have already been made. He also noted that part of the project was expected to be phased. He noted that if this money is not used by the Town of Beacon Falls, it will go back to Congress.

P. Byrnes explained that when you receive a grant, it always comes with lots of conditions therefore if Beacon Falls chooses to use the grant, they would have to follow the criteria that came with it. The conditions are that the design for downtown had to be reviewed by everyone (actually following the DOT's design system which is very complicated) and all the state agencies have to review the plan 3 or 4 times starting with the preliminary design. P. Byrnes explained that with the complicated design, it costs a lot of money plus DOT does get a cut of the grant money. He noted that DOT loves these kinds of grants because it helps cover their overhead.

P. Byrnes explained that the contract must then go out to bid. Ten contractors picked up the bid on this project and 6 bids were received; Dayton Construction won the bid. He explained that Dayton Construction is out of Watertown and they are a very good construction company and would like to move forward with this project.

It was explained that this job was bid in 2 parts, 1 being the base bid. It was broken down due to what they thought would be the available dollars. P. Byrnes noted that engineers never win a bid, they come up with the estimates but they do not win the bids. He also explained that Beacon Falls is part of an overall master plan for the River Walk that goes from Torrington to Shelton. It was noted that a lot of the towns are working on their link explaining that Beacon Falls has also been working on their link and this is where the phasing comes in as well.

P. Byrnes explained that in order to take the project to meet the EDC criteria, they took it from the Depot Street Bridge to Route 42 but cut it short based on the dollars. It was initially designed to stay away from Route 42 in that would involve more state review. In the final leg he noted, they go right to 42 and those improvements are all part of this package. He noted that the contractors have been told that the communities may only award the base bid.

P. Byrnes explained that the DOT has accepted Dayton as the contractor and they are ready to go. Dayton was given 120 days to be awarded the contract by the community. After the 120 days, Dayton does not have any obligation to the contract.

P. Byrnes gave a map and bid and pricing information to both boards and reviewed it with them.

P. Byrnes explained that Depot Street South is going to be a one lane 12' with a curve, a grassy area, the greenway, the walk path and the guard rail. From the street view it's going to look like a timbered rail but from the river side it is going to be backed by metal (the intention of the metal is to keep cars from going into the river in case there is an accident). P. Byrnes discussed the overlook noting that it's the only overlook with a view of the river.

He explained that they are going to create a complimentary park on the south side of Veterans Park noting that this will create a signature point for downtown Beacon Falls.

P. Byrnes spent some time talking about the visible parts of the river and how the brick wall at the park will give a view of the river noting that lots of the river can't be seen due to overgrowth.

P. Byrnes explained that if the Town of Beacon Falls decides not to use this money the DOT would tell the Federal Highway Administration that the project will not be going forward. He noted that the town has until June 1st to make a decision for Dayton Construction or they are off the hook.

S. Cable noted that the bid came in under what the cost was. P. Byrnes explained that the bid did include other things. The DOT has a 15% contingency, money for an audit, for testing materials, etc. He did not want anyone to be confused by the bid coming in lower – the money would be used by the DOT.

S. Cable asked P. Byrnes to explain that this project was endorsed by the town and this is just a link to the overall process – from the Council of Governments down to the Valley Council. S. Cable noted that we actually got 2 grants for the base bid. It was again noted that if Beacon Falls doesn't use this money, it will be gone, no one else can use it.

S. Cable noted that they have spent approximately \$40,000 on engineering so far for this project.

It was noted that they are now waiting for the town's money. S. Cable noted that the town would need \$205,000 to do the whole project.

P. Byrnes noted that the town would have to pay the 20% and the DOT would send the town their part.

It was noted that if we don't do both parts of the project, the grant money would be less.

The discussion continued with the BOF asking where the 20% from the town would come from.

S. Cable explained that she and M. Gomes have reviewed the funds and if the BOF approves it, they could use the CRRRA funds of approximately \$103,000 on the balance sheet plus left over \$37,000 from the Federal Government that was given to them for improvements. S. Cable noted that they have enough money for the base bid. P. Byrnes explained that the DOT wants to know if they are going to do the entire project up front.

A lengthy discussion continued.

W. Hopkinson wanted to know if this had to go before a town meeting. S. Cable explained that she doesn't think so however she will double check that with an attorney.

The discussion continued with S. Cable noting that several residents have been involved with this project. She also noted that if she goes to the DOT with good intention, they may give her an extension.

S. Cable noted that the format that she was bringing this before the Board of Finance was to see if they would support this project. S. Cable noted that they always try to put money aside for things but due to public outcry are unable to.

The discussion continued with the boards with C. Bielick noting that at some point we do need to go forward with the town.

P. Byrnes let everyone know that if anyone has any other questions, please feel free to contact him and he will try and help aid the town's decision.

The discussion continued. W. Hopkinson asked that it be verified if this has to go before a town meeting.

The boards decided to table this discussion until the end of the meeting.

Budget Discussion

S. Cable re-iterated that the little that was cut from the budget brought the budget down to a .5 mil increase which would make the mil rate 26.1 noting that it is currently at 25.5. She noted that she heard the public talk about other towns that did not have any increase however she noted that those towns had higher mil rates. S. Cable noted that Beacon Falls is not out of line.

C. Bielick noted that the Board of Finance understands this and noted that the disconnect comes in getting this information out to the residents of the town.

S. Cable discussed selling liens and a tax amnesty explaining that in order to have a tax amnesty, there has to be legislature to do so. We could do an ordinance but we would not be able to act upon it without a law from legislature and it would take time.

S. Cable explained that she discussed the possibility of sharing police with Prospect noting that B. Chatfield was really disappointed to find out that because the Town of Beacon Falls does not touch the property of Prospect, they could not share resident troopers. The town of Bethany is in the way.

A lengthy discussion continued.

S. Cable read a letter from J. Chadderton which explained that the abatement program and all that applied would bring the budget up \$7,000. The letter also explained that if the town lowered the amount from \$500 to \$200, the town would save \$83,000. The discussion continued with the BOF asking what the requirement for the \$500 abatement is. S. Cable answered that it's low, \$75,000 for a single person and \$150,000 for families of 2 or more noting that you would have to be over 65.

S. Cable noted that she is going to recommend to the BOS that they are going to change. They are already going for the one amount. C. Bielik asked if that would mean lowering the amount from \$500 to \$200 – S. Cable noted that she doesn't know if she wants to do that and W. Hopkinson noted that she would rather see the income threshold lowered so that the people who really need it can get a break.

R. Doiron asked if you can change this threshold now? S. Cable noted that it is something for the future and will not affect this budget. C. Bielik asked if this might be considered for the 2012/2013 budget?

The required amount of time living in Beacon Falls to qualify for this abatement was noted to be 1 year. M. Krenesky mentioned that at one time it was 1 year, then it went up to 5 years, then back to 1 year.

W. Hopkinson asked for the figures again and S. Cable noted that she would give W. Hopkinson a copy of the letter.

S. Cable noted that it's \$151,000 that we are losing out on because we give a \$500 tax abatement.

S. Cable noted that this is something she is working on. She noted that this is a point of discussion for future planning.

J. Dowdell mentioned that he just heard that if you put a geothermal system in your home, you can get a \$3,000 tax abatement from the town. A lengthy discussion continued regarding where this money would come from. S. Cable noted that she would look into it but thinks it must be based on the enterprise zone where the town gets reimbursed for that.

A discussion continued with J. Dowdell suggesting that this be looked into.

S. Cable noted that she sat with the unions last week. She noted that it was not a very fruitful session. She noted that M. Krenesky, herself and the attorney left the meeting. She explained that they asked for things and the union asked for things. Since then, they asked for an answer on 1. Giving up their pay raise, yes or no, 2. Give up longevity pay, yes, or no and 3. Give back medical pay, yes or no. S. Cable noted that she believes there will be some concessions but she can't say what.

S. Cable noted that she doesn't think this budget could be cut any more. She noted that she is looking into privatizing some services – not for this budget but maybe for next budget. W. Hopkinson asked what she was thinking about privatizing and S. Cable mentioned the parks and the sewer and possibly the roads.

S. Cable asked what everyone wanted to do with this budget. The discussion continued about whether or not they should wait to hear from the unions before they go forward with the budget. It was decided that whatever the give backs may be, they would not be significant enough to wait for the possible number. After lengthy discussions, all decided to go forward with bringing the budget to the town without waiting to see if there are any concessions.

The discussion continued noting that the message did not get out to the town that they had already taken out the town employees wage increase from the budget (with furloughs being an option if there were no concessions). All agreed that they should go forward with the budget vote but work on getting the message out to the town that the employees raises were taken out.

The discussion continued.

It was noted that they should also get the message out that if the budget does not pass again, then they should have a way to get the message out to the public that there will be drastic changes and cuts of services.

Medardo Carraero, 3 September Lane, spoke about how the BOS needs to be tougher with the unions and tell them what they are going to do. He believes that they should not hesitate to let the unions know that if they don't give back concessions then they will be laid off. He noted that is why the public voted against the budget in his opinion.

It was explained to Medardo that the raises have already been taken out of the budget and the union does have a contract and knowing that there will be furloughs if there are not any give backs is there way of letting them know they are playing hard ball.

A lengthy discussion continued. It was noted that there will be between 9 and 12 furlough days if the employees do not give any concessions.

It was noted that if they were to give 12 furlough days per employee, they would save the town \$49,626.17 which is more than if they were just to concede their raises.

W. Hopkinson noted that she had discussions with some families regarding the possibilities of cutting sports subsidies and Wendy noted that their reactions were that they were horrified. W. Hopkinson noted that she is concerned about how to get the message out to the public and she herself does not want to see anything taken away from the kids.

S. Cable noted that in the news article, it says that the union says that the town cannot give furlough days. S. Cable noted that is wrong. The town has every right to give furlough days and it is stated in the contract. M. Krenesky explained how that works.

S. Cable brought up the emails she has received. Some are regarding trash pick and she received 3 against the town nurse. C. Bielik noted that in the emails and discussions he has had did not say anything negative regarding the town nurse or the trash pick-up.

R. Doiron motioned to bring the 26.1 mil budget to vote for referendum. J. Dowdell 2nd the motion. All voted aye.

M. Krenesky motioned to accept the BOF recommendation that the 26.1 mil budget go to a referendum for a town vote. D. Sorrentino 2nd the motion. All voted aye.

It was decided that the referendum will be Tuesday May 31st. S. Cable noted that she will have everything posted including what the ballots should say.

Transfers

It was noted that “transfers” were not on the agenda therefore the BOF could not discuss or approve them. Transfers will be added to a separate Special agenda for immediately following the 5/24 joint meeting that will be held at the Fire House. L. Classey will post that agenda.

S. Cable noted that opening the transfer station on June 4th was added to the transfers.

Streetscape

The subject of Streetscape was open for discussion. R. Doiron asked where we would be getting the \$65,000 from. S. Cable noted that she is only looking for a motion to address the base bid.

A discussion continued regarding whether payments could be deferred or not.

M. Krenesky noted that he believes they should go forward with the base bid but noted that the project loses something without the bump out – scenic over-look.

After much discussion:

W. Hopkinson motioned that the BOF recommend that the town go forward with the base bid, an estimated \$673,000 (total cost) of which Beacon Falls will be responsible for \$134,600, contingent on the legal opinion of whether or not a town meeting would be required. J. Dowdell 2nd the motion. All voted aye.

W. Hopkinson motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:59. R. Doiron 2nd the motion. All voted aye.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:59 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Classey
Clerk for the Board