

Minutes – Acton Finance Committee
August 11, 2009, 7:30 p.m.
Room 204
Town Hall

Pursuant to a notice duly posted with the Town Clerk and with a quorum of members present, the Acton Finance Committee convened at 7:30 p.m. on August 11, 2009 to review various matters.

Members present for the meeting: Herman Kabakoff, Chair, Mary Ann Ashton, Vice Chair, Bill Mullin, Clerk, Pat Clifford, Bob Evans, Steve Noone, Doug Tindal, Brandy Brandon, Associate Member and Karen Kucala, FinCom Staff Liaison. Kent Sharp was absent.

Chairman Herman Kabakoff called the meeting to order at 7:30pm.

Public Participation

None.

Approval of Minutes

Deferred.

Land Purchase Program

Selectman Terra Friedrichs made a presentation to the Committee advocating an expanded land purchase program. Time being short, the presentation was fast paced. At the end of the presentation, Mr. Brandon presented a quick-look spreadsheet analysis of the fiscal impact of new building as compared with land acquisition.

Mr. Mullin asked how this new effort interfaced with the existing land acquisition committees in town, that is, the Open Space Committee and the Community Preservation Committee, and whether they are not doing their job. Ms. Friedrichs opined that this new committee could be more nimble in making an acquisition. Mr. Mullin listed all of the major land acquisitions we have done in Town over the last decade or so, and offered his view that we have not missed any major opportunities and that the Open Space Committee and the Community Preservation Committee are doing their jobs. Mr. Tindal felt that this type of committee might be helpful.

Mr. Brandon quickly showed a spreadsheet that asserted the fiscal value of acquiring land as compared with it being developed as housing.

In summary, Mr. Kabakoff said that the Finance Committee would let Ms. Friedrichs know whether they were interested in studying this issue further. Mr. Brandon agreed to share his spreadsheet analysis with the full committee.

Presentation to School Committees with respect to The 97% Solutions

Chairman Kabakoff advised the FinCom that the School Committee had invited Bill Mullin, as author of The 97% Solution Point of View to come to their meeting on September 3 to discuss the rationale behind it. Mr. Kabakoff thought it was a good idea. Mr. Mullin stated that his intent was to say to the School Committee that the FinCom

Point of View is a standalone document and does not need any interpretation, but that he would be honored to provide his thinking behind it.

ALG Meeting Discussion/Planning for the Year

The big issue is whether a Special Town Meeting will be needed to change (lower) the FY10 budgets in light of the new fiscal realities. (Ms. Kucala expects Free Cash to be certified the first week in September.)

Chairman Kabakoff presented three ALG scenarios showing varying degrees of shortfalls, based on certain assumptions. He asked for committee member views and the committee was, with limited information, split. Several members thought we should begin to use the “most likely” scenario, but other members said that we are only showing one-half of the equation (i.e., revenue changes). Mr. Noone felt that none of the scenarios addressed the issue of expense control and, as such, don’t solve the problem.

With respect to the need for a Special Town Meeting, differing views were expressed here as well. Mr. Evans opined that, in the spirit of openness and transparency, we should definitely have a STM if the budgets are to change. Mr. Mullin, abetted by Ms. Clifford, concurred to a point, but offered that we have elected Town Leaders to lead and that they should assert their positions unless a STM is definitely needed.

The bottom line is that more information is needed to determine the proper course of action.

Committee Reports

Solar Panels. Mr. Tindal reported about the Solar Panel issue. He is preparing to circulate a memorandum on the subject.

Cost Reduction Committee. Ms. Ashton reported about the Cost Reduction Committee, saying that they had met again and were working through some roadblocks in getting sufficient data and information. She felt that the committee would be prepared to make a presentation at the second meeting in September.

Economic Development Committee. Mr. Tindal reported that the EDC has been creating “teams” to address specific subject areas. To date, two teams have been formed: 1) Demographic and Research about the Town of Acton and 2) Marketing (collaborating with the Chamber of Commerce). Four more teams are to be launched.

South Acton Train Advisory Committee. Ms. Clifford reported that the committee met, but determined that more guidance is required from the T before any progress can be made.

Other

Mr. Kabakoff invited members to attend the Association of Town Finance Committees Annual Meeting on October 24 in Franklin, MA.

Adjourned

Ms. Clifford moved to adjourn (seconded by Mr. Noone) and the meeting was adjourned sometime around 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by William C. Mullin, Clerk.