

DOVER WARRANT COMMITTEE
Minutes of the March 15, 2021 Open Hearing on the Warrant

Members in attendance: Rob Andrews, Melissa Herman, Cam Hudson, Gordon Kinder, Sara Kinney, Janet McCormick, Steve Migausky, Peter Smith, Andy Ursitti

Other Speakers: Robyn Hunter, John Jeffries, Bob Springett, Board of Selectmen; Jim Repetti, Moderator; Andrew Keough, Superintendent of Schools; Dawn Fattori, Schools Business Administrator; Leslie Leon, Dover School Committee; Maggie Charron, Regional Schools Committee; Barry Goldman, John Quackenbush, Capital Budget Committee; Gerry Clarke, Ron Myrick, Water Resources Committee; Courtney Starling, Land Use Director; Carol Chirico, Planning Board; Bonnie Akins, Board of Assessors; Carol Jackman, Cemetery Commission; Chris Dwelley, Town Administrator; Mark Howe; Justine Kent-Uritam

Location: on-line, via Zoom

Mr. Kinder called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm.

Mr. Kinder opened the meeting with a review of COVID-related remote meeting procedures, followed by an overview of the Open Hearing format.

Mr. Repetti said that the Annual Town Meeting will be held outdoors again. He is seeking input from citizens as to whether we should apply for a reduced quorum, and if we should consider eliminating non-urgent articles to shorten the meeting.

Article 4 (Operating Budget) – Mr. Andrews presented an overview; a more detailed review is available on the recording of the March 11 Board of Selectmen meeting. The operating budget increase is less than 1% over FY21. As before, the schools are the largest component. The estimated tax rate if all articles pass would be \$12.76, down from \$12.89 in FY21.

Dover School – Superintendent Keough thanked the citizens for their unwavering support for the schools during his tenure. Ms. Fattore presented the FY22 budget, which assumes in-person learning and level enrollment. The operating budget will increase by 0.38%. We have secured Federal funding for PPE and other COVID measures, so the budget is not affected. Trend budgeting has allowed paring some non-salary budget items. The number of out-of-district special education placements is expected to go down next year. Ms. Leon thanked Ms. Fattore and the rest of the administration for their careful work.

Regional Schools – Mss. Fattore and Charron presented the Region's budget, which incorporates the same assumptions of in-person learning and level enrollment as at Chickering. The operating budget will increase by 0.87%. The OPEB trust is again funded using savings in insurance costs, as staff move to 50-50 cost-sharing and high-deductible plans. Dover's assessment percentage is down slightly due to enrollment shifts. The Middle School construction debt will be paid off in 2024. Ms. Kent-Uritam remarked that she sees quite a few empty school busses: wasn't there a more efficient transportation solution for this COVID year? Ms. Charron noted that State COVID precautions limited busses to 1/3 their usual capacity until very recently, and many parents are driving their children to school.

Article 5 (Capital Budget) – Messrs. Goldman and Quackenbush presented the Capital Budget. The total for FY22 is \$1,036,591. A new roof for Town House, at \$700,000, is the biggest item. They are paying close attention to energy efficiency and sustainability. The window replacements at Town House that were approved at last year's Annual Town Meeting will commence soon. Net-zero carbon emissions will be a goal for future projects, including the Caryl Center.

Article 10 (Capital Stabilization Fund) – Ms. Hunter explained that three years ago the Selectmen began a review of past and future capital needs, with the goal of smoothing out the ups and downs in capital purchases and replacements. To that end, they propose creating a Capital Stabilization Fund that once initially funded, would receive a steady annual contribution. Withdrawals would require a 2/3 vote at Town

Meeting, and could be used to fully fund items, or for annual debt service where items were bonded. The Selectmen propose establishing the fund with \$2.5 million from Free Cash this year, and then appropriating 1.5% of the levy each year thereafter. Ms. Kent-Uritam asked what the current Free Cash balance is and what other towns are doing in this regard. Ms. Hunter replied that our Free Cash balance as of July 1, 2020 has not yet been certified by the State, but is approximately \$10 million. Comparably sized towns have established funds on the order of \$200 thousand to \$4 million. Ms. Akins noted that Free Cash has been growing rapidly over the last five years, to the detriment of the tax rate. Ms. Hunter replied that better budgeting and other improvements will correct this.

Article 12 (One-Time Projects) – Dr. Clarke introduced the article by reviewing recent droughts. Ms. Hunter followed up with the request for \$100,000 to continue the Water Resource Committee’s work monitoring water levels and withdrawals. Mr. Myrick discussed the details of the existing monitoring infrastructure and emphasized the need to expand on the baseline data collected so far.

Article 15 (Accessory Apartments) – Mss. Chirico and Starling presented the amendments to the existing bylaw, which seek to clarify and streamline the approval process. They note that the current bylaw does not even define an accessory dwelling unit. Long-term rentals of either the accessory or main unit on a property would be allowed, but short-term rentals would be explicitly forbidden. It was noted that under MGL Chapter 40A this bylaw change only requires a simple majority at Town Meeting.

Article 16 (Property Tax Deferral for Seniors) – Ms. Akins explained that this article would allow the Town to reduce the interest rate on deferred property taxes from 8% to 4%.

Article 17 (Property Tax Exemption for Seniors) – Ms. Akins said that this would increase the permissible tax exemption from \$1000 to \$2000.

Article 20 (Cemetery Bylaws) – Ms. Jackman went over the proposed changes, which would allow: non-family member burials; greater flexibility in interring cremation ashes; changes to headstone limits; and burial of former residents.

Article 24 (Stagecoach Lane) – Mr. Howe explained that this article asks the Town to accept Stagecoach Lane as a Town Way, having satisfied all requirements.

Town Administrator Dwelley explained the remaining articles:

Article 18 (Elderly and Disabled Tax Relief Fund) – This would allow voluntary donations to a fund to assist residents in tax difficulty.

Article 19 (OPEB Trust Fund) – This would bring the Town’s OPEB Trust Fund into compliance with State law, irrevocably committing the fund to providing benefits to plan members and protecting the assets against creditor claims.

Article 21 (PILOT Agreement for Solar Installation) – This would authorize the Selectmen to negotiate a PILOT (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) agreement with the operator of a proposed solar array on the roof of the Town Garage.

Article 22 (Animal Control Fines) – This would harmonize the Town’s schedule of fines with current State law regarding dog ownership, required rabies vaccination, and service dogs.

Article 23 (Cell Tower Leases) – This would authorize the Selectmen to enter into long-term leases with occupants of the cell tower behind the Town Garage. The current leases will all be expiring in the next few years.

There being no further business a motion was made to adjourn, seconded by unanimous proclamation. The meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm.

A recording of the meeting can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0o25b3azm4>

The next meeting will be at 7:00 pm on March 24.

Respectfully submitted,
Peter Smith, Secretary