



Finance Committee
Minutes of Meeting held on October 7, 2019

1. Chair Steinberg Called the Meeting to Order: 4:05

Committee members present: Andrew Steinberg; Cathy Schoen; Lynn Griesemer; Dorothy Pam; Robert Hegner (non-voting); Sharon Povinelli (non-voting); Marylou Theilman (non-voting)
Members absent: Shalini Bahl-Milne
Town Staffs: Sonia Aldrich, Comptroller. David Ziomek and Geoff Kravitz

Minutes taken by Martha Marteney. Amherst Media recorded/video of the meeting available.

2. First Announcement:

Steinberg welcomed Martha Marteney as minute recorder today.

3. Hickory Ridge Recommendation:

Assistant Town Manager Dave Ziomek and Economic Development Director Geoff Kravitz joined the meeting to present and review the proposed purchase of the Hickory Ridge property.

Griesemer noted that the agreement has been extended into December, and the topic is on the Town Council agenda for October 21.

Ziomek reviewed the slides already presented to the Town Council. Town was initially approached by the Hickory Ridge property owners, who have been working to secure a solar project on the property.

Highlights from the slides:

- Fort River, which abuts and runs through the property, is an undammed tributary of the CT River which contains rare species of fish and mussels
- The property is close to a developing town center, just off Route 116 in terms of recreation, as well as possible use of the clubhouse and surrounding acreage
- Paths and bridges throughout the property, paved/crushed stone/dirt and in relatively fair shape. There is also the opportunity to connect the residential properties just to the north of the property for further accessibility
- While the river flooding has been a problem for the golf operation, it should not interfere with the proposed use, including the location of the club house
- The Purchase & Sale contains several contingencies that still need to be met, including the Solar Project approval into the SMART program. The Sale to the Town is contingent on this approval
- Much of the property is in NHESP Estimated & Priority Habitat, approximately 112 acres of the 150 acres
- 26.2 acres would be in the proposed solar project, which has been approved by the town and state agencies



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- There remains approximately 6 to 10 acres of buildable land, primarily along Pomeroy Lane. The precise estimate is not yet possible until the property is surveyed for wetlands, rare species, and other low-impact concerns
- Possible use of the property includes conservation land; trails, along with reuse of clubhouse that could be affordable housing, “swing spaces” temporary for Fire/DPW. It would also be possible to sell off land lots or parcels.

Kravitz noted that Town Manager signed the Purchase & Sale in August for \$520k, with several stipulations including Town Council approval, SMART project acceptance and securing funding. He further pointed out the purchase is at a lower cost than the one Northampton considered for a golf course. Ziomek added that the golf industry is waning and municipalities across the country are looking to absorb that land into the recreation facilities.

Kravitz explained that the Town would purchase the property and provide the Seller with an easement on the 26 acres for the solar project and road access, which would have an initial term of 20 years with four 5-year extensions for a total period of 40 years. These extensions would be at the option of the Seller.

In terms of the tax impact, property currently pays about \$30k at a reduced rate because it is in Chapter 61B (recreational/golf use.) If the purchase and solar project goes through, the Town would receive estimated PILOTS payments on the Solar Field of \$39,800 the first year, growing to \$63,700 in year 20.

Griesemer clarified on the Financing that the CPA funds - \$200,000 - have already been approved by the Town Council for this purpose. Additional Funds would be allocated from the Stabilization Fund and use of Town land already sold (see Chart)

Ziomek responded to questions prepared by the Finance Committee:

- The property is zoned for residential; yet, much of the acreage north of the river is wetlands. However, there is some development potential along Pomeroy Road, per the appraisal
- There will be only one access road as part of the easement to the solar project on the east end of the property line on Pomeroy Lane. It is as of yet undetermined whether any public access will be permitted along this easement. The easement holder (seller) must maintain the access and the road.
- There will need to be a public/master planning process to decide what to do with the developable land. Both the Fire Department and the Department of Public Works need swing space. Multiple options exist – including housing, reuse of the club house or demolition of the club house.
- Regardless of how the developable segments proceed, the town would want to ensure access and parking to the recreational space
- In addition to the purchase price, the Town estimates an additional \$100k is an estimate of costs for at least the first year such as electricity, insurance, maintenance (though not maintaining it

as a golf course per se,) and likely less in year two once any surveys and assessments are done. Some can be done in-house but some would require outside consultation.

- Asked about second or future year maintenance, Staff responded that this would depend on decisions made about use of the property. The \$100K would only cover the first year.
- The Fort River Watershed Group has already written a grant for riverfront restoration, if the town moves forward with the purchase
- The question of carbon footprint as well as fertilizers/pesticides was discussed. Ziomek noted that on conservation land, the town does not apply herbicides or pesticides
- As part of the easement terms, if in 20 years the Seller would have the option to extend the easement. At the point the Seller terminates the agreement and easement, the owner would have to remove the panels. There might be an option for the Town to purchase the panels
- PILOTs are negotiated rather than considering the solar panels as taxable private property.

Theilman asked about the finance breakdown on the real estate money available, and Aldrich explained it was from land sold off previously.

Schoen expressed concern on not knowing the operating costs for the next five or so years, as she does not want to see the project underfunded. She also raised concerns about the clubhouse being left empty – deterioration and liability. Ziomek noted that CPA funding may be available for improvements, especially since CPA money will be used for the purchase.

Povinelli left meeting at 5:00.

Public Comment:

Irv Rhodes said that although he feels it is an incredible project, he is concerned about liability from the river and potential flooding. Rhodes relayed that Ziomek has assured him that if the Phase I Environmental report does not come back clean, then the P&S is voided. Rhodes also expressed concern about the assumption that any further CPA funds will be used for this project, with similar concerns regarding the Stabilization Fund.

Tom Joyce said he was a long-term golfer at Hickory Ridge. From his opinion, it was not flooding but the mismanagement of the clubhouse that has been the issue. This makes him concerned about going into an agreement with this same management company for the solar project. He also noted that the views will significantly change with the fencing around the solar panels. He also noted that the clubhouse has become run-down, not well maintained.

Ziomek responded that the Town includes the Phase I requirement for any town purchases. Regarding future costs, Ziomek agreed that these need to be determined, even so far as whether the building should be razed. Regarding potential non-performance on the solar project, the town would be dealing with the actual solar developer, not the current golf course management company.



Schoen recalled a specific map showing the acreage to be funded with the CPA amount. Ziomek referred back to the map in the slides to show the various sections of land as identified, which does not show the specific land for the CPA funds. Ziomek noted the master planning needs to be done first before assigning which acreage is funded by which sources.

Steinberg spoke further about drawing down on the stabilization fund. Theilman added that in the past one condition had been that for new projects funding required that the project would be money generating.

Griesemer moved that the Finance Committee recommend the Order # FY20-26 for the Acquisition of the Hickory Ridge Property to the Town Council and approve the acquisition of the property. Pam seconded. Voting: 3 in favor; zero against; one abstaining (Schoen); one absent.

Ziomek and Kravitz left the meeting at 5:40

4. Consideration of the Council President's proposal "Launching a Conversation with the Community about the Four Major Capital Projects."

Steinberg asked for committee non-voting resident for comments.

Hegner said he feels that the town needs to find a way to engage the low- and moderate-income population. He would also like to see a discussion of what will be given up if these capital projects are moved on.

Theilman is concerned that few residents will come out in support of Fire Department and the Department of Public Works while many will come out for the schools. She would like to find a way to see who is coming out in support of which projects.

After a short discussion, it was decided that Steinberg would report to the Town Council regarding the Council President's proposal.

5. Other Items:

Steinberg noted that the budget calendar is being flushed out, including a meeting and a forum on Nov. 7. Also, on Dec. 7 there will be a meeting on the regional school budget.

Aldrich advised the committee of the need to do a transfer order for the Medicare funding, which will be a Council order, similarly one for the Stabilization fund. Griesemer asked Aldrich to send those to both Town Manager Bockelman and Griesemer so that they can determine whether a forum is required.

Meeting adjourned at 5:54.

Draft minutes by Martha Marteney on 10/10/19. Minutes reviewed, edited, and approved by Cathy Schoen, 10/17/2019



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