

Westwood Finance Commission
March 13, 2006
Meeting Minutes

Chairman Connors called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M.

Finance Commission members absent: George Hertz, Brian London, Ann Wood.

***Planning Board – General Discussion – SRD (Senior Residential Development) and
MRD (Major Residential Development)***

Chairman Connors asked the Planning Board to attend tonight's meeting to provide information on the differences between SRD and MRD development requirements. Three petition articles dealing with these issues will be presented to this year's annual town meeting and the Finance Commission requested clarification on some issues. Town Planner Diane Beecham and Planning Board Vice Chair Rob Malster were present to provide some information.

Some of their major comments included:

- In 1996, the town appropriated funds to support preparation of a Comprehensive Plan for the town. A Steering Committee was formed to ensure broad-based participation throughout the process, to facilitate coordination, provide policy guarantee, and serve as the sounding board for proposed actions.
- In response to Committee discussions regarding the need for more expansive growth management tools, the MRD zoning article was presented and approved at the 1998 annual town meeting. The purpose of that innovative special permit review process was not to limit residential development, but to allow the town to incorporate a wider range of quality of life criteria with which to review development.
- A focus on senior housing came about in 1999. Long term residents became vocal about the need for diversified housing needs in town. The seniors made it clear they wanted to stay in Westwood, but in smaller homes which required less maintenance.
- The subsequent recodification of the zoning bylaw included some provisions dealing with senior housing. These provisions, along with others, were combined to create the SRD regulations.
- The SRD and MRD bylaws are meant to be very different.
- The Planning Board would have preferred petitioners of a pending warrant article to come before them and discuss issues they may have had with sections of the bylaw. If these articles were to pass, it appears future SRD development would be non-existent.
- An SRD application must have a minimum of five acres (a State Housing regulation) and the applicant must participate in the special permit process. The special permit process allows the Planning Board discretion based on certain criteria.
- An MRD application is tied more to the subdivision control law.
- The special permit requirements are included in the Planning Board's general rules and regulations.
- A recent senior residential development (High Street) was denied by the Planning Board because it did not meet certain standards. Standards usually considered involve safety, water issues, and the environment, amongst others.
- The special permit rules and regulations are not specific; they specify items to be included in the applicant's traffic and drainage studies, etc.
- Westwood Station will come before the Planning Board at some point for a special permit.

- With the subdivision control law (although a zoning change is contemplated), if plans are filed and approved by the Planning Board, then the zoning in effect would be in effect for eight years.
- Chairman Connors suggested the Planning Board plan to speak at subsequent public meetings to clarify this issue for residents, particularly those supporting the need for senior housing.

Education Subcommittee Report

Superintendent Antonucci, School Committee Chair Josepha Jowdy, and School Committee member Brian Kelly were present.

Lisa Pisano, Chair of the Education Subcommittee had provided members with a draft of her report to which she provided verbal comments. Lisa also expressed thanks to the School administration, School Committee, Pam Dukeman and Sheila Nee for their assistance and cooperation during the process.

Some member comments/questions included:

- Chairman Connors stated Education Subcommittee member Brian London could not attend tonight's meeting. However, via an email today to the Chairman, Brian wanted to express that the subcommittee worked well together but never would have been successful without Lisa's leadership, dedication, and hard work.

Chairman Connors also extended his appreciation to Lisa and the subcommittee for their efforts.

- Question whether the \$4M in unfunded capital requests is for all different items and does not include items that are double counted by requesting them multiple years.

Lisa will follow up with the School Department for an answer to that question.

- Teacher COLA salary increases are not tied to the CPI.
- Who suggested the utility reserve account proposed for FY07?

Pam Dukeman. The School Department believes it is a good idea; people feel less comfortable basing a budget on such uncertainty and separating utility expenses from the operating budgets seems like a good idea.

- 100% of eligible children attend the town's full-day kindergarten; approximately 20% of whom receive financial aid.
- The K-5 school model currently in place was discussed at length...its merits, cost benefits, etc.

Chairman Connors stated the former School Superintendent's first agenda item when he came to Westwood was to change to the K-5 model; it appeared to have been done very quickly. Josepha replied at the time the School Committee was convinced the change was better educationally and she believes that has been found to be the case.

Superintendent Antonucci replied if any changes are to occur in the current model, they will not be done for budget reasons. The K-5 model will be reviewed over the next few years and several factors will be involved in whatever the decision.

- Did the subcommittee review controllable vs. uncontrollable costs?

Subcommittee members have differing opinions on that question; Lisa's comments:

- Parts of the SPED program are controllable; for example, the School Department has made strides in creating in-town programs to service SPED students, rather than reliance on the more expensive out-of-district programs.
 - Salaries are very controllable.
 - This is not a bare bones budget; some other communities are looking at reducing teacher staff by 40 positions. Westwood has a good quality school system that residents support.
- Chairman Connors stated the importance of the ongoing teacher negotiations; that the administration must be cognizant of the town's ability to pay future salary increases.
 - Superintendent Antonucci replied education is a people-driven business and that teachers face the responsibility of educating sometimes 25 students each day.
 - Although they realized reductions had to be made to balance the FY07 budget, two subcommittee members did not support some of those reductions taken by the School Committee; specifically, those in the following areas:
 - SPED.
 - Middle School technology.
 - Athletic stipend payment to coaches.
 - A member expressed the need for the School Committee to set future direction and become more involved in publicly supporting the need for additional funding. Continual reliance on fees should not be part of our public education system.
 - Suggestion the School Committee look ahead 2-3 years and present those needs and the costs to the town.
 - Does the Superintendent think there has been an erosion of quality education in Westwood since his arrival?

Erosion of quality education does not happen within a few months, but over a much longer period.

- Suggestion the School Department consider reviewing similar communities' statistics to determine how Westwood compares and what they may be doing different. For example, according to the Department of Education, Winchester has low per pupil costs yet their MCAS scores are high.
- Chairman Connors expressed his disappointment with the limited public participation in the budget/town meeting process.

Chairman's Update

- Chairman Connors stated a Project Manager will probably be hired to be the point person and to manage the town's administration of the Westwood Station project.

Warrant Article Voting Attached

No Old or New Business Was Discussed.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:50 P.M.

Attachment: Article voting.

2006 Town Meeting Articles Voted			
Date	Article	Vote	
3.13	Planning Board – earth removal	Unanimous to Recommend	
3.13	Planning Board – housekeeping	Unanimous to Recommend	
3.13	Appendix “C” – Salaries of Elected Officials	Unanimous to Recommend	