



# BOARD OF FINANCE

Clifford J. Hurgin Municipal Center, 1 School Street  
Bethel, Connecticut 06801 Telephone: (203) 794-8501

## MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, January 10, 2012

7:00 p.m.

CJH Municipal Center – Meeting Room “A”

**PRESENT:** William Kingston, Chairman, Patricia Smithwick, Eileen Freebairn, Claudia Stephan, Gary Regan and Timothy Draper. Also in attendance were Comptroller Robert Kozlowski and First Selectman Matthew Knickerbocker.

**Call to order/Pledge of Allegiance:** William Kingston called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Public Comments:** Patricia Rist, Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission (requesting Open Space item be moved up on the agenda). Paul Szatkowski, John O’Neil, Robert Legnard, and Beth Cavagna all spoke in support of the purchase of the Open Space Property.

Timothy Draper made a motion, which was seconded by Claudia Stephan, to move Consideration of Purchase of Open Space Land, up on the agenda, to be discussed after consideration of meeting minutes. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.

**Minutes of December 13, 2011:** Patricia Smithwick made a motion, which was seconded by Gary Regan, to approve the minutes as presented. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.

### **Consideration of Purchase of Open Space Land:**

The Board of Selectmen had recommended to the Board of Finance, an appropriation of an amount not to exceed \$855,000 which represents 90% of the purchase price of \$950,000 (\$95,000 pledge from the Planning & Zoning Open Space Fund) to purchase open space property on the corner of Old Hawleyville Road and Plumtrees Road, subject to Special Town Meeting approval.

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TOWN OF BETHEL  
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Gary Regan made a motion, which was seconded by Claudia Stephan, to approve the Board of Selectmen's recommendation to purchase Open Space property.

Discussion ensued.

Timothy Draper questioned the P&Z Open Space Account and whether they could or would contribute more towards the purchase. Mr. Palmer explained that the P&Z has an account which accepts fees in lieu of open space; the account has approximately \$210,000. P&Z pledged \$95,000 towards this purchase and would like to retain funds in the account for various other items, including appraisals, possible seed money for other ventures, etc. He noted that no new funds were added to the account in 2011; the account had been built up over many years.

Steven Palmer explained that the Franc property has been a subject of interest for many, many years. The town now has an opportunity to purchase it. Mr. Palmer noted that the purchase and expenditure of funds to purchase the property is finite and we as the town control its destiny; whereas, if the property is developed, the costs (town services) would be in perpetuity.

Timothy Draper questioned whether a portion of the property could be sold off to a developer and half retained by the town. Town Counsel Martin J. Lawlor noted that the Franc family was not interested in splitting up the parcel. Mr. Palmer offered that the value to the property, which includes wetlands, is its entirety.

Use of the property was discussed. The property was always anticipated to be open space with perhaps passive recreational use. The Franc family has not put a restriction on the purchase for its use. The Town would be able to determine its future use if we owned it.

Comptroller Robert Kozlowski talked about financing the purchase; one of the suggestions was to finance it over a 3-5 year period. He noted a recent Bond Anticipation Note (BAN) rate was .3%; a similar rate would result in an approximate interest cost of \$7,700 over 5 years. Annually this would be approximately \$171,000 plus interest if done over a 5 year period.

William Kingston noted that he would like to see more residents participate in the legislative process than at a typical Special Town Meeting and suggested a town wide referendum.

Timothy Draper offered that he felt conflicted on the purchase; on one hand he would feel hypocritical in that this would take work away from fellow builders, and on the other hand, as an outdoorsman, believes in the benefit of outdoor/open space.

Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved. It was agreed to determine the method of financing at a future date.

**Chairman Report** – William Kingston gave a brief overview of the world economic climate and offered that there has been some good news in that the unemployment rate has gone down, 200,000 new jobs have been created, and there appears to be a slow trajectory of improvement.

**Comptroller Report:** Comptroller Robert Kozlowski passed out various reports. Discussion took place regarding the formatting of the monthly status reports. Comptroller Robert Kozlowski explained that the new computer system does not allow for the detailed reports like the old system in a succinct manner; they are still looking into ways to make the report more detailed and condensed.

**Changes in the Grand List** – Comptroller Robert Kozlowski noted that the Assessor is still compiling the Grand List; it is anticipated to increase slightly.

**Tax Collection Trends:** Comptroller Robert Kozlowski noted that tax collections are comparable to being the same as last year although we are ahead on back taxes since the Tax Collector recently held a Tax Sale.

**Non Tax Revenue:** Comptroller Robert Kozlowski advised that he does not anticipate any significant change to state revenues.

Comptroller Robert Kozlowski advised that they are still compiling the total costs related to the October storm; reimbursement by FEMA would be in 6-9 months. Accounts would be reimbursed accordingly.

He reminded the Board of Finance of the Fund Balance Policy he had passed out. He noted that the rating agencies would like to have the town have one in place.

**Discussion of 2012-2013 Budget including setting dates for budget presentations:**

William Kingston advised that the First Selectman's Office would coordinate establishing the dates for the budget presentations.

**Consideration of a recommendation from the Board of Selectmen to fund a full-time temporary position for the remainder of the current fiscal year in the Assessor's Office.**

Timothy Draper made a motion, which was seconded by Patricia Smithwick, to approve the recommendation from the Board of Selectmen to fund a full-time temporary position for the remainder of the current fiscal year in the Assessor's Office.

Discussion ensued. The Board of Selectmen had recommended funding this position. First Selectman Knickerbocker was present to explain the request. He noted that due to the workload required, the additional work created by the State of Connecticut and an employee injury necessitated the part-time employee to work more hours thereby using the funding more quickly than anticipated. He explained that it would be a budget neutral transfer, as there is funding in the wage contingency and contingency accounts.

William Kingston expressed concern that this request puts the Board of Finance in a dreadful position and that they should have been made aware of this earlier. The Board of Finance had deliberated and recommended keeping this position as a part-time position (due to economic reasons) and the budget approved by the voters contained funding only for a part-time position, offering that he felt this was being forced on the Board of Finance last minute and deceiving to the public and that if the Board of Finance. First Selectman Knickerbocker noted that there were several extraordinary circumstances that created this shortfall and that there was no intent to deceive anyone.

Assessor Ann Marie Heering reinforced the need and provided an in-depth explanation as to the workload of her office, staffing history, additional work required by the State, etc. She noted that there were extraordinary circumstances that led to having to use more hours for the part-time employee than originally planned: employee injury, the office needed to be covered, the public needed to be served and the office requirements (grand list, personal property, inspections, assessments, etc.) had to be met. She reiterated First Selectman Knickerbocker's sentiment that there was no intent to deceive, they fully expected normal office functions to return but, basically, there was just one thing after another. She and her staff worked through lunch hours and weekends just to get the work done. She noted that her office is the office that creates the grand list; this is a considerable task which requires a great deal of work.

Gary Regan expressed concern over the communication and the monthly reports. He noted that if they received monthly reports showing the account detail, the Board of

Finance would have been alerted to the funds being used more quickly than anticipated.

Voting in favor of the motion: Patricia Smithwick, Eileen Freebairn and Claudia Stephan. Voting against the motion: William Kingston, Gary Regan and Timothy Draper. Motion fails.

More discussion on the same topic ensued.

Second vote on the original motion netted the same results. Voting in favor of the motion: Patricia Smithwick, Eileen Freebairn and Claudia Stephan. Voting against the motion: William Kingston, Gary Regan and Timothy Draper. Motion fails.

Patricia Smithwick made a motion, which was seconded by Gary Regan, to fund for a part-time temporary position for the remainder of the current fiscal year in the Assessor's Office, funding to come from the wage contingency and/or contingency account. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.

The Assessor will provide monthly status reports on the situation.

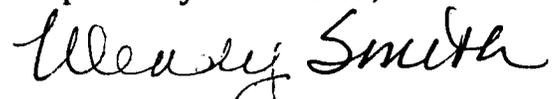
**Consideration of a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen regarding bonding for further Road Construction.**

William Kingston explained that this topic was on the agenda as he wanted to see about the feasibility of combining the road construction funding with the Open Space purchase for consideration on a referendum ballot, but was advised that this was not possible. First Selectman Knickerbocker did note that the Town of Bethel recently received notification of a \$500,000 STEAP grant for road construction related to the Stony Hill Sewer Project.

It was suggested to have Barry Bernabe, Financial Advisor, and Michael Forte, Pension Advisor, attend a future meeting to go over their respective roles and provide an update to the board.

As there was no further business on tonight's agenda, Patricia Smithwick made a motion, which was seconded by Timothy Draper, to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 p.m. Vote, all in favor, motion unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,



Wendy Smith, Recording Secretary