Finance and Warrant Committee

October 14, 2020

Dave Roberts, Michelle Persson Reilly, Michael Leahy, John Heffernan, Beth Pierce, and Kevin Preston present.

Kevin Preston called the meeting to order at 6:04. He gave the opportunity for public comment. There was none.

Ms. Baker explained that it is the town’s suggestion that article 2 be indefinitely postponed.

Ms. Baker explained that article 6 is used to appropriate money for the fiscal season to come.

Ms. Baker explained that town management is suggesting article 7 be indefinitely postponed.

Leon Goodwin explained that his suggestion is article 8 be indefinitely postponed.

Mr. Preston asked if Mr. Goodwin had information on the estimated tax rate.

Mr. Goodwin explained that article 9 pertains to the tax workoff for seniors and veterans meeting certain qualifications. He noted that the people typically taking advantage of this program are in vulnerable populations.

Mr. Preston asked what the result of this article would be if a coronavirus vaccine was created before next town meeting. Mr. Goodwin answered that he found it unlikely but it would legally be in effect.

Mr. Heffernan asked if any article 9 work was performed outside of town hall.

Marty Lindemann arrived at 6:14

Dan Driscoll, town moderator spoke on article 12. He explained that his work has been largely consumed trying to run alternative town meetings and other remote work. Mr. Preston asked what he suggested they recommend for the article. Mr. Driscoll suggested they recommend accepting the report.

Ms. Baker suggested Article 13 be indefinitely postponed.

Ms. Baker explained that article 17 pertains to the establishment of the veteran’s council assistance fund. This represents a tax bill ‘check-mark’ for certain citizens.

Ms. Persson Reilly asked the process for the distribution of these funds. Ms. Baker answered that it is based on chapter 115 state guidelines that are very strictly coded.

Marty asked what veterans receive from signing up for this program. Mr. Hamilton explained that it could include fuel assistance, rent assistance, and food assistance. It is primarily for dire-need situations for its members. Mr. Lindemann asked for more details. Mr. Hamilton explained that it is a case-by-case, month-by-month program, where participants are not expected to request aid on a regular basis.

Mr. Goodwin explained that article 18 is the town accepting the BRAVE act, which allows the town to offer tax-relief benefits to veterans and veteran’s families. Mr. Preston asked if this only pertained the parents, per the wording in the article. Mr. Goodwin explained that it was intended to allow them to adjust the family’s tax credit. Mr. Preston asked if this included spouses. Mr. Goodwin explained that there are other programs for spouses. Mr. Preston asked that Mr. Goodwin prepare information on what other towns acceptance rates have been for this program.

Mr. Lindemann asked for an estimated cost of this program. Ms. Baker said she could only recall one family using it, and that it cost the town under $10,000.

Ms. Baker explained that she is recommending article 19 be indefinitely postponed.

Selectman Macdonald took the floor to speak on Article 30. This was deferred at the spring town meeting. He explained that this article is an attempt to ‘head-off’ the town’s bevy of requests for additional liquor licenses. Doing this through the warrant precludes the town having to create special, 1-off licenses. He explained that only 1 of the applicant attendants at the selectboard meeting was opposed to this article. He noted an understanding of the advantages to a business of having such a license.

Mr. Macdonald explained that there is currently a $5000 1-time fee for a special liquor license, but this article allows the select board to set the price.

Mr. Preston stated agreement with Mr. Macdonalds evaluation of the situation, but raised the concern that this could create undue burden on current liquor license holders when combined with the coronavirus pandemic. Mr. Macdonald suggested that this legislation will not be enacted for 1-2 years

Mr. Lindemann asked if this increased or decreased economic freedom. Mr. Macdonald said that he believes it increases economic freedom. Mr. Lindemann noted that this gives the selectboard the power to set the fee of their liquor licenses. Mr. Macdonald explained that there would be a public discussion to set those new fee levels.

Mr. Macdonald explained that Dedham was denied the Streets & Spaces funding because of the timing of their request, not, as the previously believed, that they had received funding for a different street.

Mr. Lindemann noted that this level of discretion with a variable fee basis can raise concerns of discrimination. Mr. Macdonald explained that they would not be variable fees, simply fees that would be set.

Mr. Heffernan asked how the license distribution between package store, full liquor, and beer and line licenses were determined. Mr. Macdonald explained that they were determined based on expectation of what could get through the administration.

Mr. Heffernan noted that chapter 138 contains a calculation for liquor licenses. He asked if that calculation creates the total number for our town. Mr. Macdonald answered that it sets the quota, and very few towns do not have a quota.

Mr. Roberts asked if this article passed, it would eliminate the applications for site-specific special liquor licenses. Mr. Macdonald answered that anybody can file an article at town meeting, and this does not change that. This would likely create a system where town meeting can be comfortable rejecting these special requests which can now go through proper channels.

Ms. Persson Reilly asked about the process, were this article to pass. Mr. Macdonald explained that it would be a selective process with the goal of laying out criteria.

Ms. Persson Reilly asked what occurs with restaurants that close but have licenses. Mr. Macdonald explained that that would depend on the license. Site-specific licenses still need to stay there.

Mr. Lindemann asked about the licenses requests from the shopping center near the Panera. Mr. Macdonald explained that he would have to look into it.

Mr. Roberts requested an estimate for the expected outcome of the upcoming appropriations to the Robin Reyes fund.

Mr. Heffernan asked if this warrant would address the public safety building. Mr. Goodwin answered yes.

Mr. Roberts asked how the guaranteed maximum price was being negotiated on this public safety building. Mr. Goodwin answered that the BPCC has been involved as well as Commodore.

Mr. Lindemann asked if they would be looking at a level of redesign on the building. Mr. Goodwin explained that early changes were made to try to avoid having to do a full re-evaluation in front of the planning board.

Mr. Lindemann noted that the parking garage represents an immense expense, and some people have suggested eliminating it and using the nearby county parking lot. Mr. Goodwin explained that they believe their current method of saving on this construction is effective, and that the delay to starting this building could represent significant additional cost.

Mr. Lindemann motioned to adjourn, Mr. Leahy seconded. It was approved 7-0, unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 7:15.