

Twos and Zeros by Alex Hertz

BOS meeting 12/4/19

As a foreword, the Ayer Police Department is doing a holiday drive for new, unused, and packaged toys, which can be dropped off at Carlyn's. Instated has been a winter parking ban, from now until April 15th which states that one cannot park in the Town of Ayer from 12 AM - 2 PM, and one cannot park there during a snowstorm. Also, the 4th annual candlelight street tree lighting ceremony, on Saturday, December 7th, went very well - as I had aided in the recording of the event - and the town would like to thank all participants, including the marchers, the Victorial Carolers, and the ice sculptors.

Mostly discussed herein will be the mathematical enigma that is the taxes of the town, the inauguration of a new town clerk, a few extrapolations on previously discussed traffic issues, general installations, renewals of various warrants, grants, and licenses, further discussing prevalent contentions with the assimilation of Devens, and the meeting concluded with plans to agendize the decennial town government study.

First, the Town would like to warmly welcome their new clerk, Shaun C. Copeland, who was voted in on Monday, December 2nd, and a thank you to all of the voters who made it out despite the harsh weather conditions. Welcome, Mr. Copeland, and the Town is excited in anticipation of starting a wonderful year of working with you.

The second order of business was the National Grid Public Hearing Poll on Sandy Pond Road. National Grid is to install 3 SO polls that will aid in covering several houses and various swaths of the area with high-speed internet; these polls will be northeast of the central line of intersection of East Maine, 100 feet, 150 feet, and 850 feet by the edge of the road's traffic rotary. Though a few logistical concerns were brought up, Javier Morales, a representative from National Grid, quenched those avowals by informing the Board that via aerial construction, not many trees will have to be cut down, the implementation will be environmentally sound, and every construction will comply with the National Disabled Association's guidelines; the polls were then approved.

The next subject was the Town's tax plans. While they are quite lengthy, a summary of the contemporary fiscal situation will be presented: Tom Hogan, the assessing administrator of Ayer for 23 years and John Cacomins, the newest board member, discussed with the board the most favorable tax plan moving forward, and there were three options for our selective tax break options: Open space, residential, or commercial. Residential was most compatible with the town, and thus that option, Residential Factor .08731 (essentially a metric for calculating the tax price) was approved. The FY (fiscal year) 2020 valuation percentages are as follows: Residential% stands at 67%, while CIP (Commercial, Industrial, and Personal) are at 33%. Since we have such a strong and diverse tax base, we are ranked very highly fiscally in Massachusetts; we're #63, while Boston is #65, and our town's tax rebate reached over \$1.3bn this year. We really do stand out, from an evaluatory standpoint.

In lighter news, there is a change order for Waterline Industries regarding an issue that was discussed previously in regards to the dangers of flooding. They have completed the first phase of the wastewater treatment project. The rest of the construction will require concrete, reinforcing steel, curbs around the base, stair nosing, and test pits; the total would lie at \$14,140.50, for signature, and the total contract is evaluated at \$2,332,072.52.

Next, we have an update and an extrapolation on the Groton-Harvard Road Intersection ordeal. As a recap, there are indeed a few traffic signs present, but the entire crossroad still remains very messy, disorganized, and ill-defined. There have been 16 accidents there since 2015, and the majority of them failed to yield to oncoming traffic. To better understand and deal with these complications, the Town is considering hiring a traffic engineer to analyze the traffic and the crash data in order to develop cost estimate alternatives to remedy this issue. Traffic engineering cannot be easily put into context, but a few of the proposed ideas include

- Flashing LED STOP signs in each direction, cost of ~\$5,000
- Additional signage on Groton-Harvard road and Central Ave to warn motorists, ~\$2,000
- Completing an engineering report/Preliminary design
- Defining the lanes further

The Town is doing its due diligence to ensure the safety of all of the citizenry.

In that same vein of traffic, there has been a proposition for a grant of easement for an electric utility installation on o Park Street Parking Lot. This small triangle next to the fire station will be repaved, as it sees its fair share of use. Further, there have been propositions to construct electrical vehicle charging stations, as there is a \$26,000 grant and the prospect of modernizing the town as an incentive to do so. Further, underground, there is a proposal to install an internet network, though the cost for uprooting the ground and the installation is undetermined at this time, though its costs will be covered by the grant.

Town Manager, Robert Pontbriand, presented an administrative update for recent occurrences: First, a thank-you to Susan Copeland, the registrars, and the constables that allowed the election of a new town clerk, now Shaun Copeland, to go very smoothly despite the snow. The capital planning process for the FY2020 budget can all be found under the capital web page, and there is a proposal to transmit the budget to the BoS the first Friday after New Year's.

On Monday, Dec 9th, there will be a public ribbon ceremony, and all are invited to the park. The next best initial steps will be taken for the Depot's steps, and a bathroom building is being designed for the spring, which would cost an approximate \$250,000 earmark for the state, though an extra \$750,000 is available if necessary. Further, ideas are being put into motion for the installation and construction of a sidewalk for Park St., and to get the utilities underground.

For Groton-Maine Rd. as well, there is a footprint design plan for the sidewalk, and for the intersection of Park and Maine St., there are plans to revitalize and repair any obstacles presented there.

The following motion was to approve the renewal of all licenses for 2020. The BoS approved all of business license renewals, except Tiny's Restaurant, subject to all requirements. Tiny's license will be approved dependent on the submission of all paperwork and requirements.

Selectman Houde then presented the idea of a jurisdictional committee for Devens; he has been meeting with Shirley, Harvard, and business residents, and has been charged with the planning for and initiating discussions with the appropriate parties with the goal of presenting a plan to Ayer voters to resume jurisdiction over the land presently part of Devens. Several factors must be considered, which include but are not limited to

- The impact on services
- Liabilities within the current infrastructure
- Opportunities for growth
- Managing new tax revenue stream
- Structural and housing prospects in Fitchburg Square
- The integration of Devens residents and the impact on Ayer residents
- Potential future housing projects within Devens

A consequential fact that may excite many citizens of Ayer is that if we are able to resume our authority over Devens, as it used to be, the fireworks for Pirone Park may be more of a possibility than a liability; a pipe dream. However, a committee must be formed to facilitate the discussion for these actions, and this committee may be composed of

- 1 member of the Ayer Board of Selectmen (Scott Houde)
- 2 members of the Ayer Planning Board
- 5 Residents (including 1 from Devens)
- Ayer Director of Econ and Community Development

This will impact these towns for generations, so much care is being taken in the consideration of such actions.

A priority is acquiring a better, more accurate map of the area to survey our potential prospects, as we must consider any and all relevant proprietary reverberations. The federal government must be dealt with in this process as well, and negotiations and compromises must be made over historical boundaries with our sister towns (Harvard, Shirley, etc.) Mass Consultant must be considered as well.

The formation of Devens jurisdictional committees are also significant; Selectmen Livingston, Community and Economic Development Director, Alan Manoian, and Manager Pontbriand are all involved in resolving existing contentions, as this issue of disposition involves numerous permutations.

A critical, creative approach is being taken, as the federal aspect and constructions such as the aquifer cannot be neglected. The town is making an admirable effort to resolve these contentions once and for all, and to get seats at the proverbial table to self-advocate in regards to our complications and how we see fit to resolve them.

Finally, the Town is responsible for conducting another government study. The studies are conducted decennially, and a brief synopsis entails the following: The committee's charge was with evaluating the current structure of Ayer's government, finding structures similar to Ayer, and providing structures that would enhance organizational efficiency. After a town vote, the board members were reduced from 5 to 3, and further analysis of the committee and the town's analogous structures will be held. Future plans also entail deciding what the makeup of this committee would be, and affirming what would need to be done to form this committee.

This valuable esprit de corps has led to widespread success of the town, and the fact that there are always so many contemporaneous cases to keep up with is a testament to how thorough and diligent we are as a town, and as a people. Thank you, and have a happy holiday.