

Town of Plymouth
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Plymouth Town Council
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Minutes

April 2, 2012

Call to Order: Acting Mayor DiAnna Schenkel called the scheduled April 2, 2012, Town of Plymouth Public Hearing Meeting to order at 6:01 p.m., in the Community Room, Town Hall.

Roll Call: Present were Town Councilman Remie Ferreira, Town Councilman Richard Foote, Town Councilwoman Susan Murawski, Acting Mayor/Town Councilwoman DiAnna Schenkel, and Town Councilman Tom Zagurski. Also in attendance were Director of Finance David Bertnagel, Public Works Director/Town Engineer Anthony Lorenzetti, and Town Attorney Salvatore Vitrano.

Fire Exits Notification

Acting Mayor Schenkel noted the Fire Exits for the record.

Pledge of Allegiance

Acting Mayor Schenkel led the Plymouth Town Council and the Public Audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

To Consider and act upon a resolution entitled “Resolution Appropriating \$9,800,000 for Various Capital Improvement Projects And Authorizing The Issuance Of \$9,800,000 bonds Of The town To Meet Said Appropriation And Pending The Issuance Thereof The Making Of Temporary Borrowings For Such Purpose”.

Acting Mayor Schenkel stated that copies of the Resolution had been provided for the Public on the table at the back of the room.

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To Consider and act upon a resolution entitled “Resolution Appropriating \$9,800,000 Cont’d.

Town Councilman Ferreira read the Resolution into the record as follows:

RESOLVED: That the Resolution entitled “RESOLUTION APPROPRIATING \$9,800,000.00 FOR VARIOUS CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS AND AUTHORIZING THE ISSUANCE OF \$9,800,000.00 IN BONDS OF THE TOWN TO MEET SAID APPROPRIATION AND PENDING THE ISSUANCE THEREOF, THE MAKING OF TEMPORARY BORROWINGS FOR SUCH PURPOSE.”

Town Councilwoman Murawski made a motion, seconded by Town Councilman Ferreira, to accept said Resolution as read into the record.

Acting Mayor Schenkel stated that at this time the Council would take Public Comment on the language of the Resolution.

To consider and take Public Comment regarding the “Resolution Appropriating \$9,800,000 For Various Capital Improvement Projects And Authorizing The Issuance Of \$9,800,000 Bonds Of The Town To Meet Said Appropriation And Pending The Issuance Thereof The Making Of Temporary Borrowings For Such Purpose”

Pattie DeHuff, 20 Lynn Avenue, Terryville, stated that she wanted to remind the Council that the Town had a policy that was called Level Debt Service and that she noticed that it was kind of being downplayed at this Referendum since the last Public Hearing. She further stated that while the intent of the policy may be to try to prevent spikes in the mill rate from year to year, it also has an opposite affect of not being able to reduce taxes.

Pattie DeHuff stated that this year, like no other year in the past ten years, half of the Town’s debt was being paid off, citing the Plymouth Center School and the Sewer Treatment Plant.

Pattie DeHuff stated that the Board of Finance had determined that “we the people” could afford to pay \$3.3 million as a Debt Service payment (kind of like a monthly credit card payment).

Pattie DeHuff stated that as of July 1, 2012, the \$3.3 million dollar figure would drop in half to \$1.65 million. She further stated that the Town could take the \$1.65 million and pay cash for these projects.

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Pattie DeHuff stated that she had calculated it out and that going out to the calendar year 2016, the number would be \$1.65-\$1.67 million dollars every single year to pay cash for these projects and that she wanted to go on record as being in favor of fixing the Town roads and the North Main Street Bridge, but that it was a matter of how the Town paid for it.

Pattie DeHuff stated that the dilemma the Town had was that the Level Debt Service was preventing the Town from paying cash for the projects in question.

Pattie DeHuff stated that she wanted to remind the Council that when the Town had the June Referendum vote everyone was told that the Seymour Road Project would cost \$1.75 million dollars and when the Referendum was defeated, the \$1.75 million dollar changed to \$3 million dollars and questioned why the figure had gone up.

Pattie DeHuff stated that when the Town had the June Referendum vote everyone was told that the North Main Street Bridge would cost \$1.2 million dollars and three months later when the new figures came out it jumped to \$1.6 million dollars.

Pattie DeHuff stated that at the last Board of Finance Meeting she learned that there was a special fund that only the Board of Finance could spend money out of it and if the tax-payers approved \$3 million dollars for Seymour Road and the project came in under that amount, the money would be transferred into what was called the Unassigned Capital Project Fund.

Pattie DeHuff stated that the people had no say in where the monies went, noting that it would go to a Capital Project determined by the Board of Finance.

Pattie DeHuff stated that another fund in the General Fund that was \$1.6 million dollars and was unassigned, and so there were two different line items unassigned; one being the General Fund and a second unassigned Capital Projects Fund in the amount of \$700,000.00 to \$750,000.00.

Pattie DeHuff stated that if the Town didn't have the Level Debt Service, the Town could take the \$1.65 million dollars that the Town wouldn't have to pay because it had paid off the Plymouth Center School, as well as the \$700,000.00 sitting in the unassigned fund and that only the Board of Finance could make a determination on how it would be spent.

Pattie DeHuff stated that it would be a nice chunk of money to get some projects done in Town without going into debt.

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Pattie DeHuff stated that she would urge the Council to not go the Route of the State and Federal Government, which was debt, and that she learned that LOCIP money was borrowed State money that was given to towns, and questioned if that was a wise use of taxpayer dollars, noting that she did not think so.

Pattie DeHuff asked the Town Council to consider these things as they consider pursuing a Referendum and urged the Council to consider not setting a date, but tackling the issue of getting rid of Level Debt Service, as well taking the money in the line item and applying it to the Town roads and bridges. She further stated that this action would also bring some tax relief to the taxpayers.

Catherine Kosak, 201 Harwinton Avenue, Plymouth, stated that at the last Public Hearing, Harwinton Avenue was mentioned as one of the roads that would be worked on and noted that it was worked on approximately three years ago and questioned why the Town would be spending more money on this particular road, unless it was a section she was unaware of, but from Route 6 up to Armbruster Road was all redone and didn't seem like a wise expenditure when there was so much more need on other Town roads.

Catherine Kosak stated that she had urged Council to consider four (4) questions, noting that it may cost more, but if the whole thing goes down, the Council will never know why and felt the taxpayers deserved the right to vote on each issue separately.

Matthew Tellier, 238 Preston Road, Terryville, stated that during his last PowerPoint presentation, the roads, which were being addressed, were shown on different maps and the section of Harwinton Avenue being addressed was from Armbruster Road to Seymour Road and this was just an extension of the previous work that was done a few years back.

William Allread, Makara Street, Terryville, stated that he wanted to point out that when the Referendum passes that all of the roads laid out were actually bypass roads to Route 6 through Town.

William Allread stated that when there was a fire, or some kind of a disaster in the downtown area, the bypass roads were heavily used and they should be incorporated into the design.

William Allread stated that commuters and Town shoppers traveling on Route 6 would be very happy with this recommendation.

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Ralph Zovich, 4 Knight Lane, Terryville, stated that there had been a serious misunderstanding and a distortion of what the Level Debt Service was, noting that Level Debt Service was not a minimum expenditure; it was never intended to inflate the Town’s Debt Service to a minimum. He further stated that if anything, the Board of Finance intended it to be a maximum and that it was a cap, not to exceed.

Ralph Zovich stated that he was not clairvoyant, but should a future Board of Finance or future Town Council decided to never authorize another bond issue, the Town would pay its debt according to the legal schedule that the Town was obligated to pay and Debt Service would go down. He further stated that maintaining the Town’s debt at nine (9) percent of the General Fund Budget was never intended to be a minimum, but instead a maximum.

Ralph Zovich stated that if the Town were to go with five-year bonding, the Town would pay off the principal and interest on this project in five years at historically low interest rates. He further stated that Debt Service could always be paid off, but what the Town was trying to do was to avoid increasing Debt Service and didn’t want it to spike up, noting that would trigger a tax increase.

Ralph Zovich stated that the Town was retiring the bond payments for the Plymouth Center School and Waste Treatment Plant, noting that they totaled approximately \$1.6 million dollars in principal and interest. He further stated that the Town could take that money and transfer it into the General Fund, but the problem was that in years past every time a Referendum on the Budget was defeated, the first thing the Town did was cut Capital Outlays.

Ralph Zovich stated that it was inappropriate to put a multi-year, long-term project, such as Seymour Road, in an Operating Budget.

Ralph Zovich stated that Pattie DeHuff had two of the funds mixed up, noting that the General Fund was the Operating Budget of the Town of Plymouth, all the day-to-day operations for the Town Departments, i.e., salaries, wages, material, supplies, including vehicles, (which were purchased out of the General Fund), etc. He further stated that the Debt Service was also paid out of the General Fund.

Ralph Zovich stated that Debt Service was nine (9) percent of the General Fund Budget and would not increase taxes, however the other 91 percent of the General Fund Budget would increase the taxes and if anyone was interested in that portion they should come to the Board of Finance Public Hearing on April 23, 2012.

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Ralph Zovich stated that there was a Fund Balance in the General Fund of \$1,680,000.00 and that it declined last year because the Town came up short in its revenue collections and that was the Town’s Emergency Reserve (in the General Fund) to pay for unforeseen emergencies.

Ralph Zovich stated that the Capital Projects Fund, alluded to previously by Pattie DeHuff, had been set up years ago to handle these multi-year projects and noted that the Government Accounting Standards does not allow the co-mingling of the funds. He further stated that that a Town could not issue a bond and receive money from the investors and put it into the General Fund. Ralph Zovich stated that it had to go into a separate controlled account and that was what the purpose of the Capital Project Fund.

Ralph Zovich stated that there was approximately \$700,000.00 in the Unassigned Fund (previously known as the Undesignated Fund Balance) but that was comparable to having a balance in one’s checking account and that one had to have money in the checking account in order to write checks. He further stated that the Town could not start a project without having money in the account.

Ralph Zovich stated that the Board of Finance does not make the transfers; the Town Council authorizes the transfers and then they are approved when the Budget, or in this case the Bonding, was approved.

Ralph Zovich stated that towns such as Avon, Redding, Greenwich, Simsbury, had enough money on hand to pay with cash and that those towns could actually fund the whole \$3 million dollar Road Project; however the Town of Plymouth could not. He further stated that was what multi-year financing was for. Ralph Zovich noted that no one could build a house for cash, noting that a person borrows the money from the bank as a Construction Loan and noted that the money was not given out until the actual construction began.

Ralph Zovich stated that the Town of Plymouth only put \$650,000.00 per year into the Town’s Capital Outlays in the General Fund budget to cover all the needs of the Town, which included small equipment, vehicles, and one-time expenditures.

Ralph Zovich recommended combining the Budget Referendum, to be held on or before May 3, 2012, per Charter requirements, with the Bonding Referendum to save expenses and noted that the Town might see a better turnout. He further stated that he thought it might alleviate confusion, as well, noting that the Referendums would be only a week or two apart from each other.

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Rodney Houle, 16 Frankie Lane, Terryville, Chairman, Capital Improvements Committee, stated that this issue was not a “us versus them” issue and that the entire Town would win if this work was accomplished.

Rodney Houle stated that the five-member Capital Improvements Committee receives assistance from the Municipal Facilities Committee, consisting of 14 Town residents who were volunteers that want to make the Town a better place to live.

Rodney Houle stated that the Committees were trying to work with the Town Engineer, the Mayor, the Director of Finance, the Town Council, and the Board of Finance to improve the Town’s infrastructure.

Rodney Houle stated that the \$9.8 million dollars was the first step in the project and that they would be utilizing the \$30,000.00 Road Study for the major work, as well as the two Engineering Studies. He further stated that there would be no Construction Manager to oversee the work, the Town Staff and Committees would be taking care of the oversight.

Rodney Houle stated that the Town had to take care of the safety of the citizens noting the flooding issues in the neighborhoods and businesses, noting that Beach Street was impassable during heavy rains.

Rodney Houle stated that this was the route to take noting that there were a lot of experts on both Committees that were willing to oversee the project and donate their time and expertise.

John Wunsch, Armbruster Road, Terryville, noting that he was a Council member when the Level Debt Service had been approved by the Council, questioned and stated that the Level Debt Service would limit the amount of money that the Town would spend in the year to \$3.3 million dollars (total) and that if the projects were not approved and another dime wasn’t spent, that money would not go to a mysterious fund and the Town would not continue to carry the \$3.3 million dollars down the road. He further stated that if the Town paid off a half a million dollars this year, the Town would not collect the money and hide it somewhere.

John Wunsch stated that the debt would go down and the Town would get tax relief, however in the meantime the roads would crumble around us.

Ralph Zovich stated that John Wunsch’s statements were correct.

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John Wunsch question and stated that he understood that because of the Level Debt Service, the Town could not borrow more than what it had paid off.

Ralph Zovich stated that John Wunsch’s understanding was correct; the Town had to stay under that cap.

John Wunsch stated that if the Town paid off \$500,000.00 this year the Town could re-bond \$500,000.00, not two million, not anything over what had been paid off in the debt year. John Wunsch stated that Level Debt Service was very simple, it was not magic, not witchcraft, etc.

Ernest Pickhardt, 3 Burger Road Terryville, questioned if Bemis Street, Smith Street and High Street were included in the Engineering Studies and if they would be rebuilt at this time.

Matthew Tellier stated that the Bemis Street area mentioned by Mr. Pickhardt would not be addressed, it went to the idea of an Engineering Study and noted that the residents felt (from comments received at the previous Bonding Proposal) that before the Town authorized larger expenditures for streets such as Bemis, Todd Hollow Road, etc., that Engineering Studies should be done prior. He further stated that these studies would help with the true costs, as well.

Matthew Tellier stated that the area questioned by Mr. Pickhardt would be in a future Bonding Proposal.

When questioned by Ernest Pickhardt, Anthony Lorenzetti stated that the North Street Bridge would include engineering to see what needed to be done as part of the project.

Ernest Pickhardt stated that the Townspeople needed to keep in mind that in some instance the Town has to have the money for an entire project before the work could begin and that was done with a bond issue or a mortgage for a homeowner.

Melanie Church, 328 Main Street, Terryville, stated that she believed Seymour Road would take three years to do, noting that it wasn’t a rush and the Town could save for it.

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Melanie Church stated that the amount changed, noting that the Town was now going to make a boulevard out of it, with flowers being put in the center by volunteers and the Town didn't need that, it needed a road.

Melanie Church stated that in October the Town had an emergency because the roads failed and the Town was going to spend a million dollars because it could be done without the taxpayers say. She further stated that the emergency roads were not on the list including Todd Hollow, Bemis Street and that only a design and study for Bemis Street was shown.

Melanie Church stated that the roads could be changed so she felt it was a wish list.

Melanie Church stated that she believed the Town had cash to do some of this work and the proposal was general and she did not believe it would pass.

Melanie Church stated that she wanted to compliment Town Councilman Zagurski and Town Councilwoman Murawski for requesting that the questions be separate, and stated that she felt people had been clear and that they wanted the questions specific and that she would be voting no.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that the Town had been working with FEMA on the portion of Bemis Street from the Industrial Park to Harwinton Avenue and on the damage which had been incurred in August from Storm Irene and that the Town was in the process of trying to get that resolved.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that originally, there had been two projects on Seymour Road, one being Seymour Road and the other how Lake Winfield operates (water quality) and that some things had been included in the design to try to keep the water quality as good as possible.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that tying in existing sidewalks on Seymour Road had also been included.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that there were a few people on Seymour Road that did not have sanitary sewers and that was being looked at, as well.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that ledge on Seymour Road would have to be removed and that sewers would have to be tied in.

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Anthony Lorenzetti stated that the latest price for Seymour Road was a result of an Engineering estimate that had been done by the Consultants who had been brought on board.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that he was a professional Engineer, however he was not capable of putting the necessary man-hours that the Consultants put into these types of projects. He further stated that many towns with Engineers also hire Consultants.

When questioned by Town Councilman Zagurski regarding the sanitary sewers, Anthony Lorenzetti stated that it covered just a small section (200 feet) and that when a town blows out ledge it was something that a town would look at regarding any possible sewer work that might be needed. He further stated that it was just a couple of homes.

When questioned by Town Councilman Zagurski, Anthony Lorenzetti stated that storm water sewers were a part of the projects that would be tied in from up on Ridge Road.

Town Councilwoman Schenkel, referencing artist rendition of proposed road verses actual bid, requested that Anthony Lorenzetti speak a little about the planters previously mentioned as to whether or not they were a requirement or a wish list item.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that the potential increase in speed on Seymour Road had been examined and that the island with granite curbing was looked at. He further stated that it was one possibility to slow people down at the bottom of the hill by Lake Winfield.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that the Town would be listening to people in the neighborhood to see if that was something that might be a concern, or not. He further stated that the Town tries to look at past projects to deal with problems.

Joseph Longo, 134 Seymour Road, Terryville, stated that that he lived on a corner road on Seymour Road for 32 years and that the road was a risk to the daily High School walkers, as well as residents and dogs in the area that also walk it daily.

Joseph Longo stated that the runoff from Harwinton Avenue washes across his front yard.

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Joseph Longo stated that speeding on Seymour Road was also a concern and that he had vehicles that had driven across his lawn speeding and that he had one vehicle hit the tree on the center of his property.

Joseph Longo stated that Seymour Road was way over due for repairs and that he doesn't use it if he can help it, he utilizes Harwinton Avenue to Route 72.

Joseph Longo stated that there were numerous ruts and potholes that do damage to vehicles traveling the road, even at a minimum speed of 25 miles per hour.

Joseph Longo stated that he hoped the Town would straighten out the dangerous curve on the corner of Seymour Road and Ridge Road.

Anthony Lorenzetti stated that straightening the curve would also be looked at.

Joseph Longo stated that the “no thru trucks” sign had been taken down on the road and need to be put back up.

Joseph Long stated that he wanted to thank everyone for everything that had been done to date to examine the Seymour Road work and noted that he realized there were other roads in Town that needed attention, as well, but that the work needed to be done gradually, one road at a time and that people had to understand that the more severe roads had to come first.

Town Councilwoman Murawski read a letter (see attachment) addressed to the Mayor/Town Council, received from Vincent Klimas (see attachment) dated April 2, 2012, into the record.

Adjournment

Town Councilwoman Murawski made a motion, seconded by Town Councilman Foote, to adjourn at 6:59 p.m. This motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Acting Recording Secretary

Attachment (on file in Town Clerk's Office)