

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

As part of longer-term planning and oversight by the Board of Selectmen, a Special Town Meeting (STM) was held in December 2005 for the purpose of the residents voting on whether or not the Town should purchase the Minuteman property (104 acres for \$4 million) under the State's right-of-first refusal section of Chapter 61. The process the Selectmen have incorporated over the past couple of years regarding land that is coming out of Chapter 61 status is to have various boards/committees review the property for potential municipal use. If there is enough interest in a property, the Board exercises the Town's right-of-first refusal. The property then comes before a Town Meeting where the residents decide whether or not the Town will actually buy the parcel.

During the December 2005 Special Town Meeting, the School Building Committee (SBC) made a presentation of a potential school use for the property. Voters rejected both the school proposal as well as the purchase of the Minuteman property by the Town.

Following the voters' rejection of the recommendation of the SBC, the Board met in January with representatives of the SBC and the School Committee to discuss an alternate approach. The following month, the Board voted to create an 11-member "School Building Task Force" (SBTF) with very specific objectives and expectations for a presentation at the 2007 Annual Town Meeting in May 2007. Membership of the SBTF was designed to reflect a broad range of perspectives on the school facilities issue. In addition, a non-voting facilitator was also included on the team to enable the chairperson to participate fully in the deliberations as well as to facilitate the conversation at meetings. During February, interviews of applicants were completed and appointments were made jointly by the Board and Stow members of the Regional School Committee.

Another issue addressed during the year was land banking. A majority of the Board that was in place in 2005 voted in favor of this strategy as did a majority of the 2006 Board. Basically land banking is the purchase of land for a variety of municipal needs, even if there is no specific need identified at the time of the purchase. Several Board members are concerned that the town has very little land for such things as affordable housing, a community center, expanded schools, a larger fire station, etc. The majority opinion is that property acquired for land banking is really an investment in the town's long-term future and that such proactive planning is very important; much like the right-of-first refusal mechanism regarding Chapter 61 land. The Board expects to use the findings of the Municipal Land Use Committee along with the Master Plan and Open Space Committee report to help establish priorities for any land acquired through land banking plan and/or right-of-first refusal on Chapter 61 land.

The Special Town Meeting in December 2005 approved creation of an Agricultural Commission, and the Board appointed members the following February. The purpose of this Commission is to serve as a facilitator and advocate for farming and agriculture in Stow. The Commission will also provide dispute resolution services and help the Town promote and protect agricultural interests.

The Board has been looking at the town's organization chart in an effort to identify areas of overlapping responsibilities and opportunities to eliminate committees that have completed their work. In this regard, the Board wishes to thank the members of the Municipal Land Use Committee. After presenting their final report in September, the Board agreed with their request to be disbanded.

On May 10, just after the Annual Town Meeting and election, the Board welcomed the two newest members: Tom Ruggiero and Jason Robart. Janet Wheeler and Steve Dungan were elected Chair and Clerk, respectively, for the new term.

Every Board member serves as a liaison to one or more other boards and committees. These liaisons provide updates at nearly every meeting in an effort to stay abreast of activities across the community. In addition, at least one Board member attends the monthly "TriTown" meetings of officials from Stow, Lancaster, and Bolton. These sessions have been helpful in sharing ideas and developing synergies.

Every year, the Board must perform various administrative tasks, and 2006 was no exception. Examples include:

- Approving numerous appointments
- Conducting hearings related to animal complaints, street acceptances, tax classification, utility pole locations, and unregistered vehicles
- Approving various licenses
- Approving documents related to debt activity
- Conducting budget reviews
- Approving labor contracts
- Granting permits for special events
- Responding to requests for documents under the Freedom of Information Act.

During a discussion late in the year, the Board considered ways to identify the issues with the most strategic impact on the town. There was agreement that more time should be devoted to the priorities, and it is possible the Board may begin holding an extra meeting each month if necessary.

Creation of more affordable housing received renewed attention when the Housing Partnership visited the Board in October. During the May 2005 Annual Town Meeting, voters agreed to accept a new state law allowing cities and towns to establish Municipal Affordable Housing Trusts. The Partnership requested that the Board implement this vote by appointing trustees, and the Board expects to do so early in 2007. The law authorizing these trusts allows communities to collect funds for housing and to segregate them out of the general budget into an Affordable Housing Trust.

A very critical issue that arose in 2006 was the lack of a central water supply in Lower Village and the likely impact on the business owners in the area. After a long hiatus, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) began enforcing setback requirements that mandate a minimum distance between wells and septic systems. Lots in Lower Village are relatively small and some owners cannot comply with these requirements. In November, the Board asked Town Administrator, Bill Wrigley, to set up a working group with the objective of identifying one or more possible locations for a well to serve Lower Village. A report of their findings will be available prior to the May 2007 Annual Town Meeting.

In November, the Board received a petition from some citizens who requested that the Board hold a special meeting for the purpose of electing a new chairman. The entire Board concluded this step was premature and mediation was presented as an alternative. A majority of the Board voted to enter a contract with a specific mediator to work with all five members and certain town employees.

The Board noted increased resident attendance at many meetings during the year. We are also aware that more voters are watching the proceedings on the local cable access channel. These are

very positive developments, and we encourage all residents to stay in touch and communicate with us on any issue of concern.

The Board would like to recognize Jacquelyn Cronin, the Town's former accountant. We also want to thank Ross Perry and Jack Clayton for their many years of service on the Board. Finally, we want to acknowledge all other Town employees for their hard work and the many volunteers who devote endless hours of their time to help Stow be a stronger community.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet G. Wheeler, Chairman
Stephen Dungan, Clerk
Carole Makary
Jason Robart

Thomas Ruggiero

Susan McLaughlin, Administrative Assistant