



**TOWN OF MADISON  
BOARD OF FINANCE**  
SPECIAL MEETING, June 8, 2016

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Approved July 20, 2016

Present: Joseph MacDougald, Mark Casparino, Sharon Kokoruda, Bennett Pudlin;  
Jennifer Tung, Jason Ulstad

Also present: Tom Banisch, First Selectman; Stacy Nobitz, Finance Director; Director;  
Scott Gyllensten, Herb Gram, Peter Thomas, Ad Hoc Senior Tax Relief  
Committee; Scott, Corcoran, Youth and Family Services; Jean Fitzgerald,  
Chairman, Board of Education; numerous member of the public; MCTV

Mr. MacDougald called the meeting to order at 6:45 p.m.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

a. Discussion on Negotiations: LeSage Property. On motion made by Ms. Tung, and seconded by Mr. Casparino, the Board voted unanimously to enter Executive Session at 6:45 p.m. to discuss negotiations for the LeSage Property.

On motion made by Ms. Tung, and seconded by Mr. Casparino, the Board voted unanimously to return to open session at 7:00 p.m.

**REGULAR SESSION**

1. Pledge of Allegiance. The Board of Finance and members of the audience stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of minutes – Regular meeting of May 18, 2016 and Budget Workshop of May 25, 2016. On motion made by Mr. Ulstad, and seconded by Mr. Pudlin, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 18, 2016 as submitted.

On motion made by Mr. Pudlin, and seconded by Ms. Tung, the Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the Budget Workshop of May 25, 2016 as submitted.

3. Chairman's comments. There were no Chairman's comments. Mr. MacDougald suggested that public comment on the Tax Relief Program be provided under Item #7.

4. Citizen and Finance member comments. Mr. Horvath commented on the purchase of the LeSage property to be discussed under Item 5 on the agenda. He noted that interest in this property started 25 years ago. At that time letters were sent out to property owners of land that might be of interest or benefit to the Town, requesting that the Town be given an opportunity to purchase if they are interested in selling. Under the administration of Tom Scarpati, a lease-purchase arrangement was made for the LeSage property. The Town has utilized this property for ball fields which are an important asset for the sports program. He recommends that the Board of Finance approve the purchase of this property to protect this important investment.

Art Symonds, Bartlett Drive, commented that he disagrees with Mr. Horvath. He believes there are three components to the LeSage property. The first component is the driveway but he believes the change in the school start time at Polson will resolve the traffic and safety issues in this area. The second component is the tennis courts, which is related to the driveway. The third component is that purchase of this property by the Town would remove the property from the tax rolls as well as lose an historic 1740 house which is a part of Madison's history. He is also concerned that purchase of this property is the first step toward putting a new school on this property. Looking to the future he is concerned with what would happen if the property is purchased but the Town does not approve construction of a new school. He does not believe that purchase of this property by the Town is necessary and Town funds should not be expended for this purchase especially with the recent cut in State funds

Bruce Jocelyn questioned if there is an opportunity to subdivide the property and keep the ballfields for Town use if this piece is purchased by the Town. Mr. MacDougald noted that the Board of Selectmen, rather than the Board of Finance, would have the responsibility of negotiating for the property and its possible future use.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

5. Discuss and take action on the purchase of the LeSage Property Ms. Fitzgerald clarified issues that had been brought up related to the purchase of the LeSage property. She noted that the purpose of the property is not to serve as a driveway. She also does not believe sub-dividing the property will be effective. She noted that the Town's Conservation Plan encourages the purchase of property adjacent to existing Town property. The High School property is land locked and cannot be expanded. Ms. Fitzgerald also noted that, if this property is sold for private development, the Town will lose the \$980,000 investment it has put into the fields on the property. She believes the Town is very far away from looking at this property as a location for a future school.

Mr. MacDougald noted that the Board might have additional information available for the July meeting and can consider action at that time.

6. Discuss and take action to approve a funding request from the Special Education External Placement Reserve account to the deficit in the current Special Education Excess Cost Accounts of \$188,000. On motion made by Mr. Pudlin, and seconded by Mr. Ulstad, the Board voted unanimously to approve funding from the Special Education External Placement Reserve account in the amount of \$188,000 to fund the deficit in the current Special Education Excess Cost Account.

7. Discuss and take action on a recommendation from the Ad Hoc Senior Tax Relief Committee. Mr. MacDougald noted that the last discussion on the report of the Ad Hoc Senior Tax Relief Committee had focused on the pros and cons of the freeze vs. deferral programs and he encouraged further discussion this evening.

Mr. Gyllensten noted that the Committee had worked very hard on researching programs and also held multiple public hearings to obtain input before developing the recommendations submitted. One item discussed regularly was how the deferral program is underutilized with only 19 people currently enrolled. The primary deterrent to utilization for this program is concern over a lien being placed on the property. To encourage greater utilization of a program for seniors in need of assistance to remain in their homes in Town, the Committee wanted to propose a program that would better serve this population.

Mr. Thomas commented that concern over the deferral program is a qualitative and generational issue with most individuals very concerned about the impact of placing debt on their home. The Committee sees the freeze as a way to meet the needs of people now and in the future. The Committee members feel there is a benefit to both the individuals and the Town in keeping seniors in their homes. This is partially accomplished by including a cap to protect the Town and by including a provision to allocate available funding to those with the lowest income and highest need first if the cap is met.

Mr. MacDougald noted that a suggestion has been made to add a provision to provide for a reevaluation of the Tax Freeze Program after a specified number of years to offer an opportunity to make adjustments. There should be a stipulation that a review and any possible change would not impact existing program participants.

Mr. Pudlin noted that an opportunity already exists in the regulations to review the cap annually. Mr. MacDougald noted that the new recommendation is proposing an additional review after approximately 5 years.

Mr. Casparino questioned the increase in the basis points to 100. Mr. Thomas noted that the Committee members agreed the use of the 100 basis points is necessary to be able to meet the anticipated need.

Ms. Tung noted that, with the plan funded at 1%, there will be a cost of \$800,000 and she believes it is important to make the source of the funding clear to the taxpayers. Ms. Nobitz noted that it will be part of the mill rate calculation, which has the impact of

distributing the cost among the balance of taxpayers. Mr. Gyllensten noted that calculations show the freeze would impact the average taxpayer with a \$500,000 priced home an additional \$16.62 in taxes in year one of the program, which could increase to \$70.00 per year in the year 2021.

In response to a question by Ms. Kokoruda, Mr. Gyllensten noted that the program will be promoted through Senior Services with the applications and approval process through the Assessor's Office. Appeals could go through the Board of Assessment Appeal process.

Mr. MacDougald opened up the meeting for public comment.

Ron Hicks, 15 Hamilton Drive, commented that he believes discussion and focus should not be on who will pay for costs associated with the program but should stress the savings associated with seniors remaining in Town, such as fewer school age children.

Owen Charles, 5 Nicholson Drive, commented that he believes discussion should focus on the importance and benefits of keeping Madison a multi-generational community and this can partially be accomplished with this proposed fair and balanced regulation.

Henry Owen, 69 Wellsweep Drive, commented that many homes currently occupied by seniors have a number of rooms and if they leave Town these homes would most likely be purchased by families with school age children. Keeping seniors in these homes can help keep the education costs down.

Mr. Gyllensten commented that the Committee had discussed the offset for the taxes frozen under this program but placed greater emphasis on a belief that this program is the right thing to do from a moral standpoint.

A resident of Oak Avenue recommended that this program be approved. She believes that providing a program that helps seniors is a moral issue. The Guilford program has been in place for 15 years and has been successful.

Yamm Van Heurck, 32 Arbor Lane, commented that, while she personally will not benefit from the tax freeze program, she is happy to pay more in her taxes to be able to provide this benefit for seniors in need.

Gus Horvath recommended that the Board support this program.

Mr. Ulstad commented that he agrees with many of the recommendations discussed tonight to improve the program and provide good controls and a stop gap.

Mr. Casparino commented that he agrees with many of the recommendations discussed this evening. He would also recommend a review of the application of the basis points.

Mr. Pudlin commented that it would be important to not fund the program at a level that would not be sustainable. He believes the Town is moving in the right direction and he is open to discussion on some of the ideas expressed. He welcomes the idea of a review in five years but believes it should be referred to as a review rather than as a sunset provision.

Mr. Tung recommended that a provision be included to take the program to Town Meeting after the review, with an exception included for existing participants who would not be impacted by any future recommended changes.

Ms. Kokoruda thanked the Committee for their hard work. She also noted that she is in agreement with the comments made and agrees that establishing a workable Tax Freeze program is important.

Leslie Kintz, 53 Bassett Lane, recommended that consideration to given to ensuring that an extra burden is not placed on seniors who do not qualify for the program.

Mr. MacDougald recommended the formation of a Drafting Committee, with representatives of the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Tax Relief Committee, to work out any unresolved issues including the following suggested by the Board members:

- The spousal definition
- The issue of property held in trusts
- Miscellaneous language clarifications
- The inclusion of a 3 – 5 year program review to provide a circuit breaker with existing participants exempt from any changes.
- A provision to change the eligibility age if there is a change in the social security retirement age.
- An application of the program cap to a specific percentage rather than connecting it to the budget.
- Provide additional specific detail about the source of program funding which is apportioned among the balance of taxpayers.

Mr. Thomas noted that the Committee only had 60 days to complete its report so they understand there is a need for further discussion to work out details and the Committee members will be happy to assist with this process. The intent was to provide a working document.

In response to a question, Mr. Hall noted that the program would need to be available to put out to the seniors by January or it would have to be put off for another year. Mr. MacDougald suggested a timeline of completing the sub-Committee work in time to go to the various boards for approval by September followed by Town Meeting consideration.

On motion made by Mr. MacDougald, and seconded by Mr. Pudlin, the Board voted unanimously to form a Committee to review the recommendations from the Ad Hoc Senior Tax Relief Committee and to prepare a final proposal for consideration by the Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Town Meeting.

8. Discuss and take action to accept \$10,000 from Work Force Alliance to provide funding for a MYFS pilot Summer Youth Employment Program, pending their acceptance of our proposed budget and the signing of Memorandum of Agreement between WF Alliance and the town of Madison. This program will reimburse the Town for wages paid for seven (7) youth job placements, with program coordination and job coaching to be provided by existing MYFS staff. Mr. Corcoran explained that the grant would provide funding for a pilot summer youth employment program. The salary for the youths will be 100% reimbursed by the grant.

On motion made by Mr. MacDougald, and seconded by Mr. Ulstad, the Board voted unanimously to accept \$10,000 from the Work Force Alliance to provide funding for a MYFS pilot Summer Youth Employment Program for seven youth job placements, pending their acceptance of the proposed budget and the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between WF Alliance and the Town of Madison.

9. The following line transfers are designated as routine and appropriate for approval as a single action by the Board of Finance, if so desired. A board member may request removal of any line transfer item from the consent agenda for review and discussion.

**Motion: To approve Line Transfers totaling \$11,436.84.**

On motion made by Mr. MacDougald, and seconded by Mr. Pudlin, the Board voted unanimously to approve Line Transfers totaling \$11,436.84.

10. Review of Financials. Ms. Nobitz provided an update on the undesignated fund balance noting that it is currently \$200,000 better than reported last month. She noted that she will forward the Health Insurance Report when it is completed.

11. Citizen comments. There were no citizen comments.

12. Liaison Reports and Report from First Selectman. Mr. Banisch complimented Madison's extensive scouting program for boys and girls since he had just returned from a Bridge Ceremony.

Mr. Banisch noted that the Town had applied for a \$2 million Transportation grant and received \$400,000 from the Transportation Grant and after the \$11 million available in funding was split among the applicant Towns, Madison received \$400,000. This funding will be used for improvements to the Tuxis Walkway

Mr. Banisch noted that legislation had been approved to delay Madison's revaluation for another year with the interval to be restored to five years.

Mr. Banisch noted that the new Health Director started yesterday.

Mr. Banisch also reported that there is no update on the status of State funding.

Mr. Casparino reported that the first CIP meeting was held today and he thanked Ms. Nobitz for all of her assistance with this program.

13. Adjourn. On motion made by Mr. Pudlin, and seconded by Mr. Casparino the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

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Terry Holland-Buckley, Clerk