

Town of Princeton, Mass. – February 7, 2017 – 1 PM Board of Selectmen – Meeting w/ ClearGov - Minutes

Chairman Stan Moss, Edith Morgan, Jon Fudeman present; and TA Nina Nazarian.

1 PM Stan opened meeting with Chris Bullock, CEO of ClearGov in the Town Hall Annex. ClearGov offers a website with all towns in commonwealth and each has a vast Excel-based database of financial info, from public sources. It stands out as a tool with simple charts and graphs that's very easy to navigate and use, compiling data that is otherwise difficult to consolidate. Most of the data is available as public record from the State's Dept. of Revenue (DOR) or through the Division of Local Services (DLS). Bullock has pulled from DOR's huge Excel file any array of fields to analyze and compare. He presented Power Point slides with all kinds of comparisons from peer communities. Peers were defined by criteria such as population, median income or geography—within a 75-mile radius, for instance.

Bullock has created "free" community pages with basic info, and showed the one for Princeton. He also had regional school districts and showed a Wachusett Regional page with data from the Dept. of Education. A second half of the website included a "back office" feature intended for town administrators.

Jon F. had questions about data fields such as income, home values, per capita vs. per household figures. The group agreed that the major advantage of buying into ClearGov was the opportunity for transparency and enhancing confidence of residents/voters. They could not justify the expenditure on the basis of an ROI (return on investment) as ROIs are different as applied to municipalities. The large capital outlay from "supplemental spending" was a factor that could be included but was not part of the system's analysis. The group saw ClearGov as a PR tool, noting that it's very smooth to operate and negotiate and easy to make comparisons.

The fee to Princeton for the ClearGov service and enhanced website was \$4,125 for the first year. Selectmen discussed the town's situation with having virtually no commercial tax base, and noted that the average tax bill rose 48 percent from 2003 to 2015 which was about the lowest rate among immediate neighbors.

Selectmen agreed that purchasing ClearGov was not advisable at this time.

2:05 PM A resignation was received by BOS from Andy Brown, cemetery superintendent. Nina reported that she had spoken to Cemetery Commission members about it. Selectmen voted all in favor to accept the resignation although it is on the agenda for a future BOS meeting.

Veterans Agent Karen Greenwood, who is retiring, is willing to train a new person for the job, and one applicant is a possibility with experience working at a neighboring veterans center.

Selectmen discussed the report they received from Adv. Cmte. and Stan noted that they now "get it" and realize they should just dig in to the town's financials. The town accountant had forwarded financials from FY'16 and FY'17 but they need Fy'15. Selectmen noted that a single member can upset a whole committee and pointed out the importance—or not—of working cooperatively among the boards.

Group discussed new accounting software the town will be installing.

2:15 PM Selectmen voted to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted, Marie Auger, admin.assist.

BOS Referenced Documents: AC's Report to the BOS on the 2018 Budget (1st Draft); resignation letter of Andy Brown.

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