

**CLERK OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S STATEMENT  
CONCERNING SEPTEMBER 21, 2015 SPECIAL TOWN  
MEETING WARRANT**

**Mr. Chairman,**

**Before we read the warrant for the upcoming fall special town meeting set for 7:P.M., September 21<sup>st</sup>, at Dighton Middle School, I ask the board's indulgence in a few prefatory remarks.**

**The warrant for the fall town meeting was opened on July 8<sup>th</sup>. Department heads were reminded that the warrant was open, at the department heads' meeting on August 5<sup>th</sup>. A last draft of the warrant was sent to the chairman of the finance committee and all departments on August 12<sup>th</sup> with a message that the selectmen would like to close the warrant, and final corrections from the accountant's office and final additional articles were received. The board closed the warrant and signed it at a special meeting at noon and it was posted by the town clerk on Thursday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, in the post offices, the fire stations, and at town hall, and it was e-mailed that afternoon to the finance committee members whose e-mail addresses the town clerk had, to the town moderator, town counsel, and the town accountant. Today, August 19<sup>th</sup>, the final warrant was posted on the town website and e-mailed to all town government department heads. Copies for posting have also been sent to the Lincoln Village Housing for the Elderly, the Public Library, the Town Highway Garage, and the Police Station. After the finance committee meets on September 1<sup>st</sup> to make recommendations concerning the warrant, the text of the**

warrant with the finance committee recommendations, the warrant will be sent for publication in full in the *Taunton Daily Gazette* as required by the town's by-laws. A notice of the meeting has been given to the Cable Commission for our local Cable TV Channel 9 notice boards. Tonight as a result of concerns expressed at our last special town meeting, the selectmen have formally appointed a new town meeting communications committee which will assume the task of finding new and better ways, especially electronically and on social media, or perhaps signs along the roadways, of disseminating the announcement and warrant for the fall special town meeting on Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, at Dighton Middle School, at 7:00 P.M. This committee will report to the town under Article I of the town meeting warrant, on September 21<sup>st</sup>.

As clerk of the board of selectmen, I would like the public to understand as much as possible about how the town meeting warrant for September 21st was developed. How was the date of the meeting set? What business has been put off until the annual town meeting next spring and why? How will the articles on this warrant improve Dighton? And, what are the financial ramifications of the propositions on this warrant?

First, how was the date of the fall town meeting set?

Many considerations influence the setting of a town meeting date. The fall town meeting date cannot be set until the Massachusetts Department of Revenue has certified the free cash remaining in the Treasury on June 30<sup>th</sup> when the last fiscal year has ended. This year, to our advantage, free cash was certified expeditiously by the state on an unaudited balance sheet, on Tuesday, August 4<sup>th</sup>. Ordinarily, our fall town meeting has occurred on the last Tuesday in October. With

**this year's early free cash certification, by having the fall special town meeting prior to the state deadline of October 23<sup>rd</sup> for the board of assessors to set the tax rate, the town meeting can make appropriations and transfer free cash to influence the final fiscal year 2016 tax rate, including a possible direct transfer of some certified free cash for a tax rate reduction.**

**In setting a date prior to October 23<sup>rd</sup>, the board of selectmen had to insure that town counsel, the town moderator, the finance committee, the assessors, and the town clerk are available to attend, and that the auditorium of the middle school, the best venue for special town meetings by virtue of its centrality, code compliance, intimacy, and lighting, is available for the town to use. Finally, the selectmen, who are charged by law with the responsibility of calling the town meeting, must exercise what discretion they have left, to insure that the date is the most prudent for accomplishment of time sensitive business and so that town meeting approval is obtained in time for anything that should be accomplished before the onset of winter.**

**Taking advantage of an opportunity to obtain land that will help with expansion of the grammar schools, the possibility of initiating upgrades to Van Gyzen hall before winter, and insuring that a school resource police officer is provided to the high school as soon after the start of this school year as possible, all militated in favor of setting a September special town meeting since it is possible this year. A special town meeting prior to the special election of a selectman on September 26<sup>th</sup> will likely increase meeting attendance since candidates can be expected to attend and participate in the special town meeting, offering voters a unique opportunity to hear them on issues before the election.**

**After weighing all considerations, one month and five days after having declared the warrant open for submissions of articles, the**

**board of selectmen set Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup> as the date of 2015's fall special town meeting.**

**What business has been put off until the annual town meeting next spring and why?**

**The selectmen explained to the heads of the town government departments on August 5<sup>th</sup> that some matters that they had expected to be acted on at the 2015 fall town meeting would be put off until the annual town meeting next spring. Specifically, these are proposals to raise the tax rate and appropriate funds for the hiring of new full-time personnel not proposed in this year's fiscal 2016 town budget. The hiring of a director of public health, a new full-time police officer, a new full-time firefighter/EMT, and two new full-time qualified laborers for the highway department, can all included in proposed departmental budgets in fiscal year 2017. The town accountant has advised the board of selectmen that sound modern municipal finance and human resources practices militate against the tradition of having each and every new hire voted on separately outside the budget as a special article at town meeting, and that departmental budgets for the year should accurately forecast what manning levels will be required and the cost, without reference to diverse special articles. Also, we need to end the practice of adding personnel to departments in the middle of a fiscal year. For a variety of policy and administrative reasons, except in rare and unusual circumstances, new personnel positions should be approved in the budget at an annual town meeting and new hires begin their work on July 1st when the fiscal year begins. The town government department heads have been informed of this, and it will be included in the final town government policy manual in October.**

**Another article not appearing on the fall town meeting warrant is a pending article that had been expected from the Community**

**Preservation Committee for an appropriation from the Historic Resource Reserve of \$102,000.00 for rehabilitation of the Dighton Historical Society, Inc.'s, Winslow-Davis Historical House, at the corner of Williams and Center Streets. I consulted with Community Preservation Committee Chairman Anthony Linden personally and was advised that the article should be included on the fall town meeting warrant, and though the Committee had not drafted such an article nor submitted it, the selectmen's office inserted a "placeholder" article in the warrant for the purpose. However, when the Committee Clerk Timothy Rhines subsequently explained that the Community Preservation Committee and state approvals would not be ready in time to support town meeting action, the selectmen's office deleted the article until a final committee vote, state approval, and a submission, are obtained. If still necessary later to preserve the Historical House from unacceptable Winter damage, this board will not hesitate to call upon the town at the appropriate time to do what is right.**

**Similarly, the director and board of trustees of the public library are obtaining prices to repair the chimney of the public library building. This board will approve the repairing of the chimney out of public building maintenance funds already appropriated. We are aware of the condition of Dighton's ten public buildings, and barring an unforeseen act of God, public building maintenance account should be adequate until the end of the fiscal year, when if necessary it can be replenished by interdepartmental transfers of unexpended balances.**

**How will the articles on the fall town meeting warrant improve Dighton?**

**The fall 2015 meeting warrant is a wise and progressive town meeting warrant. Of \$1,720,665 in unexpended free cash remaining in the**

Treasury when fiscal year 2015 ended on June 30th, the warrant that we are about to read proposes that \$400,000 be saved against the town's growing employee retiree benefits obligations, and that \$500,000 be saved to create a municipal capital stabilization account with which Dighton may one day address capital needs raised by growth. Other free cash spending proposals actually are proposals for investments in Dighton's future, including land adjacent to the grammar schools which will soon be critically in need of expansion, and restoration of Van Gyzen Hall for future community building or town hall annex needs. A proposal to initiate electronic permitting and archiving in the building department is included. The warrant proposes a school resource police officer for the Dighton-Rehoboth Regional High School to be paid for by the D-R Regional School District. The Parks and Recreation Commission seeks funds that will enable the Commission to use a generous gift from the Lions' Club to make the Community Playground outfitting handicapped accessible, and the Town Historian has submitted a proposed by-law, to protect the town's historic stone walls as Dighton moves into the future. This year's fall town meeting warrant does not contain politically controversial hot-button articles. Instead, it appeals to our good we have shared as a town and lay as good a foundation as possible for the future.

**What are the financial ramifications of this warrant?**

This warrant proposes free cash transfers totaling a record \$1,568,312.36, of which \$400,000 will be savings for post employment benefits of town employees, and \$500,000 will be savings for municipal capital stabilization, and \$355,000 will be permanently invested in town owned real estate assets. The warrant proposes \$64,944.95 in new taxation and appropriation but then proposes a transfer of \$ 150,000 to reduce the tax rate for a net tax rate reduction

of \$85,055.05, and we project an unexpended free cash balance of \$202,352.64.

We have a long way to go for this warrant to be put into effect. The finance committee will be making its recommendations, and the town meeting will debate all of the propositions. But this board of selectmen is proud of this town meeting warrant. We commend the great officers and employees of the town whose prudence, frugality, and selflessness gave Dighton the \$1,720,665 certified free cash balance at the end of fiscal year 2015 that has made it possible for the town to prepare for the challenges of its future.



*Patrick W. Menges*

**PATRICK W. MENGES**

**Clerk of the Board of Selectmen**