Lexington
Town Meeting Member Association

Minutes of the January 9, 2003
TMMA Executive Committee Meeting

Attendees:  Chair: Andy Friedlich; Vice Chair: Hank Manz; Treasurer: Charles Hornig; Clerk, Wendy Manz; Pct. 1: John Bartenstein, Jon Cole; Pct 3: Patrick Mehr; Pct 4: Lisa Baci, Gloria Bloom, John Rosenberg; Pct. 5: Marjorie Daggett; Pct. 6: Norman Cohen, Dana Wendel; Pct 7: Margaret Counts-Klebe; Pct 9: Francine Stieglitz; Others: Marge Battin, Town Moderator, Rod McNeil, Kay Tiffany, David Williams.

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:35 P.M. by Andy Friedlich, and a quorum declared.

2. The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed and approved.

3. Charles Hornig gave the Treasurer's Report. Current balance is $3,312.73

4. Andy Friedlich introduced Rod McNeil, Kay Tiffany and David Williams citizens among those who requested a Special Town Meeting to further consider the rebuilding of Lincoln Fields. Kay stated that a proposal will go out to all households in town by mail. Charles Hornig noted that the finance committees were considering mailings on their positions on this issue, and Marge Battin suggested that this might shorten presentations at the Special Town Meeting. Charles suggested that any questions for the Capital Expenditures Committee should go to him by e-mail so that they could be addressed in the Committee’s report to Town Meeting.

Charles recapped the history of the issue: In the fall of 2001, a citizen group interested in rebuilding Lincoln Fields approached the Board of Selectmen and the Recreation Committee. The group hired a consultant to propose a rebuilding plan and put a warrant article, which had the support of the Recreation Committee, on the March 25, 2002 Town Meeting agenda. After 90 minutes of discussion, the article, which spoke of rebuilding the fields without specifying the details, was approved by a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting. The material presented to Town Meeting in support of the article all specified installation of artificial turf, as did the material that went out to voters before they approved a debt exclusion to pay for the project. A detailed plan was created over the summer of 2002; a request for bids went out from the Town Manager’s office in December, 2002; bids received were opened on January 2; and a contract was signed within days thereafter. The Selectmen support the signing of a contract and are legally entitled to implement the previous citizen vote. John Rosenberg noted that the Selectmen had indicated they would let a contract in early January. Norm Cohen noted that the artificial turf plan was fully presented to citizens.

However, a number of people were surprised, not to say unhappy, that the Town had signed a contract in early January, knowing that as of December 10, citizens had submitted the necessary 200 signatures to call a Special Town Meeting on January 22 to further discuss this issue. John Bartenstein suggested that as the contract would be binding on the Town, any changes at this point might constitute a breach, making the Town potentially liable for damages. Rod McNeil pointed out that the Town legally had 30 days in which to sign a contract, but chose to do so immediately after bids were opened on January 2. Patrick Mehr suggested an inquiry as to why the contract was signed so quickly, when the Special Town Meeting was already planned.

The citizens calling the Special Town Meeting include the Lincoln Park Committee, a subcommittee of the Recreation Committee. Lisa Baci presented their concerns: The completed plan has features not included in the sketch plan presented to Town Meeting; it compromises the existing fitness path, creates potential drainage problems, and relocates parking to a central lot rather than the originally proposed peripheral lots. Many citizens also strongly prefer natural grass to the artificial turf in the existing plan. The proposal to be addressed at the Special Town Meeting calls for a pause to review these issues and to try to reconcile the proposals of the Recreation Committee, the Lincoln Park Committee, the Conservation Commission and others. The Lincoln Park Committee had commissioned a plan for renovation of the fields from the Sasaki landscape architect firm which was completed last March, and they expected that the Recreation Committee would consider this plan. The LPC objects to a number of large berms, some up to eight feet high,
in the existing plan, and is concerned that some of these berms crowd the fitness path, especially if they become seating for spectators of the soccer games. There is also a lot of concern about drainage, as the artificial turf is designed to shed water rapidly into drainage channels which emerge through 12” pipes into the area just short of the boundary line of the wetlands in the lower part of the park. Because the plan stays outside the statutory buffer area of the wetlands, the Conservation Commission did not have to approve it.

Norm Cohen objected that the Town has already voted on a debt exclusion for three large capital projects, including this one, and that typically such projects change somewhat in the implementation from the sketch plans originally presented. He suggested that it isn’t feasible to call a Special Town Meeting every time there is unhappiness with a plan approved by the voters. John Bartenstein countered that the By Laws provide for a Special Town Meeting if the required number of citizens apply for it, and the project shouldn’t be “railroaded” through over valid objections. Rod McNeil stated that the Lincoln Park Committee had only sought a Special Town Meeting because the Recreation Committee was unresponsive to their concerns. Marge Battin suggested that the warrant article submitted for the March Town Meeting “to see if the Town will install natural grass” on the fields, was very narrow, and possibly moot in light of the signed contract. She also pointed out that the Special Town Meeting will cost the Town approximately $8,000 in a very tight budget year. The law was drafted to speed implementation of measures approved by Town Meeting and the voters, as this one was, and that the Town Manager’s office was charged with getting the fields in place by fall.

Rod McNeil pointed out that the article had a final phrase allowing the Selectmen to act on any other aspects of the plan. The hope was that a new committee, representing all the “stakeholders” in Lincoln Fields (e.g., walkers, joggers, nature lovers, skiers, athletic teams) would be appointed by the Selectmen to reconsider the whole plan before the March Town Meeting. Kay Tiffany stated that while everyone agreed that the field needed to be rebuilt, the fear was that this plan would ruin other aspects of the park. The Kirk bequest had provided for the construction and maintenance of the fitness path, and there have been other bequests to maintain garden areas within the lower part of the park. Any plan should take into consideration whether drainage or other problems would compromise these areas.

John Rosenberg noted that because of the school rebuilding project, the playing fields at Harrington School will be unavailable in September 2003 and rebuilding Lincoln Fields is supposed to be scheduled to be completed by then. Hank Manz suggested that experience shows natural grass fields can’t be successfully maintained under the heavy usage they get.

Charles Hornig noted that this was not the forum for the merits of the issue, but rather to decide what could be done to make a productive Special Town Meeting. Marge Battin stated that the proponents of the article would have 15 minutes to make a Power Point or other presentation, and could divide the time among the Selectmen, the Recreation Committee, the Conservation Commission or any other desired speakers. Each finance committee and the Lincoln Park Committee may five minutes. She advised that no one call the question prematurely, before adequate discussion. As the original proposed article addresses the natural grass issue, the article before the Special Town Meeting needs to propose referral of the matter to another committee for review.

John Rosenberg gave a report on the most recent Summit Meeting on the town budget. The budget gap as of this week is $5.5 million, with $1 million to come out of free cash and $1.5 million to be gained by negotiation of a reduction in employee benefits. The next Summit is scheduled for next week. Whether the Selectmen will ask for a one year $5.5 million override, whether they will ask for a multi-year override, and whether the override will be bundled or unbundled remains undecided. Andy pointed out that budget cuts already negotiated have reduced the gap from $10 million to $5.5 million. Charles Hornig noted that if the Selectmen don’t go for a multi-year override, and they stay with their current free cash policy, greater cuts will have to be made, even assuming level funding from the state (an uncertain assumption). Special Education in the Town costs $2 million, of which the state pays one half, and this contribution may be cut. Ongoing services are needed, and next year the Town begins substantial borrowing, pursuant to the debt exclusion already approved. A 10% property tax increase seems inevitable.

5. John Rosenberg gave a report on the most recent Summit Meeting on the town budget. The budget gap as of this week is $5.5 million, with $1 million to come out of free cash and $1.5 million to be gained by negotiation of a reduction in employee benefits. The next Summit is scheduled for next week. Whether the Selectmen will ask for a one year $5.5 million override, whether they will ask for a multi-year override, and whether the override will be bundled or unbundled remains undecided. Andy pointed out that budget cuts already negotiated have reduced the gap from $10 million to $5.5 million. Charles Hornig noted that if the Selectmen don’t go for a multi-year override, and they stay with their current free cash policy, greater cuts will have to be made, even assuming level funding from the state (an uncertain assumption). Special Education in the Town costs $2 million, of which the state pays one half, and this contribution may be cut. Ongoing services are needed, and next year the Town begins substantial borrowing, pursuant to the debt exclusion already approved. A 10% property tax increase seems inevitable.
Andy Friedlich announced that volunteers were needed to do the write-ups for the Warrant Information Book for the upcoming Town Meeting. Ingrid Klimoff will work on the Information Book organization. Hank Manz, Francine Stieglitz and Jackie Davision will work on the bus tour, and Hank promises a CD of the information this year. Town Meeting begins on March 24 this hear. Information sessions will likely be held on March 12 for the municipal budget, March 13 for the school budget, and March 19 for the citizen articles. The bus tour will be March 16.

The following citizen articles were assigned for write-ups:
1. Lexington Skate Park Phase II Dana Wendel
2. Zoning amendment: CRO-CD for Ledgemont John Bartenstein, Norm Cohen
3. Zoning amendment (Nieman) for a bank drive up window on Lowell Street John Bartenstein, Norm Cohen
4. Signs on residential property (Fournier) (First Amendment issue) Marjorie Daggett
5. Zoning Board of Appeals handling of comprehensive permits (Friedlich) John Bartenstein
6. Lincoln Fields issue of natural grass Dana Wendel
7. Hanscom Field development Kay Tiffany
8. Municipal budget Andy Friedlich

All other articles will be assigned at February meeting. A Planning Board article is likely, perhaps a land acquisition article. There will be no school technology article this year in light of the tight budget.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Wendy Manz, Clerk