

## MEMO

To: Mark Schilling, Cambridge Town Clerk  
Justin Marsh, Cambridge Conservation Commission Chair

From: George Putnam, Cambridge Selectboard Member

Date: 03/24/17

Subject: Jeffersonville Commuter Bus Update & Recommendation

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### SUMMARY

Action Needed: Cambridge needs to decide whether to fund the Jeffersonville Commuter bus after 6/30/17 and, if so, how much.

Recommendation: Although we have talked about a special town meeting to decide this question, I recommend that the Cambridge Selectboard (SB) decide this matter itself and approve \$14,000 not currently in the budget to fund the Jeffersonville Commuter bus for the period 7/01/17-6/30/18 contingent upon Green Mountain Transit (GMT) agreeing to make no material adverse change to the current service through June 30, 2018.

### DISCUSSION

Background: The Jeffersonville Commuter bus is operated by GMT, a regional transit authority. There are four round trip bus trips per weekday, two in the morning and two in the evening, from Burlington to Jeffersonville and back to Burlington with stops in Underhill, Jericho and Essex. See the schedule for Route 36 here: <http://ridegmt.com/gmt-schedules/>.

Operation through 6/30/17 is assured. To continue operation for the subsequent twelve months, GMT asked for \$14,000 each from the towns of Jericho, Underhill and Cambridge (total of \$42,000). Jericho agreed to \$14,000. Underhill agreed to \$5,000. (The Underhill SB initially said \$0. The voters at town meeting agreed to fund the same as the previous year which was \$5,000.) Cambridge has not yet decided whether to fund after 6/30/17 or, if yes, how much.

I attended a GMT board meeting on 3/21/17. Sara Lourie from the Cambridge Conservation Commission and Michael Oman from Underhill also attended. Michael was authorized by the Underhill SB to bring back information.

The GMT board did not make any decisions, but there was considerable discussion. Options discussed, if the full \$42,000 was not forthcoming, included cutting back from four to two round trips per day and/or not coming all the way out to Jeffersonville (and various combinations of those options). However, I sensed a strong desire to continue the service as is, at least for the coming year. If the full \$42,000 was not forthcoming, it was discussed that perhaps GMT consider subsidizing the route for one year, especially if it looked like the towns were trying to come up with funds. Although no commitment was made, GMT was pleased that representatives from Cambridge and Underhill attended their board meeting. It is possible that Underhill will come up with more than \$5,000. I do not know what they will do, or what they can do within the budget their voters approved at town meeting.

Two factors seemed important to the GMT board. First, they are currently engaged in a strategic planning exercise called the GMT Next Gen Transit Study with outside consultants Nelson Nygaard. GMT would like to see the results of this study before making major changes in their routes. This study is not expected to be completed before late 2017. Second, GMT believes that if this bus route is lost, it will never come back, because the federal funding that started the route is difficult to obtain (it is a competitive grant program), and may completely disappear.

Timetable and Recommendation: The GMT board meets on the third Tuesday of each month. The April board meeting is Tuesday 4/18/17 and the May board meeting is Tuesday 5/16/17. GMT needs to decide the future of this route for 7/01/17-6/30/18 no later than their May board meeting.

The Cambridge SB meets on the first and third Mondays of each month. They meet twice before GMT's April board meeting: Monday 4/03/17 and Monday 4/17/17.

A special town meeting needs to be warned at least 30 but not more than 40 days before the meeting.

It is no small process to hold a special town meeting, and a significant challenge to hold one before GMT's May board meeting. Because of these challenges, I propose that the Cambridge SB decide this matter itself, and appropriate \$14,000 to GMT for the period 7/01/17-6/30/18 contingent upon GMT agreeing to make no material adverse change to the current service through June 30, 2018. The Cambridge SB has responsibility for the general supervision of the affairs of the town (24 V.S.A. § 872(a)), and the Cambridge treasurer tells me that money can be found for this expenditure analogous to how the town would meet unexpected snowplowing expenses or highway truck repairs. It will stress town finances but is manageable. (On the other hand, the town will save the unbudgeted expense of holding a special town meeting.)

Since the Cambridge SB has delegated aspects of the Jeffersonville Commuter bus to the Cambridge Conservation Commission (CCC), I suggest that the Cambridge SB consult with the CCC to see if they would support this recommendation. The CCC meets on the second Thursday of each month. The following schedule seems workable, and potentially resolves this matter before GMT's April board meeting on 4/18/17:

4/03/17 – Cambridge SB meeting – discuss; no action

4/13/17 – Cambridge CCC meeting – discuss and make recommendation

4/17/17 – Cambridge SB meeting – CCC representatives attend; GMT representatives attend if they wish; SB acts

Following is further discussion in support of this recommendation.

Cambridge Town Meeting: The discussion at Cambridge town meeting was confused for several reasons. First, there were conflicting understandings as to whether the \$14,000 in the article as warned represented \$14,000 new money (i.e., not in the proposed budget) or money already paid as a deposit (\$12,000) plus \$2,000 that was in the proposed budget. Second, there were conflicting understandings about what period or periods the \$14,000 was for. At the time the warning was written, the difference between GMT's fiscal year and Cambridge's fiscal year was not understood. Third, and perhaps most significantly, at the time of town meeting it was known that the Underhill SB had denied the requested amount of \$14,000 and had decided on a contribution of \$0. It was not known how GMT would react to that. For example, would GMT ask

Jericho and Cambridge to make up the difference and increase their contributions to \$21,000 each? Would GMT reduce service?

The outcome of the Cambridge town meeting was that the \$12,000 deposit plus \$2,000 in the budget was approved for the period ending 6/30/17. No decision was made for the period after 6/30/17 pending more information.

We now know that Underhill, in a motion from the floor at their town meeting, increased their contribution from \$0 to \$5,000. And we now know that GMT has not asked Jericho and Cambridge to increase their contributions. The contribution requested from Cambridge is still \$14,000. We do not know if GMT will reduce service if they receive less than the full \$42,000 that was requested, but there are indications that they may be willing to continue service as is, at least for one year – if they receive the full amounts requested from Jericho and Cambridge and at least \$5,000 from Underhill; see discussion above.

While there were comments at the Cambridge town meeting both for and against the bus service, my sense is that a strong majority of voters who publicly commented would have supported an expenditure of \$14,000 for the twelve months after 6/30/17, in addition to the \$12,000 plus \$2,000 for the period up to 6/30/17 which they did approve.

Voters will have a chance at the next town meeting in March 2018 for another look at funding after 6/30/18. Everyone will have more information at that time, including the results of GMT's Next Gen Transit Study. The Cambridge Conservation Commission may wish to use the time until next town meeting to work to increase ridership and community support.

#### Further background:

The Jeffersonville Commuter bus service began on 10/14/13. Costs are covered by a combination of grants and fares. GMT says that for the 12 months ending 6/30/16 total costs were \$236,400 and fares were \$27,500 (12%). For the first three years, operating costs net of fares were 100% covered by federal/state grants (Circumferential Highway Alternative Grant). After the first three years, operating costs net of fares are covered 80% by federal/state grants obtained by GMT and 20% by the towns of Jericho, Underhill and Cambridge. Cambridge has paid its share of costs through 6/30/17.

As noted above, for the twelve months ending 6/30/18 GMT asked Jericho, Underhill and Cambridge to contribute \$14,000 each for a total of \$42,000. This was calculated as follows:  $(236,400 - 27,500) \times 0.20 = \$41,780$  which they rounded to \$42,000. GMT estimates that the total annual contribution needed from the three towns after 6/30/18 will be about \$42,000 plus about 3% per year due to general inflation.

Ridership is counted as number of people boarding at each stop. GMT does not keep track of where people get off. Most people get on the bus in the morning and return in the evening, but it is possible to board in the evening and return in the morning (this can be attractive to someone working a night shift).

The following tables count people boarding at both morning and evening:

Boarding at any location anywhere on the route:

Year ending	Total	Avg per month	Avg per day
6/30/14*	8,193	964	49
6/30/15	12,764	1,064	50
6/30/16	10,795	900	42
6/30/17**	5,806	726	34

If everyone rode a round trip, dividing these numbers by 2 should approximate the number of people using the bus.

Boarding at one of the four stops in Cambridge:

Year ending	Total	Avg per month	Avg per day
6/30/14*	1,174	138	7
6/30/15	2,785	232	11
6/30/16	2,385	199	9
6/30/17**	1,431	179	8

If everyone who boarded in Cambridge later reboarded outside of Cambridge for the return trip home, using these numbers as is should approximate the number of people using the bus.

In other words, for an apples-to-apples comparison of the number of people using the bus, divide the “anywhere” table by 2 but do NOT divide the “Cambridge” table by 2. For the year ending 6/30/16, if every rider used the bus for a round trip, 44% of the riders initially boarded in Cambridge ( $2385/(10795/2)$ ).

\*approx. 8.5 months (10/14/13-6/30/14)

\*\*through 2/28/17 so eight months (7/01/16-2/28/17)

#### Notes:

The averages per day in the above tables are based on the following number of service days: FY14-168, FY15-255, FY16-257, FY17-170.

I used years ending June 30 because that is GMT’s fiscal year. It also happens to be the fiscal year for Jericho and Underhill. The fiscal year for Cambridge ends December 31.