

Select Board Minutes
Tuesday, September 1, 2020
7:00pm

The Select Board Regular Meeting was held virtually in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L.c.30A. S.20.

Select Board participants:

Chair Alice von Loesecke, Rich Maiore, Kara Minar, Stu Sklar, Lucy Wallace

Town Department attendees:

Town Administrator Tim Bragan, Assistant Town Administrator/HR Director Marie Sobalvarro, Executive Assistant Julie Doucet, DPW Director Tim Kilhart

Additional participants:

Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee Chair Bruce Leicher, Board of Health Chair Sharon McCarthy, Nashoba Board of Health Sanitarian Ira Grossman and Harbormaster Bob O'Shea

Update on Ayer Road construction project

DPW Director Tim Kilhart spoke with the Department of Transportation (DOT) who said they could not rule out the need for a roundabout and suggested use of the new SPICE tool to evaluate whether or not a roundabout would be warranted. He explained based on the current data they would not rule it out. Kilhart advised following DOT's recommendation. He is not asking the board to vote on the project tonight if there is a chance the design may change. He will continue to work with DOT to expedite the process. Kara Minar would have liked an opportunity to speak with DOT as well. She said focus should not only be on fatalities in this area but also consider increases in traffic due to future development and vehicle speed. She suggested review of previous studies done by Lloyd Bristol to determine how data was populated. She volunteered to work with the engineers and Kilhart to help move the project forward.

Kilhart gave additional updates:

- All 730 signs in town have been replaced and to the best of his knowledge are all in compliance.
- The Complete Streets project was completed on-time and under budget.
- He received a \$250,000 small bridge grant for repair to the culvert/bridge on Old Mill Rd over Bowers Brook.

Review of the Fall Special Town Meeting draft warrant

Tim Bragan shared the draft warrant and briefly reviewed each article:

- 1) Senior Housing Bylaw – Inserted by the Planning Board
- 2) Easement National Grid – Inserted by the Planning Board
- 3) Lease for Solar on School Roof – Inserted by the Planning Board
- 4) Bromfield House Disposition – Inserted by the Planning Board
- 5) CPIC Article – Inserted by the Planning Board
- 6) Amend Fiscal Year 2021 Omnibus and Sewer Enterprise Budget

Bragan received an article from the Community Preservation Committee: COVID-19 EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM - To see if the Town will vote to approve the transfer of \$20,000 from Fiscal 2020 Community Preservation Fund Unspecified Reserves to the Affordable Housing Reserve, or pass any vote or votes in relation thereto, to cover the implementation and administration of a COVID Emergency Rental Assistance Program for the Town of Harvard. Bragan will have more information on this article at the September 15th meeting.

Minutes

By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Minar – aye, Mairoe – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve minutes of 8/4 & 8/19, as presented.

Town Administrator Report

- Who is drafting the new charge for the Transfer Station Committee? Bragan advised a tight timeline if there is any interest in changing how trash removal/recycling service is operated in town. Any decisions also impact capital improvements items included by the DPW Director over the next five years. Sklar remains skeptical residents would want the Transfer Station closed. He asked the board to consider including the operational costs in the tax base which would eliminate the need to charge for the sticker itself only requiring an additional cost to residents for purchase of bags. He noted this would continue to incentivize recycling. Sklar offered to collect and organize the data necessary to do a cost benefit analysis. The members agreed public outreach is important. They will target October to have the data necessary and then decide on the next steps.
- Who is re-writing the Select Board policy regarding the appointment process? Kara Minar volunteered.
- Bragan reported the Permanent Building Committee (PBC) had discussed the DPW Building Design Study at their last meeting, which was described in the Warrant Booklet with a predominantly DPW-operations focus. The PBC seeks the board's insight on the scope of the DPW Building Design study, in light of the Fire Station Study which highlighted constraints on the Center Station site. Would the Board be willing to provide input on whether the PBC's RFQ should limit this scope to the DPW Facility, or to have the study explore the feasibility of the site for multi-purpose/multi-use (DPW/Fire)? The board was receptive to the idea of a multi-purpose building. They agreed a needs assessment of the DPW building should include a site review as well. They requested an opportunity to review the draft assessments prior to any final reports being issued. Alice von Loesecke will meet with Marie Sobalvarro to discuss the multifunctional use of the DPW site as an option.
- Bragan announced the Select Board needs to appoint a representative to the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee.
- License for pole easement with National Grid - By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Minar – aye, Mairoe – aye, von Loesecke – aye, Sklar – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the grant of license to Mass Electric Verizon on New England (National Grid) pole relocation.
- Bragan reported the Finance Committee is beginning discussions for Fiscal Year 22 and are seeking guidance from the Select Board.

Public Communication

Bill Johnson, 72 Warren Ave, spoke about his displeasure with how the Board of Health has handled the algae situation at Bare Hill Pond. He is asking for them to focus on what needs to happen now and work on an agreed plan of action for next time with more effective communication.

He suggested the use of the emergency call system with this type of situation. Johnson thanked Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee Chair Bruce Leicher for his efforts.

Phil & Darcy Robinson, 183 Littleton Rd, asked for the update on the fire pond restoration project. Bragan offered to follow up with the Fire Chief.

Park & Recreation Commission resignation

By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar – aye, von Loesecke, the board voted unanimously to recognize resignation of Darren Magan from the Park & Recreation Commission and send thank you letter.

Park & Recreation Commission appointment

Commission Chair recommended Keith Bilafer to fill the vacancy. By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar – aye, von Loesecke, the board voted unanimously to appoint Keith Bilafer to the Park & Recreation Commission.

Magnet Fishing & Unexploded ordinances

Bragan reported Devens and MassDevelopment have placed a moratorium or fine on anyone magnet fishing within their jurisdiction. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has notified the Army for their plan on how they will address this problem. Harvard landowners who abut the Nashua River will be sent a letter from the town notifying them of this.

Testing Bare Hill Pond

Von Loesecke included this topic on the agenda due to the current algae bloom that has caused the pond to turn an awful shade of green prompting the Board of Health to advise against contact with the water. She invited Pond Committee Chair Bruce Leicher, Board of Health Chair Sharon McCarthy and Sanitarian Ira Grossman to speak on this topic. Her goal for the discussion is to determine how best to notify abutters to the pond/residents/out of town users if this type of situation occurs in the future.

Over the past week, Leicher has been contacted by numerous residents with questions about the posted notices and condition of the pond. His intent for this meeting is to focus on how town government can provide clear communication to residents. Harbormaster Bob O'Shea said he received questions asking if the algae was toxic. Leicher noted the MA Environmental Toxicology program has protocols in place to regulate these types of occurrences as should the town. He admitted his surprise at the lack of urgency about this potential public health risk from the Board of Health. Leicher acknowledged Bare Hill Pond is different from other lakes/ponds in Massachusetts as many have an association that would handle this type of situation however in Harvard ultimately it is the town who allocates who is responsible for what.

Board of Health Chair Sharon McCarthy offered some points of clarification and a timeline of events. Sanitarian Ira Grossman explained testing can be requested at any time through the local office or the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health. Grossman said the notices from the Board of Health were specific for closing of the beach areas. They had not been notified of other areas of that pond that were of concern. He agreed developing procedures for testing and communication makes sense. Grossman's advice is no contact with the water. They can decide next steps once the testing results come back. Town Administrator Tim Bragan recommended all abutters to the pond and residents subscribe to receive news via email through the town website. This is the best way to receive official town news and alerts. Leicher, von Loesecke, McCarthy agreed to meet to draft procedures.

Budget recommendation from Finance Committee and Budget Advisory Committee

Finance Committee Chair Don Ludwig sent an update, explanation and recommendation via email. With level funding for Local Aid and Chapter 70, the Finance Committee was able to add back \$100,000 which they had anticipated not receiving. New Growth was decreased by \$30,000 and the Overlay Account decreased by \$25,000. All of this provides a new revised deficit of \$226,639. The surplus is made up of \$200,000 put into the Reserve Fund if we need it due to uncertain circumstances moving forward with local receipts, uncertain federal assistance, and of course Covid-19. This coupled with the savings from updated numbers from Worcester County Retirement, the savings of ~\$138,000 in insurance changes, the \$60,000 cut to the Police budget (Vehicle and OT), and one half of the originally estimated School cuts (\$112,000) gives us a surplus of \$302,047.

The Finance Committee unanimously recommends not cutting the \$10,000 from the Tree Warden's budget (this is public safety), not cutting the \$26,000 in Merit Pay (these individuals already contributed to our savings in insurance), and finally we do not recommend reducing the OPEB contribution at this time, as we may need to use this when budgeting for FY22. Town Administrator Tim Bragan supports their recommendation and strongly advocated for the merit pay increases. He reminded the board that the employees who would lose the merit raise are also the same employees that were affected by the health insurance cost increase when other employees did not. The board members were overall supportive however Kara Minar was not convinced it was the right thing to do therefore she abstained from voting. By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted to retain the \$26,000 for merit pay increases. By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, Minar – aye, the board voted unanimously to limit reduction to half \$112,000 for the school department.

Next steps for the Insurance Advisory Committee

Assistant Town Administrator/HR Director Marie Sobalvarro reported MIIA (Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association) is interested in offering quotes for health insurance coverage to the Town of Harvard. She asked the board to officially vote to restart the committee to evaluate Blue Cross Blue Shield plans. The committee will be comprised of seven representatives from affected organizations and the Select Board selects a retiree. By a roll call vote, Sklar – aye, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to create the Insurance Advisory Committee and find a retiree representative to appoint.

Select Board Reports

Von Loesecke reported the Capital Planning & Investment Committee has three requests for the fall special town meeting: additional funds for the water treatment system computers, Bromfield School ramp (repair & replace only necessary parts) and full phase study/design for the commercial district. The commercial district request will be better for the spring town meeting to allow time for the necessary outreach and information for the voters. Grant funds may be available to help with funding of the ramp.

By a roll call vote, Minar – aye, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Maiore – aye, von Loesecke, the board voted unanimously to continue the meeting after 10:00pm

Lucy Wallace reported a senior housing forum next week. Registration is required.

Wallace said the Council on Aging is in need of volunteers to help deliver lunches. Anyone interested should call the Hildreth House and speak with Lisa Rosen.

Stu Sklar reported the War Monument Restoration Committee will meet with the Historic Commission about the World War II monument.

Rich Maiore reported the School Committee continues to navigate personnel changes as the start of the school year quickly approaches.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:10pm.

Documents referenced:

Magan resignation email – dated 8.25.2020

Bilafer vol form – dated 8.10.2020

Fin Com recommendations – email dated 8.27.2020 with updated budget numbers

Special Town Meeting warrant – draft 10.3.2020

Bare Hill Pond:

Excerpts from state sanitary – dated 9.1.2020

Ma DPH cyanobacteria testing standards – dated 9.1.2020

Board of Health comments to SB – dated 9.1.2020