

Select Board Minutes

Tuesday, November 17, 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 and Executive Assistant Julie Doucet, Assessors David Manzello and Mike Saltzman, Land Use Administrator/Conservation Agent Liz Allard

Additional participants: Open Space Committee Chair Peter Dorward, Bill Ference, Stephen Ford, Bev Rodrigues, Harvard Conservation Trustee Tom Cotton

National Grid pole hearing – Oak Hill Rd

A representative from National Grid attended the November 3rd meeting to explain the request. National Grid was anxious to begin the project prior to the official hearing date. The project details have been reviewed and residents affected were agreeable therefore the Select Board needed to take an official vote. By a roll call vote, Wallace – Aye, Minar – aye, Maiore – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the petition for the pole location on Oak Hill Road.

Tax Classification hearing

Assessors David Manzello and Mike Saltzman came to review the data used to determine the property tax levy and property valuations in preparation to set the tax rate. Manzello briefly explained the tax levy, levy limit and excess levy capacity noting assessments are fair and conservative. Saltzman said after reviewing the qualifying Means Tested Senior Tax Exemptions the burden shift for the coming year will be an increase of \$.03 to the residential class. By a roll call vote, Minar – aye, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously in accordance with M.G.L., Ch. 40, Sec. 56, as amended, the percentage of local tax levy which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the Fiscal Year 2021 tax rates and set the Residential Factor at 1.0, with a corresponding CIP shift of 1.0, pending approval of the town's annual tax recap by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue.

Report from the Open Space Committee (OSC)

Committee Chair Peter Dorward reported the committee has been working hard to identify lands suitable for active recreation and prioritize open space for protection. They have discussed how to approach capital planning for open space. Rich Maiore asked for clarity on the OSC's role after they have identified and recommended land for open space. How are the lands secured and which entity shepherds the funding process? The board members discussed the OSC as the entity tasked with building the strategy by collaboration with the Conservation Commission and the Harvard Conservation Trust. In addition, Dorward requested the board consider a few minor revisions to the OSC charge. These revisions will be acted on at the next meeting.

Insurance Advisory Committee (IAC) recommendation

IAC Committee Chair Liz Allard came to formally present the IAC's recommendation to remain in the Minuteman Nashoba Health Group with a 6-1 vote. A letter from the School Committee had also been shared previously - recommending the same. Lucy Wallace appreciated the detailed pros and cons included in the recommendation. She said it was helpful as some details she was not fully aware of. Wallace was sensitive to employee concerns however managing budget costs is important as well. Allard asked for clarification as the IAC was told solicitation from MIIA about their health insurance programs was not due to cost savings. Assistant Town Administrator/HR Director Marie Sobalvarro noted MIIA bases their offerings on claims history therefore our ability to be considered for their program may not be available next year. MIIA representative Adam Thornton said they are able to offer a dental benefit and

increase their fitness reimbursement amount as those two items were of most concern to employees. Alice von Loesecke was apprehensive about the limited local health care options that may force employees to a higher cost plan. She was also sensitive to the idea of employees possibly have to change health care providers during the Covid pandemic. Stu Sklar and Kara Minar agreed with von Loesecke. Sklar proposed revisiting this issue next year emphasizing the significance of the upcoming teacher contract negotiations. By a roll call vote, Sklar – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar –aye, Wallace – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to stay with Minuteman Nashoba Health Group for the upcoming renewal year, accepting the IAC report dated November 16, 2020 and will revisit in a year.

Bromfield House Committee interviews

Residents Bill Ference, Pat Jennings, Stephen Ford and Bev Rodrigues were each given an opportunity to provide their background and reasons for seeking appointment to the committee. Von Loesecke said official appointments will be made at the December 1st meeting.

Minutes

By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Minar – aye, Sklar – aye, Maiore – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the 11/3, as presented.

Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

At the request of the ZBA, by a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Minar – aye, Maiore – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to change Steve Moeser to associate member and Michael Lawton to be a full member.

Town Administrator Report

- Under the new requirements for testing of public water systems for PFAS the results of those tests for well #2 and well #5 are as follows: Well 2 has a PFAS level of 6.61 ppt, Well 5 has a PFAS level of 15.2 ppt, Well 2 and 5 blended has a PFAS level of 8.28 ppt. These results either individually and combined are below the new State level of 20ppt. We are automatically having a re-test to confirm the results and I will let you know when I receive them. I spoke with Bob Bostwick from MassDEP and he said that as long as the results remain below 20 ppt we will have to do nothing but begin the quarterly testing beginning in Oct. 2021 as we are currently scheduled. Tim Kilhart, once we get the results of the next test, will be providing something to the paper for an article as the information will be put on the State website and he will have to report it in the 2020 Consumer Confidence Report that he files with MassDEP.
At the end of June 30, 2021 our liability insurance company will no longer cover notary services that are not associated with official Town business. This means as of July 1, 2021 we will no longer provide notary services to the general public. Since the Town pays for the renewals of the individual notary licenses we are looking to see what the correct number of notaries will be necessary in order to have official Town documents notarized.
- The Pond Road pole hearing that was delayed last month will resume on December 1st as the location and the guide wire location were found to be okay. This is the pole location to support the new school project.
- The pandemic continues and recently Harvard has been notified that there were 5 confirmed cases since last Thursday and this does not include the School or Town staff persons that tested positive. This is the highest number in a week for Harvard since the pandemic began. As the numbers rise, in both the State and in Harvard, we are being mindful of the safety of our staff who provide direct services to the general public. And if the current projections are true then soon after Thanksgiving there will be serious consideration of stepping back to having Town Hall open to the public by appointment only so that we can control the number of people in the building at any given time. We are already starting to hear this is being done in other communities that have opened up and there are still those that have not been open as long as we have providing all services in person to the public. I will keep you informed of any decisions that will protect the employees and impact services before they are implemented.
- The House has approved their version of the State Budget and the Senate is currently working on theirs (they have 473 filed amendments) and they hope to have something to the Governor by Thanksgiving.

- The initial deadline for resumes for the Finance Director Position is this Friday and we will begin reviewing them next week. We are hoping to have someone onboard before Lori leaves. We advertised in the MMA's The Beacon and the State Accounting Association. We have received several applications from individuals of various expertise and experiences.
- There has been much discussion surrounding town property and cell tower placement. The only property we could currently use is Bolton Road (at the water tower) and this would require an RFP. No RFP has been issued and none have been approved to be issued and thus this property cannot currently be considered. The discussion of Hildreth property is more complicated in that it would first need Town Meeting approval to lease the property for a tower and then an RFP would need to be issued. In short neither property is currently available to be used for this purpose.
- We will be having a hearing for Carlson Orchards on December 1, 2020 and on December 15, 2020 the board will have before them license renewals for 2021.
- Town Report notice went out today and Julie has set Monday, January 25, 2021 as the deadline for getting annual reports to her.
- On a final note we will close at 3PM on the 25th and will be closed on the 26th (Thanksgiving Day) and Friday the 27th.

Transfer Station discussion

Stu Sklar worked with DPW Director Tim Kilhart to gather the necessary data. He also consulted with Mass Toss Director Tessa David. Sklar learned 65% of households in Harvard utilize the Transfer Station. He said based on the high usage he would advocate in support of the transfer station for fiscal22 while planning to bring the issue to town meeting next fall. David offered some ideas on ways to increase revenue such as promoting single stream recyclables when the market comes back or another container for the metal pile. Sklar will work with David to brainstorm innovative ideas possible to help with operating costs for the station. He said the ability for residents to purchase punch cards at the station using a swipe card system will help to catch any last minute needs. Sklar is not opposed to resurrecting the use of volunteers if it can help control costs. Sklar proposed mailing two stickers to each household with their tax bill, continue to charge a fee for the bags and roll the operation costs into the overall budget. His notion is if operating costs are not sustainable with the current system but a majority of town wants to maintain the station then include the operation costs in the overall budget. The board members discussed various options and agreed a fiscal vision for the transfer station is imminent.

Harvard Conservation Trust (HCT) restrictions on Cruft Lane

HCT trustee Tom Cotton explained the conservation restrictions have been certified by the Conservation Commission. Cotton assured the board the CR's are standard and is a substantial gift to the town. He asked the board to vote to accept the restrictions. By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Minar – aye, Maiore – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to accept conservation restrictions on Cruft Lane and easement from Margaret Nestler.

Select Board various budgets

Tim Bragan distributed the Select Board FY22 personnel and expenses.

By a roll call vote, Minar – aye, Maiore – aye, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke – aye, the board voted unanimously to go past 10:00pm to finish the budget review.

Bragan highlighted the following expense increases:

- Building Inspector/Facilities Maintenance salary due to the level of certifications.
- National Grid street light costs
- Building liability insurance coverage by adding the new school.

Bragan reviewed his top additional funding expenses and a prioritized list of cuts, if necessary.

The meeting adjourned at 10:15pm.

Documents referenced:

Oak Hill Rd pole petition request – dated 10.12.2020

Tax Classification – dated 11.17.2020

OSC report and revised charge – dated 11.17.2020

IAC recommendation – dated 11.17.2020

Bromfield House Committee interviews; volunteer forms: Burns dated 11.6.2020, Ference dated 10.30.2020, Ford dated 10.29.2020, Jennings dated 10.28.2020, Wirch dated 10.28.2020, Rodrigues dated 11.17.2020

Transfer Station spreadsheets – dated 11.17.2020

HCT conservation restriction – dated 11.17.2020