

Meeting Minutes March 11, 2024

Ph. (978) 352-5755 □ Fax (978) 352-5727

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Memorial Town Hall

7:00PM-General Meeting

Verizon Channel 42/Comcast channel 9

Selectmen Present: *A. Smith, Chair, D. LaMonica, R. Hoover and R. Bancroft*

Others Present: *Orlando Pacheco, Town Administrator.
M. Shultz, Administrative Assistant participated on Zoom.*

Absent: *D. Dawes.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS :

A. Smith announced good news from the Affordable Housing Trust had received state approval to list an affordable two bedroom, two and a half bath condo located at 201 Central Street, Unit 12 for sale. The lottery opens today and will run for 60 days. And for more information, please contact the affordable housing coordinator, Diana Toomey. There will also be an information session about this lottery, on held via Zoom on Monday, April 8th at 6:00 PM. And the, the trust has also received state approval to list an affordable two-bedroom, one bath, single family home located on Larch Road. And that lottery will be opening very soon, so stay tuned for more.

WALK BY MOONLIGHT:

Michelle Olsen spoke on Community Events Walk, Walk by Moonlight, Keep the Lights on for Small Businesses that will take place with four events starting throughout the summer with the following dates-June 14th, July 17th, August 21st and September 18, 2024. And it's free for the community to get involved, visit the businesses, people that don't have storefronts that would like to set up a table for people to visit them and get to know all the talented people in town. We had a lot of musicians last year also attend. So again, we are going to be on private property, so there's no need for any road closures or anything, and it's going to be along east and west main.

A. Smith mentioned that the group has been a great supporter of local charities with Goats to Go, it was asked about how many are in the group presently, fliers of the event were left for the Board.

NEW BUSINESS: PROPOSITION 2.5 OVERRIDE DISCUSSION:

The Board discussed putting the Finance Committee's recommended \$3 million override on the May ballot. Questions were raised about the round number and school budget not being finalized. The vote was tabled to the March 25 meeting.

The Finance Committee recommended the select board proceed with a \$3 million override and provided ballot question wording

The Finance Advisory Committee met last Wednesday and it was suggested that the residents should watch the meeting, the result of that meeting was to proceed with an override -which will be on the ballot.

O. Pacheco, Town Administrator gave an explanation of a debt exclusion and the general operating override.

O. Pacheco, Town Administrator gave an explanation of the Levy was explained. the levy limit is the amount though the limit at which we are allowed to tax under proposition 2a half. Right. And the difference is one is permanent and one is one just lives with the life cycle, not the life cycle of the debt so if it's 20 years 30 years whatever that may be then once that's paid off and only that amount associated with the debt because sometimes depending on how the debt is structured it declined the amount declines over time in terms of annual payments. So that is all that's excluded, but this is not that case.

A. Smith mentioned that this a permanent increase to our taxes.

D. Lamonica mentioned he has looked over the all the finances, his only issue was when I see a flat number like that, it just tells me we're just going to kind of I'll use the phrase spitball and see what works as opposed to seeing a number, he is still working through all of this finance data that they gave me and it's a lot of numbers, it's not like at home when you do in your home budget, I don't know what vast majority of these line items are, especially with the school department, it was asked if there's a possibility that it might be too much referring to the three million dollar amount.

D. LaMonica spoke on the following: needs of the Town, consequences of our decisions, spoke on some data points, average tax liability that went up and is going up again, spoke in individuals living on a fixed income, seniors living alone, need of a vibrant public safety & schools that is why people live here, thinks its very important that the residents understand these decisions that might have to be made, spoke of people that do not have children in the school system, more seniors than there are school age children, mentioned it is a tough sell when your telling somebody your tax bill is going to be so high.

D. Lamonica questioned using a round \$3 million number rather than an exact figure tied to specific needs. Town Administrator Pacheco explained it was reduced from \$3.1 million as a not-to-exceed number, with some flexibility from increased interest income.

D. LaMonica expressed concerns about the impact of the override on seniors and those with fixed incomes, noting the average tax bill would increase \$926 on top of a recent \$441 average increase. He wants to ensure both the town's needs and taxpayers' concerns are considered.

R. Bancroft spoke on a huge tax increase already this year, asked if there is a reason why this has to be done this year or can it be put off, people cannot handle this not in today's economy, gave an example of going to the grocery store and what you are buy two years ago is not what you're buying today.

O. Pacheco, Town Administrator spoke on objectives that have been spoken of like police staffing at this level, we want fire staffing at this level, to a certain extent, we want school reconfiguration, forget staffing. and all these other items within the school budget that they want to address. So, you have all these other tools you have all these other items in there. I mean, that's really where you get to the ultimately, if people don't approve it, we'll have to come back with a budget that looks very different, structural deficit.

R. Hoover stated that he thinks we have a reasonably good sense of where the school's money went and he would like to clarify that I think your questions are really good, and he thinks the communication proposal he is going to speak on next will be helpful.

Fire Chief Matt McKay advocated for the override, explaining the dire staffing shortages in his department that need to be addressed.

The Board decided to table the vote on placing the question on the ballot to their March 25 meeting, as the wording needs to go to the printer 35 days before the May 8 election.

Questions arose about placing the override on the ballot when the school budget is not finalized, as it makes up a large portion of the overall budget. O. Pacheco, Town Administrator and Finance Committee Vice Chair Raspa clarified the schools have presented preliminary numbers that are being refined but not expected to change substantially.

PUBLIC RELATION PROPOSAL:

R. Hoover presented a proposal from John Guilfoil Public relations LLC.

The Board discussed a proposal from John Guilfoil Public

Relations LLC to assist with town-wide communications and information regarding the proposed override. The proposal includes ongoing PR services and the creation of a dedicated microsite about the budget/override.

Town-wide PR/communications services for \$7,200/year (\$600/month) including coverage of all Town departments except schools.

Creation of a dedicated microsite about the annual budget/override for a one-time fee of \$5,000. The site would host news blogs, documents, and an interactive tax calculator.

Police Chief Dave Sedgwick and Fire Chief Matt McKay spoke in support of Guilfoil's services based on their departments' positive experiences working with the firm.

D. LaMonica motioned the Board to authorize R. Hoover and the Town Administrator to move forward with the Guilfoil proposal, with details on funding to be worked out with the Finance Committee, second by R. Bancroft.

The Board of Selectman does not have this amount budgeted, will have to move funding/line items.

MINUTES & WARRANTS:

R. Bancroft motioned the Board to approve meeting minutes from February 12, 2024 seconded by D. LaMonica. R. Bancroft abstained from vote as she was not present at meeting. Roll call vote was taken 3 to 1 in favor.

R. Hoover motioned the Board to approve meeting minutes from January 8, 2024, seconded by D. LaMonica with a typo error to be corrected. Roll call vote was taken all in favor.

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING WARRANT DISCUSSION:

The Board reviewed a draft list of articles for the Annual Town Meeting warrant. Changes were discussed and the vote to open/close the warrant was deferred to a future meeting.

O. Pacheco, Town Administrator Pacheco presented a preliminary list of potential articles for the Annual Town Meeting warrant, including:

- *Financials and consent agenda*
- *New revolving fund for Council on Aging trip fees*

- *Increase to veterans' tax exemption*
- *Right to Farm bylaw*
- *Solid waste committee bylaw amendment*
- *Fire alarm bylaw amendment to increase fees*
- *Bylaw amendment to allow Finance Committee members to serve on other boards/committees*
- *Potential road acceptances*
- *Capital projects*
- *Noise/Construction bylaw*
- *MBTA Communities zoning*
- *Community Preservation Committee projects*

The Board discussed some of the articles in more detail. No votes were taken as the articles still need to be finalized. The board will review final warrant article language and vote to open/close the warrant at a future meeting.

The Town received its FY25 Chapter 90 allocation of \$306,937.96 from the state for road and sidewalk maintenance.

Town Administrator O. Pacheco reported the Town received notice of its FY25 Chapter 90 allocation from the state in the amount of \$306,937.96. This funding is used by the DPW for road and sidewalk maintenance projects. The allocation amount is based on the miles of public ways in the town, including state routes 133 and 97 which are maintained by the Town.

SELECTMEN'S REPORT:

The Board will be meeting on the following dates:

- *April 8, 2024*
- *April 22, 2024*
- *May 6, 2024 -Prior to Town Meeting*
- *May 20, 2024*

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT: *O. Pacheco, Town Administrator discussed the following:*

CHAPTER 90 ALLOCATION- *The Town received notice of its FY25 Chapter 90 allocation from the state in the amount of \$306,937.96. This funding is used by the DPW for road and sidewalk maintenance projects. The allocation amount is based on the miles of public ways in the town, including state routes 133 and 97 which are maintained by the town.*

MBTA COMMUNITY ZONING PUBLIC HEARING-*The Planning Board has scheduled a public hearing for March 27th at 7:00 PM via Zoom on the proposed MBTA Communities zoning bylaw. A draft zoning map was provided showing the area under consideration for the multi-family overlay district. O. Pacheco, Town Administrator emphasized this is being driven by the need to comply with state requirements, not an initiative of the Planning Board.*

TOWN PLANNER ADVERTISEMENT. *The Town has posted the Town Planner job opening and started receiving applications as the current Planner prepares to retire. With Town Planner John Cashell retiring, the town has advertised for his replacement and begun receiving applications. John Cashell's last day was the prior week. A small celebration was held before he left for a vacation.*

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE *recommended Projects-Standard seven (7) projects- last meeting was good focus was on needs, dollar will be in the Warrant. The Community Preservation Committee met and voted to recommend seven projects for CPA funding, along with the standard financial reserves article. Dollar amounts for each project will be included in the Town Meeting warrant. A public information meeting on the projects will be held in early April.*

SENIOR CENTER BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS POLICY *-The Council on Aging board and director developed a new behavior policy for the senior center in response to some recent issues with participants, there have been some challenging interactions with certain senior center participants recently that have made the staff uncomfortable. In response, the Council on Aging board and director drafted a new behavior expectation policy for the senior center. The goal is to have clear rules in place, so, if participants do not follow them, they can be asked to leave. The policy still needs to be reviewed by town counsel. Alternate accommodations are made when needed so no one is denied services.*

R. LaMonica was surprised to hear about this.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

A. Smith spoke on the Public Comment time on the agenda and would prefer it takes place at the beginning of the agenda.

Chris Candia, 140 Tenney Street, Conservation Commission member spoke on the following:

False Narratives going around for six years, uncloud the way people perceive the Conservation, still hearing about payroll fraud, spoke of a 2018 legal criminal report from our Town Council which had found no mis conduct from our former Conservation Agent, hours, exempt employee, salary employee, still keeps hearing payroll fraud, all on the board is ethnical and good people not fraudulent feels like they have a shroud over them, Conservation spends hours helping people ,no one has an agenda and no one is bias. questioned salary exempt employees time, exempt employees using time sheets, spoke of hours of work and work being done by the former conservation agent starting daily @ 6AM, would like Concom to have a fresh start, wants to put this all behind them.

O. Pacheco, Town Administrator stated that that is not true-not a criminal complaint and it did not address payroll fraud -it was false-read from the complaint

O. Pacheco, Town Administrator asked if she had evidence of any of that work was being done as she stated regarding the past agent.

A. Smith spoke for the board on improvements for the Conservation Commission that have already been made, complete support has been given to the current chair.

D. LaMonica stated Point of Order spoke on the expectation as a Board as she would be speaking as a resident and not a member of the Conservation Commission wanted to reiterate the better venue would be to add it to an agenda -residents are entitled to know who is speaking -separate commission within the Town -can't conflict the answer, identify the issues -not dismissing what is being and the Board always willing to listen but has to be in the right context.

Resident Ida Wye, 1 Andover Street spoke a as resident and asked about a meeting that was supposed to take place between the Conservation and the Board of Selectman that did not take place.

A. Smith clarified that this meeting was supposed to take be scheduled by the former Chair Carl Shrader but never happened.

ADJOURNMENT: *D. Lamonica motioned the Board to adjourn, seconded by R. Bancroft. Roll call vote to adjourn the meeting all in favor.*

NEXT MEETING: March 25, 2024.

