

Select Board Minutes
Tuesday, April 7, 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 Staff participants:

Town Administrator Tim Bragan, Meeting Host/Assistant Town Administrator Marie Sobalvarro, Executive Assistant Julie Doucet

Minutes

By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar –aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke - aye, the board voted unanimously to approve minutes of 2/25 & 3/3, as presented.

Open Space Committee Appointment

By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar –aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke - aye, the board voted unanimously to appoint Dan Daly to Open Space Committee as the rep from Park & Recreation.

Carlson Orchards pouring license fee

Carlson Orchards requested the fee they paid for one day liquor licenses not used be credited toward the fee due for their newly approved pouring license. By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar –aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke - aye, the board voted unanimously to apply the balance of unused one days issued for 2019 to the current license fee with a balance of \$550 due.

Tax payment extensions

Bragan announced the town is extending the due date of 2020 Real Estate & Personal Property tax bills to June 1st and excise tax payments to May 1st. There will be no penalty fees assessed.

Covid-19 affects to the FY20 & FY21 budgets

The board members discussed how Covid-19 could impact local and state budgets for FY20 and FY21. Bragan reported revenues are less than forecasted due to the state shutdown. He has instituted a policy with town departments to limit all spending to essential with approval from town administrator required. Bragan will begin working with the Finance Committee on options to address possible budget shortfalls. He explained the State of Massachusetts has a rainy day fund which could be utilized during this time. Bragan will continue to follow the state's budget process closely.

Transfer Station operation and fees

The board needed to revisit previous discussions regarding the Transfer Station. Bragan asked the board to consider relaxing sticker requirements bearing in mind the need to increase user costs. Sobalvarro said with costs increasing and the transfer station still running in a deficit why not simplify the process for residents. Everyone realizes the town will eventually need to decide to either keep running the Transfer Station or move to a more cost effective system. Currently, the sticker revenue helps pay for operations and the bag revenue is applied toward municipal solid waste. By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar –aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke - aye, the board voted unanimously to relax regulations, increase sticker price to \$130 for up to two stickers and an additional cost for a third sticker.

Covid19 updates

Bragan confirmed after discussion with the Moderator the Annual Town Meeting is being moved from May 2nd to June 20th. This will follow a traditional schedule with the town election being moved to Tuesday, June 23rd.

They revisited their previous discussion with respect to budget impacts due to the Covid – 19 pandemic. They talked about utilizing the capital and/or the stabilization funds if the override does not pass. Bragan said under the circumstances there is a very good chance it will not. Everyone was in agreement brainstorming ideas sooner rather than later on ways to address budget shortfalls is the best approach. Bragan expects state revenue projections prior to the next Select Board meeting on April 23rd.

Bragan has received complaints related to the closure of the Harvard Gun Club. He said people are under the impression Harvard closed it down. He said this is not the case and the gun club is primarily located in Boxborough. He directed those concerned to contact Boxborough directly.

Bragan prepared the updated town meeting warrant with new dates for the meeting and election for signatures by the board members.

Minar asked about releasing the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in town. Von Loesecke has noticed some communities are publishing this information on their websites and others are not. In her opinion, residents have the right to know. She believes it is a matter of trust and exhibits full transparency. Wallace and Sklar agree with von Loesecke. Bragan said the release of this information is under the jurisdiction of the Board of Health. Minar believes this may create a false sense of security which is the wrong public message to send. In addition, she wonders about the accuracy of numbers. Von Loesecke invited Ambulance Service Co-Director Jason Cotting to offer his opinion. Cotting said the reporting of confirmed cases, in his opinion, is bad information and he feels good decisions cannot be made with bad information. They decided to reach out to the Emergency Response Team to convey the boards desire to share the number of confirmed cases with an understanding this is a decision to be made by the Board of Health.

By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar –aye, Sklar – aye, von Loesecke - aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the warrant with new dates for the Annual Town Meeting and town Election.

Bragan recommended the Select Board allow Fivesparks to defer rental payments for the old library over the next few months and spread the balance due out over the term of the lease. The board members were agreeable to this suggestion. Town administration will contact Fivesparks about this decision.

Minar asked town administration to inform employees and board/committee members this virus should only be referred to as the Coronavirus or Covid-19 and nothing else.

Bragan reported town hall employees continue to work from home and at the office part of the time. He mentioned there are positions within the town government that are working from home but based on their job responsibilities there is little for them to do. Town administration has begun thinking about how to address employees that have a reduced amount of work due to the state shutdown. He noted in some departments the workload relies primarily on public foot traffic. The board members understand the need for administration to consider all options however during these trying times they do not want to add to the incredible stress employees are under already.

Wallace publically thanked all of the first responders, doctors and nurses within our community for all they are doing.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40pm.