Select Board Minutes
Tuesday, April 6, 2021
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:
Kara Minar, Stu Sklar, Lucy Wallace
Select Board members absent:
Alice von Loesecke & Rich Maiore

Town Department attendees:
Town Administrator Tim Bragan, Assistant Town Administrator/HR Director Marie Sobalvarro and Executive Assistant Julie Doucet

Additional participants:
Board of Health Chair Sharon McCarthy & Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee Chair Bruce Leicher

Discuss statewide mosquito spraying
Board of Health Chair Sharon McCarthy explained an application for an Alternative Mosquito Management Plan is required for a municipality to Opt-Out of spraying conducted by the state Reclamation and Mosquito Control Board by May 15th. McCarthy said along with the application a public hearing is required and a formal vote by the Select Board. The Opt-Out application has been reviewed by the Board of Health and requires input from various town officials. Lucy Wallace thought it prudent to have the Town Administrator involved. Kara Minar will assist in organizing a meeting with those officials that need to be involved; DPW Director and Community & Economic Development Director. Together they will review the required information to determine if indeed the town can facilitate their own alternative mosquito management plan to qualify for the Opt-Out option.

Minutes
By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Minar -aye, the board voted unanimously to approve minutes of 3/16, as presented.

Public Communication
Kathleen Doherty, Bromfield teacher and member of the Harvard Teachers Association Negotiating Team, gave a statement on behalf of the Harvard Teachers Association (HTA). (Attachment A)

Staff Report/Updates
- The Ginny Thurston Scholarship is available this year. Alice von Loesecke & Rich Maiore were tasked with reviewing the letters of interest submitted.

- Event requests for Harvard for 2021 updates: No Annual Plant Sale this year; The Fireman's Muster is new this year and will be held on June 19. There are no road races until we get to Phase 4 Step 2.
- The Insurance Advisory Committee (IAC) met to review the FY22 apples-to-apples comparison for the insurance proposals (MIIA vs. MNHG); if you recall, one of their issues was that there was not a true comparison. If the Town had made the switch last year, we would have saved $163,000 in contributions ($114K Town/$49K Employee). This review will come up again, and the Board will have another chance to join Blue Cross Blue Shield if there is, hopefully, savings like we missed this year and if our claims profile remains favorable. With the potential change this past fall and the new actual comparison, the retirees would have been the group that saved the most at a rate of approximately 16% savings. Next year the landscape will be different and the ability to save may very well be diminished. Fallon announced last week that it will no longer offer commercial plans for FY23, and instead will concentrate on their Medicare and Medicaid options (see attached). MNHG will be working this issue and may bring in a new provider and if they do not those on Fallon will see larger increases next year (Fallon plans are subsidized by MNHG and other plans have a higher starting cost).
- The new drinking water report for 2020 is available on-line for everyone.
- Our email provider Civic Plus, now Civic Engage Open, informed Harvard the First-Class Email service will cease to operate on September 1st. Our IT contractor is working on how to migrate or archive tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of emails and what the easiest platform would be to transfer them to.
- The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) guidelines will be coming out sometime during the second week of May and until then there is only speculation of what we can and cannot spend funds on. Employee Unions looking at these funds as a way to fund their contracts must be cautious as the Town cannot use Cares or ARPA funds for these purposes. The schools may be able to use ESSER Funds (different set of regulations).

<u>Budget Updates</u>:

- There was a small change since last meeting and that had to do with the interest on the renewed BANs being able to be raised as the items were exempted from proposition 2 ½.
- On the State level there is no new movement but the lottery continues to do well and tax collections for March were up.
- Town Hall opened April 5th with social distancing, face masks, and hand sanitizer being required. The issue with the rise of the variants and thus the number of infected individuals in Massachusetts is rising with both the England and Brazil strains being the cause along with people letting their guard down. Town Hall has seen a limited number of issues with people not wanting to wear masks or maintain their distance and we will be escorting these folks out of the building. Thus far there has not been a Covid positive person at Town Hall and this is due to diligence and safety measures. We have opened up safely and if we have to take a step back due to this most recent rise in numbers we will.
- Friday, April 9th, Town Hall Staff will work from home as the Facilities Manager is having a cleaning company come in to clean the floors and rugs.

Act on request from the Town Clerk to reduce hours of the town election

By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Minar – aye, the board voted unanimously to authorize the Town Clerk to set voting hours for the May 18th town election of 3:00pm to 8:00pm.

Finalize ballot question for the old library roof
Lucy Wallace offered a suggested edit. By a roll vote, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Minar – aye, the board voted unanimously to endorse ballot question 1 for the old library slate roof.
(Shall the Town of Harvard be allowed to exempt from the provisions of Proposition two-and-one-half, so called, the amounts required to pay for the additional bonds issued in order to repair/replace the slate roof, gutters and necessary brickwork on the Old Town Library?)

Act on Revenue Ideation Committee charge
The topic was tabled to the next meeting when Rich Maiore is present.

Community Project Funding support letter for Fruitlands Museum
By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Minar – aye, the board voted unanimously to endorse letter to Congresswoman Lori Trahan.

Bare Hill Pond Watershed Management Committee - conflict of interest
BHPWMC Chair Bruce Leicher explained this came about because questions had been raised as to whether members of the committee might have a financial interest in decisions by virtue of their ownership of property which abuts or is near the pond or within its watershed. Town Counsel was consulted and recommended a ruling be obtained from the Select board to cover any committee member participating in these decisions based upon applicable exemptions. A local real estate attorney can assist with this. Lucy Wallace asked if this issue impacts other boards/committees. Town Administrator Tim Bragan will again consult Town Counsel for clarity. By a roll call vote, Wallace – aye, Sklar – aye, Minar -aye, the board voted unanimously to authorize the participation of any/all BHPWMC members, including those who either abut Bare Hill Pond or are in the Bare Hill Pond Watershed, in any of these matters/decisions that would fall under MGL Ch. 268A Sections 19 (b)(1) and (3)

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm.

Documents referenced:
Mosquito spraying article – dated 3.23.2021
Town Clerk request – dated 3.18.2021
Revenue Ideation Committee draft – dated March 2021
Community Project Funding support letter – dated 4.6.2021
Letter from Owner/Broker/Appraiser David Haschig (conflicts of interest for BHPWMC members) dated 3.26.2021

Attachment A

HTA statement to the Harvard Select Board ~ Tuesday, April 6th ~ 7 pm

Good evening. My name is Kathleen Doherty. I am a Bromfield teacher and also a member of the Harvard Teachers Association Negotiating Team, both last year and this year. I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the HTA.

Harvard educators are concerned that the School Committee is moving our contract into state mediation even though the HTA and the School Committee reached a three-year agreement just prior to schools closing in March 2020.

After members of the HTA ratified that agreement, the School Committee did not take a ratification vote and instead asked if educators would be willing to implement just the first year of the contract, given the financial uncertainty we all faced at the start of the pandemic. We agreed to that request.

Now that we all have a clear picture of the substantial federal assistance that Harvard will receive to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic, it is time for the School Committee to ratify the remainder of the full three-year contract it bargained in good faith with the HTA.

But rather than do that, the School Committee is still trying to unnecessarily re-negotiate years 2 and 3 of our contract and has unilaterally called in a state mediator to facilitate this.

Frankly, educators find this move to be demoralizing and disrespectful, especially in light of the job we have done over this past year to meet the academic, social and emotional needs of our students.

Furthermore, this handling of the HTA's contract is part of a troubling pattern in the treatment of municipal employees in Harvard. In addition to our upcoming mediation, the Harvard police officers and the town are in arbitration over a contract and the department of public works employees have been working without a contract since July. It is also worth noting that five of the DPW's 11 employees have left Harvard over the past year to work in other towns offering more competitive compensation. It is unusual and disturbing that there is so much contention between the town of Harvard and its employees.

All of these issues have come about during the pandemic. We are optimistic that as the worst of the pandemic is (hopefully!) coming to a close, so too will these unfortunate and unnecessary labor disputes. The recent announcement of over two million dollars of funding to Harvard through the American Rescue Plan and the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds should help to facilitate a fair and swift resolution to all of these issues.

It is important to note, however, that even without this economic aid, the contract reached by the HTA and School Committee in 2020 is very comparable to the ones that other towns in the region had settled - and continue to settle; other communities which have also been facing this pandemic and are still able to honor their current contracts.

We are here tonight to urge the members of the Select Board to take whatever steps you can to see that the existing contract between the Harvard educators and the School Committee is implemented and also to commit to ensuring that all town employees are treated with fairness and respect.

Thank you for your time and consideration.