



Select Board Minutes Tuesday, July 18, 2023 7:00pm

The Select Board Regular Meeting was held virtually in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2023 to Provide for Supplementing Certain Existing Appropriations and for Certain Other Activities and Projects, and signed into law on March 29, 2023, this meeting was conducted via remote participation.

Select Board participants:

Erin McBee, Charles Oliver, Don Ludwig, Kara Minar

Rich Maiore was absent. Vice Chair Erin McBee chaired the meeting

Town Department participants:

Town Administrator Tim Bragan, Assistant Town Administrator Marie Sobalvarro, Executive Assistant Julie Doucet

Additional participants:

Bonnie Chandler, Tom Cotton, Jim Lee, Pat Jennings

Board of Registrars appointment

Longtime resident Bonnie Chandler expressed her interest in serving to help with elections.

By a roll call vote, McBee – aye, Ludwig – aye, Oliver – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar – aye, the board voted unanimously Bonnie Chandler to the Board of Registrars.

Harvard Conservation Trust restriction Mettacomett Path/Jacob Gates Rd

Trust members Jim Lee and Tom Cotton were present to explain the benefits of this restriction and answers any questions. They thanked the family for their patience through this process. The restriction includes 27 acres. By a roll call vote, McBee – aye, Ludwig – aye, Minar – aye, Oliver – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the conservation restriction on Mettacomett Path and Jacob Gates Road as described.

Historical Society upcoming event

Pat Jennings announced the Historical Society is hosting a program to mark the 250th anniversary of the Boston Tea Party and Harvard's Elijah Houghton who was here. The event will be held on September 9th and they invite all to attend.

Minutes

By a roll call vote, McBee – aye, Ludwig – aye, Oliver – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve minutes from 6/6, 6/20 and 6/21.

Annual appointment corrections

Executive Assistant Julie Doucet outlined appointment terms that needed adjusting:

- Planning Board - John McCormack from one alternate to full three-year term
- Conservation Commission – Paul Willard to one year associate
- Historical Commission - Marjike Vallaeys to one year alternate

By a roll call vote, McBee – aye, Ludwig – aye, Oliver – aye, Maiore – aye, Minar – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve appointment corrections.

Staff Report/Updates (Attachment A)

Open Space Committee appointment

By a roll call vote, Minar – aye, McBee – aye, Ludwig – aye, Oliver – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to appoint Kerri Green to the Open Space Committee as Agricultural Advisory Committee member.

Resignation of Corey Dufresne from the Permanent Building Committee

The board recognized the departure of Corey Dufresne from the committee. They thanked him for his contributions.

FY24 Goals (Attachment B)

Rich Maiore asked his fellow board member if the draft goals were captured accurately. All agreed.

Review and discuss budget calendar for the 2024 annual town meeting

Town Administrator Tim Bragan reviewed the draft FY25 budget memorandum which included important dates for their consideration. They decided to move their second meeting in February to the 27th to avoid school vacation week. They discussed how the town election date will need to be adjusted due to the earlier town meeting. A date was not chosen.

After some discussion on how to handle the budget parameters they agreed to ask departments to submit two budgets; level funded and level service. This will allow for the proper amount of due diligent during a budget cycle that may prove to be challenging. All agreed this will allow for thoughtful consideration of choices that may be required.

Assistant Town Administrator Marie Sobalvarro created a new budget calendar format for easy reference. In addition, they reviewed the Capital Planning and Investment memorandum which required submission by September 1st.

Select Board Reports

Erin McBee reported the Planning Board is working on the Open Space Residential Design Bylaw for the fall town meeting. The proposed project on Ayer Rd is ongoing as well as the MBA Community Guidelines.

Executive Session per MGL Ch. 30A, s. 21(a)2

By a roll call vote, Minar–aye, Oliver – aye, McBee– aye, Ludwig – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to enter executive session at 8:00pm as per MGL 30A Sec. 21.2 To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.

The meeting adjourned at 8:20pm.

Documents referenced:

Chandler vol form – dated 6.14.2023

CR materials – dated June 2023

Dufresne resignation – date 6.15.2023

SB Goals – FY24

Budget memos – dated 8.4.2023

CPIC memo – dated 8.6.2023

FY25 Budget calendar - draft

**Staff Report
July 18, 2023**

1. Miscellaneous:

- a. The Town Clerk, Lynn Kelly, has left us as she had given her notice and decided to go to work with a friend of hers. She will be missed.
- b. A new Town Clerk, Rose Miranda, will be starting on the 24th of this month. (see attached)
- c. Nashoba Associated Boards of Health announced (see attached) that they will be closing their Nashoba Nursing Services and the Hospice program, which was a fee for service program and was separate from the regular work NABH provides to cities and towns. This will not impact the public health nursing services they provide member communities.
- d. A copy of the 2022 Water Quality Report from Devens is attached and is another great reason why our connection to Devens will be beneficial for Harvard. There PFAS levels are at 1.5, this is well below the State's limit of 20 and the pending Federal level of possibly 4.

2. State Fiscal Notes of Interest: (State House News Service)

- a. In a July 5th article the SHNS reported that Massachusetts is one of six states without a budget. We are joined in this group by Michigan, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.
- b. The lack of a budget continues on to today with the House only meeting formally once in 78 days. We may not have an approved State budget or a closeout of the FY23 budget until after we start our FY25 budget process.
- c. The House did pass a supplemental bill for FY23 last Thursday in the amount of \$693 million. One of the items in the bill is funding for Special Education cost which have skyrocketed since the pandemic.
- d. The State is making a considerably smaller rainy-day fund deposit this year than in previous years. This year the deposit was expected to be ~\$1.5 billion but is tied to Capital Gains Taxes which have been trending much lower than expected. This year it looks like the deposit to the rainy-day fund will be almost 1/2 of the original and come in around \$595 million plus 90% of whatever capital gains is collected in June.
- e. June revenues (mid-month) were 1.6% (\$36m) above last year and totaled \$2.277 billion. This is still behind the benchmark set during budget preparations to the tune of \$583 million. Overall, revenues for Fiscal 2023 are down \$1.93 billion from Fiscal 2022 levels.
- f. This drop, in rainy-day revenue and overall tax collections, is unsettling and is only made more complicated by the fact that Massachusetts Business Confidence is still holding steady in the pessimistic zone. This is coupled with the fact that the House and Senate cannot agree on what tax relief for businesses will look like. This could not bode well for planning FY25 budgets.

3. Police Updates:

- a. Because of Chief Babu's willingness to work with Stow on the co-clinician NVRDD is receiving \$45k.

- b. The POST (Peace Officers Standards and Training) Commission certified over 9,760 officers. There are only 557 officers across the state (non in Harvard) that have not submitted the necessary information to get certified

4. Energy Items:

- a. The State has rolled out a new dashboard that tracks electric vehicle rollout. The dashboard tracks electric passenger vehicles registered in Massachusetts. This tool was set up to help track climate progress.
- b. An article in the Lowell Sun on July 3rd discussed the need for reliability to take priority in energy policies so that we do not end up like California and Texas with rolling blackouts. The grid's stability is of utmost importance.
- c. Solect Energy is working on a proposal for the COA solar array.

5. Housing Development Issues:

- a. Recent applications to MassHousing under Chapter 40B have been for rental projects like the 300-unit project in Dracut that has recently received MassHousing approval.

6. Buildings and Fields:

- a. The COA has fully moved into their new building, and is enjoying the opportunity to host larger events.
- b. Gale Associates is finalizing their interviews for the Field Needs Study, and is on schedule for mid-August completion.
- c. Harvard Park and Woods bid package is out, responses due 7/17.
- d. The Permanent Building Committee will be meeting tomorrow to review and refine the contract with their selected engineer for the DPW Schematic Design.

7. Notice, Reminders, and Updates:

- a. Budget letter will go out on August 6, 2023, in accordance with Chapter 14 of our bylaws, as the official start of the FY25 budget process.
- b. There will be a dog hearing on August 8, 2023 at 7:30PM.
- c. The Sarah Watson Scholarship is available to current college students. Information can be found on the town website with applications due by August 15, 2023
- d. The Harvard Lions Club has applied for a one-day liquor license for their fall festival. The one-day liquor license policy calls for a hearing upon the initial request but subsequent requests do not require a hearing if the event is held without any issues. This has been the case with this event therefore the license will be on the August 8th agenda for approval.

Select Board Goals for FY24

Determine Future of Town Fire & EMT departments

- Review potential merger plan
- Gain input from residents, town departments and committees
- Determine whether to move forward with proposed merger

Increase Resident Engagement in Town Governance

- Increase attendance at Town Meetings
- Increase number and diversity of volunteers
- Research new ways to regularly communicate SB activity to residents

Improve Town's Future Financial Stability

- Explore new revenue sources
- Assess budget process
- Develop plan to update and collaborate with Town Depts and Committees on potential override in 2024

Improve & Increase Town Playing Fields

- Share and gain feedback from Needs Assessment report scheduled for completion by Sept 2023
- Identify specific parcels for potential development
- Determine potential costs and funding sources

Develop Vision for the future of Transfer Station

- Create ad hoc committee to research needs, gain resident input and provide recommended plan
- Develop recommendations to increase usage by residents

Ensure Harvard is a More Accessible Community

- In collaboration with Town Depts & relevant committees implement priority tasks from Committee on Disabilities 2023 plan

Increase Affordable Housing in Town

- Work with Municipal Affordable Housing Trust to communicate and implement 2023 Housing Production Plan
- Conduct outreach with state and local elected officials

Expand Town's Green Initiatives

- Support HEAC to identify potential future solar and EV opportunities
- Work with Town Depts and relevant committees to implement HCIC plan