



Select Board Minutes
Tuesday, November 21, 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:

Rich Maiore, Charles Oliver, Don Ludwig, Kara Minar
Erin McBee was absent

Town Department participants:

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

National Grid pole hearing continued – Fairbank Street

Rich Maiore explained this hearing was continued to encourage National Grid to follow through on the towns request for removal of the pole located in the Bromfield parking lot. He is also mindful of the delay this causes for the homeowner in need of this approval. Maiore proposed approving the request now while town administration works with National Grid to finally have the pole in question removed. Homeowner Fay Martin asked the Select Board to act on her request and she too will encourage National Grid to remove the pole in the Bromfield parking lot. By a roll call vote, Minar – aye, Ludwig – aye, Oliver – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the National Grid pole at 5 Fairbank Street.

Hearing on noncompliance of required training by Conservation Commission member

Rich Maiore confirmed with Town Administrator Tim Bragan that all requirements have been met therefore a hearing is not necessary.

Public Communication

Resident Bill Johnson submitted a letter in support of the town center cell tower. He described two incidents one personal and another that the lack of cell service was an obvious detriment to those in immediate need. (Attachment A)

Update from HR Director on Dental and Eye insurance benefit options and next steps

HR Director Marie Sobalvarro shared material on the dental and eye offerings from MIIA. This includes the Dental Blue Freedom Plan for either family or individual and Blue 20/20 options for eye care. She indicated the next step would be for the Insurance Advisory Committee (IAC) to review and provide recommendation. The plans would take effect on July 1, 2024. She confirmed this will be entirely employee paid and offered to all employees of the town. The only cost to the town is the additional administrative responsibilities for the HR Director and payroll clerk. Sobalvarro said this coverage will terminate upon retirement therefore no OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) liability. By a roll call vote, Minar – aye, Oliver – aye, Ludwig – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve dental and eye care for review by the IAC with report back to the Select Board.

Minutes

By a roll call vote, Ludwig – aye, Oliver – aye, Minar – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the 11/7, as presented.

Staff Report/updates (Attachment B)

Decide next steps on the cell tower

Town Administrator Tim Bragan reported the recent request for proposals had no responses. He provided possible options to the Select Board for moving forward. Everyone agreed this is an important priority for public safety.

Discuss particulars for the Grant Coordinator/Administrator position

The board members discussed part time versus full time and options for contracting for this assistance. They all agree committees need the support and anticipate grants funds could help with funding of the position. HCIC member Ellen Leicher confirmed MRPC has contracted with a grant writing consultant that communities can utilize. She believes the Transportation Advisory Committee is working with their consultant currently.

Act on rental space agreement for the new Council on Aging building

By a roll call vote, Oliver – aye, Ludwig – aye, Minar – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the rental space agreement.

Resignation of Jefferson Burson from the HCIC

The board recognized the resignation and a letter of thanks will be sent.

Act on surplus items from the Department of Public Works

Assistant Town Administrator Marie Sobalvarro described the items from the DPW; catch basin truck, fire tanker, tractor, and vehicle. By a roll call vote, Oliver – aye, Ludwig – aye, Minar – aye, Maiore – aye, the board voted unanimously to approve the surplus items from the DPW as detailed for sale on GovDeals.

Discuss holiday lights for the town common

Rich Maiore is revisiting his idea from last year to have festive holiday lights on the town common. He has spoken with a company that would install and take down the display. He expects to have an estimate for consideration at the next meeting. The board members were supportive of the idea.

Select Board Reports

Charles Oliver reported the Capital Planning & Investment Committee are reviewing requests currently.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm.

Documents referenced:

Dental Blue & Blue 20/20

Grant Writer job desc. – dated 11.15.2023

Senior Center Building use – dated Nov 2023

Jefferson Burson resignation – dated 10.20.2023

To: The Harvard Select Board

I am unable to attend the Select Board tonight. However, I would like to submit this public comment as the Board considers its options following the lack of response to the most recent RFP for the Town Center cell tower.

Improving the cell telephone coverage in Town is more than a public need, it's a public imperative as part of the Emergency Services responsibility of the Town to its residents and others traveling inside our borders. To repeat the obvious, a person in the uncovered area of Town can only reach 911 if they are within WiFi range of their personal home. Not in their car, not on the street, not even in the far reaches of their own property. And even that assumes that power or cable service has not been lost in a storm event or car crash. On several occasions, I have had to walk or drive to the center of Town get sufficient cell service to report downed telephone poles on Warren Avenue with wires hanging low or even on the ground. A car went off the road and crashed down in a ditch a couple of years ago, and the drivers and passengers were unable to call for help. They had to go to a nearby house to be able to call Emergency Services. But the greatest risk is for a medical emergency, and I have a very personal story that I would like to share.

Nineteen days ago, I went for a walk as part of rehabilitation for a pacemaker implant that I had the month before. Normally I walk to the area south of my house on Warren Ave, away from Town Center, where there are fewer cars and, also no cell coverage. That day, I veered from my norm and decided to walk to Town Hall and back. I made it as far as Elm Street when I went had an A-fib episode so extreme that it triggered the defibrillator in my pacemaker. *Twice*. It knocked me to the ground, but my cell phone was in reach so that I was able to call my wife and 911. Police and ambulance were there in minutes, and I was taken to the hospital under Advanced Life Services supervision.

I was lucky. If I had been anywhere on my normal walks, or even at the beginning or end of that walk on Pond or Warren Avenue, I would have been unable to call for help. ***Unable to call for help...***

We don't need to optimize this cell tower proposal for revenue or aesthetics. We need to optimize it for timeliness and effectiveness. Let's follow the consultant's recommendations to lower the fee structure and proactively secure the necessary zoning variances ourselves. Whatever it takes to make this happen quickly.

Before we lose someone because they were unable to call for help.

Bill Johnson
72 Warren Avenue

Staff Report, November 21, 2023

Building/Facility/Project Related:

- VoIP is 95% of the way completed; what this means is that there's intermittent service while we port Verizon numbers to our new system. All should be operational by the end-of-day Wednesday.
- The Massachusetts Smart Solar Incentive Program has moved our application for the Senior Center/COA forward to the next step after approving our application. Many thanks to Marie Sobalvarro and David Fay for their efforts with respect to this project.
- The Solar project for the Senior Center has been deemed complex by National Grid which may mean delay or further decisions to be made.

FY24 Operations:

- Julie and I have been working on a Memorial Bench and Tree Policy as requests have been made to plant a tree or place a bench in honor of a loved one. Attached are two policies, one that would allow for such memorials and one that would not allow it. We are waiting to hear from Library, School, Park and Recreation and Conservation for their thoughts and input as they are other entities that have and control land in town. During our research we found stories that support placing these memorials on public land and ones that oppose it. Opposition to such a policy has been that it changes the feel/vibe of an open space area to one of a memorial setting, there is limited space to have such a memorial, upkeep can be intensive, and deciding who can have one (1st come 1st served) and not having a place for someone that dedicated their life volunteering for the community. In fact, I reached out to Bill Calderwood and JC Ferguson to get their input from the Elm Commission representative and Tree Warden specifically around tree memorials (see their replies attached) and they are generally not in favor.
- Drop and Ride to Littleton train station started on the 6th of November and will continue daily Monday through Friday. There were two riders last week on the return 5:45 PM trip.

FY25:

- The CPIC, FinCom, and CPC are all working toward having their recommendation done in accordance with the schedule set in place earlier this fiscal year (see attached). Budgets have been submitted or requests made and questions and answers are flowing between the committees and departments.

Legislature/Beacon Hill: (information from State House News unless otherwise noted)

- The Secretary of Administration and Finance and the Department of Revenue have been monitoring the four-month tax trend and reported to the House and Senate that tax revenues for the first four months of FY2024 have fell short \$355 million and that each month has seen the revenue miss the target set back when the State Budget was

developed and approved. This is the first time in over five years that tax revenue has not met the benchmark for each month for four consecutive months.

- The House and Senate as of last Wednesday were working out a financial deal that would close-out last year's budget shortfall and deal with ongoing issues for Family Shelters, MassHealth, State Contract Settlements, and Special Education Costs.
- Recent report out by the Retailers Association of Massachusetts (RAM) sees flat spending for the upcoming holiday season. If this comes true then sales tax revenue will take a hit and this will be on top of the first quarter deficits.
- October home sales dropped to a 12 year low in October. If this trend continues it means less funds to CPA and that State may have to infuse money into that system again.
- One of the bigger budget items the State will need to contend with in the near and distant future is the repair cost of the MBTA. It is currently estimated to cost \$25 billion for everything that is not currently in a state of good repair.

Notices, Reminders, Dates of Note:

- UU Calendar of events at the church and Fellowship Hall. (See attached)
- Julie sent out the 2023 Town Report notice to all departments, boards, and committees and the deadline for submitting the material is January 18, 2024.
- Town Offices will be closed the day after Thanksgiving as staff will be using PTO for that day.
- Annual Licensing will be coming up at the Board's second meeting in December (12/19/23).