



BOARD OF SELECTMEN REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Monday, Oct. 24, 2022

Members Present: Shana M. Shufelt, Chair, Steven J. Ouellette, Richard W. Brewer, Ann E. Boxler, Brian Valcourt

Also Present: James Hartnett, Town Administrator

6:00 p.m. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Ms. Shufelt with the above members present, and commenced with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Acknowledgments & Recognitions

The Chair noted the recent passing of resident Muriel Peters, who served the Town as a poll worker for more than 30 years, mostly at the Macomber School. Ms. Shufelt also noted that Early Voting for the November election is now underway, with polls in the basement of Town Hall open from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. for the convenience of voters.

1. Public Hearings: None.

2. Licenses/Permits: None.

3. Appointments and Resignations

a. Request from Keith Dias to be appointed to the Recreation Commission. Mr. Dias was present, and told the Board that he was a Westport native who returned to town in 2008 after some time living elsewhere. He is the part owner of Cat & Raven, a local business, and has experience in entertainment and marketing which he felt would be of value to the Commission.

MOTION by Mr. Valcourt to appoint Keith Dias to the Recreation Commission. Second by Mr. Ouellette. The motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

b. Request from Matthew Armendo, Board of Health Director, to appoint Ryan Furtado as Transfer Station Worker, effective Nov. 3, 2022. Mr. Armendo told the Board that he has been trying to fill the vacant position requiring a Commercial Driver's License (Class B) and Hoisting License for nearly a year without success. The candidate he is recommending is a Cemetery Dept. part-time seasonal employee who is studying for the CDL License and is enrolled in a Hoisting License class starting Oct. 29. These licenses will enable the employee to load containers and drive the truck hauling waste and recycling materials offsite, a service now being provided by an outside contractor.

Mr. Armendo indicated that the Board of Health voted to recommend a provisional hiring, allowing the candidate six months to obtain both licenses as a condition of continued employment. Mr. Ouellette suggested that the BOH request to reimburse the candidate \$2,900 for the cost of the CDL licensing classes after one year of employment had to go before the employee union for endorsement. Mr.

Hartnett said he would discuss the matter with the union, with the understanding that approval of this case would not set a precedent for future hires.

MOTION by Mr. Ouellette to approve the appointment of Ryan Furtado as a Transfer Station Worker, effective Nov. 3, 2022, subject to appropriation of funds and union approval of the \$2,900 reimbursement after one year of town employment. Second by Mr. Valcourt. The motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

4. Discussion

a. Group Insurance Commission/Southeastern Massachusetts Health Group

Mr. Hartnett provided a series of charts prepared by a consultant comparing group health insurance costs from the current provider, SMHG, and the state's GIC plan. For Fiscal Year 2022, the \$5.2 million cost with SMHG would have been \$278,964 less with the GIC plan, although the potential savings would be reduced to an insignificant amount if 20 percent of employees migrated to upgraded coverage. For FY2023, the estimated potential savings from a switch to GIC would have been around \$50,000, but many employees would probably be paying higher premiums for upgraded coverage. He did not recommend a switch to the GIC plan at this time.

b. Budget Timeline

The Town Administrator reported that department budgets for FY2024 are due by Oct. 28, and meetings with department heads will be held throughout November. His recommendations on proposed budgets will be given to the Select Board by Dec. 19. A chart of projected revenues and expenses for the coming fiscal year was provided, indicating new revenues of \$1.3 million and new expenses of approximately \$683,000. He suggested that the net increased revenue won't even cover the traditional annual salary increases for town employees; without significant new revenue sources in the future, the Town will be forced to cut expenses and salaries or seek a property tax override.

c. Long Term Building Committee Recommendations – Old High School

Mr. Hartnett reported that after a one-year review of options for re-use or disposal of the old high school, the Long Term Building Committee recently voted to recommend that the Town retain ownership of the building and grounds, and explore plans to redevelop the property for municipal use. He indicated that an appraisal placed the valuation at \$11 million from a sale for the highest and best use as a private educational facility. An architectural study indicated all municipal offices and other space needs could be accommodated in the current building with partial demolition of the auditorium and kitchen space – Town Hall, Town Hall Annex, Council on Aging, and perhaps Highway Dept. could be relocated there, and school department offices maintained at the current site. Renovation and demolition costs were estimated at \$29 million, and offset by potential sale of the Town Hall, Annex and COA sites. Mr. Valcourt, Chair of the LTBC, estimated that current renovation and upgrade needs at those three buildings will cost the Town \$20 million or more in the near future. He suggested renovation of the high school could also provide options for rental space, affordable housing units, future educational use, and community use of the auditorium, cafeteria, and commercial kitchen. By unanimous vote, the LTBC proposed a non-binding referendum question on the annual election ballot, asking voters preferences to sell the property, retain and lease the building and keep the athletic fields on site, or pursue redevelopment for municipal use with funding provided by a debt exclusion override question.

It was noted that the Town Administrator, a non-voting member of the committee, had recommended the Town sell the building and grounds. He was asked to begin drafting a potential ballot question listing

the various options. Board members also asked that a cost/benefit analysis be done on the various potential options to be explored, and that the Historical Commission be consulted on the potential sale of the Town Hall, Annex and COA sites. Mr. Ouellette suggested that a phased high school renovation and redevelopment plan be considered as a means of reducing potential costs.

d. Planning Board Procedure for Obtaining Permits for Driveway and Street Construction.

Building Inspector Ralph Souza explained that the state is now requiring access permits from MassDOT for any curb cuts (driveways, new streets) on state roads including Route 6, Route 177, and Route 88 before a building permit may be issued. Mr. Ouellette noted the overzealous paving of street frontage along Route 6 is producing significant additional stormwater runoff onto the state road.

5. Action Items

a. Request from the Council on Aging to accept the following donations: \$50 from Ralph Urban for Best Use; \$50 for Equipment Loan Best Use; \$20 from Carol Dennis for Tech Help; \$25 for Hospitality; \$5 for Emergency Food; \$25 from Westport Women's Club In Memory of Elinor Gay; and \$3,000 from William Walsh In Memory of Helen Walsh; totaling \$3,175.

MOTION by Mr. Ouellette to approve the COA's acceptance of the donations as listed. Second by Mr. Brewer. The motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

b. Chapter 61A Release, 287 Drift Road, Map 52, Lot 20A, Parcels A & B, as shown in ANR Plan Book 184, Page 12.

Mr. Valcourt noted that the property abuts town land that was once investigated for cemetery use, and provides an easement to the town land. If the property is released by the Board, the Town would retain the right of way easement to the town land; Mr. Valcourt said the one-lane roadway would likely be widened for private development and would benefit the Town as well. Betty Slade indicated that the Cemetery Task Force had looked at the town land earlier, but recommended the site be re-evaluated for possible cemetery expansion. Ms. Shufelt indicated that while the Town might have some use for the private land, it lacked the \$330,000 purchase price that would have to be matched.

MOTION by Mr. Ouellette to release 287 Drift Road from the Chapter 61A program. Second by Mr. Brewer. The motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

c. Request for approval of a Conservation Restriction on Berry Hill Farm, located at 764 Pine Hill Road, Assessor's Map 43 Lot 8.

Ross Moran, Director of the Westport Land Conservation Trust, was present to discuss the request for approval of a Conservation Restriction on the 47-acre farm which the owners have kept in agricultural production, primarily blueberries, for more than 50 years. Mr. Moran indicated that the Trust has already secured enough private donations to purchase the property with the Conservation Restriction; the land will be resold to the chosen respondent of a Request for Proposals for continued agricultural use. The resale will include provisions to allow a single residence; the existing residence on the site will be retained by the sellers.

MOTION by Mr. Valcourt to approve a Conservation Restriction for Berry Hill Farm, 764 Pine Hill Road. Second by Mr. Ouellette. The motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

d. Request from Ralph Souza, Building Commissioner, to increase the Senior Clerk hours from 20 hours per week to 24 hours per week.

Mr. Souza reported that the Building Department needed more administrative assistance tracking the many open permits that need follow-up action. The current clerk, Rebecca Priest, is working about 19 hours per week, and the salary is paid from the department's revolving account. The Town Administrator recommended approval of increased hours on a temporary basis, for up to three months, with continued increased hours dependent on a review of the proposed budget for the next fiscal year. He noted that employment over 20 hours per week triggers eligibility for employee benefits. Mr. Valcourt said he would not vote on the matter, but supported the increased hours, suggesting the department is seriously understaffed. Mr. Souza reported 875 applications for permits received since Jan. 1; many of those permits are still open, he indicated.

MOTION by Mr. Ouellette to approve the Senior Clerk position for up to 24 hours per week, effective immediately, with re-evaluation of the hours allowed after three months. Second by Ms. Boxler. The motion passed on a 4-0-1 vote, with Mr. Valcourt abstaining.

6. Town Administrator Report

Mr. Hartnett reported receiving a number of calls about Question 5 on the election ballot, a town-sponsored referendum question asking whether the town's \$7 or \$8 million share of the Diman Regional Vocational School expansion project costs should be funded by a debt exclusion bond or from the operating budget. He noted the bond costs would produce a 20-year tax hike of about \$11 per \$100,000 in property valuation; a no vote would require allocating operating funds to cover the assessment each year.

MOTION by Mr. Ouellette to put an explanation of the Question 5 options on the town web site for voter information. Second by Mr. Valcourt. The motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

7. Approve Minutes

a. October 11, 2022

MOTION by Ms. Boxler to approve the minutes of the Oct. 11, 2022 Select Board meeting as submitted. Second by Mr. Valcourt. The motion passed on a 5-0 vote.

8. Report on Bill Warrant

Ms. Boxler reported all in order.

9. Selectmen Liaison Committee Reports & Suggestions for Future Agenda Discussion / Action

Mr. Valcourt thanked all the volunteers who participated in a recent community fundraising effort. Ms. Boxler noted upcoming meetings for the COA and Affordable Housing Trust. Ms. Shufelt indicated that the Internet Advisory Committee would be finalizing its recommendations to the Select Board at its next meeting.

10. Comments and Statements: No public comments.

11. Boards/Committees/Commissions Vacancy List

12. Topics not reasonably anticipated forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the meeting: None.

Adjournment

MOTION by Mr. Ouellette to adjourn the meeting at 7:38 p.m. Second by Mr. Valcourt. The motion passed on a 4-0 vote.

Respectfully submitted, Robert Barboza, Recording Clerk

APPROVED:  Ann Boxler, Clerk, Select Board Member

3a Keith Dias - Recreation Commission
3b BOH Ryan Furtado
4a BOS Recommendation 10-20-22
4a Final 10-5-22 GIC Funding Analysis
4b 10-24-22 BOS Meeting Presentation
4b FY24 Budget Calendar – Proposed
4b FY24 Budget Timeline
4c LTBC BOS Recommendation
4d PB MassDOT Highway Permitting requirements
ltr
4d PB Procedure
5a COA Donations
5b 61A Marcotte
5c Berry Hill Farm_Conservation Context
5c Pierce-Pine Hill-site plan – FINAL
5c Westport CR 075 Ref 17163 approved for local
signatures
5d Buiding Department Request
7a 10112022 Minutes
Ballot Question Summary