



Select Board

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Select Board Meeting Minutes

March 11, 2020

6:00 PM: Open Meeting

Quorum present: Select Board Members: Bernie Fallon, Chair; Doane Perry, Eric Shimelonis and Town Administrator Marie Ryan.

Review and act on previous meeting minutes.

Review and sign warrants (payroll and vendor)

Agenda Items/Action/Discussion Items: Meeting Opened at 6:05 PM

Bernie opened the meeting by stating he wants the community to heal and move forward from the last meeting. He mentioned that it was a difficult meeting but he knows we can work together to get through this.

Bernie noted that Carrienne Petrik from the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program is unable to attend tonight's meeting due to her company's policy in regards to the Coronavirus.

Bernie read the following statement from DPW Director Curt Wilton:

The Town's "Tree Pruning and Removal Contracts" were open on March 4, 2020 at 7:00 PM and have been taken under advisement and carefully reviewed by Public Works Director (Curt Wilton) and the Town Tree Warden (Andrew Fudge). All requirements and necessary documentation have been met. It is our recommendation to the Board at this time to award the contract to the "Low Bid", Brush Hill Tree Services. Once awarded, the winner will be notified and we can begin to utilize their services.

The Board all voted to approve and accept the bid from Brush Hill Tree Services.

Town Administrator, Marie Ryan stated that the current Animal Control Officer has resigned. She said that she is working with the Town of Richmond to jointly hire a new person for this position in the near future.

Citizen Speak Time:

Bernie then announced that since they need to wait for Acting Fire Chief Steve Traver to arrive, he opened Citizen Speak Time.

Dan Breton, EMT and Fire Fighter since 2018 spoke. He stated that he and Eric have been friends for 20 years but that he felt very insulted by what happened at the last meeting. Dan said he thinks Eric was very vindictive and that showing the picture of the last fire in town was disrespectful. He feels that now the mood has changed with regards to the West Stockbridge Fire Department by the other Towns. He feels the Fire Department gets no respect from other Towns. He then read an article that Eric wrote in the Local Yokel in 2018 about the Fire Department and Pert Skorput which was a positive article. Dan stated he feels that now Eric has the total opposite opinion about the Fire Department. Dan felt that the truth is somewhere in the middle. He said that the Department now has many young people who are enthusiastic and want to learn. These people need mentoring and not to be criticized.

Eric then thanked Dan and said that he apologized for the theatrics with the picture and that it was in not intended to be insulting. Eric said it is hard to make changes and he only wanted to show the facts. He hopes that everyone can move forward and he will help do whatever he can to assist.

Doane also thanked Dan for his comments and he also hopes everyone can move forward and improve the Fire Department.

Amanda Gadd:

Amanda stood up to speak at the last fire at her home. She thanked the Fire Fighters and the Police Department for all their help that night. She then told Eric that he exploited her tragedy. She felt that she should have been contacted prior to the last Select Board meeting since they discussed the fire at her home. She felt that Eric should have never shown that picture of the fire at her home. She was upset that she had to see the picture in the newspaper and was never contacted and Eric never even said he was sorry for her loss. She gave a very emotional speech about her experience. She then asked the Board to act to help the Fire Department and that action needs to be taken to help them improve. Amanda praised and thanked for the Fire Fighters but explained that in researching her incident, she discovered several problems with the incident: she brought up response times, running out of water, and the late calls for mutual aid. She then demanded the Board to take action to help the Fire Department, warning that inaction could be tragic. Eric then said that at last week's meeting, we took exactly that action that she is demanding and made an change in leadership. Bernie agreed that the action is going on now and will continue.

Resident in Town:

A resident in town wanted to discuss an accident that happened recently on Route 41. The driver was joy riding at extreme rates of speed on Rte. 41, then he crashed into a telephone pole. She was concerned that he could have hit her child who could have been crossing the street at that time or playing in the yard. She told the Board that something needs to be done about the speeders on that stretch of road and asked for suggestions and help with this issue. She suggested possibly using the flashing speed signs or more police presence after school hours, weekends and evenings. Police Chief Portieri stated that they are doing more patrol and radar in that area. He said also, that no one called about someone drag racing there or they would have gotten there before he crashed. He also stated, that as it was, a police car was in the area so when the crash happened, he was there within about 5 seconds. A discussion ensued in regards to possible helpful suggestions. Bernie noted that he will have this on the agenda for the Board to discuss further for their April 1 meeting.

Fire Department Update:

Acting Fire Chief Steve Traver asked for an applause for the Fire Fighters that were in attendance for all they were doing and working on and the fact that they did not quit despite the last meeting. He said that they are all doing an excellent job. They have made a few small changes, purchased new radios so each person has a radio at a fire and have been put on the Richmond run card for now. They have also changed the policy for responding on the turnpike so a lane is closed so it is safer for them to work when responding to an accident.

Steve stated that he needs the Select Board to meet with him and the Richmond Select Board for future plans for the two Fire Departments.

Steve then said that the Members wanted him to ask the Board if the sirens can be turned back on in town. Steve asked if they were turned off for a reason like complaints. Bernie said he seems to remember that there were complaints and Peter turned them off but never back on again. The members asked if they could be turned on again maybe from 8 AM – 8 PM so there won't be as many complaints. The Board agreed and Steve said he would contact Tom Grady at the Sheriff's Office so they can program the tones again for them.

Another issue Steve said is that one of the trucks is vibrating when you drive it and he will have that looked at and fixed. He also stated that he discussed with the Richmond Select Board about how long he can continue to be the acting chief in West Stockbridge and they told him it is up to him. Steve wanted to assure West Stockbridge he won't leave until they are settled and have a new or interim chief in place.

Bernie also stated to the press, that to be clear, Peter did not quit and is not fired. He is on Administrative Leave. He then asked Marie what Town Council about this. Marie said that he is on Admin Leave not quit or fired. He will be on Admin Leave for as long as the Board determines and that when on leave they can proceed with any investigation they would like such as the After Action Review which is up next for discussion.

Bernie then asked if any of the members of the Fire Department wanted to speak and no one responded.

After Action Review:

Homeowner in the audience:

A homeowner in the audience thanked the Fire Fighters for all they do but suggested that looking into the last three fires could be extremely helpful for future fires. He doesn't ever want what happened at the last fire to happen again. He doesn't think the review is to point fingers at any one person but to help see if they need improvements with procedures or equipment as well. The data could start this path of improvement and to honor the fire fighters.

Eric said that it is very hard to sit here and make the difficult choices but hopefully time and perspective will heal this situation. He stated that he came to this meeting against spending

this money on looking back, but hearing the distance between points of view in this meeting, we might need this objective review and he is all for having it completed.

The homeowner thanked the fire fighters and the Select Board, he knows it is not an easy job.

Amanda Gadd reviewed her fire again and said that she feels they need to have this after-action review completed to help with any issues that were not realized at the time and could help so that no one else has to go through what she has been through with her fire.

Select Board:

Bernie said the Board needs to discuss the After Action Review. Bernie commented that this review will look into the systems and procedures and look at ways to get better. He then asked Marie the cost, she said it was \$6800. Doane said that he is in full support of having this done. He thinks that this is a good, in depth review that will help to go forward. Eric said that they need an objective review and he is all for having it completed.

Steve Traver said that this could be a good thing to help the department improve. One of the fire fighters also commented that they felt it was a good idea to have from an outside person to help them rebuild for a brighter future and give them a better department.

Bernie said he is also for having this done.

The audience thanked the Board and the Fire fighters for all they do. Doane stated he felt this was a great meeting.

Bernie then made a motion to adjourn, Doane Seconded, all in favor.

The Select Board adjourned at 7:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie Y. Ryan

Marie Y. Ryan

Town Administrator