



Select Board

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Select Board Meeting Minutes

July 22, 2020

21 State Line Road, Town Hall

Open Meeting

Quorum present: Roger Kavanagh, Select Board Chair, Kathleen Keresey, Select Board Member, Eric Shimelonis, Select Board Member, Marie Ryan, Town Administrator

Also present:

DPW Director Curt Wilton,

Town Accountant Elaine Markham, and

Finance Committee Members: Bob Salerno, Dan Buehler and Andy Krouss.

Review and sign warrants (payroll and vendor)

Roger opened the meeting at 6:03 PM. He reviewed the agenda, noting that the Board had reviewed and signed warrants (payroll and vendor) before the meeting. He then made a motion to approve the July 15, 2020 minutes, Eric seconded and all were in favor.

DPW update – Curt Wilton, DPW Director:

Curt welcomed and congratulated the new Board members and provided his regular update to the Board.

- Cemetery Commission- They have a new member, Mary Korte Kinmond and he thinks she will be a great addition. He said she goes to the cemeteries daily and will keep him and the other commissioners updated on how things are going. Curt reported that the contractor who does the landscaping at the cemeteries is doing a great job. He noted that tree work is coming up and there will be more headstone repairs done this year. 48 stones have already been repaired and the Commissioners have money for, and have approved, four more days of repairs.
- Parks and Recreation Committee- The Committee has been working hard. There will be new playground equipment installed in the next month. Curt said this has been a long time coming and has been in the works for at least three years.
- Card Pond Beach – The beach is open with social distancing and masks. The dock has not been installed this year and a handicap restroom has been placed there.

- Transfer Station- Curt informed the Board that this area is getting a facelift. They have new signs coming, a roof will be installed over the trash compactor, which previously had no cover and the road will be repaired and repaved sometime in September-October.
- He also told the Board that the new metal, glass, plastic recycling compactor is saving the town money because compacting eliminates wasted space in the container. That means it holds more material and takes longer to fill, which reduces the number of containers per year that have to be hauled to the recycling vendor site at \$275 per load.
- Highway Department- Everyone has been extremely busy and working hard. No one has gotten sick due to COVID-19. Curt said the State Aid was recently approved so the Town will be getting approximately \$151,000 of State Chapter 90 funds for road work, He said they will start as soon as possible on the West Center Road project and will have the majority of the road completed and ready for winter with the final paving being completed in the spring.

Eric thanked Curt for allowing the Board to speak with him by phone at the last meeting regarding the closure of Center Street to accommodate outside dining at Rouge Restaurant.

Curt asked the Board to sign the paperwork he needs to submit to get the Chapter 90 funds. Roger asked Curt to set the closeout time on the bid documents for the West Center Road project at 6PM or earlier so the bids could be opened at the beginning of a Board meeting. Curt agreed.

- Shared Streets and Spaces Grant -Curt spoke about the draft grant application he and Marie had put together. He believes the timing for this grant is perfect, especially since Towns are trying to be creative in helping businesses stay open and become financially stable, which benefits the whole community.

The Board had a draft copy of the application which included durable plastic materials that can be used to support outside dining and other business activity in the immediate future and for other purposes in the future. The application also included a project to pave the parking area near the public restrooms. Curt read an e-mail from Kathleen that spoke to other potential ideas the Vision committee and Master Plan committee had been discussing related to the area Curt was proposing to pave. Curt said that it could take a long time for those ideas to be developed and approved and in the meantime, the Town is really in need of a usable parking lot. He said the Select Board may also want to add more ideas to the application.

Kathleen stated that she would like to see ideas from the Committees all dovetail together, taking into account other creative uses for that space and for the funds from the grant. She mentioned the possibility of sidewalks on Swamp Road, work on the Williams River Trail and the road behind Trucs. She would like to see expansion of the downtown into the neighborhoods, making the whole area more walking friendly. Eric suggested parallel parking on Moscow Road and marking the parking lot on Main Street with a staircase going up to the parking lot behind the old Town Hall.

Roger asked Marie to coordinate with Kathleen, Eric and Curt on this to create a revised application that would reflect some of these other ideas. Kathleen said she would like to contact someone at the State about the grant before the application is submitted. She agreed to arrange a meeting in the coming week with Eric and Curt where they can all discuss and agree upon other ideas to include in the revised application.

Joe Roy asked if he could provide his insight on this discussion from the perspective of a downtown merchant. He asked the Board not to take away the parking lot or any parking in Town. He feels the Town needs more parking not less.

He also spoke about the public restrooms. He noted that they are closed right now but they really need to be opened. He asked the Board to consider hiring a cleaning service to ensure that they can be opened and that they are maintained in safe and sanitary condition (a proposal the Town Administrator is actively pursuing). He added that the Town should also think about modifying the current restroom building so that it could be used year round versus just seasonally.

The Board thanked Curt for his detailed DPW update.

Finance Committee Appointment – Frank Landsberger

Roger made a motion to appoint Frank Landsberger to replace Kathleen Keresey on the Finance Committee. Eric seconded the motion and all were in favor.

Finance Committee Presentation – Bob Salerno

Bob introduced Elaine Markham, the Town Accountant and members of the Finance Committee who were in attendance. He stated that since the Board had two new members he thought it would be a good idea to provide an overview of how Municipal Finance works by covering the Budget process, Municipal Accounting and the process of setting the tax rate.

Budget Process and schedule:

- December: Departments begin giving the Town Administrator their budgets
- January: Department Heads meet with the Select Board to discuss their budget
- February: Town Administrator puts all the numbers together
- End of February: Finance Committee gets the budget and meets with Department Heads
- March & April: Meetings continue with Select Board and Finance Committee
- April: Select Board approves budget and Town Meeting Warrant is posted
- May: Budget is voted on at Town Meeting
- July: The new budget is effective July 1

Bob emphasized that the Finance Committee's role is to advise the Select Board on the development of the budget and the final responsibility for the Town Budget rests with the Select Board.

Municipal Accounting:

Bob told the Board that Elaine will close the books on the prior fiscal year around October of the current fiscal year and then an audit is performed by a firm under contract to the Town.

He then stated that he feels the Town should seriously consider finding a different audit firm that would conduct and complete the annual audit in a much more timely fashion. He said that the current auditors get all the information they need for the audit before December but we don't get the draft report until June or July. Elaine added that she thinks we're not getting the service we should expect for the money we're paying. Bob agreed and asked the Board to give Elaine approval to solicit bids for a new audit firm.

Roger made a motion to have the Town Accountant prepare an RFP seeking bids for a new audit firm. Kathleen seconded the motion and all were in favor. Elaine will start working on this right away.

Bob stated that each month Elaine also prepares budget sheets that the Finance Committee and the Department Heads receive. He feels the Board should also get these reports so they can see the status of the Budget at any given time. The Board agreed and stated that they will be actively monitoring budget versus actual throughout the fiscal year.

Bob explained that the Finance Committee usually asks for a Special Town meeting near the end of the fiscal year to seek approval for shifting funds from underspent accounts to other accounts in order to cover expenses at the end of the year.

Elaine explained that looking at a monthly report may be deceiving because some departments have increased costs at different times of the year, e.g., Cemeteries in summer/spring and DPW with ice and snow expenses in the winter.

Bob asked the Board to periodically look at budget versus actual expenses in order to keep an eye on variances throughout the year. He explained that about 70% of the budget is locked in due to contracts and commitments, such as the Town's share of the Regional school budget and the various insurance policies the Town is required to have. That leaves approximately 30% of the budget that can be somewhat controlled. He said the bigger departments, such as DPW, Police and Fire Dept will have some wiggle room in their budgets, but not much.

Then Bob explained the following:

Free Cash – This is used for capital items (not extremely expensive) or special articles in the warrant. This money is like a savings account and the amount in the account is certified by the State each year.

Stabilization – Money from this account can only be used if approved by a 2/3 vote at a Town Meeting. These funds are like a savings account for large unexpected expenses (disasters).

Capital Reserve Fund – Funds in this account can be used for large purchases (like Fire trucks) to help offset the amount that has to be borrowed. Use of these funds requires approval by a 2/3 vote at a Town Meeting.

Bob explained that the Town gets a small amount of income each year from the State based on meals and hotel taxes collected. Last year this amounted to \$37,000.

Tax Rate:

When the tax rate is calculated by the State, it takes into account the budget that was passed at Town Meeting, the valuation of taxable property in Town, and other sources of income. The tax rate for the fiscal year gets set in October-November each year.

Bob told the Board that the Town does borrowing on major capital items such as the West Center Road project and renovation of Town Hall. He said that this borrowing is primarily done through State House notes that have extremely low rates and no transaction fees.

To summarize, the Board is responsible for setting the budget which in turn effects the tax rate. Throughout the fiscal year the Board can decide not to spend some of the money approved in the budget, but it cannot change the tax rate once it is set.

The Select Board thanked Bob for his review and discussion.

Select Board Speak Time:

Roger spoke about the Exec Session that was held on July 16, 2020. He read the following announcement, which had been prepared by Town Counsel:

“Peter Skorput is no longer employed as Fire Chief of the West Stockbridge Fire Dept. As this is a personnel matter, I am not authorized to comment further.”

Roger also wanted to bring the Board up to date on a call he received from Heather Bellow, a reporter for the Berkshire Eagle. She wanted to know if he would comment on the cost of a police detail that was making it impossible for Maggie Merrell to open the Rouge restaurant for outdoor dining. He told the Board that he took Heather through the details of the last two Board meetings when the Board approved the Rouge restaurant application for outdoor dining and the other where it approved closing the street as needed, with the caveat that the details would be worked out with the Police Chief and the Director of the DPW. He also told her about the thank you note Maggie sent to the Board and the Town Administrator which stated that Rouge was not going to use the street and would open using the sidewalk and the back deck. He said he ended the conversation with Heather stating that the Board had left the door open for more conversation if Maggie needed to revisit this and that he was surprised and disappointed that Maggie had taken her issue to the public through a press release rather than contacting a Board member or the Town Administrator about what appeared to be ongoing

issues. After some discussion between Board members, Roger asked Marie to get in touch with Maggie the next morning and tell her we wanted to address and resolve whatever issues she was having that were preventing her from opening her restaurant.

Eric mentioned that the Class 2 /3 business license renewals will be coming up in the next few months and he thinks that the D'Aniello's have done a great job improving the appearance of their property. The Board agreed. Roger said this is one of the processes he would like the Board to understand better, with the expectation that the annual license renewals would be a very routine event based on compliance with the existing bylaws. All agreed that this should be an item for a future meeting agenda and that Brian Duval should be asked to join that meeting to provide the perspective of the Town Enforcement Officer.

Kathleen requested that the file name on the Selectboard minutes be changed so the date is at the beginning of the file name. She thinks this will make it easier to store and retrieve them in meeting minute archives. All agreed and Marie will make that change starting with the minutes of this meeting.

After checking to see if there were any more items for discussion, Roger made a motion to adjourn, Kathleen seconded, all were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:01PM

Respectfully submitted,

Marie V. Ryan

Town Administrator