

SELECT BOARD MEETING
Minutes
Monday, January 24, 2011 – 6:30 p.m.
Town Room, Town hall

Attendance:

Present: Stephanie O’Keeffe, Diana Stein, Alisa Brewer, Aaron Hayden (Clerk pro-tem)

Absent: James Wald

Also: Town Manager John Musante

Others presenting:

Hwei-Ling Greeney, Kevin Noonan, Sonia Aldrich, Andy Steinberg (Chair Fin Com)

6:30

Public Comment:

Hwei-Ling Greeney, (Vice Chair Committee on Homelessness) speaking as private citizen visited the shelter several times each week and regrets the sign directing people to other shelters.

(First) It is not a matter of inconvenience but a matter of life and death with wind chill at -25 degrees when people can freeze to death in minutes. The Town Manager’s approval of additional guests was well received. She applauded the Town Manager’s efforts to be sure no-one would be turned away but wanted to know what the criteria is for lifting the capacity limit of the Shelter? She would like the rule to be explicit.

(Second) people affected by the announcement didn’t know that the limit was lifted so it is important to keep people notified. The Town website is a good place, as are Not Bread Alone and other places where the clients get meals. The Jones Library also is a good place to post the notice.

(Third) When severe weather is forecast Ms Greeney asked that early arrivals be accepted as was done recently. Something that people should be notified about.

(Fourth) The Town Manager needs to take a steady approach on “all are welcome” and opening early times notifications.

Ms. Greeney wanted to know what she could do to help.

Kevin Noonan (lives on a dead end street and appreciates that it is always plowed) echoed Ms. Greeney’s remarks that there is a problem with capacity at the shelter. It is the latest opening shelter in Western Massachusetts so people may not know until late if they have a bed. There needs to be a discussion on how to find places for the overflow - maybe other places in the fellowship hall - rather than sending people away. These people may need the benefit of the shelter. Maybe the foyer of the police station or other places would be OK. Sending them away is playing with fire since someone may end up dead. Each storm is different and when Town Hall, the Bangs Center, and the Jones

(Library) are closed he has taken people to a bench and the bus stop. When Town Hall is closed maybe we could accept the unbudgeted expense and open up the South Room in the Bangs center to let people have shelter. Can we have a policy to help people find a safe place?

John Musante responded: 2 years ago there was no shelter, and last year the Town started a warming shelter. This year, with help from citizens and some grant money the Town has been able to find and help improve a shelter that met all the life safety requirements at the First Baptist Church. These safety and building codes limit the number of overnight guests is 16. We have reached capacity on many nights, not all, and through the efforts of the Milestone Ministry, Town staff and the First Baptist Church have been very flexible. In order for the church to operate its own program the space shelter can't be made available before 9. About the capacity issues: when we have had forecasts of deadly cold in the Connecticut River Valley, Mr. Musante has worked with AFD, APD, Inspection Services and the Church to open the shelter for extra guests, but even with the severe weather last night the shelter was not at capacity. Also the church agreed to keep the shelter open later though none of the guests have availed themselves of the extra service.

The Shelter is still operating under a seasonal permit that limits us to 16 – but we are going to be flexible especially when the weather really requires it. Mr. Musante is reluctant to write down any policy which is counter to what the law allows. This season has been marked by excellent communication with emergency services in Town and other towns. He is looking forward to better weather that should allow things to get on a more even keel.

Stephanie O'Keeffe added that she and Alisa Brewer met with the Milestone Ministries to discuss these issues and they are doing a lot of work on this. She appreciates the public coming and speaking with the Select Board on this.

6:50

Voted unanimously to approve 8 Special Liquor Licenses (Diana Stein moved, Aaron Hayden seconded)

6:55

Voted unanimously to approve new polling place for Precinct one at the Immanuel Lutheran Church (Diana Stein moved, Aaron Hayden seconded)

Budget update:

(A memo from Sonia dated January 20, 2011 was in the packet and is on website) Sonia Aldrich reported that half way through the year there is not a lot to report:

- The golf course membership is down a little
- investment income is at about 23% probably because of the economy
- there are a some adjustments to be made between accounts
- non-recurring income is at 99% which includes school reimbursements.

She answered questions about line items on snow removal, Select Board, and Schools.

Ms. Aldrich also reported that accounting for all the encumbrances raised are no red flags in this report.

She also noted that Governor Patrick reported to the MMA conference, this weekend, that there will be a smaller cut to state aid than we had forecast, \$600k reduction instead of \$1.7m - making this the 4th year of substantial state aid cuts. Representative Charlie Murphy suggested “not counting the chickens before they are hatched” on the budget news since there is still a long budget process that extends through June with a number of votes to be taken by the State Legislature.

The State budget has no cuts to Chapter 70, school aid, which will help reduce the pressure on the 4 Towns to come up with a regional school budget.

Stephanie O’Keeffe asked about the Cambodian outreach worker status? – This outreach worker is still working 24 hours each week and is funded by a grant from Khmer Associates. The Town is still covering her benefits. Mr. Musante will be meeting to figure out was to strengthen the plan.

Stephanie O’Keeffe noted that the budget Restoration List includes housing enforcement and wondered if stronger enforcement would collect more fines and so support itself?

John Musante promised a more detailed proposal in the final draft. There seems to be a potential that fines that could support the cost but there are no estimates of that revenue now. The budget is level funded and the restoration list was deliberately limited to those things that the community really needs rather than it being a wish list – anything on the list should be seriously considered. If all the restoration on the list were included the budget would increase by a little more than 2%.

Stephanie O’Keeffe thought that we should take care how we spend the excess capacity from the override and is looking for detail that shows we are being responsible. It is meaningful to address any budget cynicism to say that we got permission but we shouldn’t if we don’t need to. And we may be able to hold off asking for another override.

Diana Stein feels we did demonstrate our responsibility by not spending the entire amount last year and though we need still to be cautious.

John Musante noted that we do need to use some excess tax capacity to get to level funding. We can show the cuts we would make if we don’t use the excess capacity.

Andy Steinberg (Chair Finance Committee) reported: Having asked for a level funded budget means that we will have a cut to services. The Restoration list doesn’t bring us all the way back, we do have to think about spending the excess capacity very carefully. The

School and Library will be presenting executive level budgets. The Budget Coordinating Group will have similar discussions on February 17. The Finance Committee has cut capital spending in this budget and made restoring it a high priority. It is among the many pieces that will be looked at over time.

The Finance Committee decided to revisit some policies more carefully like the Reserve Policy which has been evolving, the “OPEB” trust fund and its funding, and there is no policy on what Enterprise Fund balances are appropriate. All these are related in a significant way.

Putting the budget for capital expenditures at 5.64% is lower than last year but is part of getting back to a level funded budget. Also the percentage of the whole budget was lowered since the budget itself was increased by the Override.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission’s 10 resolves:

The Planning Board considered approving the PVPC’s 10 resolves as presented with the additional comments by Jonathan Tucker and adding an 11th resolve on light rail.

Diana Stein noted the Resolves’ emphasis of greening communities.

Alisa Brewer had comments on the process: The Select Board doesn’t really have time to make a significant review in the short time we were given. Maybe we could get a draft on the website or some other means to help us get up to speed.

Stephanie O’Keeffe thought that we do need to work on improving our communication process with the PVPC.

And that we appreciate the emphasis on greenness and would like to draw attention to Jonathan Tucker’s letter .

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission’s Valley Visions III:

Discussion was postponed until all the pieces can be assembled for our review.

Town Manager’s report:

APD was re-accredited by the state - Amherst was the first to receive this difficult accreditation.

Kendrick Park Advisory Committee is meeting on January 27 at Bangs Center in Pole room; 6-7 for an open house, with a formal presentation of conceptual plans form 7-9.

Traffic calming is on the agenda next Tues, February 1st with Public Works Committee hearing on recommendations on traffic calming experiments with the goals of reducing the volume and speed of cars on Lincoln Ave. Recent experiments have had moderate success and Guilford Mooring has a simplified plan which will be presented.

Downtown parking Pay-and-display machines are at the end of their useful life. There are meetings to review new machines that can take credit cards and other forms of payment and maybe a pay by space machine (where spaces are numbered so driver doesn't have to return to parked car with receipt). They are considering ways to extend time that doesn't require returning to the machine, maybe pay by cell-phone.

Diana Stein wondering if the reliability of new machines was considered?

John Musante replied yes - the primary problem with current machines' reliability is that they are old. Durability in a New England setting is important.

Alisa Brewer wondered what moving forward means? How will it mesh with our, possibly, changing the rates?

John Musante hoped to be signing a contract and moving forward this spring with the installation. We may be replacing the street machines and can change the rates then.

Stephanie O'Keeffe wondered what was the Select Board's role?

John Musante noted that the parking fee for the lots and streets is are all part of the SB's overview.

Alisa Brewer that it would be unfortunate to install a new machine with the old rate.

John Musante attended the MLK breakfast that brings together people from all parts of the community.

He also attended the Wizard of Oz part of a wonderful LSSE theater program that is more and more supported by volunteers.

John Musante reported on Regional Dispatch: the Hadley Select Board is still actively discussion joining the system along with some other communities. HE expects to have more definitive word at our next meeting.

John Musante met for the first time with the review committee to work on bids for a Photovoltaic farm.

Reports:

Massachusetts Municipal Association meeting is valuable for meeting colleagues from all around the Commonwealth formally and informally and to hear from the Governor. Select Board members O'Keeffe, Stein, Brewer and Town Manager Musante attended seminars on:

Getting contributions from non-taxable institutions which developed a framework for agreements.

Zoning, favorable 40 B petitions (as opposed to a hostile 40B), 40R, project based zoning design and Form Based Code. Would like the community to get a similar

program to get familiar with the ideas before we need to consider it as a recommendation for something.

Performance management a formal statistical program that allows data driven decisions. Amesbury started a program and for 3 years could put forward level funded budgets without cuts.

Funding for rail trails including swapping the old rails and ties for leveling the surface. The DOT has improved the approval process.

The State Budget

A women's luncheon where it was noted that 75% of women were ready for a black president and only 67 ready for a woman.

Open Meeting law update.

Creating a Community Foundation for West Mass as a way to fund things.

And the The trade show

Representative reports

Community Preservation Act Committee meeting which is formulating questions on submitted projects to help their decisions. Questions include reporting on how far along a group is on previously approved projects.

Zoning Sub-committee is reviewing RFPs for North Amherst village center planning. It runs out public review is not allowed until afterward. The ZSC discussion will be videotaped. They also discussed livestock zoning.

Flag – the DRB is not happy with the Town Seal as it is for the flag and wants to get together again with the Historical Commission to get a better design - or start another contest which may not get much better results.

The Leisure Services and Supplemental Education committee is working with the Housing Partnership and Fair Housing Committee on Wednesday with the consultant working on Olympia Drive.

Disabled Access Advisory Committee has some issues that mostly have gone to the Town Manager like getting even more van parking in the Town lot in advance of the construction of Boltwood Walk.

Committee on Homelessness is rescheduling because they can't get a quorum They will be discussing issues that came up tonight. They need to be aware of the flexibility and that things are basically under control at the Shelter. Ms. Brewer really appreciates how hard Milestone Ministries is working to meet all the demands.

The Retail Partners group of the CCC discussed what resources should be put on the website for others to see and what the best practices for the Committee might be.

The Housing Authority was approached by the Pomeroy Coop to ask that they take over control. They are getting close to finalizing their agreements.

On Open Meeting Law it was discussed whether it is OK for one member to send a proposal to the rest for their review before a meeting – yes but as long as there is no discussion.

Definitions for Special Municipal Employee Status will be making its way through the process and we all will get the appropriate ethics training in the end.

Handbook:

Corrections to Diana Stein.

Chair's report

Stephanie O'Keeffe has heard from many people what a good job DPW has done plowing recently.

Untimed items:

3 taxis licenses were unanimously granted (Diana Stein moved Aaron Hayden seconded).

Committee Appointments

2 appointments to the Committee on Homelessness were unanimously approved; Kevin Eddings and Michael Giles (Diana Stein moved Aaron Hayden seconded).

Minutes

The minutes for January 14th's Select Board meeting as corrected were unanimously approved (Diana Stein moved Aaron Hayden seconded).

Calendar Review.

January 27th – Next Select Board meeting; Liquor Licenses, Town Manager goals, litigation update, Gateway update

January 28th - JCPC starting to meet,

January 29th - the 4 Town meeting this at 9 am

January 31st - Gateway presentation on 1/31

February 14th - One item agenda if needed to hear feedback from BCG on budget recommendations

February 28th Select Board meeting on Bylaw and code enforcement issues.

Comments and corrections encouraged,
Respectfully submitted; Aaron Hayden