

**Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes**  
**February 9, 2021, 7 pm**  
**Stow Town Building & Via Zoom**

Physically present at this meeting at the Stow Town Building were board members:

Thomas Ryan, Chair

Jim Salvie

Cortni Frecha

Also Denise Dembkoski, Town Administrator

Board members present remotely via Zoom: Ellen Sturgis, Megan Birch McMichael

Mr. Ryan called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

**Public Input:** On behalf of the Town Clerk, Ellen Sturgis noted that the Town Census has been mailed out and urged everyone to return their forms. Nomination papers will be available soon for spring elections. Megan Birch McMichael announced that Food Pantry is now accepting monetary donations and would welcome volunteers. Further information is on their website.

**Chairman's comments:** Tom Ryan noted on behalf of Police Chief Sallese that there are two slots open for the Citizen's Police Academy starting next week. Also, dog licenses are available with the census form. He noted that there was some confusion about the Town meeting date and that the actual date is May 22<sup>nd</sup> and not May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Tom reminded residents not push snow into the roadways. Finally, he noted the passing of George Shultz, former Secretary of Labor and Secretary of the Treasury at age 100. He noted that Mr. Schultz had previously served on the Board of Selectmen for six months in 1955, and asked for a moment of silence in his memory.

**Appointment of Officer Luke DeZago to the Position of Police Prosecutor**

Tom Ryan noted that tonight's appointments were requested by the Chief of Police and that the Selectmen have a letter from him. Chief Sallese was present and described the duties of the position. Officer Collins has resigned from the position. Officer DeZago has been filling the role for some time and has already done great work streamlining procedures. Sallese requested DeZago's appointment. The Town Administrator supported the recommendation. Ellen Sturgis thanked Officer DeZago and asked the Chief if DeZago also serves in a regular position. Sallese said that this is an additional responsibility and does not take him out of the rotation. Board members praised DeZago's work. *Jim Salvie moved to appoint Luke DeZago as a Police Prosecutor for the Town of Stow Police Department, for the remainder of a two-year term expiring June 30, 2021 and subject to reappointment thereafter. Cortni Frecha seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

**Promotion of Darren Thraen to the Position of Police Lieutenant**

Chief Sallese noted that the position has been vacant for some time. He has worked cooperatively with Darren Thraen to manage the department. The Lieutenant will still be on patrol and responding to calls. It is a nonunion position. Sallese described the duties of the position and Thraen's background

and work for the Department. He noted that, in his opinion, Thraen has stepped up as a leader and they work together closely. He said that he is the only one qualified and his choice for lieutenant. Denise Dembkoski said she has reviewed the paperwork and is comfortable with the appointment. Jim Salvie remarked that during the events of last year he worked very closely with Thraen and found him very qualified and appreciated his help. Ellen Sturgis remarked on his service over many years back to when he was a DARE officer. Tom Ryan also commended Darren for stepping up when he was needed. All were supportive of the appointment and appreciative of Thraen's work over the years. *Jim Salvie moved to appoint Darren Thraen as Police Lieutenant for the Town of Stow Police Department, for a term expiring June 30, 2021 and subject to reappointment thereafter. Cortni Frecha seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

#### **Lighting for Autism Awareness Month (April) – Kevin Whalen**

Kevin Whalen was not present. Board members noted that this has been done for the past few years and agreed to move forward with the vote. *Jim Salvie moved to allow Kevin Whalen to light up the Pompo Comm Center blue this April 2021 as he has in the past. The motion was conditioned on coordinating with the Building Inspector and getting his approval. Cortni Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

#### **Approve Board of Selectmen Annual Report**

The Board reviewed a draft prepared by Phoebe. The Board had several minor edits. Ellen Sturgis asked that the final version give credit to the authors of the various policies. She will send draft wording to Dembkoski. Megan Birch McMichael noted that the policies adopted in 2020 need to be separated from the ones in 2021. Sturgis also asked that the paragraph about Pine Bluff be revised, saying the wording in the draft that referred to out of towners was loaded. She asked that it read, "the open, but unsupervised, Pine Bluffs Recreation Area saw an increase in vandalism, leaving trash, and the creation of unsanitary conditions." The Board agreed to the change. *Jim Salvie moved to approve the 2020 Selectmen's Annual Report as amended. Cortni Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.* Board members commended Phoebe for her work on the Annual Report.

Ellen asked whose responsibility it was to produce the report. It was clarified that it is the Selectmen. Sturgis asked that more information be provided about revolving fund balances. Denise said she is planning to expand the report over time and she will look into this.

#### **Discussion of Covenant for Plantation Apartments/Stow Elderly Housing Corporation – Mark Jones, ZBA Chair (The minutes for this portion of the meeting were taken by Denise Dembkoski)**

At 7:26pm Chair Tom Ryan stated that because there is an appearance of a conflict with his wife being on the Board of SEHC he will be recusing himself. Jim Salvie also stated he will be recusing himself because his wife takes board minutes for SEHC. Both Board members relinquished their seats at the table.

Ms. Dembkoski stated that she will be taking minutes for this part of the meeting.

Ms. Frecha took over as Chair and stated that there have been some last-minute developments and due to lack of notification of this meeting, the Board would be discussing the matter, but no votes are expected to be taken tonight.

Selectwoman Frecha asked Ms. Dembkoski if she had any comments on this matter. Ms. Dembkoski stated that she has no comments at this time but recommended that Mark Jones, ZBA Chair and Barbara Carboni town counsel present the proposed amendment and how we got to this point.

Mark Jones discussed that this covenant is being proposed as a revision to the existing covenant on Plantation I and a new covenant for Plantation II. Selectwoman Frecha stated that she read the old and proposed covenant reasonable and it appears that it is just defining the mechanism to have a conversation and a means of working or managing the situation at Plantation. Selectwoman Birch McMichael had a question about the land swap being proposed – is there a piece of land owned by Plantation II being swapped to Plantation I to allow the buildout to happen the way the project is expected to roll out? Is that part of the problem because there are now going to be buildings on that land? To which Mark Jones replied that the land swap needs to happen to construct Plantation 2 and the covenants need to be revised to allow that to happen. The abutter's complaint is that they might be affected by the septic system and traffic impacts on a private right away.

Selectwoman Sturgis said she is new to the specifics about this and appreciates the memo from Mark with the details about this. She is sad to see how long it has taken to get to this point and knows how much housing is needed. She supports the ZBA in this project so if they are good with these amendments and new covenant, then she is good with it.

Mark Jones thinks it is important to allow abutters to have their say and provide some comments and feedback outside of the ZBA meetings. Barbara Carboni, Town Counsel said no public hearing is required, but giving some notice to the abutters so there is opportunity for input from abutters or all residents, for that matter, is important. She is recommending the board not take any action on this tonight but have this discussion and the continue to February 23<sup>rd</sup> for final discussions.

Hearing no other comments – this discussion ended at 7:38pm. Chair Ryan and Selectman Salvie returned to their seats and the regular meeting resumed.

Ms. Sferra resumed taking minutes.

**Authorize Deficit Spending of the FY 2021 Snow and Ice Account, pursuant to MGL Chapter 44, Section 31D**

Denise said that after Sunday's storm there was only \$25k remaining in the snow and ice removal budget. This will not last until the next meeting and more snow is expected. *Jim Salvie moved to allow deficit spending of the fiscal year 2021 Snow and Ice Account, pursuant to Mass General Law Chapter 44, Section 31D. Cortni Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

## **Town Administrator's Report and Overview of Preliminary FY 2022 Budget**

Denise Dembkoski had several updates:

- The next Selectmen's meeting is the all boards financial outlook discussion
- The Stow Acres Forum is 2/10 at 7:30 via Zoom, she noted a press release went out
- The ABCC approved the retail liquor license for Nan's Market and so they released the Selectmen's license.
- The Town has had recent email issues so if board members or residents are waiting on a response, please feel free to send a follow up.
- There was a Pre-construction meeting for the Gleasondale Bridge project. The Project will begin next month with utility work. They are working on the schedule and we will put information out once it is available. There will be 15-18 months of construction and there will be detour times, most often 7 pm to 7 am. Jim noted that it would be helpful to have a public forum. Denise said she will reach out to the project manager about this. Ellen also suggested updates directly to Gleasondale residents. Denise said it is possible to send a localized call to the area, but that the whole town needs to know given that it is a major roadway. She will post the schedule on the website. She also noted that conversations were underway about mutual aid.
- With regard to Covid, Denise noted that the Governor's office is getting 4x demand than the number of vaccines. The state is planning to announce two new mass sites that are handling 50K appointments weekly. They are encouraging regional efforts. They do not want nor will they authorize towns to set up clinics. They are trying to increase the number of vaccines and bringing local pharmacies online to give vaccines. She also has been meeting with regional officials and legislators – the state is aware that there are concerns. The state's top priorities are the highest impacted communities. We are trying to do everything we can to get residents access to vaccines as quickly as possible. At the end of the day there are no vaccines. She noted that local clinic have been cancelled in some towns. Megan thanked her for the hard work and noted that she was appreciative. Jim thanked her for the detail, he is satisfied that they are doing everything they can at the moment.
- The town has hired a new Assistant Planner who will start next week; she hopes to have a recommendation for an Executive Assistant by the next meeting.

## **Town Administrator's Preliminary Budget Overview**

Denise noted that she is still meeting with Departments. The budget process has given her an opportunity to do an honest assessment of the Town functions. She said that her budget will have cost implications. Some departments have needs that have not been met, resulting in operational issues. She noted Library, Highway, Cemetery and Human Resources. She will be recommending additional staff in these areas. She noted that requests came in up 4.1% over last year. She has not yet received the Nashoba budget but has heard that they plan to come in at a 2 – 2.5% increase. She also does not yet have health insurance numbers. Denise said that there is \$1 million in non-CPA capital requests, but she thinks they are all needed. She will be recommending a significant amount in capital projects. She plans to give her first recommendation to the Finance Committee by the end of next week.

More specifically, Denise said that she will be recommending the creation of an HR Director position, in

the form of an Assistant Town Administrator. Duties would include ensuring evaluations are done, implementing the classification plan, collective bargaining, and disciplinary action, among others. She would also like to see an additional circulation position in the library, noting they are down 3-4 positions from most of our counterparts. In addition, the Highway Department needs an additional laborer with the understanding that part of the job will be helping with Cemetery maintenance. She also proposed adding a summer laborer to help the Cemetery Dept Memorial Day through fall.

Denise noted that department heads did a good job of keeping expenses level. The majority of increases are utilities and services contracts, which are relatively uncontrollable. Once she has her recommendations, she will be putting everything on the website. The Board thanked Denise. Megan Birch McMichael said the HR position would be a welcome addition. She asked about buying vs. leasing police vehicles. Denise said that the department puts too many miles on them to lease them and noted that vehicles should be replaced annually on rotation. Last year they did not get a vehicle; they need two this year. Jim Salvie noted that leasing of highway vehicles might be possible and Demboski agreed, saying that she had experience doing this in Groveland.

### **Liaison Reports**

- Jim Salvie – Fin Comm had an initial budget meeting. Capital Planning has its first meeting this Thursday and is meeting with Building and Fire. Library Building Committee met and approved the RFR. There is some sentiment to looking at maximizing the use of the existing space and this has been incorporated into the RFR. Ellen Sturgis asked about the Audit Advisory Committee. Demboski said that Mark Jones plans to resign but has not done so yet. She had asked the Town Clerk to follow up with him but she will do so tomorrow. Mark's successor would be a joint appointment between BOS and Fin Comm.
- Ellen Sturgis – She has talked to the Town Clerk about having a volunteer recruitment night and inviting existing Board members to speak. They have a tentative plan to do this in March via Zoom.
- Megan Birch McMichael – Town Hall restoration committee presented to CPC last night. The Nashoba Superintendent resigned last week but will stay through the end of the school year.

### **Meeting Minutes**

- *January 26, 2021 – Jim Salvie moved to approve the minutes of January 26, 2021. Cortni Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*
- *Executive Session Minutes from January 26, 2021 - Megan corrected wording that was attributed to her that should have been attributed to Ellen. Jim Salvie moved to accept and release to the public the executive minutes of January 26, 2021 as amended. Cortni Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

### **Correspondence**

Ellen Sturgis said that when she looked at the flyer for the Stow Acres Forum she thought it was misleading and was about a conservation project because of the images used. She wants people to know that there are multiple things being considered not just open space. She also noted that she had

sent on the resignation letter from the Nashoba Superintendent as well as a letter from legislators regarding COVID. She wanted to make sure that was part of the correspondence.

**Adjournment:** *At 8:05 pm Jim Salvie moved to adjourn. Cortni Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

Respectfully submitted

Kathy Sferra

**Materials Used at Meeting**

Meeting Packet: Draft Minutes, Draft Plantation Covenants, Police Appointment Letters, Job Descriptions, and Resumes, Stow Acres Flyer  
Letter from ZBA Chair re Plantation