

Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 23, 2021
Stow Town Building & Via Zoom

Attending in the Warren Room in the Stow Town Building: Chair Thomas Ryan, Megan Birch-McMichael, and Cortni Frecha. Attending remotely via Zoom: James Salvie, and Ellen Sturgis.

Also present in the Warren Room: Town Administrator Denise Dembkoski.

Chairman Ryan called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Public Input: Town Clerk Linda Hathaway said that voter registration can be done online through the Secretary of State’s web portal (sec.state.ma.us/ovr/). The deadline to register to vote is April 16, 2021 for the May 8, 2021 Annual Town Election. The deadline to register to vote is April 30, 2021 for the May 22, 2021 Annual Town Meeting. Vote by mail is coming up and flyers will be sent out soon and will include an application. Applications are also available online now on the Town Clerk’s webpage.

The Town Clerk also reminded people to license their dogs and return their census forms.

Chairman’s Comments: This Saturday, March 27th from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. is the “Stuff A Cruiser” food drive at the Lower Village Common. The Planning Board is having a public forum tonight via zoom regarding Active Adult Neighborhoods.

Appointments

Andrea Wikerd to the NRSB Audit Advisory Committee (Joint Appointment with the Finance Committee)

The Board thanked Ms. Wikerd for stepping forward and appreciates her willingness to do this.

In conjunction with the Finance Committee, Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to appoint Andrea Wikerd to the NRSB Audit Advisory Committee for a term expiring June 30, 2022. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

The Finance Committee had a majority present and also voted to appoint Andrea Wikerd.

Allison Alter to the Stow Cultural Council

The Board spoke briefly with Ms. Alter and thanked her for stepping forward.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to appoint Allison Alter to the Stow Cultural Council, for a three-year term expiring March 22, 2024. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Michael Naill to the Zoning Board of Appeals

The Board spoke briefly with Mr. Naill and thanked him for stepping forward.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to appoint Michael Naill to the Zoning Board of Appeals, for the remainder of a five-year term expiring June 30, 2024. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Liza Mattison to the Conservation Commission

The Board spoke briefly with Ms. Mattison and thanked her for stepping forward. Selectwoman Frecha noted she served on the Commission with Liza’s mother and we now have a second generation serving.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to appoint Liza Mattison to the Conservation Commission, for the remainder of a three-year term expiring June 30, 2022. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Charlie Aaronson to the Council on Aging

The Board spoke briefly with Mr. Aronson and thanked him for stepping forward. COA Director Alyson Toole said she is in support of the decision and he will be a great asset to the Town.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to appoint Charlie Aaronson to the Council on Aging, for an indefinite term. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Weston “Wes” Fisher to the Board of Registrars

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to appoint Weston “Wes” Fisher, Democrat, to the Board of Registrar of Voters, for the remainder of a three-year term expiring June 30, 2023. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Statement Regarding Racism and Violence Against Asian-Americans

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael appreciated that a statement was put out from the Town Administrator and the Police Chief decrying the recent uptick in violence against the Asian-American and Pacific Islanders community and asked if the Board would like to put out a similar statement. Selectwoman Sturgis suggested that the Board be added to the existing statement.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved that the statement issued last week by the Town Administrator and the Chief of Police is amended to include the Board of Selectmen. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Donation of Gym Equipment

There is a letter of support from Chief Michael Sallese, estimating the value at \$6000.00 of the equipment being donated to the Police Department gym by resident and Acting Sergeant David Goguen. Selectman Salvie noted for the record that this is some serious gym equipment to have at the house.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to accept the gym equipment for the Police Department donated by David Goguen. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Polling Hours for the May 8, 2021 Annual Town Election

Town Clerk Linda Hathaway proposed a Saturday election from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. She is not proposing in-person early voting. If someone wants to volunteer to help with the election, please email or call the Town Clerk’s office. If you voted via early voting in the past, you still need to register again for this year. The Stow Independent has agreed to do Candidates Night remotely on Wednesday, April 14, 2021. Owner/Editor Cyndy Bremer has sent out information to the candidates.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved, in accordance with MGL Chapter 54, section 64, to reduce the polling hours for Stow’s Annual Town Election on Saturday, May 8 to 10 AM to 4 PM. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Stow Clean Up Day – Saturday, April 24, 2021

Resident Sandy Taft was present via Zoom and introduced Jennifer Henderson, also present via Zoom. Mr. Taft said the Department of Public Health advised local Boards of Health that clean-ups are permitted with a maximum group size of 25 per group. Registration will be at the Lower Common and there will be 2 tables to ensure social distancing. Ms. Henderson proposed using SignUpGenius so people could pre-register and choose in advance the street(s) that they will clean over the weekend. The Highway Department will pick up the bags on Monday. No banner will be hung this year; the only formal signage would be small signs in town businesses and 4 political-style yard signs.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to permit Sandy Taft and his group of volunteers to use the town's Lower Common on Saturday, April 24, 2021 from 7 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., for the annual Stow Clean Up Day. Bags will be handed out from 8 a.m. until 12 noon and COVID-19 precautions will be taken. Selectwoman Frecha seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0).

Covenant for Plantation Apartments/Stow Elderly Housing Corporation

Both Chairman Ryan and Selectman Salvie recused themselves, and the Chairman turned the meeting over to Selectwoman Frecha at 7:35 p.m.

Town Counsel Barbara Carboni was present via Zoom. Atty. Carboni said the proposed covenant from the ZBA (Zoning Board of Appeals) arose from the hearing process for the comprehensive permit for Plantation II. The project as permitted is not consistent and conflicts with some terms of the 1982 covenant that was entered into by the Board of Selectmen and Stow Elderly Housing at the time of the original comprehensive permit. The ZBA found that they did not have the authority to undo the covenant or to enter into a new one, as the Board of Selectmen was the party to the covenant. The ZBA wants to offer the Selectmen the benefit of what it has learned during the permit process and to propose language for the Board to review when they consider entering into a new covenant.

Peter Munkenbeck, consultant for the project, was present via Zoom and introduced Attorney Rita Schwantes of Klein Hornig who was also present via Zoom.

Atty. Schwantes represents Stow Elderly Housing Corp. and explained the two covenants submitted to the Board of Selectmen. One is to amend the existing 1982 covenant permitting the existing 50-unit Plantation Apartments development, and the other is to permit the new proposed 37-unit Plantation Apartments II. There are still some components of the project to be completed by the applicant and she proposed approving and signing the covenants, and holding them in escrow and to not record them until the building permits are pulled and the project moves forward.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to accept and sign the covenants for Plantation Apartments/Stow Elderly Housing Corporation as presented on March 23, 2021. Selectwoman Sturgis seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously (3-0) by a by roll call vote: Selectwoman Birch-McMichael –aye, Selectwoman Sturgis –aye, and Chairwoman Frecha –aye.

Town Administrator Dembkoski informed the Board that Atty. Carboni will be leaving our town counsel firm and moving to the municipal sector. The Board thanked her and wished her the best of luck.

Selectman Ryan resumed as Chair at 7:57 PM.

Town Hall Restoration Project

Vin Antil, Chairman of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) was present via Zoom.

Mr. Antil said the CPC did not vote to support \$3.5 million for the Town Hall Project for the upcoming Town Meeting Warrant. The CPC is willing to put in \$1.75 million to give the Town an opportunity to move forward this year, and to show their support for the project.

Doug Hyde, Chairman of the Town Hall Restoration Committee (THRC), was present via Zoom.

Mr. Hyde said what his committee needs now is a commitment from the Board to put an article on the Town Meeting Warrant; they do not necessarily need the Board's support now for the article, as that can be discussed later.

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael feels strongly that this is not the year for this project as it is not ready, and it is being rushed to be put on the warrant this year. She strongly supports the project but does not support this timeline and putting it on the warrant for the \$3.5 million.

Selectwoman Frecha said the funding conversation has been useful and it has become clear that the Board should probably defer. She strongly supports the project and would like to see a Friends of the Town Hall established, as a public relations campaign for the project would make a difference.

Selectwoman Sturgis loves it as an iconic building but said we have not heard the answer to what we are going to do with the building. She stated the Selectmen are supposed to show leadership and thus she does not support putting it on the warrant.

Selectman Salvie does not support the \$3.75 million and suggested putting it off for a year. He does not believe in Selectmen denying another department or board the ability to go to Town Meeting and make their case. He would support a warrant article only if it provided for the excess funding outside of the existing levy limit.

Chairman Ryan believes the THRC should pare the project back. He would not support a debt exclusion. He would not deny the CPC putting the \$1.75 million on the warrant but would recommend against it, or anything other than CPA funding, at Town Meeting.

Town Administrator Dembkoski said a vote of an article at Town Meeting requires a funding source. If it is more than what CPA is authorizing you need either a debt exclusion or to fund it within the levy limit. She recommends a debt exclusion. The THRC meets tomorrow night and if they want a debt exclusion, the Selectmen could call a special meeting to meet the deadline for the election warrant, or it could go to Town Meeting and appear as a debt exclusion question at the next election in May 2022.

Hudson Housing Area and Adjacent Property

The Department of the Army is asking for input on a parcel they are selling which is approximately 46 acres of the Devens Annex, with approximately 5-10 undeveloped acres in Stow. Town Planner Jesse Steadman and Conservation Director Kathy Sferra did not have any comments. It is being sold 'as-is' and if there is further development, including the Stow land, they would have to follow the proper process.

Town Administrator's Report

- The CPC has approved the Kane Land Trail Project going forward to Town Meeting. Denise approved an Eagle Scout's request to build a boardwalk for the back culvert with the understanding that the project has to pass at Town Meeting.
- The Town has joined the City of Marlborough as part of a vaccine collaborative through Marlborough Hospital. Vaccines will be at the Courtyard Marriott in Marlborough with 25% of the appointments guaranteed to the cities and towns in the collaborative, which also includes Hudson and Berlin.
- The Board has received the draft of the FY22 Budget. It will be discussed at the next meeting.

Minutes of the March 9, 2021 Meeting

Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to accept the meeting minutes of March 9, 2021 with amendments. Selectwoman Frecha seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously (5-0).

Liaison Reports

- Selectwoman Sturgis attended a MA Selectmen's Association workshop on civil discourse which included suggestions for Selectboards. The COA (Council On Aging) is doing a bang-up job helping seniors sign up for vaccines. For those who want to help, there is a volunteer form on the COA website.
She would like a future agenda to include a discussion of the roles of liaisons and what their authority is as a liaison.
- Remaining reports were tabled until the next meeting.

Correspondence: No comments from the Board.

Adjournment

At 8:33 p.m. Selectwoman Birch-McMichael moved to adjourn. Selectwoman Frecha seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously (5-0).

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Sampson

Executive Assistant

Documents used at this meeting:

March 9, 2020 Draft Minutes

Additional documents can be found in the Selectmen's Office filed with meeting folder.