

Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2021, 7 pm
Stow Town Building & Via Zoom

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

Thomas Ryan, Chair
Cortni Frecha
Megan Birch-McMichael
Ellen Sturgis

Also Denise Dembkoski, Town Administrator

Board members present remotely via Zoom: Jim Salvie

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

Public Input: Ms. Sturgis stated that there will be a volunteer information night on February 3rd at 7 pm via Zoom. Information will be on the town website. Dan Barstow, Lake Boon Commission said that he is here to speak in support of Hallock Point and the Healthy Lake Boon initiative. Mr. Ryan said he will call on Mr. Barstow later during the CPA discussion.

Chairman's comments: Mr. Ryan thanked those who have worked on volunteer recruitment night and noted the importance of volunteers in town government. Nomination papers are available from the Town Clerk. The last day to get papers is 3/17/21 and signatures need to be returned 3/19/21.

Police Use of Force Updated Policy – Chief Michael Sallese

Chief Sallese noted that this is one of a number of policies that he will be bringing to the Board. He may need to revise it further based on changing state regulations. He noted the policy is lengthy and summarized the changes in a letter to the Board. It will become effective tonight if approved. The Chief said that one difference between Stow and the state is that the Stow policy contains an affirmative duty to intervene which extends to all members of the Department, not just officers. Mr. Salvie asked for clarification that choke holds are not allowed even in deadly force situations. The Chief confirmed this. The Board thanked the chief for bringing this forward. *Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to approve the updated Use of Force policy as presented by Stow Police Chief Michael Sallese. Ms. Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2021 – Board members made minor editorial corrections to the minutes. *Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to accept the meeting minutes of the February 9, 2021 meeting with amendments. Ms. Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

February 16, 2021 – *Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to accept the meeting minutes of the February 9, 2021 meeting as drafted. Ms. Frecha seconded and the motion was approved unanimously (5-0) on a roll call vote.*

Ms. Birch-McMichael suggested that going forward there be a consistent style for referring to members in the minutes.

Town Administrator's Joint Boards Meeting on the FY 22 Financial State of the Town - Joint Meeting with the Board of Assessors, Capital Planning Committee, Finance Committee, and Minuteman and Nashoba Regional School Districts Pursuant to Article 4, Section 10 of the General Bylaws

Mr. Ryan noted that this is a high level discussion and asked that presentations be kept brief. Representing other boards were: Kristin Fox from Board of Assessors, Steve Jelinek from Capital Planning, Erica Benedick from Finance Committee, Alice DeLuca and Edward Bouquillon from Minuteman, and Rich Eckel, Pat Marone and Brooke Clenchy, from Nashoba.

Town Administrator Denise Dembkoski presented slides highlighting the budget and her recommendations. She noted that free cash is above the \$2 million mark. The Stabilization account balance is just over \$500,000 due to the use of funds for the Lower Village Project. The balance for FY 21 is 8.96% of the budget. She would like to get it back to the 10-15% range. OPEB Trust Fund current liability is \$7.4 million and we have \$822,807 in the Trust Fund. She recommends that we continue funding in the range of \$230K/year. The total FY 21 Budget is \$28,817,845. Schools are 70% of the budget. Revenue is 90% from taxes, primary residential. State aid is 2% of the budget. FY 22 budget requests total approximately \$30,019,353 for an increase of 4.17%. This is preliminary and she expects this number to come down. Non-CPC capital requests are just under \$1 million. Ms. Dembkoski noted key budget drivers for FY 22. The Minuteman assessment is up more than 20%. Nashoba's assessment increase is expected to be minimal, if at all. Insurance is expected to increase by more than 10%. Effects of Covid are expected to linger for some time. Tax collection is still good and the town is fortunate in that it does not rely on sources like hotels and meals tax or state aid.

Ms. Dembkoski said that key recommendations include:

- Look for efficiencies and cost effective ways to deliver services – e.g. online permitting.
- Find ways to be more open and transparent –more information on the website, services available to residents 24/7.
- Make budget more transparent – eliminate the education incentive as a separate line item and work into salary line; also include stipends.
- Continued funding of OPEB with appropriation of at least \$235K from free cash.
- Make an annual appropriation to the Stabilization Fund of \$200K from free cash.
- Increase snow and ice budget closer to what is being spent. Recommend an increase of \$35,000.
- Fund an Assistant TA/Human Resources position to address personnel matters .
- Fund a Highway position that will work with Cemetery. Longer term look at consolidating Cemetery and Highway in a Dept of Public Works.
- Fund or support a Reference/Outreach Librarian position – Tina will be exploring funding from the Hale Trust.

In response to questions, Ms. Dembkoski clarified that an externally funded library position would be handled similarly to other positions that are funded from sources other than budget. She also indicated that her proposed OPEB funding is in line with what was recommended by a consultant hired by the town. The DPW position would not require a Board of Public Works and utilities like Hudson Light and Power can be exempted. Board members complemented Dembkoski on her clear presentation. Ms. Sturgis felt that additional cost savings might be possible with highway and cemetery.

Kristin Fox, Principal Assessor noted that there has not been a lot of new growth. FY 22 growth is about \$150-\$175K due to lack of construction projects. In response to a question, she indicated that total townwide valuation is \$1,477,656,322.

Steve Jelinek, Chair of the Capital Planning Committee indicated that the committee has received just under \$980,000 in projects this year. He noted that while they spent \$950,000 last year, a typical year is more like \$500,000. He thinks the request number will come down somewhat. About 45% is for new vehicles for police and highway, \$180K from the Building Dept to rekey the Town Building, paint the Police Station, handicapped access to Town Building and repair of the Town Building water system. Ms. Dembkoski indicated that she has met with all department heads and is attending capital planning meetings. She expects to give them her recommendations and what she feels the priorities are.

Erica Benedick from the Finance Committee said that they had a preliminary budget meeting with the Town Administrator and will be meeting with departments in the coming weeks. She is pleased with the process to date.

Alice DeLuca and Edward Bouquillon, Minuteman were present to discuss the Minuteman School budget. Mr. Bouquillon noted that Stow's assessment is up 18.4%. Enrollment is up more than 100% and they have already exceeded the design enrollment of the building. They are adding some new programs and have many out of district students on the wait list. He noted that he will be meeting with the Board for a more in-depth discussion on March 9th. Mr. Ryan asked if there would be significant increases going forward. Mr. Bouquillon said that he did not.

Brooke Clenchy of Nashoba presented slides which she said would be posted tomorrow. Key points are that expenditures are going up 1.71% from FY20. They will be making \$1.8 million in cuts. The assessment for Stow will drop by 0.42%. She said costs increased for health insurance, transportation, utilities, substitute teachers, and instructional software. She noted that the budget cut information would likely be available by April vacation. They expect more COVID funding to be made available by the federal government. In response to a question, she indicated that she did not have the numbers for COVID funds received to date but would ask Pat Marone to supply them. It was noted that the Superintendent has resigned as of the end of the year. The Board thanked her for her work.

Joint Meeting with Community Preservation Committee to discuss the Requested FY 22 CPA Projects

In attendance from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) were Chair Vin Antil and Administrator Krista Bracci, along with several members of the CPC. Mr. Antil noted that that CPC has received several applications, including a couple of large projects such as Stow Acres and the Town

Hall Restoration project. There are also a number of smaller projects, such as Hallock Point, a pickleball court at Town Center Park, and trails on the Kane land in Gleasondale. There are also future needs such as a possible second phase of Stow Acres, housing on Red Acre Road and others. CPC is concerned about the large amount of the requests and how they will get through a funding bottleneck. They would like to hear the Selectmen's thoughts on how to deal with the Town Hall Restoration Project in particular, as well as their position on bonding against CPA revenue.

Ms. Sturgis asked if the CPC does a five-year plan the way that Capital Planning does a plan. In her opinion the way CPC makes decisions seems reactive. Mr. Antil responded that they try to do this insofar as feasible but often don't know what applications are coming. Bob Larkin of the CPC added that they typically do not fund 100% of the cost of a project. The committee looks to leverage other funding sources. It was noted that Hallock Point was a good example of this leverage – with \$600K in other funds more than matching the town's commitment of \$400K. Larkin felt that other sources needed to be looked at for Town Hall. Ms. Sturgis said that there was no clear plan for the use of Town Hall and that she did not support spending \$3.5 million when we don't have a use for the building. She feels it should wait. Ms. Frecha noted that the CPC also makes use of the master plan, open space plan and other documents to help determine how much of a priority any given expenditure is.

Dan Barstow of the Lake Boon Commission spoke in favor of the Hallock Point project. He thinks the price is remarkably good and noted that more than 70 donors have contributed to fundraising to date.

Ed DeLuca of the Town Hall Restoration Committee said that a key difference in his mind is that the Town already owns the Town Hall and needs to keep it up. He feels that sets it apart from acquiring new land. Doug Hyde of the Building Department noted the previous support for this project and the need to do it now and not wait another year. Mr. Salvie noted that he liked the Town Hall design, but feels that what we are getting for uses is not worth \$3.5 million. He thinks that if the project is done there should be a debt exclusion. He does not feel that this project should be bonded against CPA funds, but would not close the door to doing that for another project. Mr. Antil suggested phasing the Town Hall project to break it up into smaller expenditures. He noted that the CPA replenishment in 2020 was \$659K in town funds and a state match of \$290K, for a total of \$949K.

Mr. Ryan said that he is not in favor of bonding, and feels the Stow Acres is the top priority, Hallock Point next and that the other projects could be deferred. Ms. Frecha said that the Town Hall Committee will be considering the funding package at their meeting tomorrow night. She thinks it is an important project. Ms. Birch-McMichael noted that it is difficult to imagine how the building might be used when we can't use it right now. She also feels that Stow Acres is a top priority, Hallock Point less so. Ms. Sturgis agreed about Stow Acres.

Erica Benedick from the Finance Committee said she was hoping to hear more about bonding against CPA funds. Mr. Ryan felt that this should not be done except under extreme circumstances and for very short period of time. Ms. Sturgis said that she was also opposed and would rather see a debt exclusion. Ms. Birch-McMichael was also opposed. Ms. Frecha was concerned that it might tie up CPA

funds going forward but said she would support short term bonding for small amounts. Mr. Salvie said he does not have a problem with bonding, but doesn't support it for the Town Hall.

Bob Wilber of Stow Conservation Trust said that the two open space projects that are being discussed tonight are two of the most important opportunities in front of Stow currently. He noted the many benefits of the Stow Acres project, and the great value and leverage presented by Hallock Point. He believes that the state match is likely to stay strong given the political clout of the many cities and towns enrolled in CPA.

Mr. Antil thanked the Board for their feedback.

Town Administrator's Report:

- COVID – Stow has been downgraded in terms of COVID risk and has some of the lowest numbers of cases in the area. Ms. Dembkoski noted that vaccines have been expanded to those over 65 and additional appointments are being made available. The Governor's office confirmed that they are stopping local vaccination clinics in favor of encouraging regional efforts. She is continuing to work with a coalition of communities to push for a closer large vaccination site for Stow.
- The newly hired Executive Assistant will start on Monday.
- There are two short surveys on website – one from the Nashoba Area Social Justice Alliance re improving diversity of Stow, also the Town Hall Restoration Committee.
- Stow Acres – Ms. Dembkoski commended Jesse Steadman, Kathy Sferra and others who put together the Stow Acres visioning forum, and noted the many positive responses that are being received.
- COA – Ms. Dembkoski recognized Alyson and COA employees for assisting seniors by providing rides and making appointments for COVID vaccines.

Liaison reports

- Mr. Salvie noted that the Building Dept. is bringing forward \$30K to design replacement of the water pipe that supplies Crescent Street. He is meeting with Rep. Hogan about the possibility of state funds for the Library Building
- Ms. Birch-McMichael said that the high school will be going hybrid on March 1st
- Ms. Frecha noted that the Conservation Commission has hired a contractor for the Healthy Lake Boon project; the Open Space Committee is focused on Stow Acres.
- Ms. Sturgis echoed Ms. Dembkoski's comments about the COA ; she also noted that the Mass Selectboard's Association is doing a webinar on civil discourse in public meetings on March 12th. There is new funding for housing being announced next week. They are holding off on perambulating the bounds until the snow melts.
- Mr. Ryan noted the Highway Dept doing a good job with snow and ice removal.

Correspondence

It was noted that the correspondence contains letters regarding COVID vaccines, also the PFAS study. In response to a letter in the packet, Ms. Frecha urged that the school board try to expand the ability of

teachers to work from home. Ms. Birch-McMichael said the School Committee is aware of the issue and she understands there are issues relating to contracts.

Executive Session – Pursuant to MGL Ch 30A, Section 21(a)(2) to conduct a strategy session in preparation for negotiations with Darren Thraen for Lieutenant of the Stow Police Department.

Correspondence

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to convene in Executive Session, pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, section 21(a)(2), to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with Darren Thraen, for the position of Lieutenant of the Stow Police Department and to adjourn thereafter. Ms. 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

Powerpoint Presentations by Town Administrator and Nashoba Regional School Superintendent