

Select Board Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, April 12, 2022
Stow Town Building & Zoom

Present in the Warren Room: Chair Ellen Sturgis, Megan Birch-McMichael, Cortni Frecha, James Salvie, and Town Administrator Denise Dembkoski

Chair Sturgis called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

Chair Sturgis said with the resignation of Zack Burns, it is now a Board of four members. If there is a unanimous vote she will not request a roll call. The Chair noted that Stow TV is recording this meeting. If there is any public comment, please identify yourself and limit comments to under two minutes.

Public Input - none

Board Member Comments:

Chair Sturgis made the following comments:

- The Stow Council On Aging (COA) is looking for volunteers for the Friday morning Bridges Together program, which is with the fourth graders. Anyone over age 60 who wants to volunteer can contact the COA.
- The Randall Library Friends Book Sale is April 23-24 at the Pompo Community Center.
- If Board members have comments on the draft of the Nashoba Regional Agreement, send them to the office and she will make sure that they get to the committee.
- Stow Clean-Up Day is Saturday, April 30th.
- There is a Candidates Night on April 27th sponsored and run by the Stow Independent.

Recognition

Eagle Scout Luke Piotte's service project in 2019 was at Pine Bluff Recreation Area where he refurbished the gate and replaced signs, including the one-way sign and two identification signs.

Board member Salvie moved to recognize Boy Scout Luke Piotte for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout, and to sign the letter and proclamation, to be presented at his recognition ceremony on Sunday, April 24, 2022. Board member Frecha seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Appointments

Firefighter/EMT

Fire Chief JP Benoit said that Rachel has been with the Fire Department since 2019, first as an EMT and then within a year as a Call Firefighter. Firefighter Vroegindewey said it is a great honor and she hopes to do the Town proud.

Board member Salvie moved that the Select Board appoint Rachel Vroegindewey to the position of Firefighter/EMT through June 30, 2022, and subject to reappointment thereafter. This appointment is contingent upon final approval from the Town Administrator after a review of any reports provided by the pre-employment mental assessment. Board member Frecha seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Zoning Board of Appeals Associate Member

Bill Byron has stepped down as a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals after 18 years and asked to be appointed as an associate member. Board members shared their appreciation of his tenure on this and other committees. Member Salvie said Mr. Byron cares passionately for and has a breadth of knowledge of the Town.

Board member Salvie moved to appoint William Byron as an Associate Member of the Zoning Board of Appeals, to complete the remainder of an unexpired term expiring June 30, 2023. Board member Frecha seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust

Cathy Leonard was present via Zoom. She has been attending the meetings for four years and has an interest in affordable housing.

Board member Salvie moved to appoint Catherine Leonard to the Stow Municipal Housing Trust (SMAHT) to complete the remainder of an unexpired two-year term expiring June 30, 2023. Board member Frecha seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Town Administrator (TA) Report

- The next Household Hazardous Waste Day is Wednesday, May 4th. The schedule is the first Wednesday and the following Saturday of each month from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. weather permitting.
- The current COVID count in Stow is 5 cases, which is a 1.13% positivity rate.
- April is Volunteer Appreciation Month, and the TA thanked all the volunteer board and committee members, the numerous volunteers in various Town departments, and in particular, Liza Mattison and Holly Clack who were both appointed to the Conservation Commission in 2021 and have recently completed 8 units of the MA Conservation Commission's training program.
- The Eversource project in Gleasondale should begin in May or June on the right-of-way. They will use outreach such as door hangers, going door-to-door, a website, a hotline, etc. It will impact the Chestnut St. Bridge so arrangements will need to be made for police, fire, and public access.

Discussion of Zack Burns' Resignation from the Select Board

Special Election

The Board can call a Special Town Election to fill the unexpired 3-year term that ends in 2024. The Town Administrator recommends holding it with the state election in November. The Town Clerk prefers holding it with the September primary only if the school agrees to be closed on that day. The board discussed having an election in the summer. The Board decided to discuss this further at the May 24th meeting, after the Annual Town Election when there is a new Select Board in place.

Capital Planning Committee Vacancy

The vacancy is through 2023 and has not been posted yet; it is a Select Board appointee and historically it is a Select Board member in that role. The Board will wait until the May 24th meeting.

Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC) Select Board Representative Vacancy

MAGIC has asked if there is a new representative. The Board decided to wait until the May 24th meeting. The TA offered to be the representative as many Town Administrators serve in that role.

Sustainable Stow – Nonbinding Resolution Article Request Overview

The petition for a warrant article filed by Sustainable Stow was received after the deadline. Based on the Town's Charter and town counsel's opinion of the Charter, the Select Board cannot overrule any provision of the Charter.

Rick Lent and Jen Sylvester of Sustainable Stow were present. Mr. Lent said his group thought that the state statute could override the Charter. Ms. Sylvester hopes that at the next opportunity this can be on the warrant and that it will receive the support of the Select Board.

Allan Fierce was present via Zoom. Mr. Fierce said they presented a written memo to the Board that referenced MGL Ch. 39 Section 10 and that the state law regarding warrant articles trumps the Town Bylaw. He would like to see the written opinion from town counsel. The Town Administrator clarified that it is in the Charter, not the Bylaws, and that the Charter can be more restrictive than state law.

Some Board members praised Sustainable Stow's efforts but most felt there was a lack of urgency for getting this article on the upcoming warrant via circumventing the Charter. Member Birch-McMichael was disappointed in the way that Sustainable Stow's members went about trying to solicit input from the Board. One member reached out to Birch-McMichael at work and she said for the record it was "out of the realm of what is appropriate" and that her feelings on this are rooted in the messaging.

FY2023 Budget Discussion

The budget book and the Town Administrator's budget recommendation letter are on the website. The salary increases include the rolling in of the education incentives that had been a separate item in prior years, and the salary classifications are now what the true salary for positions should be. The Highway Department has chosen to unionize, and in negotiating the contract the pay scale has increased to market value. The Cemetery Supervisor position has joined the union and this position is being phased into the Highway Department as part of the creation of a Public Works Department. In a future year, the final step will be requesting a bylaw change to formally create this department.

The Minuteman High School assessment is up 35.7% (\$564,000) and the Nashoba Regional School District increase is 2.64% (\$476,000), for a combined increase of over \$1M. Revenues are still an estimate at this time, but the budget will average out to an approximate 3.5% total budget increase and will be balanced safely.

The Finance Committee met last night and unanimously approved every article except the Town Hall Restoration Committee funding through the Community Preservation Committee and held on the highway equipment article pending more information.

Annual Town Meeting Warrant Review

The TA discussed Article 3, Wage and Salary Schedule. The TA worked with the Asst TA/HR Director to remove the highway positions (now in a contract), add a new seasonal employee rate schedule, and create an 8 grade, 12 step schedule.

The TA also discussed Article 56, Amend General Bylaw Article 11 – Personnel Administration. Proposed changes will define how the new step schedule works and move day-to-day decisions from the Select Board to the TA in order to follow the Charter.

The Board will review and approve the 2022 Annual Town Meeting Warrant at its next meeting.

Meeting Minutes

Member Frecha asked for corrections on page 2 to the numbers in the presentation by Senator Eldridge and Representative Hogan. The amount the Nashoba district received last year to be corrected to \$7.8 million, and the amount the district received to be corrected to \$100,000 to fight food insecurity.

Board member Salvie moved to accept the meeting minutes of the March 22, 2022 meeting as amended. Board member Frecha seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Correspondence

Member Frecha commented on an email regarding Canada geese, noting that it is sad and she would like to know what happened and that she will inquire elsewhere.

Member Frecha commented on the email regarding the Cemetery meetings. She asked if there would be value in having a staff member to support committees that do not have staff to assist with minutes. Chair Sturgis said that many committees do not have staff support and the committee members can rotate taking the minutes. They both appreciate having minutes available on the Town's website. The TA said she spoke with the Cemetery Commission chair and most items in the email that was sent to the office are not accurate. She has responded to the person who sent the email and both she and the commission chair offered to meet with him. Chair Sturgis encouraged the Cemetery Commission to meet in the Town Building.

The Nashoba Area Social Justice Alliance is seeking submissions for its Art Show in May; the submission deadline is April 25th.

Adjournment

At 9:07 p.m. Board member Birch-McMichael moved to adjourn. Board member Frecha seconded the motion and it passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Sampson

Executive Assistant

Documents used at this meeting:

Documents can be found in the Select Board's Office in the meeting folder.