

Select Board Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 10, 2023
Stow Town Building & Zoom

Present in the Warren Room: Cortni Frecha, Megan Birch-McMichael, Ingeborg Hegemann Clark, Hector Constantzos, John "JT" Toole, and Town Administrator Denise Dembkoski

Chair Frecha called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. and noted that the meeting is not being recorded or broadcast live on Stow TV. The meeting is being recorded on Zoom and will be posted later.

Public Comment - none

Recognition

Chair Frecha acknowledged the proclamation for the Randall Library Friends.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to approve and sign a proclamation for National Friends of Libraries Week, October 15-21, honoring the local nonprofit service group, Randall Library Friends Association, for their work in the community.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Board Member Comments

Mr. Constantzos acknowledged that today is Mental Health Awareness Day and if you need help please reach out and get some help.

Town Administrator (TA) Report - none

Appointment

Police Chief Michael Sallese was present in the Warren Room.

With the resignation of Brendan Fitzpatrick, the role of senior detective is open. Christopher Kusz is the junior detective and per their contract Kusz's reassignment has to be approved by the Select Board.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to approve the assignment of Christopher Kusz to the role of Senior Detective for the Stow Police Department through June 30, 2024.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Special Event Permit - Fall Festival at Stow Acres

Conservation Director Kathy Sferra was present in the Warren Room.

Ms. Sferra said the fall festival is an opportunity for residents and families to explore the north course of Stow Acres. There will be pumpkin painting, face painting, games, a self-guided tour of the new trail, golf cart tours, and information tables including one for the master planning process. If it rains the event will be smaller and moved inside.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to grant a special event permit to the Stow Conservation and Recreation Departments for a Fall Festival on Sunday, October 29 from 1-4 PM (12-5 PM including set up and clean

up) at Stow Acres North Course, pending Town Administrator approval that all necessary documents have been received.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Special Event Permit – Stow Gobbler

Event Managers Adrienne Hoey and Kaitlyn Smith were present via Zoom.

This is the 16th annual Stow Gobbler, and the second year that the Stow Community Chest has organized the event. Last year they raised \$21,000 for the community. Ms. Hoey and Ms. Smith gave an overview of their application, and Chief Sallese said there is an operational plan that is shared with the fire department that has been used for years. Roads will be blocked and the Police Department will post information on social media.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to grant a special event permit for the Stow Gobbler 5K Run/Walk sponsored by the Stow Community Chest on Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 23, 2023 from 6:30-11 AM, pending Town Administrator approval that all necessary documents have been received.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Common Road

Fire Chief JP Benoit, chair of the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (TSAC), was present in the Warren Room and said the TSAC held a public forum on October 3 to discuss the concept of Common Road becoming one-way. The TSAC decided that a recommendation should be made to the Select Board for a possible change. Chief Sallese, a member of TSAC, said the goal is to make Common Road a safe right of way for all types of road users, including pedestrians and cyclists. The proposed alternative would make Common Road one-way westbound, with two-way traffic allowed in and out of the First Parish Church parking lot at the east end.

Mr. Constantzos asked why a decision needs to be made now if this is not going to be implemented for a few years. Ms. Demboski said the 1,165-page library bid has been published and is based on Common Road being one-way to incorporate a patio, sidewalks, raised crosswalks, and parking. The road will be closed during construction and the goal would be to reopen it as a one-way.

Morgan Hillman, 64 Crescent Street, a member of the Library Building Committee, spoke as a resident and asked if there will be a dedicated left turn lane from 117 east onto Common Road. TSAC will be looking at improvements that can be made there.

Ms. Demboski spoke about the taking of some land from the common to make defined parking on the south side of Common Road. This would not impact existing trees or the water spigot.

Discussion ensued about receiving public input on the taking of this land. However, drivers already park on this land, it has been a known issue for many years, and it is on tonight's agenda if a resident wanted to comment on this. Most members wanted to move this forward with a more specific motion.

Chief Sallese said that defined spaces with parking in one direction will alleviate potential problems.

Kat Copeland, a member of the building committee, spoke as a resident and asked if the cost for the parking is included in the library bid. Defined parking and curbing in front of the library was included.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to accept and approve the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee's recommendation to make Common Road a one-way street westbound, west of the intersection with

route 117 westbound to Library Hill Road and still allowing two-way traffic at the easternmost entrance to the First Parish Church parking area.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to take 2-5 feet from the Town Common to add defined and marked parking on Common Road up to the proposed side parking with a smooth transition to Common Road.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion.

Discussion ensued about revising the wording of the motion.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to take up to 2-5 feet from the Town Common to add defined and marked parking on Common Road from Library Hill Road for a distance of approximately 100 feet with a smooth transition to Common Road, ensuring that all legislative requirements are met.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed 4-1 with Mr. Constantzos opposed.

Police Department 9.05 Wellness Program

Chief Sallese and Lt. Kellie Barhight were present in the Warren Room.

In January, the Board accepted and approved a wellness program that allowed a 30-minute workout time for police personnel. The program has been successful and participants have requested an increase to 60 minutes to include time to change before and after a workout. Lt. Barhight said that 60 minutes is the industry standard, and it is good for mental and physical health. Policing with adequate coverage comes first, and no police services have been affected by this program in the past 10 months.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to approve a change to the 9.05 Wellness Program for the Police Department, as requested by Police Chief Michael Sallese.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Donation to the Police Department

A resident has offered to donate a workout exercise cage with an estimated value of \$250-\$400. The wellness officer inspected it and said it is in good condition.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to accept the donated Workout Exercise Cage from Robert Webster for the Stow Police Department. Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Town Administrator's Performance Evaluation

The Board discussed their differences of opinion on certain sections of the review. Ms. Hegemann said the positive really shines through and it was an incredibly good review. Ms. Dembkoski said she is very pleased with the 4.9 out of 5 rating but she does not agree with everything. She is disappointed that the score on personal development and understanding the role was one of the lower scores. She is a member of multiple state associations and has continued with her personal development. She appreciated the feedback and the effort put forth by the Board in writing the reviews.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to approve the Town Administrator Performance Evaluation as presented at this meeting.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Green Communities Competitive Grant for the Library Project

The state puts forward an annual decarbonization grant for up to \$500k. Because the library will be a fully sustainable building and the town has adopted many of the state green initiatives and codes, there is a good chance that the town will receive something in this grant. The goal is to receive the full amount. It is a lengthy grant process and two of the requirements are the Chair signing and authorizing the grant application and signing a document stating that the town has the required 25% match.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to authorize the Chair to execute an application for up to a \$500,000 Green Communities Competitive Grant for the library project.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

MA Select Board Association (MSA) Seeking Feedback

The Healy-Driscoll Administration has reached out for feedback from the 351 municipalities via different state associations, such as the Select Board Association and the Small Town Administrators of MA (STAM), to see what needs to be changed, streamlined, or updated. They will then conduct a listening tour this fall. The deadline for feedback to the MSA is Friday.

Discussion ensued and the items to be submitted to the MSA on behalf of the Board are, in summary:

- Chapter 32 Section 15 needs better accountability for the taxpayers;
- Better access to MEMA (MA Emergency Management Agency) funds;
- MSBA (MA School Building Authority) funding should be more accessible and equitable;
- Municipal Building Authority to offer support for non-historical municipal buildings;
- Address prevailing wage and the inequities of rural communities.

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved that Denise submit our feedback bullet points to the Massachusetts Select Board Association.

Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Residential Tax Exemption

Principal Assessor Kristen Fox was present via Zoom.

Ms. Fox said that the residential exemption has been around since 1979 and she does discuss it at the yearly tax classification hearing. This exemption is typically granted by two types of communities, those that are seasonal and those with very large apartment or rental bases. It creates a higher tax rate for only the residential class and everybody pays the higher rate, however, properties that fall below a break-even point can have a portion of their residential value exempted from taxation. This is why the rate goes up, you are using a lower residential value to calculate the tax rate.

Granting a residential exemption is something that the Select Board would need to decide. Ms. Fox stressed that every time the assessors grant an exemption, a discount, or an abatement that somebody else pays for it.

If the goal is to provide tax relief to seniors, there are several things that can be done. Harvard and Lancaster have an Elderly and Disabled Taxation Fund, and taxpayers can donate money to this fund. There is also a Means Tested Elderly Exemption which requires special legislation as it is not a statute that can be adopted locally.

There are several exemptions adopted in Stow for veterans, the legally blind, surviving spouses, surviving minors, and two for seniors. The base amounts for these state exemptions have not changed since the 1980s. All of these options are on the town's website.

"Trish C" was present via Zoom and made several comments, and asked about Stow forming an Elderly & Disabled Taxation Aid Committee similar to the one in Harvard.

Ms. Dembkoski said that if the Board's goal is to focus on the senior population then she and Ms. Fox could research the means exemption and see what type of legislation has been implemented in other communities. It would address the concern that Stow's seniors are being priced out of the community. However, this would still shift the burden to other taxpayers in town. The Board will discuss this further at a future meeting which will include the Board of Assessors.

Meeting Minutes

Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to accept the meeting minutes of the September 26, 2023 meeting as drafted. Mr. Constantzos seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Board Correspondence & Updates

Mr. Constantzos asked about the Board of Appeals decisions that are often included in the Board's correspondence. These decisions are informational only and do not require any action by the Board.

Adjournment

At 9:16 p.m. Ms. Birch-McMichael moved to adjourn.

Mr. Constantzos 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 Office in the meeting folder.