

Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Date: January 10, 2022
Time: 6:00 p.m.
Place: McCourt Social Hall
Memorial Town Hall, Spencer, MA
Present: Chairman Woodbury, Vice-Chair Howard, Clerk Grigg, Member Hicks, and
Town Administrator Jeffrey Bridges
Remote: Pepe

Chairman Woodbury called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcement Any members that are participating remotely in accordance with Regulation 940, CMR 29.10 of the Open Meeting Law

Chairman Woodbury announced that Mr. Pepe will be participating remotely in accordance with Regulation 940, CMR 29.10 of the Open Meeting Law

Meeting Minutes:

Review and Act on Meeting Minutes of December 13, 2021

A motion to approve the minutes of December 13, 2021 (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0 with a roll call vote: Grigg-yes; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-yes; Woodbury-yes

Citizens Input

Matt Defosse, 7 Pauls Drive: spoke against mandating masks in Town buildings and asked the Board to allow citizens to choose whether or not to wear a mask.

Mike Malone, 128 Mechanic Street: spoke in favor of mandating masks in Town buildings and asked the Board to go a step further and implement a town-wide indoor mask mandate.

Communications

None

New Business:

Update on the David Prouty High School (DPHS) MSBA Building Project (Joint meeting with the DPHS Building Committee and Spencer Finance Committee)

Present were: Jason Monette, Dr. Paul Haughey, Kristian Whitsett, Elizabeth York, Dorrie Brooks, and Phil Palumbo.

Jason Monette, member of the DPHS Building Committee and Chairman of the SEBRSD School Committee reported that the District held three public forums on the feasibility stage of the building project; the Committee is hopeful this project will bring the entire community together for the education of all students. The Committee will continue to meet with the Board of Selectmen, Finance Committee, and members of the community throughout the process.

Dr. Paul Haughey, Superintendent of the SEBRSD spoke on the importance of the DPHS Building Project to the community and said the presentation will walk through the introduction of the project, why it is important to the community, and highlight the educational visioning process. The proposed Project will be a partnership with the Mass School Building Authority (MSBA) who will match approximately half of the cost.

Kristian Whitsett, with Jones Whitsett Architects presented a Power Point outlining the following:

DPHS was built in 1966 and is 55 years old. There have been minor repairs over the years, though there has never been a major renovation. The School is made up of three wings: the A wing, which consists of offices, a few classrooms, a cafeteria and auditorium; the B wing, consists of classrooms which are not conducive to modern teaching methods; and the C wing, which contains the gym and lockers. The roof over C wing has a history of leaking, though the other roofs are in good shape, including the B wing roof which was replaced in 2016. The classroom wing B needs considerable updating, including more ventilation to meet code and address mold issues, better teaching technology, more electrical outlets, infrastructure, occupancy sensors, secure hardware and other features of 21st century schools. After conducting an in-depth study, it became apparent it was not worth saving the classroom wing B. The low ceiling height and unique structure makes new mechanical and fire suppression systems impossible to install.

There are site issues to be considered as well. The hill creates access challenges, the track is undersized and in disrepair, the fields need maintenance, and site parking and access roads are needed. From an educational perspective, the layout of School is challenging and not conducive to modern teaching methods.

Elizabeth York, DPHS Principal noted that the process included seven focus group meetings, outreach to students and families through meetings and surveys, resulting in a vision to provide gifted students small spaces to collaborate, offer larger classrooms for vocational learning, and prepare all students for real world careers. She pointed out that negative perceptions are causing the District to lose students creating in a \$1 million dollar loss each year as a result of Spencer students attending other schools.

Dorrie Brooks, with Jones Whitsett Architects reviewed the plans and advised that several options were considered and ultimately, the preferred option was a major renovation/addition which preserves the building, is less expensive, and saves many of the positive features. The new design places classrooms on the south side, improves site entry, and outdoor space, resulting in better orientation, improved flow, and good ventilation.

Phil Palumbo with Collier Engineering discussed the preliminary costs noting a total estimated project cost of \$94.5 million, of which the SEBRSD's share is \$52 million, after the MSBA reimbursement. The design portion of the project is expected to be complete at the end of 2023 and the construction is expected to take up to three years with an estimated completion date by the spring of 2027.

Jason Monette thanked the Board and said he will keep them updated throughout the process.

Review & Act on the 2022 Community Comparisons

A motion to approve the 2022 Community Comparisons sheet (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0 with a roll call vote: Grigg-yes; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-yes; Woodbury-yes

Old Business

Review and Act on Traffic / Pedestrian Signals at Main and Pleasant Streets

Erin Thompson, Traffic Engineer for VHB reviewed the Town Center project which realigned the Main/Pleasant Street intersection. After construction, additional phasing/timing changes were reviewed and at that time the approach was to install additional signage on Pleasant Street.

U & F Superintendent Bill Cundiff indicated that in response to the number of incidents at the intersection, it makes sense to look at the timing of the signals to address pedestrian safety issues.

Mr. Grigg said he became aware of the high number of accidents at the intersection and considering five people cross each hour, it makes sense to change the signal to an all-pedestrian phase and revisit if issues arise going forward.

Mr. Pepe suggested eliminating the Pleasant Street crosswalk completely and have pedestrians use the Main Street crosswalks. Dr. Hicks was opposed to removing the crosswalk expressing concern with creating additional risk to pedestrians and likely encouraging jaywalking. After some discussion, Erin Thompson indicated she is not in support of eliminating the Pleasant Street crosswalk and advised that one of MassDOT's basic principles is to design intersections for pedestrian mobility and to eliminate jaywalking. She is in support of a change that eliminates the concurrent pedestrian signal to an all-pedestrian signal.

A motion to change the signal to an all-pedestrian phase (Grigg/Hicks) passed 5/0 with a roll call vote: Grigg-yes; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-yes; Woodbury-yes.

Update on Coronavirus / COVID-19 Cases

Health Agent Daoust reported:

- There have been 883 Coronavirus cases since August 1, 2021, with 211 since January 1st.
- Over 7,528 Spencer residents have been fully vaccinated, with 877 partially vaccinated and 3,123 boosted.
- The CDC has shortened the recommended isolation and quarantine period if a person tests positive, regardless of vaccination status, isolation is for five days and can come out on day six, provided they are symptom free and must continue to wear a mask around others for an additional five days.
- If you are exposed to someone with COVID-19 and have been fully vaccinated within the past six months, you do not need to quarantine, but must wear a mask around others for ten days. If possible, test on day five.

Dr. Hicks asked about the total number of Covid-19 in Spencer since the start of the pandemic. Ms. Daoust will research and report back at the next meeting.

Ms. Daoust requests approval for use of ARPA funds in the amount of \$7,200 to purchase test kits for Town employees.

A motion to approve the recommendation of the Health Agent to spend \$7,200 in ARPA funds to purchase test kits (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0 with a roll call vote: Grigg-yes; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-yes; Woodbury-yes

A motion to authorize the Health Agent to purchase \$25,000 worth of test kits for residents, if a grant is awarded (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0 with a roll call vote: Grigg-yes; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-yes; Woodbury-yes

Review & Act to Require Masks in Town Buildings

Mr. Grigg said he believes vaccines work and masks reduce transmission rates, nevertheless, he is not in favor of mandates and believes it should be up to the individual.

A motion effective on January 18 that masks be worn in all Spencer public buildings with the exception of private offices through February 7th and will be reviewed at the Board Meeting on February 7th (Hicks/Howard) passed 3/2: Grigg-no; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-no; Woodbury-yes

Chairman Woodbury reported that Senior Center Director April Caruso would like to close the Center for two weeks. Director Caruso said she would like to close the Center for two weeks due to high Covid cases and to protect the senior population.

A motion to close the Senior Center effective January 11th until the Director feels it is appropriate to reopen (Hicks/Pepe) passed 5/0 with a roll call vote: Grigg-yes; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-yes; Woodbury-yes

Review & Act on Use of ARPA Funds

Administrator Bridges reported that the Town was awarded \$3 million in ARPA funds. The US Treasury Department has expanded the use of these funds and he proposed soliciting input from employees on the potential use of the funds and from the residents via an online survey to assist in decision making.

A motion to survey town employees and to survey the general public on use of ARPA funds (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0 with a roll call vote: Grigg-yes; Hicks-yes; Howard-yes; Pepe-yes; Woodbury-yes

Dr. Hicks asked if HVAC improvements would be covered using these funds. He is concerned over the lack of ventilation in certain areas of Town Hall. Mr. Bridges will research.

Mr. Pepe asked if the salt shed project could be covered under the wetlands protection category to protect the wetlands in that area. Mr. Bridges will research and asked the Board to send any additional suggestions to him.

Town Administrator's Report

Preliminary FY2023 Budget Discussion

Administrator Bridges reported that budget documents have been distributed to department heads and meetings to review the submissions have begun. The draft budget will be presented in February.

Review FY2023 Budget Calendar

The calendar was reviewed.

Citizen's Input

Matt Defosse: the mask mandate denies freedom of choice for those who choose not to mask.

Bill Shemeth: would like elected and appointed boards and committees to participate in the ARPA funds survey and allow time for them to discuss at their meetings. He suggested public hearings be held for folks who do not respond to the survey.

Board Member and Staff Comments

Dr. Hicks: stated that people who do not wear masks are spreaders of the virus and he is concerned for others. He believes there is an obligation to protect your fellow man.

Mr. Pepe: wants to discuss strategy on obtaining funding for Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrades. Chairman Woodbury said he attended the Sewer Commissioners meeting earlier

in the day and the Commissioners are working on moving that forward. A letter has been sent to Congressman Neal.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Savoie
Executive Assistant

Referenced documents: DPHS MSBA presentation; VHB Proposal; ARPA funds memo; FY2023 budget calendar