

## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Selectmen**

Date: February 28, 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  
Pepe and Town Administrator Jeffrey Bridges

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**

None

### **Meeting Minutes:**

#### **Review and Act on Meeting Minutes of February 8, 2022**

*A motion to approve the minutes of February 8, 2022 (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0*

#### **Review and Act on Executive Session Minutes of February 8, 2022, not to be released at this time**

*A motion to approve the executive session minutes of February 8, 2022, not to be released at this time (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0*

### **Citizens Input**

Matt Defosse, 7 Pauls Dr.: read a statement expressing his concern with commercial solar development and emphasized the negative impact to the Town and asked the Board to make this their highest priority. He submitted an information packet and requested it be provided to the Board and Town Staff involved in solar development.

Kurt Nordquist, Gale Dr.: suggests the Board send letter to Cornerstone Bank requesting that they reconsider the closure of their West Main Street location; thanked Cormier Jeweler's for remaining in Town; suggests the Sewer Commissioners hold their meetings at the Town Hall, not at the Water Department.

William Shemeth, Dale St.: Sewer Commissioner's meetings are too early and given the current issues, he requests that they meet in the evening and at Town Hall; public hearings need to be held on the new Open Space Plan.

Mr. Pepe: the salt shed was presented to the CIPC as an environmental issue; he would like a determination on whether the existing shed location is sufficient.

Chairman Woodbury: a salt shed is currently being built in the Town of Holden at an estimated cost of \$1.2 million.

Matt Defosse: suggests improvements be made to Powdermill Park as part of the Meadow Road reconstruction project.

### **Communications**

Announcement: March 1<sup>st</sup> is the last day to submit nominations for the 2021 Meritorious Service Award – nomination forms are available on the Town Website or in the Administrator's Office

### **New Business:**

**Review & Act on a 1-day Alcohol License Application from Mary Queen of the Rosary for a St. Patrick's Day Dinner on March 19, 2022 from 5:30 to 10:00 pm**

*A motion to approve the 1-day Alcohol License Application from Mary Queen of the Rosary on March 19, 2022 (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0*

### **Discussion with SMOC Representatives on Police Activity at 126 & 204 Main Street**

Lieutenant Befford was present with representatives from SMOC: Darlene Assencoa, Lori Bianchin, Ryan Rodrigues and David Davidowicz.

Chairman Woodbury noted that the Board has concerns over the increased police activity at SMOC managed properties located at 126 and 204 Main Street, and Bixby Road. There were 84 police calls at 204 Main Street and he wants to ensure those numbers improve.

Mr. Pepe mentioned that spikes have occurred in the past and after the Board meet with SMOC representatives, the numbers would trend the right direction and now the numbers are increasing. He wants the properties to be managed well within the Town.

Ms. Assencoa indicated that challenges brought on by COVID has caused significant hardship and with the pandemic restrictions ending, she expects things will improve and will reestablish regular tenant meetings and work to bring the numbers down.

Mr. Grigg asked about the significant increase in December. Ms. Assencoa said some folks become lonely and depressed during the holidays, which causes an increase in mental health issues.

Mr. Pepe pointed out that Bixby Road had 129 calls with 10 arrests and asked what is being done to improve the situation. Mr. Davidowicz said Bixby Road was previously being managed by a third party and is now being managed in-house. He will work to get the numbers down to an acceptable level.

Lieutenant Befford said the Police Department has a good relationship with SMOC management and will continue to work with them to improve the calls at the lodging houses and Bixby Road.

Mr. Pepe suggests a meeting with SMOC within three to six months to review the numbers.

### **Review & Act to Send Letter of Support to the Division of Conservation Services for the 2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan**

*A motion to send a Letter of Support to the Division of Conservation Services for the 2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan (Pepe/Hicks) passed 5/0*

### **Review & Act on Agreement with the Department of Fish & Game for Browning Pond Fishing & Boating Access Improvements**

Administrator Bridges relayed that ongoing discussions with the Department of Fish & Game (DFG) to improve the Browning Pond boating access has been in the works for a few years. The DFG drafted an agreement with the Town outlining a list of improvements with pricing and advised the Board to move forward with the contract.

*A motion to authorize the Agreement with the Department of Fish & Game for Browning Pond Fishing & Boating Access Improvements (Hicks/Pepe) passed 5/0*

### **Review & Act to Temporarily Designate the Conservation Agent as a “Special Municipal Employee”**

Mr. Bridges reported that he wishes to appoint the current Conservation Agent Lauren Trifone, as Interim Town Planner, however in order to hold two municipal positions, one must be designated as a Special Municipal Employee. Since the Conservation Agent is a part-time position, it makes sense for it to hold the designation. If the Board agrees, this will allow Ms. Trifone to temporarily hold both positions.

Dr. Hicks asked if the Conservation Commission was asked for feedback. Mr. Bridges said he will notify them if the Board approves. Dr. Hicks said he is concerned about communication and is reluctant to vote, unless the Commission is in favor.

Chairman Woodbury questioned the reduction in hours for Conservation Agent from 19.5 to 15 hours per week, when in the past, 19.5 hours were not enough hours for the position.

Mr. Grigg asked what the alternatives are. Mr. Briges said he would have to bring someone in from the outside on a temporary basis. Since Ms. Trifone is already familiar with the Town, this provides greatest opportunity for success.

Mr. Pepe asked what the plan for the position is after the interim period. Mr. Bridges said he will know more in a few months and will decide at that time. In the meantime, he will handle the economic development portion of the position.

Mr. Grigg acknowledged there would be a 5-hour reduction for the Conservation role, nevertheless, in the interim it is the best path forward.

Dr. Hicks made a motion to temporarily designate the Conservation Agent as a "Special Municipal Employee" subject to approval of the Conservation Agent Chair. The motion was not voted.

*A motion to temporarily designate the Conservation Agent as a "Special Municipal Employee" (Pepe/Grigg) passed 4/0 (Woodbury abstained).*

### **Review & Act on Request of Conservation Agent/Conservation Commission on the Proposed Cleanup of U24-17 Meadow Road**

Glenn Krevosky, with EBT Environmental Consultants previously presented a plan to the Conservation Commission to restore an abandoned dumping ground at U24-17 Meadow Road. In conjunction with a pending Notice of Intent submitted for his work at 10 Meadow Road, he is looking to include U24-17 as part of a 2:1 offsite mitigation restoration. He has identified several items dumped on the property including steel, tires, concrete, and other waste and will need to thoroughly inspect the property with the Conservation Commission to have a better idea of what is involved.

Conservation Agent Lauren Trifone indicated that the Conservation Commission agreed to grant Mr. Krevosky the opportunity to restore the land in the best interest of the Town and requests that the Board of Selectmen grant the request to allow Mr. Krevosky to work with Conservation on the process for restoration.

*A motion to authorize the Proposed Cleanup of U24-17 Meadow Road to move forward (Hicks/Howard) passed 5/0*

### **Review & Act to send letter to Cornerstone Bank re: Fair Plaza Branch Closure**

Chairman Woodbury wants a letter sent to Cornerstone Bank requesting they reconsider the closure of the Fair Plaza branch over concerns it will increase traffic at the Main Street Branch and contribute to traffic congestion in the downtown area.

Administrator Bridges agreed that sending a letter is appropriate. He spoke with Cornerstone Bank and learned they will keep the ATM machine, though from a business perspective it makes sense to close the the Fair Plaza with two branches in close proximity.

*A motion to send a letter to Cornerstone Bank on the Fair Plaza Branch Closure (Hicks/Pepe) passed 5/0*

## **COVID-19**

### **Update on Coronavirus / COVID-19 Cases**

Mr. Bridges noted that COVID caseloads are slowing, with only 11 new cases from February 16 through the February 23, and 13 new cases from February 9 through February 16. The total number of cases is 2,318 from August 1 through February 23, 2021.

### **Update on American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Survey**

Administrator Bridges anticipates closing the survey out today and will reach out to the business community for feedback. A full report and final list of comments will be provided to the Board.

### **Town Administrator's Report**

#### **FY2023 Initial Budget Presentation & Capital Update**

Mr. Bridges presented the initial FY2023 budget and noted it is balanced and does not rely on funding from free cash or stabilization. He outlined some of the increases which include:

- Allocating funding for a full-time accountant/benefit coordinator position, which will be partially funded using the \$30,600 currently being paid to the Town of Leicester for accounting services and \$5,000, which is half of the current amount being paid to NFP Corporation for benefit consultant services.
- \$15,286 is being added to restore four hours on Saturdays at the Richard Sugden Library
- An additional \$14,000 has been added for additional cleaning and maintenance and will be allocated across all municipal buildings.
- \$33,337 has been added to the Police Department budget for impact bargaining resulting from the use of body cameras.
- An additional \$36,500 has been added for as an estimate of the true cost for water and sewer services and will be distributed among municipal buildings.
- Other additions include \$7,712 to the Highway budget for a seasonal laborer; \$30,450 to Snow and Ice; \$16,000 to gasoline and diesel fuel budget; \$10,000 to Town Counsel budget; \$8,750 to Information Technology budget for new computers and \$6,500 to Information Technology budget for installing new technology in Conference Room A; \$109,766 to the Employee Benefits budget for the required increase in Worcester Regional Retirement system contributions; and \$50,000 to the Employee Benefits budget for a contribution to the Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) account.

There was some discussion on the large increase in the State's local minimum requirement to the SEBRSD. Mr. Bridges noted that the number will drop next year. Chairman Woodbury mentioned the \$345,000 for the Siemens project helps for FY2023, however there will be a deficit for FY2024. Mr. Bridges said the Board can decide to pay it this year.

Mr. Grigg questioned whether the fuel increase of \$16,000 is enough since there will likely be a more significant increase. Mr. Bridges said the numbers will be reviewed again in 60-days.

Dr. Hicks suggests the Police Department purchase hybrid vehicles for savings in gasoline expenses. Mr. Bridges will obtain pricing.

Chris Woodbury, member of the CIPC said police vehicles are specially designed for the specific use of the Police Department and cannot be hybrid.

Mr. Pepe said he appreciates the Administrators efforts on the budget.

### **FY2023 SEBRSD Preliminary Budget Update**

An update will be provided at the next meeting.

### **Citizen's Input**

Kurt Nordquist: suggests a letter be sent to the State Banking Commissioner regarding the Cornerstone Bank Branch closure.

Matt Defosse: is happy with the addition of Saturday hours at the library; commented that the pervious two Town Planners were not aggressive enough in limiting solar development.

Jonathan Viner: the project for 10 Meadow Road needs to be brought before the Planning Board as a Site Plan Review; asked about the status of his request for expenditures on the FMPC Roads Project and information on the audit of that account.

Mr. Bridges: there are three separate accounts for the FMPC Roads Project, one for each phase and expense reports can be printed from Munis. He will check into information regarding the audit.

### **Board Member and Staff Comments**

Mr. Bridges: advised the Board that the Attorney General's Office indicated the Town may be challenged with the increased setback requirements with the Solar Bylaw.

Mr. Pepe: asked about assistance for the Housing Production Plan Committee. Mr. Bridges said Ms. Trifone will assist during the interim.

Dr. Hicks:

- Is pleased the Library will open on Saturdays
- Suggests the Water and Sewer Commissioners schedule their meetings at 5 pm or later at the Town Hall
- Spoke with Gary Suter regarding the issue with the pipes freezing and bursting at the DPHS and the insurance will cover the bulk of the cost. There is concern it will continue to pose a problem until the building is remodeled or replaced.

Mr. Grigg: keep in mind the Massachusetts Coalition of Police for premium pay from ARPA funds.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Savoie  
Executive Assistant

Referenced documents: Meritorious Nomination Forms, MQR License application, Police Activity Report on SMOC, Letter of Support to DCR; Browning Pond Agreement, Conservation Memo on proposed cleanup of Meadow Road, FY2023 Budget Projection #1