

Board of Selectmen Meeting:  
Memorial Town Hall Conference Room  
Chairman:

10-15-2019 @ 6:00pm  
Approved: May 19, 2020  
Selectman Brian Moriarty

Present: Selectmen Brian Moriarty, Edmund Jaworski, Diana Szynal, Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator

Selectman Moriarty opened the meeting at 6:00pm.

#### Announcements –

Selectman Moriarty announced that long time Board and School Committee member, Pat Gaughan has passed away. He offered condolences and said a beautiful testimonial was done by Ms. Szynal. He gave wake and funeral details informing that perhaps the Board could coordinate Board member attendance. Selectman Jaworski noted also that a letter was sent regarding the ribbon cutting of the new field hockey field.

Selectman Moriarty read the public participation information, saying also that this will be read at all meetings.

#### Public Forum-

Resident, John Wilkes asked to have reflectors on the Chestnut Street Bridge. It's very narrow and there are no safety barriers.

#### Community Preservation –

Bob Wagner would like to get financial reports from the accountants in order to see if there are outstanding things, and balances in the accounts. Ms. Michonski has been trying to get the information from them. Nov. 1 is their last meeting and they can't make expenditures without the numbers. The footbridge at the old mill is a project Ms. Michonski would like to see remain on the table. Selectman Moriarty said we'll work with the accountant's office to get the information before the 30<sup>th</sup>.

#### Appointments to the Emergency Management Planning Committee

Geri Rodgers, Council on Aging Director replaces Jane Betsold. John Robert was appointed but hasn't been sworn in. Christopher Buckland is to be appointed as the alternate school rep.

Selectman Moriarty moved to appoint Christopher Buckland as the alternate school representative to the Emergency Management Planning Committee. Selectman Jaworski seconded. The motion was approved.

Selectman Moriarty moved to appoint Geri Rodgers as Council on Aging representative to the Emergency Management Planning Committee. Selectman Jaworski seconded. All being in agreement, the motion was approved.

#### Letter to US DOA - Survey of Soils

Ms. Michonski said this is for land preservation. Property may be able to have a Chpt 61a eligibility. Request does not bind the town. Selectman Szynal asked for clarification. Selectman Jaworski moved to send Bob' Wagner's letter pending clarification. Ms. Szynal seconded. The motion was approved.

#### HR Policy Review-

Some edits were made to a portion which was seen last week. Treasurer was removed from section 1. There are two distinct types of records. Ms. Szynal assisted. Selectman Szynal moved to accept the changed Sec 25, Personnel Records as presented tonight. Selectman Jaworski seconded. The motion was approved.

#### Town Hall Renovation -

Project meeting Thursday, Selectman Jaworski said there is ongoing discussion regarding a pad-mount placement in front of the building. The landscape architect and contractor are reviewing that. If the transformer is moved there may be a change in price; but we don't want a transformer in front of the memorial stones. Also, a second ramp was addressed in May 2018. Ms. Michonski informed that they've gone through the floor in the kitchen for the elevator pit. There was some concern about noise and the smells.

#### Finance Committee

Mr. Darryl Williams, Mr. Sean Barry, Betsy Rider, Diane Brzozowski, Ms. Edwina Palmisano, Ms. Sharon Strzegowski, Ms. Lydia Szych and Justin Cole, Baystate Municipal Accounting Service. Selectman Moriarty told Mr. Cole that the town was in receipt of his letter and expressed sorrow about the direction Mr. Cole's business has taken. Selectman Moriarty thanked him for coming in.

Mr. Cole listed open items saying FY19 close is substantially done. He said Ms. Strzegowski has done great work getting this under control. There is still work to do on receivables. Year end was penciled in for October the 20<sup>th</sup> seems reasonable. He will send free cash packet to the auditors who can use it to do a preliminary analytics review. He will give auditors everything they need for the FY19 audit. Ms. Rider asked for the target getting information to Tony Roselli, to which Mr. Cole replied, barring unforeseen circumstances, Oct. 20<sup>th</sup>.

October should be the target to submit for this sized town. Mr. Cole said we are on schedule. The tax rate is done and we are just waiting for the hearing. Ms. Szych asked about the recap sheet and Mr. Cole said it needs to be gone through one final time. The assessor's stuff has to be done between now and next weekend. Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> is the tax classification hearing.

The Board and Finance Committee discussed FY20 with Mr. Cole who said he needs all numbers. Mr. Williams said department heads should make adjustments as they go. Ms. Michonski asked Mr. Cole to let her know which departments have not submitted information. He will check with Mary. Selectman Moriarty said large budgets such as the school might possibly pose a problem, but isn't it just salaries and expenses. Mr. Cole answered that there is more detail, especially reporting to the State.

Mr. Williams, said for example, if a department budget is cut they should bring a new budget that includes the cut before town meeting, so the budget should be reconciled. Budgets should be more detailed rather than less to show trends, such as increasing costs of certain items. If departments did due diligence in their budgeting it would avoid problems of under-budgeting. Mr. Barry said money still has to get moved around; some things are unpredictable. Mr. Cole said actuals are the basis for conversation; what was your game plan, and what actually happened.

Mr. Cole said the town has come a really long way. Mr. Williams summarized, FY19 will be done in a couple of weeks, it will be send to Roselli, and in theory they will be in here before December. Ms. Michonski said, the middle of November. There are some open items for FY20, but get budgets in so they can be reconciled.

Ms. Strzegowski will start collecting bills with new program November 12. She had previously printed 1000 pages of paper for Mr. Cole. Mr. Williams said it seems we need to get somebody in here soon because they will need to be brought up to speed to get us through the end of FY20. Mr. Cole outlined some options but said there is not a deep pool of candidates for towns trying to go a traditional route. Mr. Barry said Tony Roselli recommends hiring someone. Mr. Williams said we should only hire someone if it hits an absolute home run.

Ms. Michonski mentioned Franklin COG. However, if we were to use them we would have to use their software. She has talked with David Nixon, Hadley Town Administrator, about a shared position and also contacted Eric Weiss, PVPC Regional services, and Easthampton Acting Treasurer, Eric Kinsure about an RFP. Ms. Michonski said the firm Melanson Heath does provide accounting services but perhaps after July 1.

Involved discussion between the Board and Finance Committee revealed that several present preferred to seek a firm in the short term, i.e. to get through until June 30th, and hire one person as accountant without feeling pressured to do so right away.

Mr. Cole agreed with Mr. Barry in saying that the town should try for both a long term and short term solution now, advertise and see what you get. If you get bad resumes you're not obligated to hire someone but you might do well. Mr. Cole went on to say most firms don't pick up clients at this time of year. He also said the town should not be interested in training somebody as most town accounting is 75% the same.

The Board discussed with Mr. Cole the market rate for the accountant position and where to advertise to find applicants. Selectman Jaworski said if it rate is \$70,000 it's really \$90,000 if you include the benefits. Ms. Michonski said we are accustomed to the accountant being right down the hall. Mr. Williams noted you can still email or talk to an offsite accountant. Mr. Barry said everything is not just transaction processing. Mr. Cole gave Lexington as an example, saying you can't just throw money at it; it is very competitive. Mr. Barry noted the need for a hiring process, and standards. If an applicant doesn't meet the standards then go in a different direction. Ms. Rider has done recruitment for 25 years and asked about other states to which Mr. Cole answered stay close to Mass, perhaps New Hampshire or Maine.

Mr. Barry said you can interview people as resumes come in and don't have to wait for a close. Ms. Szynal asked if it's reasonable for an accountant for a town this size to have an assistant. Mr. Cole said A/P can add 10 hours/week, but some weeks it would be 6 hours and some weeks 18 hours. He said it's disruptive, and takes more time and has less value than everything else the accountant does. The Town is right on the cusp considering the number of transactions and their complexity.

Mr. Cole asked what the town's onsite expectation was and added an accounting clerk won't help you with your budget. He cautioned not to commit a 'crime of convenience', just to have somebody time on site. Mr. Barry said it might help attract somebody because if they don't have to be on site all of the time. Selectman Moriarty said we rely on staff for their input because none of this Board works here. Mr. Cole criticized the Job description as being tired old language borrowed from other towns. Mr. Williams said he wants the accountant sitting with us doing the stupid budget spreadsheet. Mr. Cole said doing the budget starts to edge into a finance director's job. A town accountant produces no work of their own. Ms. Szynal asked the difference between the accountant and finance director salary. Mr. Cole answered assistance in preparing budget and doing basic analytics would possibly be \$84,000.

Selectman Moriarty said a timeframe is needed; the next vendor or person should be on board December 1st. Employees take longer to transition in than vendors do. Mr. Cole advised taking time writing the job description so it's not generic.

Selectman Moriarty said he prefers a vendor, but Mr. Cole said you still need to define for a vendor what you need. Ms. Rider will draft something and get it to Ms. Michonski. The three components are: Job description, period of time, and expectation of what happens at the end. Mr. Barry asked about who would interview, or would there be a search committee. Selectman Moriarty said no official committee will be formed. Interviewers could be someone from the Treasurer's office, a Finance Committee member, the Town Administrator, and the Board of Selectmen.

Selectman Jaworski said Ms. Michonski can push for vendors and in the meantime write a job description. Ms. Rider can make phone calls in NH, ME, etc. and Mr. Cole can give her a short list

of people he thinks are good at what they do. Then get back to Mr. Cole next week with a draft. He suggested steering away from advertising locally. Say the position is open until filled.

Mr. Williams mentioned goal setting for water/sewer rates and noted that there has to be money somewhere to cover costs, such as water main breaks. Selectman Jaworski said this is an example for when we raise the rates. Selectman Moriarty said people have to know that the 2% rise in rates every year is not enough to cover operating costs. Mr. Williams pointed out that Northampton went up 8%. Ms. Strzegowski explained the process of people not paying their water bills; people know their water won't be shut off. She asked for a change in policy so she can collect her backlog. Perhaps Northampton can be asked how to do it. Mr. Williams said let's work on this and not wait until next April –prior.

Selectman Szynal asked about policy on collecting water bills, and perhaps State guidelines. Ms. Michonski said between Nov. 1 and April 1 she couldn't shut off water but after April 1st she did shut water off.

Selectman Moriarty thanked Mr. Cole and wished him good luck. A job description will be sent out to the board for comments and include John Robert.

Selectman Szynal moved to adjourn. Selectman Jaworski seconded. The motion was approved and the meeting ended at 8:32pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ki. J. Eno  
Executive Assistant