

Select Board  
Meeting Minutes  
November 30, 2021, 6:00 p.m.  
59 Main Street, Hatfield, MA  
Virtual GoToMeeting

Present: Select Board Chair Diana Szynal and Members Edmund Jaworski and Brian Moriarty. Also present were Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator; Michael Dekoshak, Police Chief; Robert Flaherty, Fire Chief, Phil Genovese, DPW Director; Chris Farrell, Manager of Berkshire Gas and Ronald King, Senior Director of Gas Operations at Berkshire Gas; Michael Ohl of CEI Engineers. Residents of West Street present at the meeting were Susan Berry, Virginia Canton, Dennis Routhier, Ursula Donaldson, Janice Longstreeth, Louise Routhier; Attorney John McLaughlin

**CALL TO ORDER** Chair Szynal called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**PUBLIC FORUM** Residents began voicing their concerns regarding the water and sewer project on Route 5 and while the Select Board wanted to hear their concerns, Chair Szynal wanted to be sure that the residents' concerns were part of the Agenda and not public forum. The residents voiced their concerns about the way this project was being handled by the contractor. Large equipment being left on their property over weekends and holidays. There were times when construction was going on that their homes would shake for days on end. Residents are concerned that their foundations would crack given the amount of shaking on a daily basis. The residents wanted to know if something happens to their homes due to the construction, who do they contact? The Select Board advised the residents that in cases like these, they should contact the DPW Director, Phil Genovese.

Residents also voiced their anger at Geeleher because they asked personnel of Geeleher to let them know in advance what would be going on. They stated that their water was shut off for days without advance notice, the construction company would leave trash on their property, generators in their front yards, outhouses on their front lawns, Geeleher would park heavy equipment on their property blocking their driveways and their view of oncoming traffic when they were able to get out of their driveways and no one would communicate with them. The residents agreed that they have great things to say about the Town but it was seven weeks of hell living with the road construction and no one would listen to them. The road is so uneven that every single vehicle that drives by, their homes shake and this occurs all day and night. Mr. Ohl informed the residents that this project is now shut down for the winter and that the residents should have never been dealing with these issues. He asked that when the project starts up again next spring and they need to voice concerns, to email him at [mohl@ceiengineers.com](mailto:mohl@ceiengineers.com). He also informed the residents that the contractor should never be leaving heavy equipment on their property, trash on their property and that this is a huge concern to him. The Select Board suggested that there should be another meeting in the spring – prior to work starting up again – to meet with the residents so that these things don't happen again.

## POSTED BUSINESS

Meet with West Street Residents Regarding October 21, 2021 Gas Leak and Route 5 Water and Sewer Project: Chair Szynal and the Select Board reiterated to the residents that they called this meeting because they want to hear from the residents about how the Town could better serve the residents should a gas leak ever occur again. The Select Board wants to hear from residents about what happened. The Select Board informed the residents that the gas leak is an on-going investigation and there may be questions we cannot answer. Chair Szynal stated that there are also concerns about the road but that's not going to be answered tonight. The Select Board wants to keep it to the gas leak. Chair Szynal thanked the EMS Department - Fire Chief Flaherty and his department did exceptional work at the very beginning of this situation. Chair Szynal also acknowledged Police Chief Dekoshak and his department in conducting exceptional work. Both handled this situation with professionalism, knowledge and kindness.

Mr. Farrell of Berkshire Gas gave a brief overview of what happened: the sewer contractor was excavating near the gas main and hit a service line that was attached to the main. When we were notified of the situation, Berkshire Gas was initially concerned about two things: 1) the safety of residents and 2) to limit customer outages. The electrical service to the area was immediately cut to avoid any explosions. Chief Flaherty noted that immediately the EMS Departments began going home to home and evacuating the residents of those in metered homes. Hatfield didn't have a lot of staff, so Whately was called in. Chief Flaherty mentioned that he worked a similar situation 15 years ago where another high pressure line was hit so the EMS departments were prepared. Chief Flaherty informed the residents that the Fire Department is trained on handling gas leak situations.

Chief Dekoshak informed the residents that the police were there from the start and posted all night long for security for residents homes and limiting access for people who should not be there. Chief Dekoshak would like to know if the process can be improved and what could we have done better if this situation happens again. Could we have made it easier for you or better for you?

Janice Longstreeth asked if there is a way to get the CODE RED call out quicker. The Fire Chief responded that since he was onsite and he is the one that does the CODE RED calls, it was difficult for him to get to that immediately after the leak occurred. Once he had other personnel onsite and he could leave for a few minutes safely, he got the CODE RED call out. The Fire Chief's main concern was the safety of residents. Residents asked questions such as was this a minor or major gas leak? How much gas leaked into the air? Was it a small line? Mr. King replied that he does not have that information for this meeting as the investigation is still ongoing. The residents also asked that if the work continues will this threat continue? If the project advances how safe is this project? The Select Board reiterated that they thought it best for the residents to meet again in the spring prior to the beginning of work so that these issues can be addressed again.

Attorney McLaughlin stated that someone is at fault and wanted to know is someone investigating how this happened? Chair Szynal reiterated that the leak is still being investigating and that, just like the residents, the Select Board is looking for answers as well. Attorney McLaughlin continued, the contractor should have never been using the biggest excavating equipment near the gas line. Someone screwed up, the residents need to know. Chief Dekoshak answered, those answers are impossible for us to give and you know why. It's not even our purview of the investigation between Geeleher and the gas

company. I understand what you are saying but you need to contact the attorneys for the gas company and Geeleher. We cannot get that information. Selectman Moriarty went on that Geeleher is not here tonight, it was supposed to be the Select Board speaking with the residents on their experiences of what happened and how the Town could better their response/handling of the situation. Chair Szynal stated that we cannot have a trial against Geeleher tonight and the purpose was to only to speak with the residents. Selectman Moriarty hopes that by the time the work starts up in the spring we will have the answers to those questions. Chair Szynal reminded the residents that the Select Board wants the answers you do but tonight is not the night for that. Mr. Ohl addressed the Board and residents stating that he is hearing things that should have never happened, the contractor leaving equipment on private property, etc. Their work is limited to the public way - not to destroy private property. Geeleher is not supposed to leave their equipment on private property unless you worked out a deal that they will pay you for that. Mr. Ohl said that in the future should residents have concerns they should feel free to email him at [mohl@ceiengineers.com](mailto:mohl@ceiengineers.com). Residents wanted to know how they can make a claim with Berkshire Gas. The residents were told that Berkshire Gas does not have claim forms for this situation. However, they need to fully document their claim and monetary losses in writing and send all documentation to Berkshire Gas, 115 Cheshire Road, Pittsfield, MA 01201, Attn.: Frank Maher, Director of Operation Performance. Mr. King also said residents can email him at [Ronald.King@avangrid.com](mailto:Ronald.King@avangrid.com).

Dave Canton of 37 West Street informed the Board that the EMS was very professional, kind and considerate. You were there when you needed to be and did what you needed to do. Chief Flaherty responded that he hoped nothing like this ever happens again. However, we train for natural gas issues every few years so we know how to work in these situations. He informed the residents that we need to work on a quicker response call but the most important thing was resident safety. Chief Dekoshak mentioned that the Town should have a mechanism to house people to get some type of shelter and food if appropriate, which he will look into. Chair Szynal told the residents that the Board understands your concerns and that they are not falling on deaf ears. Virginia Canton asked when the investigation is complete, will we be notified right away of the answer on the investigation and Chair Szynal was not able to answer that as no one has that answer.

Letter of Support – USDA Funding Application: Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator, presented the Board with the letter of support regarding the USDA Funding Application and recommended the Select Board sign it.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

## **UNANTICIPATED NEW BUSINESS**

## **ADJOURN**

Selectman Jaworski made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:31 p.m., Selectman Moriarty seconded, all in favor, aye, motion adjourned.

Respectfully,

Karen Brodeur  
Executive Assistant