

Approved March 4, 2024

Select Board
Meeting Minutes
February 20, 2024 at 4:00 p.m.
59 Main Street, Hatfield, MA

Present: Select Board: Diana Szynal, Chair, Members Edmund Jaworski and Greg Gagnon

Also in attendance: Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator; Robert Flaherty, Fire Chief; Phil Genovese, DPW Director; Representative Lindsay Sabadosa; David Prickett; Lt. Kerry Flaherty, Fire Department; John Pease, Agricultural Advisory Commission

CALL TO ORDER Chair Szynal called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENTS None.

PUBLIC FORUM Lt. Kerry Flaherty, Fire Department was asked by Jeffrey Hamberg to read a letter he wrote regarding Robert Flaherty, Fire Chief. Mr. Hamberg's letter stated he feels supported by Chief Flaherty. Chief Flaherty makes sure we have equipment, and his leadership qualities are hard to find. Chief Flaherty attracts seasoned firefighters and to work under Chief Flaherty is an honor. All firefighters are facing the same issues as Hatfield. Because of salary, schedule, benefits and culture it's difficult to find employees. Mr. Hamberg would rather work 24 hour shifts rather than full time at a different department and per diem in Hatfield. We have enough per diem personnel to fill 24-hour shifts. Mr. Hamberg feels by doing a 24/7 it will bring homeowners insurance costs down as response times would be quicker.

CONSENT AGENDA Selectman Jaworski made a motion to approve the December 5, 2023 and January 2, 2024 meeting minutes; Selectman Gagnon seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye. The Board tabled voting on executive session minutes at this time.

Selectman Gagnon made a motion that we accept the Presidential Primary Warrant; Selectman Jaworski seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

Selectman Gagnon made a motion that we sign the License for Cantina; Selectman Jaworski seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

POSTED BUSINESS

TOPIC 1 Representative Lindsay Sabadosa: Representative Lindsay Sabadosa presented before the Board thanking the Select Board for the letter regarding the golf carts. She informed the Board she brought the issue to house counsel, and she needs a home rule petition with a general petition from Hatfield. We need a vote from the community along with specific language. Chair Szynal asked if we need to bring this to Town meeting. Representative Sabadosa said yes and after the Town vote, we can move forward. If something happens and

you cannot make it by the end of this session, we can move forward in the following session. Chair Szynal thanked Representative Sabadosa for all her work on this matter.

TOPIC 2 Fire Chief Flaherty – Discuss attending Station Design Conference: Fire Chief Flaherty presented before the Board to discuss attending a station design conference in Arizona. Chief Flaherty stated there has been an uptick in moving critical services out of the flood plan. We are looking for a new station in the next ten years. This would be an opportunity to see how these things move along and costs. Chief Flaherty stated the cost for attending the conference would be funded through the Fire Department's travel and meals expense. Because of Human Resource policy, I am requesting the Board allow me to attend. During the conference, the construction phases are reviewed from planning to building. Selectman Jaworski asked by sending you out to Arizona for a conference when it's a few years away, is that a good or bad message to taxpayers? Are we at that stage where we are ready to begin looking at this? If you go now and years down the road you take another job elsewhere, it leaves us not in a good place. Chief Flaherty stated how you go about starting the process is a huge part of the conference. I believe a mixed-use building would be best; a building that would include fire, police and the Council on Aging so I'm out there looking now. Selectman Gagnon asked if there are any conferences in Massachusetts? Chief Flaherty responded that these conferences are held each year in different states. Chief Flaherty also stated this year one vendor is from Massachusetts and another is from Connecticut. Chair Szynal asked is all the money in your budget for this so there are no shortfalls at the end of the year? The Chief responded there will not be money left but no overages. Chief Flaherty stated at this point we have no information so going to this conference would at least give us some ideas. Selectman Gagnon made a motion to authorize the Chief to go to the firehouse conference in Arizona; Selectman Jaworski seconded but also stated this is not something that will happen tomorrow or next year, we are talking long term and the money for this conference is in the Chief's budget; no further discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

TOPIC 3 DPW REPORT: Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades Project – overview presentation of design and construction: David Prickett presented before the Select Board to discuss the design and construction of the wastewater treatment plant upgrade project. Mr. Prickett informed the Board the project is out to bid, there was a prebid meeting last week and sub bids for March 6, 2024. The general bids are due March 20, 2024. Construction will take one and a half to two years. The project remains on budget.

Laborers Union Contract Negotiations - July 1, 2024: Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator informed the Board the laborers union contract negotiations will be starting soon. The Select Board will need to choose a designee and the meeting negotiations will be on March 5, March 11 and March 14. The Select Board selected Selectman Gagnon to be the designee for the negotiations.

MassWorks Grant / Rte. 5 Water and Sewer Infrastructure Improvements MassWorks Grant Update: Ms. Michonski informed the Select Board there is a \$102,107.00 reimbursement for

engineering expenditures incurred in the second quarter (October – December). There has been communication with MassWorks and they are aware we are looking at additional project costs. MassWorks is looking into this. Mike Ohl will be at a future meeting to go over those projective costs.

CONTINUED OLD BUSINESS:

CT River Greenway Memorandum of Understanding w/Northampton for approval: Ms. Michonski presented the Select Board with another draft of the CT River Greenway Memorandum of Understanding w/Northampton stating all requested changes have been made. After reviewing and noting the changes, Selectman Jaworski made a motion to accept the MOU from the CT River Greenway as presented; Selectman Gagnon seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

TOPIC 5 TOWN ADMINISTRATOR REPORT:

Discussion re Treasurer/Collector Salary: Ms. Michonski is proposing an increase in the salary for the Treasurer/Collector position from \$78,000.00 to \$80,000.00 to \$90,000.00 range. As a result of the search, there has not been a response to the ad. Ms. Michonski spoke with the interim Treasurer, and he thinks upping the salary may help. Ms. Michonski feels the \$78,000.00 is very low for what the Town needs. Selectman Gagnon made a motion that we change the treasurer pay range to \$80,000.00 - \$90,000.00; Selectman Jaworski seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

Accounting Services Report: Ms. Michonski informed the Select Board Marcum LLP merged with Powers & Sullivan and the accountant assigned to the Town of Hatfield resigned. Elizabeth Braccia will replace Richard Howarth temporarily. Ms. Michonski feels the accounting firm is stretched thin because she feels they don't have enough accountants. Ms. Michonski informed the Board the FY23 audit is scheduled for March 11 through the 18th. We are waiting on free cash.

Rt. 5 Water and Sewer Improvements Project – Meeting with project engineer: Ms. Michonski informed the Select Board at the next Board meeting the project engineer will be presenting the additional project costs. Ms. Michonski stated we need to know where the money will be coming from. Selectman Jaworski stated we have a completion date for the end of June and there are penalties built in if they don't finish in June.

NEW BUSINESS

Historical Society Proposal to Preserve Farm Museum: Ms. Michonski presented the Select Board with the Historical Society Proposal to preserve the farm museum. She informed the Board Historical found a document stating it is the Town's responsibility to make those repairs listed in the Revised/Amended Proposal of the Hatfield Historical Society's February 10, 2024

application to Community Preservation. Selectman Jaworski made a motion to approve the Application for the Revised/Amended Proposal for the Hatfield Historical Society as presented to us in our packets; Selectman Gagnon seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

TOPIC 4 FY2025 Budget Review with Departments @ 6:15 pm: Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator presented the following FY2025 budgets to the Select Board:

HCTV: There is an increase of \$103,500.00 for the capital project to relocate the studio upstairs. The expenses are the same.

Animal Inspector/Animal Control Officer: Animal control increase is for training because of Mass. Department Agriculture & Health requirements. There is mandatory licensing now. Inspector 10% increase as Ms. Michonski is recommending the stipend be increase to \$3,571.00.

Conservation Commission: Level services \$1,846.00.

Accountant: Ms. Michonski believes there will be an increase although we have not received a proposal yet. The increase is expected to be 11% (total \$117,100.00) in the FY25 budget. Selectman Jaworski stated I think the next discussion is that we start hitting our target dates.

Audit: Level funded. The auditor stated this would be his last year with Hatfield. Ms. Michonski stated we need to hire a new auditor.

General Liability of Property, Public Safety Insurance: Ms. Michonski stated there will be increases but we have not yet been invoiced. Some of the increase is in valuations for municipal buildings. They are significantly higher than the assessors, they use a whole different formula. There will be an additional \$13,405.00 as a result of the property valuations. They may bill the Town in the current fiscal year. Ms. Michonski spoke with the insurance representative, and he stated the insurance company waited too long to assess the buildings and this is why there is a large increase this time. Ms. Michonski also stated the worker's compensation insurance increased significantly in FY25.

Legal: Ms. Michonski stated there is an increase of \$2,000.00 for rate increase in legal fees.

Select Board: Ms. Michonski stated there is an increase of 1,000.00 for professional services.

Administrator & Staff: Ms. Michonski stated she is recommending salary increases for administrative staff and there will be a one-time increase for the Town Administrator of 25% value of the estimated accrued unused sick time. Ms. Michonski is requesting to increase the administrative salaries; they get the COLA but I feel a merit increase is warranted. When looking for a candidate for Town Administrator, Ms. Michonski stated you may have to look at increasing that salary.

Technology: There is an increase in support services and replacement of equipment. Suzor provided a cost proposal for \$35,000.00. Selectman Jaworski stated one of his pet peeves is wasting paper. It would be useful to have tablets instead of wasting so much paper. Selectman Jaworski would like to see the electronic timekeeping implemented. Software licenses increased and the cost of website and equipment replacement also increased.

Town Hall Operations: Ms. Michonski stated the current copier and postage meter leases expire this year and it's cheaper for a five-year lease for both. By statute, this matter needs to go to Town meeting and be voted on. Ms. Michonski stated we reduced the copier and postage meter lease costs around \$2,000.00. We increased postage and had to bump up the cost of paper. Overall there is a reduction in this budget.

Veterans' Services: Level services, however, Ms. Michonski recommends an increase in the stipend, FY25 to \$6,329.00. We are having a hard time filling the position. The cost of training also increased. We are locked into a contract with Northampton until the end of June. Selectman Jaworski suggested seeing what Northampton would charge for the year so we have a choice in case we can't find anyone.

UNANTICIPATED NEW BUSINESS

ADJOURN

Selectman Gagnon made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Selectman Jaworski seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; meeting adjourned at 5:44 pm.

Respectfully,
Karen Brodeur
Executive Assistant