

Approved: 4-12-21

**TOWN OF WINCHENDON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES
INCLUDES JOINT MEETING WITH FINANCE COMMITTEE
MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021
Conducted by Remote Zoom Meeting**

Board of Selectmen

Present:

Michael Barbaro, Chair
Rick Ward, Vice Chair
Barbara Anderson
Audrey LaBrie

Stephen Delaney, Interim Town Manager
Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant
Taylor Tower, Administrative Assistant

Absent:

Amy Salter

Finance Committee

Present:

Tom Kane Jr., Chair
Dr. Maureen Ward, Vice-Chair
David Alexander
Charles Corts
Keith Kent

Douglas Delay
Philip Levine

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- Introduction to Remote Meeting (filed)
 - Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §20 (filed)
 - January 23, 2021 Jackie Flynn Letter of Resignation from the WHA (filed)
 - March 4, 2021 Jane Leavens Letter of Interest to Serve on the WHA (filed)
 - February 17, 2021 Notice of Vacancy from WHA (filed)
 - Petition for Resignation from the Clark YMCA (filed)
 - Cynthia Landanno Resume & Letter of Interest to serve on Clark YMCA Board (filed)
 - Board of Selectmen Individual Assent and Waiver of Notice (filed)
 - Memo from the Town Manager dated March 18, 2021 regarding Budget Information (attached)
 - FY'22 General Fund Budget (attached)
 - FY'22 Water Fund Budget (attached)
 - FY'22 Sewer Fund Budget (attached)
 - FY'22 Transfer Station Fund (attached)
 - FY'22 Capital Improvement Plan (attached)
 - June 2020 Wright Pierce Study on Water and Sewer Rates (attached)

Due to Governor Bakers recent Executive Order and state of emergency declaration with the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), this meeting was conducted remotely through Zoom Meeting. The public was notified how to join the meeting through instructions noted on the agenda.

Chairman Michael Barbaro called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Barbaro confirmed members present and persons anticipating to speak by calling their name and asking for a response in the affirmative: Ward, yes, LaBrie, yes, Anderson, yes and Barbaro, yes. Staff members present and responding in the affirmative were Stephen Delaney, Interim Town Manager, Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant, Taylor Tower, Administrative Assistant, and Joanne Goguen, Town Accountant. Finance Committee members in attendance were Dr. Maureen Ward, David Alexander, Charles Corts, Doug Delay and Phil Levine.

Barbaro read the "Introduction for Remotely Conducted Open Meetings" which noted Governor Baker's Executive order of March 12, 2020 and outlined the guidelines and ground rules for the meeting this evening.

Barbaro advised all participants that the meeting was being recorded and cautioned screen sharing. When asked if anyone besides the Town was video or audio recording the meeting, there was no response. Dr. Ward called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. **SELECTMEN'S COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:** Through the Chair, LaBrie asked Delaney if there were any updates on the initiative to incorporate Zoom access to live Board meetings. Delaney answered that staff is still working alongside the Communications Committee to see if we can put it together. Dr. Ward noted that the audit is usually done in January and she would like an update as to when we can expect to have this done; Delaney said he expects any day now. Dr. Ward then asked when Town Hall will open to the public, to which Delaney responded that he is working with the Board of Health agent on that matter and he hopes to have an answer at the next Board meeting.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENTS:** David Watkins of 235 Mellen Road wanted to relay to Brian Croteau, Director of Public Works, that he is doing a fantastic job repairing the roads.

Keith Kent and Tom Kane of the Finance Committee joined at 6:38 p.m.

3. **APPOINTMENTS/RESIGNATIONS:**

3.1 Housing Authority Town Appointed Board Member – A recent resignation from this Board leaves one vacancy. It is too late for this vacancy to be put on the ballot for the Annual Town Election coming up in May, so the WHA Board sent a notice to all federal tenants that there was a vacancy on their board and asked if anyone was interested in filling the position. Ms. Jane Leavens has come forward and the WHA Board approved this appointment unanimously at their meeting on March 9th. The WHA Board is requesting the Selectboard approve and appoint Ms. Leavens filling the vacant position for the final year of the now vacant term. Next year, the position will be open for her and anyone else to come forward to seek election to fill the new five year term. **LaBrie moved to accept, with regret, the resignation of Jackie Flynn from the Winchendon Housing Authority, seconded by Ward. With a roll call vote of Anderson, aye, Ward, aye, LaBrie, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.**

LaBrie moved to appoint Jane Leavens to the vacant seat of the Winchendon Housing Authority Federal Tenant Board with the term to expire at the May 2022 Town Election, seconded by Ward. With a roll call vote of Anderson, aye, LaBrie, aye, Ward, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

3.2 Clark Memorial YMCA Trustee Acceptance – Bud Fletcher is retiring as a Trustee and Ms. Cindy Landanno has sent in a letter of interest to fill this vacancy. According to Attorney Monnich, the new Mass. Probate rules, each of the Selectmen are required to sign a separate document signaling his or her assent to the appointment. Ms. Landanno detailed her history and her excitement to be considered for a trustee position. Mr. Fletcher explained that he has enjoyed his time serving, but he feels that it is time to step down and let younger people take over. Dave Connor, Executive Director of the Winchendon Housing Authority, said that Bud Fletcher has provided so much dedication and knowledge to the Trustees, for which they have the utmost appreciation. Among his many contributions and efforts, Mr. Fletcher helped to bring the charitable Robinson Broadhurst Foundation to Winchendon. There was a round of applause for Mr. Fletcher and the countless hours he has spent to better the Town.

Ward moved the Board of Selectmen, acting as the beneficiary of the "Trust under the Will of Wendell P. Clark," assent to the Petition for Resignation of Trustee Ernest P. Fletcher, Jr. and the appointment of Cynthia Landanno as the Successor Trustee and waive formal notice and for each Selectman to sign an individual Assent and Waiver document required by the Worcester Probate Court. This motion was seconded by LaBrie, and with a roll call vote of Anderson, aye, Ward, aye, LaBrie, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

4. **BOARDS/COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES/DEPARTMENTS –**

JOINT MEETING WITH FINANCE COMMITTEE

4.1 Presentation of Final FY22 Budget – Interim Town Manager Stephen Delaney presented the final FY'22 budget; the draft was already presented at the Tri-Board meeting in January. He briefly explained the few things that changed, one revision being that the Department of Revenue would not allow the estimated revenue of cannabis since there was no history to base it off of. Staff also found there was a need to revise the indirect charges for school. A \$210,000 increase is required in local contribution. There was a \$500,000 budget gap, prompting staff to work hard to adjust to accommodate. Various line items have been reduced, savings from health insurance were applied, and it has been recommended to defer two capital items. Delaney explained that the Fire Department came in with an additional request for funds totaling over \$46,000. Looking through the numbers, Delaney was concerned about having a true handle on the accounts and is not recommending the additional \$46,000 request. He has obtained the assistance of an outside accountant who will be taking a detailed look at the Fire Department accounts to make sure we have a good handle. Delaney explained that he does not see this as a negative, but that it is imperative to make sure there is a good handle on these accounts. He went on to inform the Board that the Capital Improvement Committee recommended to defer the replacement of the DPW roof. The Director agreed, noting that his priority is a dump truck. The Committee also suggested that it is appropriate to defer the study for Fire Station Improvements.

Ward noted that on page one, SPED Transportation, the FY'21 revised budget had \$500,000, and this one has \$1 million. Delaney responded that more students have transferred out and due to COVID-19 guidelines, transportation costs are higher.

Looking at the charges for the School Department, LaBrie asked what has changed. Delaney answered that there are indirect charges related to IT, as we don't service the School Department so IT Technology should not have been there.

Anderson was pleased to see an additional accountant come in, as she had concerns with the Fire Department budget.

Barbaro was optimistic that the Federal aid over the next two years will help the Town. With regard to the SPED Transportation, he asked if that number will go down once COVID restrictions are lifted, allowing more than one student on a bus at the same time. Joan Landers, Superintendent of the Schools, answered yes, having to separate the students was costly. Kane noted that one of the surprises was an increase in local contribution for the School Department. Kane also expressed that he is still not sure why the Spare Houseman account has increased and would like some explanation for that increase in the near future. Delay commented on the use of free cash this year, stating that it is one of our only ways to build the stabilization fund and we should concentrate on continuing to build that fund. Kane noted that the Finance Committee Special Reserve typically has \$45,000, and asked if that account will be refunded back to its original balance – Delaney answered that it would.

Barbaro said that the Fire Department budgets will be revisited to make changes that will help guide the Fire Department to next year. Kane noted that there was a 19% increase from fiscal 2019 to fiscal 2020, with no additional staff. He said that there is something that's different than the way business has been conducted in the past.

Ward moved to approve the final FY22 Budget presented this evening, seconded by LaBrie for discussion. LaBrie wished to clarify that the Board is voting on the budget as presented, but if something needs to be tweaked before Town Meeting, those changes can be made and presented back to the Board. **With a roll call vote of Anderson, aye, Ward, aye, LaBrie, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.**

4.2 Selectmen Consideration of Increasing Water and Sewer Rates – Delaney said to the Board that the budget is not balanced and it is up to them how to proceed. Last year, after a discussion about the Water & Sewer study by Wright Pierce that included the annual long term debt for the Central Street project, it was recommended and the Board approve the recommendation to increase FY21 rates for water 6.82% and 14.28% for wastewater and to vote on this increase annually. Barbaro said that the water and sewer system


still does not have enough users to pick up the cost after losing the golf course, which was a huge water customer. Anderson wanted to clarify that the rate study was not an independent study, and said that Wright Pierce works for Veolia. She would like to see an independent study done. Barbaro told Anderson that she raised a good point, and said that Veolia's contract is expiring next year. It is in the Town's best interest to examine from an independent source, but unfortunately, it doesn't change what is in front of the Board right now. Anderson said she understands there are financial ramifications to not raising the rates this year, but she is hesitant to move forward for fear of pricing ourselves out and losing our competitive rates to surrounding towns. She also said she would like to know if there would have been savings had the Town not outsourced, and instead chose to keep operations in-house. Kane said that the past few years, the budget has decreased slightly. Currently, we are running out of retained earnings and we have used them all trying to keep from raising the rates. Now there are no savings left and we have to raise the rates dramatically to catch up. He said we would have been better off keeping the savings and raising the rates gradually. LaBrie agreed now is a great time to conduct an independent study. She reminded the Board that part of the reason that the Town chose to outsource was due to difficulty obtaining qualified employees that had the licenses necessary to run the plants. Referring to multiple comments on social media regarding higher-than-usual bills, she reminded everyone that the rates have not been raised the last couple quarters. She suggested there could be higher usage due to folks working from home and children attending school remotely. She said that the costs of water used in Town buildings is incorporated into tax. Property owners with private wells and septic systems are responsible for their own maintenance and she feels that the users of Town water and sewer should do the same. Ward said whether you believe the study or not, the figures show that the Town is running a deficit. Barbaro said that Veolia did bring some savings, such as introducing more efficient chemical processes and buying chemicals at a cheaper rate. There was a long discussion in 2019 when this option was first presented to the Board.

Ward moved the following rate increases for FY22 be 6.82% for water and 14.28% for wastewater, seconded by LaBrie. With a roll call vote of Anderson, no, LaBrie, aye, Ward, aye, and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried 3-1. LaBrie said that with the talk tonight about preparing for the next year and what we need to do, she would like to see a next step for our next meeting, possibly the formation of a committee or commission to do the research and keep this thought in the forefront. LaBrie moved that the Board authorize the Town Manager to put together an RFP for an independent study to be done on water and sewer operations, seconded by Ward. With a roll call vote of Anderson, aye, LaBrie, aye, Ward, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

5. **NEW BUSINESS:** There was no new business scheduled tonight.
6. **ADJOURNMENT:** Barbaro reminded everyone that the Board may be convening on Monday, March 29, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. to review with Bernie Lynch the Town Manager Screening Progress and again on Monday, April 5th beginning at 5:00 p.m. for potential candidate interviews.

LaBrie moved to adjourn the Board of Selectmen meeting, seconded by Ward. With a roll call vote of Anderson, aye, LaBrie, aye, Ward, aye, and Barbaro, aye, the meeting adjourned at 7:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Taylor Tower
Administrative Assistant