

Approved: 1-25-2021

TOWN OF WINCHENDON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021
Conducted by Remote Zoom Meeting

Present:

Michael Barbaro, Chairman
Rick Ward, Vice-Chairman
Barbara Anderson
Audrey LaBrie

Keith R. Hickey, Town Manager
Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant
Taylor Tower, Admin. Assistant

Absent:

Amy Salter

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- Introduction to Remote Meeting (filed)
- Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §20 (filed)
- Les Goodrich Email of Resignation from the Toy Town Community Partnership, Dated December 20, 2020 (filed)
- Yearly Report of the Treasurer / Collector (attached)
- January 11, 2021 Town Manager's Report (attached)
- Minutes to be Approved:
 - December 21, 2020 Regular Meeting
 - December 28, 2020 Regular Meeting
 - December 30, 2020 Regular Meeting
 - December 30, 2020 EXECUTIVE SESSION

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 Keith Hickey, Town Manager, Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant, and Taylor Tower, Administrative Assistant.

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.

All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. SELECTMEN'S COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1.1. Declaration of an Opening on the Board of Health – A recent resignation from the Board of Health leaves the committee with one vacancy. Being that this is an elected position, the Board of Selectmen must declare the vacancy by vote of the Board. This will allow candidates to request nomination papers (which are available from January 11 through March 15) for the unexpired 2-year term to be placed on the Annual Town Election in May, saving the expense of a special town election. **LaBrie moved the Board declare a vacancy on the Board of Health, seconded by Ward. With a roll call vote of LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye, Ward, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.** Barbaro said anyone interested can make arrangements to pick up nomination papers at Town Hall.

Barbaro said that the current number of COVID cases in Town is 98. He asked everyone to take care of themselves by wearing masks and not having large gatherings at home. Numbers are high state-wide and first responders would much like not having to go to sick people's homes. Police and Fire have started being vaccinated, with the next rollout happening in February and April, consisting of teachers. He acknowledged that COVID fatigue has set in but he asked everyone to please take care of themselves and everyone around them.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS: No public comments were heard.

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS: There were none scheduled tonight.

4. APPOINTMENTS/RESIGNATIONS:

4.1. Toy Town Community Partnership Resignation – Leston Goodrich – Mr. Goodrich has submitted his letter of resignation from the Toy Town Community Partnership. Barbaro thanked Les for his hard work for the Town, noting that he is on many other boards.

Ward moved the Board of Selectmen accept the resignation of Leston Goodrich from the Toy Town Community Partnership with regret, seconded by LaBrie. LaBrie thanked Les, saying that he is very active in Town and she appreciates what he has done. **With a roll call vote of LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye, Ward, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.**

5. PERMIT/LICENSE APPLICATIONS: There were none before the Board tonight.

6. BOARDS/COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES/DEPARTMENTS

6.1. Department Update from Treasurer/Collector – Donna Spellman – Treasurer/Collector, Donna Spellman, was before the Board to provide an annual update for the Treasurer/Collector's Office. Referring to Ms. Spellman's imminent retirement after 25 years of service to the Town, Barbaro thanked her for all her hard work, through thick and thin.

Spellman detailed the responsibilities of her office, including the mailing, collection and processing of all payments of motor vehicle excise, real estate taxes, personal property taxes, as well as the collection and posting of payments for water/sewer payments. A second dropbox for payments has been added at the Pleasant Street entrance of Town Hall. Payments can be made online and the Treasurer/Collector's Office has also been assisting residents at the door since Town Hall was closed

due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, they mailed 4,674 real estate and personal property bills for the first and second quarter billings, which were due August 1st and November 1st, respectively. The commitment amount billed for the first two quarters was \$6,190,373.98 for real estate, of which \$5,751,938.72 was collected as of December 31st. Personal Property committed amount was \$194,044.52 of which \$192,871.85 was collected. This equates to 93% of real estate and 99% of personal property collected. In the first six months of this fiscal year, they have collected prior year taxes \$227,555.79 real estate and \$30,213.96 personal property. Payment plans for property taxes have been established for six property owners, in addition to three payment plans for water/sewer outstanding bills. Tax title liens have been placed on nine properties from outstanding taxes from 2017 and 2018. An auction was held in November for one property, which sold with a profit to the Town of \$30,728.91. Their goal is to have an auction yearly on foreclosed properties. In March, Spellman petitioned the Department of Revenue to foreclose through Land of Low Value on ten properties. The Department of Revenue recently responded with questions that the Assessor's Office will answer. Spellman will resubmit and await a final judgement response. She explained that motor vehicle excise will be billed in February or March for the new year. There should be over 9,000 bills mailed. Spellman's office manages the Town's funds and reconciles all bank accounts monthly. All department turnovers and all monies collected go through the Treasurer/Collectors office and these funds are deposited into the Town's bank accounts. The receivables are then posted to the appropriate department's accounts and along with cash, are reconciled with the accountant monthly. As of December 31st, cash on hand is \$7,532,819.72 and bi-weekly expenses average \$1,300,000.00.

In regards to debt, Spellman said that FY'21 is the first time the Town has been able to take advantage of the one-time discount payment of our Worcester Retirement Assessment without having to borrow. The Town has paid off the Title V loan in August 2020 and will be paying off the Police Department Sallyport in June. There are no debt payoffs in FY'22. Debt payments for FY'21 are \$1,018,785.42 for long-term debt and \$212,747.29 for short-term debt.

LaBrie asked if the current percentage of what has been billed vs what has been collected is about average compared to recent years; to which Spellman answered it is about the same. Barbaro thanked Spellman for her report, and said she has kept the Town on track and the debt ratio is lower than he expected. He told Spellman that she has always been willing to discuss Town finances with him and he appreciates that.

LaBrie asked the status of the new Treasurer/Collector. Hickey answered that Lynn Nystrom, the current Treasurer/Collector of Phillipston has been hired and is slated to start on January 25th. He said that he thinks she will be a great addition and he is looking forward to having her start.

On the topic of new employees, Barbaro noted that he has signed the contract for the Interim Town Manager, Mr. Delaney, and expects to have him sign and return shortly. He will start on January 25th.

7. **EXECUTIVE SESSION** - Executive Session under Exemption #2 to conduct strategy session in preparation for negotiations with non-union employees and to reconvene into public session for the sole purpose of adjournment.

LaBrie moved to enter into Executive Session under Exemption #2 to conduct strategy session in preparation for negotiations with non-union employees and to reconvene into public session to vote on the proposed Police and/or Fire Chief contracts, seconded by Ward. With a roll call vote

of LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye, Ward, aye and Barbaro, aye, the Board entered into Executive Session at 6:48 p.m.

Regular session re-convened at 7:14 p.m., with Ward temporarily chairing the meeting due to Barbaro's technical difficulties.

8. NEW BUSINESS

8.1. Consideration of Employment Contract with Fire Chief Thomas Smith – Ward noted that the Town Manager is bringing forward a proposed three-year contract for Fire Chief Thomas Smith. The proposed contract would become effective July 1, 2021.

LaBrie moved the Board of Selectmen approve the three-year employment contract of Fire Chief Thomas Smith for the period July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2024, seconded by Anderson. With a roll call vote of LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye and Ward, aye, the motion carried.

LaBrie thanked Chief Smith for his service so far and said that she looks forward to the next few years.

Barbaro rejoined the meeting at 7:17 p.m. Ward temporarily left the meeting due to technical difficulties.

8.2. Consideration of Employment Contract with Police Chief David Walsh – Barbaro said that the Town Manager is bringing forward a proposed three-year contract for Police Chief David Walsh. The proposed contract would become effective July 1, 2021.

LaBrie moved the Board of Selectmen approve the three-year employment contract of Police Chief David Walsh for the period July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2024, seconded by Anderson. With a roll call vote of LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye, and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried.

Barbaro congratulated the two Chiefs and said Mr. Hickey will execute the contract.

LaBrie and Barbaro thanked Chief Walsh for his service to the Town.

9. OLD BUSINESS: There was no old business tonight.

10. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT:

1. Financial Updates:

A grant was submitted on January 5th in the amount of \$300,000 to provide Safe Routes to Schools and Safe Routes for Seniors by enhancing a vital walking route that connects the Murdock High School, Memorial Elementary School, Broadview Assisted Living Center and multiple residential areas with the downtown commercial area. The existing sidewalks are uneven, less than 5 feet wide, and in disrepair. The sidewalks will be removed and rebuilt to be ADA-compliant, at least 5-6 feet wide, and include improved transitions across driveways along Central Street and Elmwood Road from the intersection of Maple St. to Memorial Dr. This grant enhances the town's ADA curb ramp project already initiated in this area.

Tracy Murphy has been exploring grant opportunities to offset a portion of the cost to repair Old Murdock and construct a new fire station. There are USDA grants available for each project. Applications for funding will be submitted. Each grant has a maximum award of \$50,000. A Robinson Broadhurst grant application has been submitted for Old Murdock repairs in the amount of \$608,000.

Monty Tech has informed the Town that a credit of \$1,246 will be given toward the FY21 appropriation.

The January 25th Selectmen's meeting will include a Tri-Board meeting to review the FY22-FY26 Five Year Financial Forecast, FY21 financial review after six months of the fiscal year and a draft FY22 Town Manager budget

2. Personnel Updates-

Lynn Nystrom was hired as the Tax Collector/Treasurer with a starting date of January 25th. Ms. Nystrom is currently the Treasurer/Assistant Tax Collector for the Town of Philipson. She has begun her Treasurer/Collector certification and will be expected to complete that during her employment with the Town.

First responders will continue to receive their COVID vaccines during the week of January 11th.

3. Project Updates-

The Mellen Road survey work has been completed. The survey company will be meeting with town staff during the week of January 11th to review the survey.

4. Miscellaneous Updates –

I have no miscellaneous updates.

LaBrie asked about the sidewalks Mr. Hickey mentioned, saying that those sidewalks are terrible and she is happy to see the grant. She wonders if there is any anticipated timeline here. Hickey responded that the grants will be awarded either January or February. One of the things that helps to make our application strong is there has been about \$130,000 expended funds from a Robinson-Broadhurst Foundation grant to repair sidewalks. This is important as it shows the grant award agency that the Town has invested financial interest in improving the sidewalks. He said that he thinks that aspect will help strengthen how our grant is seen by the state.

Aaron Gagne asked if all the sidewalks will be done or just those certain ones. Hickey said all the sidewalks from Maple Street to Memorial Drive.

David Watkins of 235 Mellen Road asked if once reviewed, a copy of the survey of Mellen Road could be released to him. Hickey said he would be happy to provide said copy and asked Mr. Watkins to send him an email.

Ward rejoined at 7:25 p.m.

11. MINUTES: 11.1 Monday, December 21, 2020 - Regular Meeting - Ward moved to approve the Board of Selectmen minutes of Monday, Dec. 21st, 2020 as presented this evening, seconded by LaBrie. With a roll call vote of LaBrie, aye, Ward, aye, Anderson, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

11.2 Monday, December 28, 2020- Regular Meeting – Ward moved to approve the Board of Selectmen minutes of Monday, Dec. 28th, 2020 as presented this evening, seconded by LaBrie. With a roll call vote of Ward, aye, LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

11.3 Wednesday, December 30, 2020 - Special Meeting – Ward moved to approve the Board of Selectmen minutes of Wednesday, Dec. 30th, 2020 as presented this evening, seconded by LaBrie. With a roll call vote of Ward, aye, LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye, and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

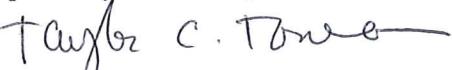
11.4 Wednesday, December 30, 2020 - EXECUTIVE SESSION – Ward moved to approve only, not for release, the Board of Selectmen EXECUTIVE SESSION minutes of Wednesday, Dec. 30th, 2020 as presented this evening, seconded by LaBrie. With a roll call vote of Ward, aye, LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye and Barbaro, aye, the motion carried unanimously.

11. COMMUNICATIONS: None were heard.

12. AGENDA ITEMS: Barbaro said that the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 25th, 2021 and will consist of a Tri-Board meeting with the Finance Committee and School Committee.

13. ADJOURNMENT: Ward motioned to adjourn, seconded by LaBrie. With a roll call vote of Ward, aye, LaBrie, aye, Anderson, aye and Barbaro aye, the meeting adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Taylor Tower
Administrative Assistant