

Approved: 4/13/2020

**TOWN OF WINCHENDON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2020 6:30 P.M.**

**-- Conducted by Remote Participation --
Zoom Meeting ID: 102 349 116**

Present:

Audrey LaBrie, Chair
Barbara Anderson, Vice-Chair
Mike Barbaro
Amy Salter
Rick Ward

Keith R. Hickey, Town Manager
Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- Introduction to Remote Meeting (attached)
 - Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §20 (attached)
 - Loan Amortization Schedules for twenty and thirty years for Senior Center along with Property Tax Impact Calendar (attached)
 - Tighe & Bond email response dated April 1, 2020 answering potential cost increase and risk with delaying Senior Center Repairs for a year (attached)
 - Town Counsel Opinion dated March 17, 2020 regarding placing Ballot Question at Town Election prior to Town Meeting (attached)
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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 social media and instructions noted on the agenda.

Chairwoman, Audrey LaBrie, called the meeting to order at 6:30PM.

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

LaBrie confirmed members present and persons anticipating to speak by calling their name and asking for a response in the affirmative: Barbara Anderson, yes; Michael Barbaro, yes; Amy Salter, yes; Rick Ward, yes; and Audrey LaBrie, yes. Staff members present and responding in the affirmative were Town Manager Keith Hickey and Executive Assistant, Linda Daigle. She noted there were others joined in the meeting this evening and was not sure who may wish to speak.

LaBrie asked each speaker this evening to please state their name before each presentation, comment or question and that all votes would be taken by roll call.

LaBrie 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.

LaBrie asked if anyone had any questions to which there was no response.

1. SELECTMEN'S COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

*Board of Selectmen Special Meeting Minutes
April 2, 2020*

Ward felt he needed to make a public statement in the spirit of transparency and let Winchendon residents know that a concern had been raised regarding his volunteer work with the non-profit Friends of Old Murdock Senior Center and whether or not it was a conflict of interest with his right to discuss and vote as a Selectmen on the agenda item this evening with the inclusion of a warrant article on repairs to the Senior Center. He was surprised that anyone would feel this was a conflict as his role as a Selectmen. He reached out to Town Counsel who advised that as there was no financial interest involved either for him or of the Friends of Old Murdock Senior Center in regards to tonight's discussion and vote, there was no conflict of interest. He filed an Appearance of Disclosure Statement with the Town Clerk's office that is available for anyone that might want to view it. He said he will continue to perform his official duties objectively and fairly and he will not recuse himself from any discussion or vote in regards to repairs to the Town's Senior Center.

LaBrie asked if there were any other comments to which none was heard.

LaBrie commented she hoped everyone was hanging in there and doing the best they could.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:** There were no Public Comments or Announcements this evening.
3. **PUBLIC HEARINGS:** There was no scheduled Public Hearings this evening.
4. **APPOINTMENTS/RESIGNATIONS:** There were no Appointments/Resignations this evening.
5. **PERMIT/LICENSE APPLICATIONS:** There were no Permits/License applications this evening.
6. **BOARDS/COMMISSIONS/COMMITTEES/DEPARTMENT:** Not applicable this evening.
7. **NEW BUSINESS:**

- 7.1. Discussion on Including a \$3.8 Million Debt Exclusion Question on the Spring Town Ballot for Senior Center Repairs - Hickey thanked the Board for their willingness to come out this evening and explained he had hoped to discuss this at Monday's night meeting but when the budget topic got tabled, this issue accidentally got bypassed. He explained that there is an opportunity to include on the local town ballot an article about repairing Old Murdock Senior Center. He noted it was his impression from a prior meeting that the Board was looking to make the repairs to the property rather than the other options of replacing the building or moving the Senior Center to some other property. If the Town put the article on the ballot before Town Meeting it would save the Town between \$5,000 and \$8,000 depending on how long the polls are open for a Special Election. He noted it is allowed to be placed on a ballot before Town Meeting but there would need to be an affirmative vote both on the Town Ballot and at Town Meeting for the funding to be approved. What he is trying to do with this meeting, if the Board is comfortable, is to have a decision to give the public the time to digest what is being proposed and what the impacts might be. The Town Clerk would finalize the ballot warrant sending off to the printer allowing for early voting and absentee ballots as quickly as possible. Hickey noted he included in the Board's packet the estimated annual cost and tax impact if the funding request were to be approved for both a twenty and thirty year note so they would have a sense of what the bond payment would look like and what the average assessed house tax increase would be.

Lastly, Hickey informed the Board he reached out to the engineer and asked if this decision was to be delayed for another construction season, what the anticipated increase in cost would be and if there would be any risk to continue to use the building another year prior to the repairs being made. The engineer responded, his best guess, to be an increase of between 3% and 5%. That increase would be between \$112,000 and \$180,000. The engineer commented it is tough to say what any potential impact to the building would be for a year; the more severe the weather, the more the impact would be. He did say there was no immediate concern that the building couldn't be used for another season prior to repairs occurring.

Anderson said she has serious concerns explaining when the assumption was made, we were in favor of this project but they had no idea at the time what was coming, financially and economically. She said the security of their residents was her top concern. We have no idea what to anticipate in the upcoming months and believes it is poor judgement to put this on the ballot at this time and wanted to wait to see if people get their jobs back.

Ward commented he understands the situation in the United States today but the building is not going to get better waiting and the cost will only go up. This decision is a big one for the Town and it should not be decided but five Selectmen. This is a Town Meeting form of government that we have. If the Town doesn't want to support it, they can vote it down. They have to vote twice to approve this. Let them decide; it is their choice not ours.

Anderson responded saying at this time, we don't even know if we will have elections in June; every day that goes by it gets scarier. She wants to be prudent and asked about having thirty days prior to Town Election to print the ballots up. LaBrie noted Town Counsel advised that any ballot question had to be provided to the Town Clerk no later than thirty-five days before election. Anderson wondered why we were deciding this on April 2nd with very little information. Hickey replied that they did not have to make a decision if they were not comfortable to do so. He shares the concerns she has expressed but to Selectman Ward's point the building is not going to get any better. The Board does not have to make a decision this evening. The delay would minimize the ability for some to early vote or file an absentee ballot. He didn't bring this forward this evening to try and rush anything, it was supposed to be discussed Monday. He wanted to bring it before the Board the earliest time he could do so the Board could at least have a discussion about it and move on from there.

LaBrie asked how early voting dates are established. Keith replied typically it is determined by the Secretary of State; this election might be a little different with the delays due to what's happening.

Barbaro expressed his feeling on the matter stating the Town will need to vote on this important issue for the community. The only concern he has right now is that they are putting the cart before the horse. Whenever there has been a debt exclusion or override article, it has always been put before Town Meeting first. He understands the cost factor. Town Meeting dictates policy; we have the simplest form of government with Town Meeting expressing their issues on matters. He is in favor of having Old Murdock repaired for two reasons. One, it is a gathering place for our senior citizens and secondly, the Town made an agreement with the state in the nineties to designate it an historical building and we accepted money from the state with our responsibility to maintain it. "We will have to fix this building; it is a matter of how we go about it." Barbaro feels the Town always has gone to Town Meeting first and didn't want to change this practice. He knows they need to do it but wasn't sure how at this moment in time.

Anderson agreed with Selectman Barbaro in wanting to have the issue before Town Meeting first, not wanting to do things backwards and too early. She understands Mr. Hickey in wanting to save the Town money but feels we are under a crisis at this time. She feels the debt exclusion article would be better off if they all supported it. She noted she has phone calls out waiting for people to get back to her with information; for right now, she said she wouldn't support it.

Salter commented she is concerned about finances noting she is an extremely financially conservative person. She knows the Senior Center needs to be repaired but doesn't believe the Town should be making any large improvements now because we just don't know and she is concerned with the finances of the state. She is not supporting this right now as a Selectman and wants to hold this through the summer to see what happens. "This has affected so many people and we are just beginning."

LaBrie commented that they all agree this is something we need to address and asked if anyone wanted to make a motion at this point.

Anderson asked if they needed a motion or could they just table the ballot question at this time. LaBrie replied that they could probably table it and just take it up again between now and when the ballot would be printed.

Barbaro commented he would move to table the topic and bring up at their second meeting in April noting the Governor has stated by that time, we should be on the other side of this surge and have a better view of where we are as far as population goes, where we stand as a state and have a better handle on which direction we are headed and what restrictions there may be and even if we are having a Town Meeting in June.

Barbaro moved to table the issue until the second meeting in April on the 27th; Anderson seconded. By a roll call vote of all aye, the motion carried unanimously.

Anderson asked if the Town Manager could update the citizens with what is going on in the Town. Hickey replied he would do another CodeRed update tomorrow. There are now five people reported positive COVID-19 cases in Winchendon. Due to HIPPA laws, he can't share certain information.

Anderson also noted the CodeRed updates are sent to cell phones and the website News and Announcements are sent to your email; you can sign up for both on the Town's website.

8. **OLD BUSINESS:** There was no Old Business this evening.
9. **TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT:** Not applicable this evening.
10. **MINUTES:** There were no minutes for approval this evening.
11. **COMMUNICATIONS:** None this evening.
12. **AGENDA ITEMS:**
13. **EXECUTIVE SESSION:** There was no Executive Session this evening.
14. **ADJOURNMENT:**
Barbaro moved to adjourn; Ward seconded. By roll call vote of all aye, the meeting adjourned at 7:06PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Linda Daigle
Executive Assistant