

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MEETING MINUTES – November 21, 2022**

7:00 p.m. - Chair's Introduction to Remote Meeting

Chair Cohen stated that this Open Meeting of the Board of Selectmen was being conducted remotely consistent with the July 16, 2022 Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency and that all members of the Board of Selectmen are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely.

Chair Cohen noted that the Order allows public bodies to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting. He added that ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. Chair Cohen noted that this meeting will allow for Public Comment throughout the agenda. He indicated the various ways that the public may view or participate in this meeting as listed on the posted agenda.

Chair Cohen confirmed that the following members and persons anticipated on the agenda were remotely present and could be heard.

Board of Selectmen

Mitch Cohen
Julianne Hirsh
Kristen Wixted
Jason Perreault
T. Scott Rogers

Others

John Coderre, Town Administrator
Becca Meekins, Assistant Town Administrator
David Parenti, Fire Chief
William Lyver, Police Chief
Scott Charpentier, DPW Director
Jason Little, Finance Director

Any votes taken this evening will be by roll call.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Maselli of 13 Maple Street expressed concern with a letter to the editor dated November 11, 2022 from Tim Kaelin regarding the use of ARPA funding for capital projects. Her concern was that Mr. Kaelin misrepresented himself by speaking on behalf of the Appropriations Committee without a meeting of the Appropriations Committee to discuss the contents of the letter taking place. She suggested that Mr. Kaelin be removed from the Appropriations Committee. Chair Cohen suggested that she bring her concern to the attention of the Town Moderator as he is the appointing authority for the Appropriations Committee.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – NOVEMBER 7, 2022 MEETING

Selectman Hirsh moved the Board vote to approve the November 7, 2022 meeting minutes; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion.

Selectman Hirsh requested that specific details be included regarding her question during the continued public hearing for Aspen Aerogels about the license staying with the property in the event that the company is sold. She asked that her question about how many applications were submitted for the Fire Station Building Committee and Mr. Coderre's response be included as well. Chair Cohen suggested Selectman Hirsh submit the additional details to Ms. Wackell for inclusion in the November 7, 2022 meeting minutes for the Board's review and acceptance at the next Board meeting.

Selectman Hirsh moved the Board vote to withdraw the previous motion to approve the November 7, 2022 meeting minutes and to postpone the approval until the Board's next meeting; Selectman Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Perreault	"aye"	Hirsh	"aye"
Rogers	"aye"	Cohen	"aye"
Wixted	"aye"		

FIRE DEPARTMENT COLLECTION FOR TOYS FOR TOTS

Fire Chief Parenti announced that the Northborough Fire Department is again an official drop off site for the USMC Reserve Toys for Tots collection program. The Fire Department will be collecting toys November 19th through December 11th from 9:00am – 6:00pm. Only new toys will be accepted and must be in the original packaging. Bins will be located outside the front entrance of the Fire Station at 11 Pierce Street.

Chief Parenti added that in lieu of purchasing a new toy, donations can be made at <https://toysfortotsusa.org>.

TREE LIGHTING EVENT, REQUEST TO CLOSE BLAKE STREET AND APPROVAL OF A MENORAH DISPLAY

Community Affairs Committee (CAC) Chair Suzy Cieslica was remotely present to announce the details of the annual tree lighting event that will be held on Saturday, December 3rd at 4:30pm at the Neil Ellsworth tree on Blake Street. She thanked DPW Director Scott Charpentier and his staff for their help with all of the CAC sponsored events. She also thanked her Committee members for their collaborative efforts in planning these events. She noted that there is interest in moving the tree lighting event to the Town Common and that this is something that she would like to see considered for the future. Details about this event can be found on the CAC Facebook Page or at www.northboroughcac.weebly.com.

Ms. Cieslica noted that the Trolley service will not be offered this year and asked local businesses to contact the CAC if they plan to have an open house or a special event on December 3rd and she will organize a list for the public.

Chair Cohen added that Hanukkah will not overlap with the tree lighting as it did last year. The Menorah will be on display and lit up simultaneously with the tree lighting. It will then be put back into storage until December 18th, which is the first day of the Hanukkah holiday. It will be lit on December 18th, with a more formal celebratory lighting on December 25th, which is the 8th day of Hanukkah.

Selectman Perreault moved the Board vote to close Blake Street on Saturday, December 3, 2022 from 3:30pm to 6:30pm for the tree lighting ceremony; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Perreault	"aye"	Hirsh	"aye"
Rogers	"aye"	Cohen	"aye"
Wixted	"aye"		

Selectman Hirsh moved the Board vote to approve the placement of a Menorah near the Neil Ellsworth tree on Blake Street; Selectman Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Perreault	“aye”	Hirsh	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”		

7:05 p.m. - PUBLIC HEARING WITH BOARD OF ASSESSORS

For the purpose of discussing the valuation of each class of property; the minimum residential factor and the allocation of the tax burden among the four classes of real property: residential, open space, commercial and industrial, and of personal property.

Finance Director Jason Little and Board of Assessors members Paul Cibelli and Christopher Reidy were remotely present.

Mr. Coderre made the presentation along-side a power point presentation, which included information and options for the Board of Selectmen to determine whether there shall be a single or split tax rate for the various classes of property for FY2023.

In summary, following a review of the market activity by the Department of Revenue, the total taxable value for the Town has increased from \$3.38 billion to approximately \$3.89 billion, or 15%. This analysis was based on valid sales activity during calendar year 2021 for single family homes and condominiums. Market adjustments resulted in overall single-family home values increasing by 17%, while condominiums increased by 14%. Commercial properties increased by 10%, industrial properties increased by 15% and Personal Property values increased by 4%.

Mr. Cibelli presented the various tax rate scenarios. Should the Board of Selectmen decide to continue with a single tax rate, the tax rate would decrease from \$16.49 in FY2022 to \$14.79 for FY2023. The levy amount to be raised by taxation would be \$57,507,128, an increase of \$1,777,912, or 3.2%. This year the Town certified \$54.3 million in “new growth” value, which results in approximately \$894,816 in new tax dollars. The average single-family tax bill would increase by \$380 from \$8,195 for FY2022 to \$8,575 for FY2023.

Following the presentation, Mr. Reidy informed the Board that the Board of Assessors unanimously recommended that the Board of Selectmen continue with the single tax rate.

Public Comments

Corridor 9/495 Regional Chamber of Commerce President Karen Chapman strongly advocated for the continuation of a single tax classification. As the business community continues to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic and deal with inflation, workforce challenges, and supply chain difficulties, the last thing a business needs is an increase in expenses.

Lisa Maselli of 13 Maple Street appreciates the support for the businesses, but asked who is speaking up for the residents, especially the senior population. She asked that the Board consider a split tax rate.

Chair Cohen asked a question regarding the Tax Deferral Clause 41A program that allows taxpayers over age 65 to defer property tax payments. Mr. Cibelli responded that the Board of Assessors will be reviewing the exemptions under this program to see if any of the income thresholds can be raised and updated. Mr. Coderre added that any updates to Clause 41A would require Town Meeting action.

Selectman Hirsh moved the Board vote to close the Public Hearing; Selectman Perreault seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Perreault	“aye”	Hirsh	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”		

In response to a question by Selectman Hirsh, Chair Cohen explained that under this tax deferral program, the Town charges an interest rate on the amount that is deferred. He added that the Town has the option to both raise the income thresholds and reduce the interest rate.

Board members expressed their support of maintaining a single tax rate.

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to maintain a uniform tax rate for all classes of property at a factor of one; to oppose the implementation of a residential exemption; and to oppose the implementation of a small commercial exemption; Selectman Perreault seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Perreault	“aye”	Hirsh	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”		

REPORTS

Kristen Wixted

- Congratulated the cast and crew of the Algonquin “Guys and Dolls” musical.
- Congratulated the Algonquin Girls Soccer team for making it to the finals.
- Noted that the Northborough Scouting for Food Day received over 14,000 donated items that will benefit the Food Pantry. Thanked the Boy and Girl Scout troops who participated.
- Asked Becca Meekins for an update on the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Committee. Ms. Meekins noted that Diedra Wrighting will serve as the School Department’s Coalition for Equity representative. Now that the Committee is at full membership she will be scheduling the first meeting soon.
- Noted that she has been asked if electronic voting devices for Town Meeting can be purchased with ARPA funds. Mr. Coderre responded that the first step would be to have a conversation with the Town Moderator. Chair Cohen suggested inviting the Town Moderator to a future Board meeting.
- Requested that a discussion item be added to the ARPA list regarding financial resources needed for the Police Department to provide more police presence in an effort to keep the roads safe.
- Asked that the renaming of the Board of Selectmen to Select Board be high on the priority list for the next Annual Town Meeting.

- Noted that the Troop 101 Wreath Sale is ongoing. Wreaths are \$15 each and can be ordered online. They are then delivered to your door.
- With Thanksgiving approaching and in this time of gratitude, she thanked the volunteers, PTO parents, school library volunteers and sports coaches for their service. Also thanked all Board, Committee and Commission members and extended a special thank you to her fellow members of the Board of Selectmen.

Jason Perreault

- Thanked Town Clerk Andy Dowd, Assistant Town Clerk Karen Wilber and the election workers for conducting the November 8th State Election efficiently and safely.
- Wished all residents a happy and safe Thanksgiving.

Julianne Hirsh

- Reported on the recent meeting of the Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC).
- Noted that the last chance to participate in the Downtown Revitalization survey is November 30th.
- Noted that the MPIC consultants are interviewing businesses in the downtown area and she is hoping that this information can be used when the Board discusses the release of ARPA funds to support local businesses.
- Reported on the recent meeting of the Historic District Commission.
- Wished everyone a happy Thanksgiving.

T. Scott Rogers

- Reported on the recent meeting of the Board of Health.
- Noted that a community resource guide has been mailed to all residents. It is also available on the Town website and hardcopies can be found at the Town Hall, Library and Senior Center.
- Noted that the Planning Board is continuing to discuss dissolving the Groundwater Advisory Committee. He reached out to the Groundwater Advisory Committee, as well as all the affected Boards, Committees and Commissions advising them of these conversations in case they want to add this item to a future meeting agenda for discussion. He requested that this item be discussed at the December 19th Selectmen's meeting. The Groundwater Advisory Committee will discuss this item at their next meeting.
- Requested that the Board consider closing Town Hall Offices, the Library and the Senior Center at noon on Wednesday, November 23rd to allow employees additional time to spend with their families for Thanksgiving. See below for motion.

Mitch Cohen

- Thanked everyone involved for their efforts with the November 8th State Election. Congratulated State Senator Elect Robin Kennedy, State Representative Elect Kate Donahue and State Representative Meghan Kilcoyne.
- Noted that the Community Resource Guide can be found by clicking on the Be Well tab on the Town website.
- Formally requested that a Town Meeting article be included to change the name of the Board of Selectmen to Select Board.
- Noted that the Downtown Revitalization survey can be found on the front page of the Town website.

MOTION TO CLOSE TOWN HALL OFFICES, THE LIBRARY AND SENIOR CENTER AT 12 NOON ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to approve the early closing of Town Hall Offices, the Library and the Senior Center at 12 Noon on Wednesday, November 23rd; Selectman Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call was taken as follows:

Perreault	“aye”	Hirsh	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”		

RECOMMENDATION FOR APPOINTMENTS TO THE TEMPORARY TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Selectman Wixted moved the Board vote to recommend Laura Ziton, Janeen Callaghan, Mark McMenemy and Christopher Deacetis for appointment to the Temporary Traffic Safety Committee as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; Selectman Hirsh seconded the motion.

Discussion

Chair Cohen noted that five applications were received for the 5 citizen-at-large vacancies. The above mentioned applicants were interviewed on November 15th. An interview will be scheduled for the remaining applicant soon.

Selectman Rogers asked that the Board use the same logic that was used when considering appointments to the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) Committee. In that case, the Interview Subcommittee had interviewed candidates and instead of recommending them for appointment, they asked that the Board re-advertise the openings in hopes of getting more diverse interest. In this case, only five applications were received for the five citizen-at-large vacancies. He added that in his opinion some are good, qualified candidates and some are not. If the Board were to use the same logic as the DEIB Committee appointments, the Board should re-advertise the openings in hopes of getting more qualified candidates.

Selectman Perreault shared the concern that there were so few applicants relative to the number of open seats. He also noted that three of the applicants are known to have previously advocated for the creation of a Traffic Safety Committee. He would like to see the Board extend the application period to see if additional applicants come forward that can provide a better balance considering that part of the work of this temporary committee is to see whether or not a permanent committee should be created. He is concerned that some of the applicants will not be able to be fully objective in making the determination as to whether a permanent committee is needed considering the past representations they have made.

Chairman Cohen noted that he was excited to see that four of the five applicants are new to volunteering in local government in a formal sense. It's exciting to get new people who have not served on Boards before to get involved. He does not share the concern that some of applicants have previously advocated for a Traffic Safety Committee. He is happy that applicants came forward that are truly interested in the charge of this committee. The process was open to everyone and he is satisfied with the process.

Selectman Wixted stated that the applicants come from diverse neighborhoods. Chair Cohen agreed that they will represent a diverse group.

Selectman Rogers expressed his frustration that while the temporary committee is taking up to six months to determine if a permanent committee is needed, the current traffic safety issues are not being addressed. He added that there is already an established process in place to report concerns and ask questions regarding traffic safety and other traffic related matters. Chair Cohen responded that while the temporary committee does its work, he trusts that Town staff will continue to address traffic safety issues as they arise.

Selectman Hirsh noted that the applicants were made aware that their first order of business is to review what is already in place and whether a Traffic Safety Committee can help with the current traffic safety issues. She added that the four applicants that were interviewed have different backgrounds and will bring different perspectives to the committee.

Following no further discussion, the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Perreault	“no”	Hirsh	“aye”
Rogers	“no”	Cohen	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”		

Selectman Perreault noted that he would have voted differently if the applicants were considered separately.

APPROVAL/EXECUTION OF PLOWING AND TREATMENT AGREEMENTS FOR PRIVATE WAYS FOR THE 2022/2023 WINTER SEASON

Mr. Coderre stated that this is the last step in the annual process to prepare for plowing and treatment of private ways.

Selectman Perreault moved the Board vote to approve and execute the plowing and treatment agreements for the 2022/2023 Winter Season for Harris Avenue and Maple Lane; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Perreault	“aye”	Hirsh	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”		

OTHER BUSINESS

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Maselli of 13 Maple Street thanked the Board for addressing traffic concerns.


ADJOURNMENT

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to adjourn; Selectman Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was as follows:

Perreault	“aye”	Hirsh	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”		

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Diane M. Wackell
Executive Assistant to the
Board of Selectmen

Documents used during meeting:

1. November 21, 2022 Meeting Agenda
2. November 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes
3. Toys for Tots Flyer
4. Tree Lighting Event Flyer
5. Information Packet – Tax Classification Hearing
6. Information Packet – Temporary Traffic Safety Committee Appointments
7. Plowing and Treatment Agreements