

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MEETING MINUTES – December 5, 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

Any votes taken this evening will be by roll call.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Alice Latoski at 490 Main Street (Pheasant Hill Condominiums) expressed concern over wetlands being disturbed if additional athletic fields are added at the high school. She also asked about the funding for this project. Mr. Coderre responded that the Conservation Commission will be discussing this project in regard to the wetlands. He added that nothing has been considered or approved by the finance committees yet. He suggested that she contact the School Superintendent for any other questions regarding the project itself. Mr. Charpentier informed her that a full set of drawings for the proposed athletic fields are available in the Planning Department.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – NOVEMBER 7, 2022 MEETING

Selectman Perreault moved the Board vote to approve the November 7, 2022 meeting minutes; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – NOVEMBER 21, 2022 MEETING

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to approve the November 21, 2022 meeting minutes; Selectman Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

TOWN PLANNER LAURIE CONNORS & DPW DIRECTOR SCOTT CHARPENTIER

Discussion and vote regarding dog park site selection.

Ms. Connors provided a status update on the Town’s efforts in regard to a Northborough Dog Park as follows:

Ms. Connors noted that the planning for a municipal dog park has been underway for many years. Respondents to a 2020 Master Plan Survey identified construction of a Town Dog Park as a top open space & recreation priority, which is included as a recommendation in both the 2020 Master Plan and 2020 Open Space & Recreation Plan.

In April 2022, the Town secured \$35,500 in FY2023 CPA funds for the initial assessment and site evaluation of up to five potential locations that could be used for a dog park, as well as the development of a preliminary design for the selected site. In July 2022, the Town executed a contract with Weston & Sampson Engineers to perform this work.

On October 11, 2022, a public information and input session took place via Zoom. Weston & Sampson presented their analysis of 4 potential sites and requested public feedback on those locations and potential amenities. Public comments were received during the meeting and written feedback was received via email in the days following the meeting. The 32-acre wooded parcel on Boundary Street received the highest number of votes. A 3.5-acre parcel of recreation land on Bearfoot Road, which is adjacent to the Senior Center, received a couple of votes but also strong opposition from several senior citizens and members of the Council on Aging. The remaining two sites (Carriage Hill Road and Buena Vista Road) received no votes.

Ms. Connors indicated that this evening, the Board of Selectmen is being asked to approve the Boundary Street site. It was noted that a funding request will be presented to the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for consideration and possible inclusion in the 2024 Annual Town Meeting warrant and that staff will begin working with the consultant to develop a design concept and cost estimate for the selected site. In January, the design team will hold another public information and input session to obtain feedback on the design concept. Following that meeting, staff will work with Weston & Sampson Engineers to refine the design and cost estimate based on the feedback received.

Ms. Connors noted that with the anticipated completion date for the design and cost estimate to be sometime in the Spring of 2023, staff will then file an application with the Stanton Foundation in the amount of \$22,500 to finalize the design, obtain required permits and prepare construction-ready bid documents. She added that the Town will provide \$11,500 in supplemental funding. If the Town’s request for FY2024 CPC funds is successful, staff will then file a grant application to the Stanton Foundation for \$225,000 in construction funding, which is the maximum grant

award. The minimum required municipal match is 10% of the total cost of construction. Once construction funds are fully secured, the Town will procure a construction contractor. Construction of the project is expected to take approximately 9 months to complete, weather permitting.

Ms. Connors noted that some of the amenities to be considered include lawn and planting; shade shelters, stone dust trails, fencing and signage, wood chips and mulch areas, synthetic turf areas, paved seating areas, water play/sprinklers and agility play equipment.

Mr. Charpentier reviewed the pros and cons of each of the four potential sites as follows:

Carriage Hill Road

The only pros for this site is the amount of shade and possible utility connections from the street. The cons include many residential abutters, a residential access road and limited vehicular access. Also, wetlands and steep slopes will limit construction in some areas.

Boundary Street

There are many pros compared to cons on the Boundary Street site. For shade purposes, it is fully forested, it is protected open space with slopes that will provide residential barriers and buffers. There are opportunities for off leash hiking and there are possible utility connections from the street. The only cons are steep slopes to the east and wetlands and easements will limit construction in some areas.

Buena Vista Road

This is a challenging site with the only pros being that it is fully shaded with mostly flat areas. Utility connections are possible from the Street. The cons include residential abutters with a residential access road. The size is limited, wet, with wetlands and easements that will limit construction options.

Bearfoot Road/Senior Center

The pros for this site is that it is protected open space that is fully forested with utility access. It is adjacent to the Senior Center and there is strong opposition from several senior citizens and members of the Council on Aging. There are also steep slopes throughout the site, a chance of flooding along the east perimeter and the wetlands will limit construction in some areas.

Mr. Charpentier stated that when you compare the analyzes of the four sites, the Boundary Street parcel has the least number of residential abutters. The Buena Vista site is the smallest and wettest. The Carriage Hill site is embedded in a neighborhood. Lastly, the Bearfoot Road site has geometrical challenges and has received strong opposition from many connected to the Senior Center.

Following a brief review of the configuration plan for the Boundary Street site, Mr. Charpentier and Ms. Connors responded to questions from members of the Board specific to this site.

Ms. Connors assured the Board that she is confident that the Town will be awarded the Stanton Foundation grant. She reviewed typical rules and regulations for dog parks, which are set by the Town and approved by the Stanton Foundation. She informed the Board that Millbury, Worcester, Oxford, Uxbridge and many in the Boston area all have dog parks in place. Hudson

has expressed interest in developing a dog park and Southborough is in the early stages of planning for a dog park. Ms. Connors confirmed that abutters who live within 500 feet from the proposed dog park at this site were notified and only one abutter expressed concern. The Housing Authority owns the duplex immediately next door and is aware of the proposal for a dog park.

Cynthia Burns at 186 Boundary Street questioned if a cost analysis had been done for the Boundary Street and Senior Center locations. Mr. Charpentier responded that the cost is based on the size and amenities and not on a specific site; therefore, the cost would be similar for both locations.

Ms. Connors stated that the dog park would be strictly a dawn to dusk facility. With her past experience in developing and maintaining the Millbury dog park, she shared that there were no complaints in regard to odors, vandalism or illicit behavior. Any complaints, which were few, related to the behavior of either the dog or the dog owner.

Rick Robinson at 167 Howard Street shared his experiences with some of the dog parks in the area, which are all positive. He added that he and his wife are strong advocates for the Boundary Street site.

John Campbell at 29 Spruce Hill Drive stated that he is the Chair of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), which heard the same presentation as outlined tonight and was struck by the extreme thoroughness of the preparation efforts put forth in recent months. The CPC will continue their deliberations on this CPA application at their meeting on January 5, 2023.

Ms. Connors shared her experience working with the Millbury Dog Park Committee and explained what their function was.

In response to one last question, Mr. Charpentier indicated that the Westborough State Hospital site was considered during the prior round of dog park site considerations, but a bulk of that land has been reused by the State and they have not been interested in surplusizing any of the little bit of land that is available. Ms. Connors quickly summarized the next steps moving forward.

Selectman Wixted moved the Board vote to approve the Boundary Street site location for the new dog park; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

Chair Cohen thanked Ms. Connors and Mr. Charpentier for all of their hard work moving this project forward. He also thanked both Town staff and the volunteers for their help.

REPORTS

Julianne Hirsh

- Noted that Chair Cohen, Mr. Coderre and herself had a very productive meeting with Senator Elect Robyn Kennedy this afternoon.

- Thanked the Town Common group for the beautiful planters on Church Street and Main Street.
- Thanked the Community Affairs Committee for organizing the tree lighting and the initial lighting of the Menorah event.

Jason Perreault

- Thanked the Community Affairs Committee for organizing the tree lighting and the initial lighting of the Menorah event.
- Offered a reminder that the Fire Department's Toys for Tots collection continues through December 11th. More information can be found on the Town website.

Kristen Wixted

- Noted that Hannaford also has a Toys for Tots collection box.
- Donated books and toys to the Police Department sponsored Stuffed Cruiser Drive at Walmart. Thanked the Police Department for organizing this event and Officer Roselle for his efforts with the collections.
- Noted that Boy Scout Troop 101 will again offer tree pick up after the holidays.
- Noted that she conducted an informal poll to see if residents are interested in electronic voting during the Annual Town Meeting. It seems that they are and she will continue to research what other communities are doing.

T. Scott Rogers

- Thanked everyone who organized and participated in the Thanksgiving Turkey Trot. They had over 600 participants.

Mitch Cohen

- Observed the Thanksgiving Turkey Trot and it was a great event.
- Thanked the Community Affairs Committee for the tree lighting and the initial lighting of the Menorah event.
- Looking forward to the official lighting of the Menorah on December 25th at 5pm at the Blake Street location.
- Thanked the Firefighters Union 3057 for their social media gag. He is enjoying watching the mischief that Pierce the Firefighter elf is getting into.

INTERVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Recommendation for appointment of Jennifer Scalise to the Temporary Traffic Safety Committee.

Selectman Hirsh moved the Board vote to recommend Jennifer Scalise for appointment to the Temporary Traffic Safety Committee as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; Selectman Wixted seconded the motion.

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

Chair Cohen indicated that the Committee is now complete and that the first meeting will be scheduled before the end of the calendar year.

PRESENTATION OF PRELIMINARY FY2024 BUDGET SCHEDULE

Mr. Coderre presented the Preliminary FY2024 Free Cash Plan for consideration and use during the upcoming budget process. FY2022 year-end Free Cash was certified at approximately \$2.44 million, significantly less than the \$3.39 million from FY2021. Following the reopening of the economy and subsequent recovery from the pandemic, Free Cash levels are likely to remain at lower historic levels for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Coderre reviewed the FY2022 year-end results as follows:

- The unspent Free Cash from FY2022 was \$500,59. The Town “generated” \$1,939,814 during FY2022 for a total FY2022 Free Cash of \$2,440,073.
- Revenues exceeded the FY2022 budget by \$765,712 or 1.16% with local receipts such as motor vehicle excise taxes, hotel & meals taxes and building permits performing better than anticipated due to the improving economy.
- Expenditures returned were \$1,144,386 or 1.67%. The return included positive results in the Employee Benefit lines due to favorable health insurance experience. Staff turnover in public safety also resulted in returned appropriations as new hires were brought on at a lower salary cost.

Mr. Coderre reported that the preliminary Free Cash plan contains the annual \$175,000 appropriation to the Reserve Account, a \$500,000 contribution to the FY2024 Operating Budget, a \$200,000 contribution to the Stabilization Fund and using up to \$1,065,073 to pay for various capital projects. The plan also contemplates leaving approximately \$500,000 in unappropriated Free Cash, which would remain available if needed.

Mr. Coderre emphasized that the Town’s bond rating, which was upgraded to Aa1 during FY2016, increased partially due to the Town’s healthy financial reserves and disciplined implementation of the Free Cash Policy.

Mr. Coderre noted that the final use of Free Cash is subject to Town Meeting approval and appropriation and that the Financial Planning Committee and Appropriations Committee will begin to meet to discuss the various projects and funding plans for recommendation at the Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Coderre referenced information in the FY2023 Free Cash Plan that was included in the Board’s meeting packets. He indicated that there is a Frequently Asked Questions section for anyone not familiar with Free Cash or the Town’s policy.

REVIEW OF TOWN MEETING & FY2024 BUDGET SCHEDULE

Mr. Coderre briefly reviewed the schedule for the FY2024 Budget and the 2023 Annual Town Meeting.

SET MEETING SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY – APRIL 2023

Selectman Perreault moved the Board vote to set the meeting schedule for January through April as follows: January 9 & 23; February 13 & 27; March 13 & 27 and April 10 & 24 (Town Meeting); Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

CONSIDER CLOSING TOWN OFFICES, DPW AND SENIOR CENTER ON DECEMBER 23

Mr. Coderre asked that the Board consider the closing of Town Offices, DPW and the Senior Center on Friday, December 23rd to allow non-essential employees additional time with their families this Holiday season.

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to close the Town Offices, DPW and Senior Center on Friday, December 23rd to provide staff additional time with their families this holiday season with the following conditions: 1) staff who are normally scheduled to work this day shall receive their regular rate of pay; 2) in the event that essential staff are called in to work, they shall receive their regular rate of pay; and 3) staff not scheduled to work this day, including staff on scheduled vacation leave or sick leave, shall have such scheduled leave calculated on a full-day basis; Selectman Perreault seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

EXECUTION OF CEMETERY DEEDS 1159, 1160 & 1161

Selectman Wixted moved the Board vote to execute Cemetery Deeds 1159, 1160 & 1161; Selectman Perreault seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

OTHER BUSINESS

Chair Cohen encouraged Board members to register for the annual Mass Municipal Association conference on January 20th & 21st.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chair Cohen invited comments from the public. There were none.


ADJOURNMENT

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

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Diane M. Wackell
Executive Assistant to the
Board of Selectmen

Documents used during meeting:

1. December 5, 2022 Meeting Agenda
2. November 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes
3. November 21, 2022 Meeting Minutes
4. Information Packet – Dog Park Site Selection.
5. Information Packet – Temporary Traffic Safety Committee Appointment
6. Memorandum – FY2024 Free Cash Plan
7. Information Packet – Town Meeting & FY2024 Budget Schedule
8. Memorandum – Meeting Dates
9. Memorandum – Closure of Town Offices, DPW and Senior Center
10. Cemetery Deeds