

**SELECT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES –January 8, 2024**

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

SB Chair Cohen read the current remote meeting notice and confirmed the following Select Board members and others could hear and be heard.

Select Board (SB)

Mitch Cohen, Chair

Kristen Wixted, Vice Chair

Laura Ziton, Clerk

Julianne Hirsh

Lisa Maselli

Others

Timothy McInerney, Town Administrator

Diane Wackell, Assistant Town Administrator

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

STATE EMERGENCY SHELTER UPDATE

Isabella Carusso, Interim Health Director, provided the following statistics with the Board:

- 28 of the 29 families have at least one adult with work authorization as a result of the community legal clinic
- 38 of the 57 adults (~67%) have obtained full time employment
- 24 of the 29 families have at least one family member who is employed full time – the Town and CMHA Community Coordinator reached out to the local Chamber along with using the connections the state made with companies
- 15 of the 29 families have two adults in the household who are employed full time
- 22 families have connected with at least one property owner and are applying for [HomeBASE](#)

Ms. Carusso stated that the Town was notified on January 2nd that the families would be moved to a new hotel in Auburn today. As of this evening, the move date was changed to January 18th. The Auburn site will be staffed by a shelter service provider, which will provide shelter service 24/7. This is part of the state's consolidation plan. Northborough will assist in making this as smooth a transition as possible but the Town is hoping that the 22 families that have applied for the HomeBase program will be allowed to remain in town because they could have an answer about housing as early as February 15th so these families will not have to move twice.

The Board thanked Ms. Caruso for the update.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

December 18, 2023 - Postponed to the next meeting.

UPDATE OF MUNICIPAL ELECTRIC AGGREGATION PROGRAM

Mr. McInerney began by saying that the Assistant Town Administrator is doing a great job navigating this plan. He added that he did the exact program in Grafton 10 years ago. There is no action required this evening by the board. This is just an update on the process.

The first thing the town needs to do is to have the consultant come to a meeting for a public presentation on January 22nd. This will open a 30-day period for public comment. He reviewed miscellaneous Department of Public Utilities (DPU) program requirements, such as website information, a specific website for energy aggregation only, notifications & mailings. It is only after the Town does all of the steps required by the DPU that it can submit for their approval to move forward with the bid process.

The electricity supply rates will be for a standard rate and a green energy rate. For example, in Grafton, the standard rate is 10.8 cents per kwh and the green energy rate is 11.708 cents per kwh. The town can ask for the terms of contract to be 12, 24, 36 or 48 months. It should be noted that the National Grid service rates change every 6 months for residential and commercial accounts and 3 months for industrial accounts.

SB Chair Cohen mentioned that the current Northborough rate is 18.2 cents per KWH, so we can do better. He added that he attended a webinar in December where they discussed how the DPU is very slow in approving town plans. In 2022 they only approved one town and none in 2023. When we are ready, we will work with our legislators to have them add pressure to the DPU to move forward with the approval process.

Mr. McInerney suggested that when we hold the public presentation, people should take a look at their bills to see what their current electricity supply rate is.

SB Chair Cohen thanked Mr. McInerney and Ms. Wackell for the update and looks forward to the upcoming public presentation.

VOTE TO AFFIRM JASON LITTLE, FINANCE DIRECTOR AS THE TOWN ACCOUNTANT

Mr. McInerney indicated that Jason Little is returning as the Town's Finance Director next week. The Finance Director also serves as Town Accountant, which, per the Charter, is the Select Board's appointment.

After discussion, SB Member Wixted moved the Board vote to affirm the appointment of Jason Little to serve as Town Accountant effective January 15, 2024; SB Member Zitton seconded the motion. The roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	"aye"	Maselli	"aye"
Wixted	"aye"	Cohen	"aye"
Zitton	"aye"		

DISCUSSION REGARDING HVAC ISSUES AT THE SENIOR CENTER

Mr. McInerney updated the Board on the HVAC issues at the Senior Center. He began by saying that the systems are up and running, adding that the staff did a great job. He apologized for the inconvenience as this occurred at the worst possible time.

There were 3 mechanical issues – the water heater, a leak in the sprinkler system and no heat. He reviewed the timeline, which started December 22nd, the first day the building was closed. Due to an issues with the parts supplier, they could not get parts until after the supplier's holiday break, which was about 2 weeks.

Chair Cohen expressed his frustration with these issues which caused the closure. He noted that the Senior Center and the Library are the 2 most retail focused municipal buildings and for any of them to be closed for any period of time prevents the town from doing some of its most important work. He would like to see whatever measures can be taken so as to prevent this from happening again.

SB Member Hirsh asked if there is any way that the assessment report can help to prevent this in the future.

Mr. McInerney stated that there is no way that the system can predict this. He will talk to the DPW Director and Facilities Manager to see if there is a way to track this on a regular schedule. The Board thanked Mr. McInerney for the update and asked for updates in the future.

DISCUSSION REGARDING A POSSIBLE SPECIAL TOWN MEETING IN MARCH FOR THE TOWN'S RIGHT OF FIRST REFUSAL FOR 432 WHITNEY STREET

Mr. McInerney referred to the information included in the meeting packet. He explained the Right of First Refusal (ROF) for Chapter 61A. Chapter 61A land is land that is not zoned for the original intent, which requires the owner to give notice to the town to purchase the land. The process is two-fold. It would require a special town meeting, because of the need for an appropriation.

432 Whitney Street, which is proposed to be sold to a private developer for industrial or commercial use, consists of 23 acres of Chapter 61A land. There is a confirmed bonified offer by a third party developer for 1.7 million dollars for the 23 acre lot. This has been confirmed by Attorney Katherine Klein at KP Law. All of the committees that have to opine on this have submitted letters of recommendation in favor of moving forward with the ROF except for Conservation Commission, which met tonight. Memos from the Planning Board, Open Space Committee, and a detailed memo from the Planning Director relative to the recommendation to exercise the ROF are included in the packet. If the Board decides to elect to exercise the ROF, the Board has to hold a hearing and provide notice of said hearing in a newspaper 8 days before the date of the hearing. The hearing could be held on January 22nd. If Board decides to exercise the ROF they would have to hold a special town meeting because the 120 day requirement will be earlier than the scheduled annual town meeting. We did ask our attorney to ask for an extension (45 days) and if approved we would have a lot of options, whereas if not approved, we would have to hold a special town meeting on March 26th.

Chair Cohen wanted to add one thing for the benefit of the public that this ROF under Chapter 61A which is, if the Town wants to purchase the land, they have to match the purchase price. This is dictated by State law and does not allow the town to negotiate the price.

The Chair asked for Public Comment:

Amy Poretsky, 47 Indian Meadow Drive – Mentioned that she just watched the Conservation Committee meeting tonight and they unanimously supported the ROF. She said that Con Com mentioned at their meeting that the Northborough DCR land that abuts this property also connects to Berlin and Hudson DCR land, which would make a nice connection in the future.

After discussion, Chair Cohen indicated that the Board, by consensus will exercise the ROF and hold a public hearing on January 22, 2024.

REPORTS

Laura Ziton

- Attended swearing in ceremony for Police Chief Brian Griffin
- Provided updates on meetings attended as liaison to the following:
Elderly & Disabled Taxation Fund Committee – in need of volunteers; Local Emergency Planning Committee – Hazardous Mitigation Survey is available; CPC; Assessors; noted that she and SB Member Maselli have traded liaison duties where SB Member Maselli now has Traffic Safety and she has Parks & Recreation

Kristen Wixted

- Attended swearing in ceremony for Police Chief Brian Griffin
- Thanked DPW for doing a great job with clearing the roads during the storm today
- Congratulations to Jason Little on his return and Diane Wackell as permanent Assistant Town Administrator

Lisa Maselli

- Thanked the following for their assistance with holiday decorating at the Town Common, the Town tree, 4 West Main Street and for the putting up holiday wreaths at Town buildings: the DPW, Dan Brillhart; Julianne Hirsh, Amy Poretsky, Caroline Harrington; Diane Desposito and Laura Ziton and special thanks to Mitch Cook of Lexus of Northborough for donating the large red bow placed on the tree in the Common
- 37 Pierce Street, the location of the food pantry, changed ownership from Try To Do Good LLC to the Fidritch Foundation. Thank you to T. Shay for all of his years of generosity to hosting the food pantry and the Fidritch Foundation for continuing to do so
- Congratulated Brian Griffin and Diane Wackell for their promotions
- Asked if the topic of future agenda items could be included on the agenda
- Reminder that we are always looking for volunteers for Boards, Committee and Commissions

Julianne Hirsh

- Added to SB Member Maselli's report regarding tree cutting and referred to the Shade Tree Policy. The Board should look further into this for clarification as this issue has recently come up and since MPIC is looking at the treescape
- Would like to see a calendar of future "big" topics to be included on the agenda so that the board and members of the public are aware that these topics will be discussed by the Board in the future (for example, SB Goals, White Cliffs, ARPA)

Mitch Cohen

- Attended swearing in ceremony for Police Chief Brian Griffin
- Thanked DPW for their work in clearing roads today's first storm of the season
- Mentioned the following Committee meeting dates:
January 17th – Fire Station Building Committee (in person at the Library at 7:00 p.m.)
January 18th – Joint Meeting with MPIC (remote meeting – 7:00 p.m.)

Town Administrator Report

- Thanked DPW for a great job with clearing the roads
- Noted nomination papers are available January 16th with the deadline March 8th for Town Election on May 14th

- Provided updates to the board on the following: Preparing to backfill the position left vacant by Diane Wackell’s promotion; Training schedules for staff in the spring for Asher training and fire extinguisher training; Continuing to meet with Union Presidents and Boards and Committee for introduction; Department monthly meetings are continuing along with developing subcommittee meeting; Budget process is starting; 13 Church Street purchase and sales agreement is underway.

EXECUTION OF CEMETERY DEED 1182

SB Member Maselli moved the Board vote to execute Cemetery Deed 1182; SB Member Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	“aye”	Maselli	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Ziton	“aye”		

OTHER BUSINESS

- SB Members Maselli and Wixted wanted to recognize and thank the Fire Chief for providing his monthly report
- SM Member Cohen would like the Board to receive a memo when there are new hires

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

ADJOURNMENT

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to adjourn; SB Member Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	“aye”	Maselli	“aye”
Wixted	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Ziton	“aye”		

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.

A recording of this meeting is available at: <https://youtube.com/live/2VMvcErwkW8>

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda LePoer
Executive Assistant to the
Board of Selectmen

Documents used during meeting:

1. January 8, 2024 Meeting Agenda
2. Meeting Minutes December 18, 2023
3. Memo from Assistant Town Administrator – Municipal Aggregation program update
4. Memo from Facilities Manager regarding Senior Center
5. Packet – ROF 432 Whitney Street
6. Cemetery Deed 1182