

SELECT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES – September 18, 2023

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

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

Michael Gallagher, Interim Town Administrator
Diane Wackell, Interim Assistant Town Administrator
Scott Charpentier, DPW Director
Kristin Black, Health Director
Jennifer Bruneau, Library Director
Jeff Farrell, Veteran’s Director
Jason Little, Finance Director
Laurie Connors, Planning Director

PUBLIC COMMENT

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

DPW DIRECTOR SCOTT CHARPENTIER

Consideration of fee schedule for snow removal and treatment on private ways.

Mr. Charpentier proposed the fee schedule for plowing and treatment services of private ways for the 2023-2024 winter season. The proposed schedule includes a \$5.00 increase from last season’s rate of \$220.00 to \$225.00 per storm per treatment. This is an annual increase which is necessary to cover increased costs of labor, fuel and materials.

Residents of the private ways that received plowing and treatment services during the last winter season were notified of tonight’s consideration to increase the fees. No concerns were heard from any of the residents.

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to set the fees for plowing and treatment of private ways less than 3,000 feet for the 2023-2024 winter season as follows: \$225.00 per storm per private way for plowing; \$225.00 per storm per private way for treatment; SB Member Ziton seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

HEALTH DIRECTOR KRISTIN BLACK

Acceptance of drug free community grant.

Kristin Black was pleased to inform the Board that the Northborough Community Coalition, Encompass, was awarded a federal grant in the amount of \$125,000 per year for 5 years. The money will be used to hire a full-time Substance Abuse Coordinator, whose primary role will be

focused on helping to reduce alcohol and nicotine use among youth in the Northborough/Southborough communities. At the end of the 5-year period, it can be reapplied for another 5-year grant.

SB Member Ziton moved the Board vote to accept the Drug-Free Communities Support Program grant as presented by Kristin Black pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44, Section 53A, and authorize expenditure by the Northborough Board of Health; SB Member Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

LIBRARY DIRECTOR JENNIFER BRUNEAU

To request for ARPA funding for Library health and wellness projects.

The Library Director presented 2 requests for ARPA spending, noting that these requests comes out of the Be Well initiative and the Library’s role in taking on some of the responsibilities of the initiative.

Request 1: \$7,000 for the purpose of limited reprinting of the Northborough Community Resource Guide. Ms. Bruneau explained that the original resource guide, which was printed in 2022, contains outdated information, most notably, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Hotline, discovered by Library staff while editing the document. The document is now updated and there is a more user-friendly on-line version available, which is easily updated. This request is for a graphic designer to reformat the printed version; 3,000 hard copies of the Guide; and 3,000 magnets with a QR code that will direct the person to the online current version of the Guide.

Following some questions and comments from members of the Board, it was decided that they wait until they receive the building assessment report before making a decision on this ARPA funding request.

Request 2: \$20,000 for the purpose of hiring a consultant to conduct a needs assessment, research and deliver a three-year Strategic Plan for the library that focuses on planning and executing a variety of health and wellness initiatives. Ms. Bruneau began by saying the library would like to hire a consultant to develop a strategic plan that will strengthen the library’s position in meeting community needs with regards to health and wellness. The ideal consultant would have a strong background in health and wellness programming as well as knowledge of public library services.

Following some questions and comments from the Board, it was also decided that they wait until they receive the building assessment report before making a decision on this ARPA funding request.

Mr. Cohen indicated that the Board include this at their October meeting and added that Ms. Bruneau would not need to be present.

VETERANS DIRECTOR JEFF FARRELL

To request the Board's support of Northborough's continued participation in the Central Massachusetts Veterans' Service District, including support of the re-application to the Secretary of the Department of Veteran's Services to maintain the District status.

Mr. Farrell indicated that this request would allow the Town to continue working with the District. He also mentioned that the Veterans Office has relocated from the Town Hall to the Senior Center, which has been a welcomed change.

SB Member Maselli moved the Board vote to authorize the Chair to send a letter to the State Department of Veteran's Services in support of the application for renewal of the Central Massachusetts Veterans' Services District for the Towns of Northborough, Grafton, Shrewsbury and Westborough; SB Member Ziton seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	"aye"	Maselli	"aye"
Wixted	"aye"	Cohen	"aye"
Ziton	"aye"		

FINANCE DIRECTOR JASON LITTLE

To request the Board take action to offer additional senior tax relief, specifically to vote to make changes to the criteria surrounding the Work-off Program.

Mr. Little informed the Board that the Senior Center and Assessors Office have revived discussions surrounding potential changes to the Senior Tax Work-Off program. The Town could make changes to the program through a vote of the Select Board. A prior Select Board set the benefit limit at \$1,000 and enacted a fixed income limit of \$40k for individuals or \$55k per multi-person household in 2017. The Board has the option of increasing the benefit limit to a maximum of \$1,500 and removing income limits. Currently there are 10-20 senior volunteers participating in this program, however there may be more interest if income limits are removed.

SB Member Ziton moved the Board vote to expand the Senior Tax Work-off program criteria adopted by the Select Board as its July 17, 2017 meeting as follows: remove income limits for eligibility, provide for a maximum annual abatement of \$1,500 at current Massachusetts minimum wage rates, set an annual aggregate benefit limit of \$40,000 and make such changes effective immediately pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 59 Section 5k; SB Member Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	"aye"	Maselli	"aye"
Wixted	"aye"	Cohen	"aye"
Ziton	"aye"		

PLANNING DIRECTOR LAURIE CONNORS

Continuation of ARPA request to establish a Northborough sign & façade program.

SB Chair Cohen began by stating that this is a continued discussion. At the last meeting, it seemed as if the Board had some level of interest in this request, but requested some changes to the program.

Laurie Connors provided the Board with a red-lined copy of the project description which includes the changes as requested by the Board at their last meeting. She also provided a clean copy. Ms. Connors reviewed the changes with the Board.

After a discussion, several of the members of the Board expressed concerns regarding the reason to use a 3-member committee rather than a 5-member committee and how decisions to award the projects will be made; some members also expressed concerns with the roles of the town staff and architect on the committee.

Public comments were heard from the following residents:

Scott Rogers, 26 Tomahawk Drive

Rick Leif, 30 Wiles Farm Road, MPIC Chair

SB Member Wixted moved the Board vote to approve the use of ARPA funds in the amount of \$250,000 to establish a Northborough Sign & Façade Program and for expenditure of such sum by the Planning Director pursuant to Massachusetts General Law Chapter 44, Section 53A; SB Member Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Hirsh	“aye”	Maselli	“no”
Wixted	“aye”	Cohen	“aye”
Ziton	“no”		

SB INTERVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Recommendations from the SB Interview Subcommittee for appointments to Boards and Committees. Information was included in the SB Interview Subcommittee meeting minutes included in the meeting packet.

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to appoint Jennifer Tolman to the Master Plan Implementation Committee for a partial two-year term to expire on April 30, 2025 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Ziton seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

SB Member Wixted moved the Board vote to appoint Olia Groza to the Community Affairs Committee for a partial three-year term to expire on April 30, 2026 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

SB Member Wixted moved the Board vote to appoint Olia Groza to the Diversity, Inclusion, Equity & Belonging Committee for a partial two-year term to expire on April 30, 2025 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

SB Member Wixted moved the Board vote to appoint Mary Alexandra Molina to the Diversity, Inclusion, Equity & Belonging Committee for a partial three-year term to expire on April 30, 2026 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to appoint Chris Wilson to the Recycling Committee for an indefinite term as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to appoint Bryan Cole to the Traffic Safety Committee for a partial one-year term to expire on April 30, 2024 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Ziton seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to appoint Kate Girard to the Traffic Safety Committee for a partial two-year term to expire on April 30, 2025 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Ziton seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

SB Member Wixted moved the Board vote to appoint Christopher Deacetis and Rachel Armstrong to the Traffic Safety Committee for a partial three-year term to expire on April 30, 2026 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; SB Member Ziton seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

CONSIDERATION OF OPEN MEETING LAW RESPONSE

For complaint filed against the Select Board regarding the September 12, 2023 meeting by Patrick Higgins and Associates.

Mr. Gallagher indicated that this agenda item concerns an open meeting law complaint filed by Patrick Higgins dated September 12, 2023 regarding the Board’s meeting of September 11, 2023, a copy of which is included in the meeting packet. He reviewed the complaint and provided a

brief outline of the process for acting on Open Meeting Law complaints, adding that the board review the complaint and decide what action to take.

After review and discussion, SB Member Ziton moved the Board vote to find that, after review of the open meeting law complaint regarding the Board's meeting of September 11, 2023, there was an inadvertent violation of the law with respect to the announcement for Agenda Item 1 – Executive Session on SA Farm and Marlborough Wastewater Plant Litigation Matters, and an inadvertent violation of the law on account of the fact that the Chair did not announce that the meeting was being recorded; that the only remedial measure needed with respect to the Board's meeting of September 11, 2023 is that for all future recorded meetings the Chair announce that the meeting is being recorded, and for all future executive sessions relating to litigation the Chair make the statement that an open session discussion would be detrimental to the Board's or Town's litigating position; and that the Interim Town Administrator report this vote to Mr. Higgins. SB Member Hirsh seconded the motion; The roll call vote was taken as follows:

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

Mr. Gallagher will respond to the complaint.

REPORTS

Julianne Hirsh

- No Report

Laura Ziton

- No Report

Kristen Wixted

- Thanked all volunteers on boards, committees and commissions for volunteering their service to the town.
- Stated that if you are appointed to a board, committee or commission, please make every effort to attend the meeting. Without a quorum the meeting can't be held.
- Mentioned that Helping Hands is holding their annual winter gear drive and the deadline to donate is October 16th.

Lisa Maselli

- Thanked the volunteers for coming forward and added that there are still openings for people to get involved.
- Asked for an update from MRI regarding the Town Administrator search. SB Chair Cohen indicated that this is under his report.
- Asked what needs to be done to get the voting clickers in place for Town Meeting as per a previous discussion. It was mentioned that this is probably something that will have to be approved at Town Meeting first.

Mitch Cohen

- Attended the Solar Jazz Festival at First Parish Church

- Update on Town Administrator search: The position was advertised on September 5th and will run for 30 days. Discussed a schedule with MRI and it is estimated that the finalist interviews with the Board will take place the week before Thanksgiving.
- Noted that Amazon Prime Day is October 10-11, 2023, and he reached out to the contact at Amazon to a flagger for the following week to assist with the anticipated increased truck traffic.
- Mentioned the power outage that occurred earlier today which was caused by a car hitting a pole on Church Street. Would like to inquire about installation of a guardrail on that section of Church Street, as this has been a cause of concern for residents in the past.

OTHER BUSINESS

None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

SB Chair Cohen invited comments from the public.

Scott Rogers, 26 Mohawk Drive – Noted that the Select Board Liaisons list on the website is not current.

ADJOURNMENT

SB Member Hirsh moved the Board vote to adjourn; SB Member Ziton seconded the motion; all members voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 10:43 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lynda LePoer
Executive Assistant to the
Board of Selectmen

Documents used during meeting:

1. September 18, 2023 Meeting Agenda
2. Memo – Fees for Snow Removal on Private Ways
3. Memo – Acceptance of Drug Free Community Grant
4. Memo – Request for ARPA Funding Health and Wellness Projects
5. Memo – Central Massachusetts Veterans' Service District
6. Memo – Senior Tax Relief Options - Senior Tax Work-off Program
7. Information Packet – Request for ARPA Funding for Northborough Sign & Façade Improvement Program
8. SB Interview Committee Meeting Minutes from August 15, 2023, August 29, 2023, and September 15, 2023
9. Open Meeting Law Complaint document dated September 12, 2023