

Shutesbury Select Board Meeting Minutes
April 14, 2020 Virtual Meeting

Makepeace-O'Neil calls the virtual meeting to order at 5:32pm.

Select Board members present: Makepeace-O'Neil/Chair, Elaine Puleo, and April Stein

Staff present: Becky Torres/Town Administrator; Linda Avis Scott/Administrative Secretary

Guests: Jeff Lacy, Leslie Luchonok, Bob Groves/FinCom; Catherine Hilton and Arlene Read/Board of Health; Police Chief Dan Fernandes

Agenda Review: Per Torres, Police Chief Fernandes will provide a departmental update.

Public Comment:

1. Jeff Lacy states that he wishes to talk about the budget and asks if the public will have an opportunity to participate in the discussion. Makepeace-O'Neil: yes. Lacy: the Planning Board zoning bylaw amendment articles have been reviewed with Town Counsel Donna MacNicol and there are changes that could be made prior to the public hearing. Lacy suggests that the Planning Board will have a meeting, make the changes, then resubmit the articles to the Select Board who (once receipt is acknowledged) will return the articles to the Planning Board prior to the public hearing. Torres asks for confirmation of Lacy's process. Lacy explains that he reviewed the proposed amendments with MacNicol, per Planning Board Chair Deacon Bonnar, the Planning Board will meet to make the changes and resubmit them to the Select Board who will return them to the Planning Board.
2. Bob Groves states the he wishes to raise thoughts/ideas regarding the FY21 budget and notes there has not been a recent FinCom meeting. Torres to Stein's question: due to tonight's Select Board meeting, the FinCom meeting has been rescheduled to 4.21.20. Groves: the FinCom needs to address current issues.

Discussion Topics:

1. Police Department Update: Police Chief Fernandes reports that the hiring process is at a standstill; currently, the Chief is working 7am-3pm/5 days/week and Officer Johansson is working 2pm-10pm/5 days/week; Officer Kristen Burgess, due to decreased hours for her other job, is available to work more hours and will be on duty 32 hours this week; the Department's goal is to maintain social distancing and still be visible. Stein acknowledges that the police officers continue to patrol the town. Fernandes: Officers Johansson and Burgess are doing a good job being visible to the community. Fernandes to Makepeace-O'Neil's question: yes, the Department has enough personal protective equipment (PPE); a container of hand sanitizer was recently donated and all the officers are working well together. Fernandes: in order to be fully staffed, different options for hiring need to be considered. Fernandes to Makepeace-O'Neil's question: he needs to talk with the applicants in the queue; a staffing update is expected for the next Select Board meeting. Lacy: last year, there was a proposal for salary increases and some cutback in hours, is this still in effect? Fernandes: the pay-scale was brought up to Franklin County standards and the Department is "down" coverage at this time. Fernandes leaves the meeting.

2. Board of Health Support Letter: Stein states she feels strongly about the importance of Board of Health's role during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for the Select Board to take a stand and show a unified front of support and suggests the letter might come from the police and fire chiefs as well. Puleo reports that while watching the recent Board of Health meeting, she found their deliberation very informative and supports their work. Makepeace-O'Neil supports the Board of Health's work as well, as theirs is not an easy task. Catherine Hilton receives the Select Board's appreciation on behalf of the Board of Health. Stein clarifies her idea to have the police and fire chiefs acknowledge their appreciation for the Board of Health; Makepeace-O'Neil agrees with Stein's suggestion. Hilton asks if the Select Board needs any additional documentation. Puleo appreciates the information the Board provides to the community. Arlene Read/Board of Health: the case numbers are under-represented. Read to Puleo's question: the only test site in Franklin County is located at Baystate Franklin Medical Center. Both Hilton and Read acknowledge that those who are not tested are not counted. Per Hilton, during the 4.14.20 Department of Public Health teleconference call, a testing task force will be going into nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Hilton, noting that the USPS states there is no danger of contamination from mail, expresses concern about post office staff not wearing masks or gloves. It is noted that the Town has no authority over the Federally managed US Postal Service. Hilton suggests the Board of Health send a letter encouraging local post office staff to wear masks and gloves. Stein moves the Select Board sign the letter of support for the Board of Health and include Fire Chief Tibbetts and Police Chief Fernandes if they so desire; Puleo seconds the motion. Roll call vote: Puleo: aye, Stein: aye, and Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the motion carries. Puleo notes that because Zoom only keeps meeting recordings on the Cloud for 90 days, meeting files need to be downloaded. Torres: a hard drive has been allocated for this purpose. Puleo suggests keeping the video recording until meeting minutes have been approved. Torres will check updated guidance on maintaining Zoom recordings. Hilton suggests keeping just audio files. Makepeace-O'Neil thanks Hilton and Read for attending the meeting. Hilton and Read leave the meeting.
3. Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020: Torres, referring to Sections 10-12, notes that tax payment relief needs to be authorized by Select Board, the Town's chief executive officers; the due date for real estate taxes can be extended from 5.1.20 to 6.1.20. Torres refers to the 4.14.20 email received from a resident requesting tax payment relief. Stein asks how waiving late fees waived would impact the Town's cash flow? Groves, noting that the Town receives revenue from escrow agreements with banks, supports waiving penalties to take pressure off those in need. Torres: per Tax Collector McKay, in general, folks are paying their taxes though there are those who have been unable to pay; if the Board votes to extend payment to 6.1.20, banks may withhold escrow payments until that date. Puleo noting that waiving fees would help those in need though would not affect escrow payments from banks, suggests waiving fees for three months then review further need. Torres: the Select Board's authority to waive fees is limited by the legislation; McKay has the authority to waive a certain amount of interest. Groves: then waiving fees could be done administratively. Torres: citizens may be expecting a due date extension; the payment extension provided for in the legislation is only for 30 days. Leslie Luchonok: there may be families who are struggling and will be stressed if they do not

know there is an extension and waiving of fees. Methods for notifying the public are considered. Stein: the Select Board's authorization to waive needs to be ensured; Plan B is to defer tax payment to 6.1.20. Torres: the Select Board is authorized to waive interest/penalties for excise and property taxes for a specific period. Makepeace-O'Neil suggests waiving interest/penalties for the quarter, to 8.1.20, which will allow folks to pay a portion of their tax bill over time without penalties. Puleo moves the Select Board waive penalties for unpaid FY20 fourth quarter real estate tax bills to 8.1.20; Stein seconds the motion. Roll call vote: Stein: aye, Puleo: aye, and Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the motion carries. Makepeace-O'Neil recommends planning for an emergency vote on Plan B, to extend tax due date to June 1, 2020, if waiving penalties to 8.1.20 is not doable and appreciates Luchonok's input. Torres: referring to Section 11, the Select Board can extend the deadline for exemptions from 4.1.20 to a date not later than 6.1.20; Administrative Assessor Kevin Rudden believes this will be helpful for those whose circumstances have changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and supports an affirmative vote. Stein moves the Select Board extend the due date for exemptions from 4.1.20 to 6.1.20; the motion is seconded by Puleo. Roll call vote: Stein: aye, Puleo: aye, and Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the motion carries. Stein refers to Section 15's guidance on holding a remote annual town meeting. Puleo suggests using a parking lot at UMass and a public address system along with a Zoom meeting. Torres: there is not an effective way to vote via Zoom. Puleo expects most residents would attend by car. Makepeace-O'Neil: Zoom does have an option to poll by person. Stein suggests having a larger discussion in May when there is a better sense of what may be needed.

4. Draft ATM Warrant and Budget: Torres, referring to the draft FY21 budget, notes the need to ensure revenue projections; the legislators are working hard to determine funding for FY21 though feel confident in FY20 funds; a lot of money is being spent and it is hoped that the economic engine will not totally stop; this is a tough picture and forecasting is difficult to do because it is based on history; staying updated on the status of state aid is necessary as this is a significant portion of the Town's budget. Makepeace-O'Neil notes that the school budget will not be overspent; will any excess come back to Town? Torres: aside from the cafeteria being closed and a decrease in electricity, there are no significant changes. Groves: there is a need to look very hard at every departmental budget because the Town may be facing a decrease in revenue from our own taxpayers; we have an obligation to do what we can, even town employees. To Groves' question, Torres agrees that school transportation costs may be decreased and notes the need to look at the bus company contract. Groves: as Torres said, the Town is in uncharted waters and all departments need to consider decreasing their budgets; there is a need to look at a bare bones budget. Groves states that he will be preparing a document for the 4.21.20 FinCom meeting. Puleo agrees with Groves' recommendation to review the budget for possible savings, i.e. transportation, and acknowledges that the FY21 budget is the FinCom's purview. Groves states that he has not noticed any diminishment in Police Department service with fewer staff; do we really need another hire? Torres notes the need to review revenue projections; at this moment, tax collections are solid and departments are very shallow; the financial team is working part-time from home and staggering their hours in Town Hall to maintain distancing; the functionality of essential services needs to be ensured. Lacy: there should be some options for savings this year,

i.e. the fire and dump trucks have been paid for so those amounts should drop out of the budget and there is the 3% reduction in the regional assessment; also, take a look at the across the board employee 3% raise; a 3% global shrinkage is expected. Lacy urges the Select Board and FinCom to take a look at the 3% raises as this may not be the year to do so. Torres: the draft warrant is pending the CPC warrant articles. Puleo: the CPC will be meeting 4.16.20. Torres: the broadband enterprise fund article is a rough draft; capital expenditures total \$45,000 which is unusually low. Torres will talk with Town Moderator Paul Lyons about the order of the articles and will prepare a more complete draft for the 4.28.20 meeting. Torres explains that the Town may want to utilize the low borrowing rate for broadband. Torres: Treasurer Ryan Mailloux will be providing an update on the MLP debt service. Puleo moves the Select Board approve and sign State EOHED contract for \$164,216 and approve the “Second Amendment to Grant Agreement Attachment C” for “Make Ready True-Up Funds” for \$164,216; the motion is seconded by Stein. Roll call vote: Stein: aye, Puleo: aye, and Makepeace-O’Neil: aye; the motion carries. Puleo moves the Select Board approve and sign the “Drop Cost Assistance Request Application” letter for \$312,000; Stein seconds the motion. Roll call vote: Stein: aye, Puleo: aye, and Makepeace-O’Neil: aye; the motion carries. Torres: per Gayle Huntress’ email, the funds are expected before end of June 2020.

5. Annual Town Meeting/Election Calendar: Torres confirms that the annual municipal election has to happen before 6.30.20 and explains the absentee/early voting procedure requiring three mailings for each ballot. Puleo asks if there is any way to hold a safe form of outside early voting with Registrars taking turns with assigned times for alphabet/last names. Torres: outside voting would be susceptible to the weather and there is the need for ballot security. Torres: the plan is for the Assistant Town Clerk to alternate some office hours with the Town Clerk; all of the ballot applications must be run through the VRIS (State computer) therefore cannot be done remotely. Stein: this is an enormous amount of work for the Town Clerk’s office. Torres: the mailings for early/absentee voting will start on May 1st; Mosher is very motivated to ensure the election process works; the date for annual town meeting can be moved and there are tools for managing finances, however, the election must be held.
6. COVID-19 Discussion: Torres: Brian McHugh/Franklin Regional Housing Authority is investigating an initiative to use CPA funds to help with rental assistance; the CPC will be considering the concept during their 4.16.20 meeting. Torres: the past week has been quiet for the Board of Health, Fire and Police Departments; with State assistance, MERC manufacturers are shifting their production to making needed PPE supplies; with utilization of short-term facilities, the bed count is up by 40%. Per Torres, there will be a 4.15.20 legislative update with State Representative Natalie Blais and State Senator Jo Comerford.
7. Town Administrator Updates: Torres recommends postponing the executive session for the PILOT pending substantive feedback from Jeff Macel/Lodestar; the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Core Team meeting is scheduled for 4.16.20. Torres notes the need for staff to continue to be paid in full. Puleo recommends Select Board representation at the 4.21.20 FinCom meeting. Torres is waiting for a call back from a

potential contractor to do the work in the Town Administrator's office and Crocker will be installing additional wi-fi power in town hall next week.

Administrative Actions:

1. On behalf of the Select Board, Makepeace-O'Neil will sign vendor warrants totaling \$633,018.06.
2. On behalf of the Select Board, Makepeace-O'Neil will sign payroll warrants totaling \$93,175.01.
3. On behalf of the Select Board, Makepeace-O'Neil will sign broadband warrants totaling \$64,648.81.
4. Approval of the 2.18.20 meeting minutes remains pending.
5. Puleo moves and Stein seconds a motion to approve the 3.31.20 meeting minutes. Roll call vote: Puleo: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye, Stein: aye; the 3.31.20 minutes are approved as presented.
6. Puleo moves and Stein seconds a motion to approve the 4.6.20 meeting minutes. Roll call vote: Stein: aye, Puleo: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the 4.6.20 meeting minutes are approved as presented.

At 7:25pm, Stein moves and Puleo seconds a motion to adjourn the meeting. Roll call vote: Stein: aye, Puleo: aye, Makepeace-O'Neil: aye; the motion carries.

Documents and Other Items Used at the Meeting:

1. Draft 4.7.20 letter to the Board of Health
2. Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020
3. KP Law eUpdate "Municipal Relief Legislation Passed by State Legislature April 3, 2020"
4. Draft FY21 warrant and budget
5. EOHED Standard Contract Form
6. "Second Amendment to Grant Agreement Attachment C"
7. "Drop Cost Assistance Request Application" letter
8. 4.1.20 email from Gayle Huntress/MLP Manager

Respectfully submitted,
Linda Avis Scott
Administrative Secretary