

SELECTBOARD AND BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING

Due to COVID-19 Public Participation is by Zoom

March 22, 2021

Remote Zoom Meeting was opened at 6:30 PM. Present were Selectpersons Rich Kuklewicz, Michael Nelson, and Chris Boutwell, Town Administrator Steve Ellis, Executive Assistant Wendy Bogusz, Board of Health Chair Al Cummings, BOH Member Anne Stuart, Director of Public Health Daniel Wasiuk, State Representative Natalie Blais, Senator Joanne Comerford, Town Planner Walter Ramsey, Parks & Recreation Director Jon Dobosz, GMRSD Business Manager Joanne Blier, Police Chief Williams, Town Meeting Moderator Chris Collins, Finance Committee Chair Jen Audley, and Town Clerk Deb Bourbeau.

Video Recording link: <https://vimeo.com/527772817>

Selectboard Chair opens the meeting, including announcing that the meeting is being recorded and roll call taken.

Board of Health Chair opens the meeting, roll call taken.

Approve Minutes:

Joint Selectboard and Board of Health: March 8 and March 15, 2021

- *Boutwell makes the motion that the Selectboard approve the Minutes for the Joint Selectboard and Board of Health Meeting: March 8, 2021. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*
- *Boutwell makes the motion that the Selectboard approve the Minutes for the Joint Selectboard and Board of Health Meeting: March 15, 2021. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye*
- *Boutwell makes the motion that the Board of Health approve the Minutes for the Joint Selectboard and Board of Health Meetings: March 8 and 15, 2021. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Cummings - Aye*

Meeting with State Representative Natalie Blais and Senator Jo Comerford

Blais and Comerford express their appreciation and gratitude to the Town of Montague for all their hard work during the pandemic.

Kuklewicz lists the three priority items the Board has chosen to discuss with them: (1) Chapter 70 aid and student enrollment, (2) Create a Bridge Repair Funding program similar to Ch. 90, and (3) Assist with efforts to redevelop the Farren Care Center in a fashion that adds value to the Town.

Chapter 70 aid and Student Enrollment Discussion

- Blier states, "This year the enrollment decline was 100 students. Because of that we are knocked back to Hold Harmless by almost \$1 million. The Student Opportunity Act impacted us greatly and we were able to climb out of Hold Harmless by about \$500,000 on the Chapter 70 side. We expected Chapter 70 would continue to grow by about \$500,000. This year we are getting \$29,130 per pupil based on this year's enrollment."
- Comerford reports that the Senate has no intention of using Governor Baker's numbers. The Senate wants to make gains on the Student Opportunity Act and intends to accelerate the projected gains. She and Blais were able to get the 21st Century Education Fund into the Student Opportunity Act. That was capitalized at \$20 million, never spent due to a Baker administration decision. They need to recapitalize that money for schools of low and declining enrollment, to be able to do transformative planning with State financial support. There are a lot of things that need to be focused on in this coming budget including regional school transportation and special education funding.
- Blais states then when she shared the concerns with the Chairwoman of the Education Committee, she indicated that school enrollment being down is a trend that they're seeing across the State. This is on the mind of the Education Committee as they begin the budget process. Blais is serving on the Ways and Means Committee and education was raised in the committee hearing last week.
- In response to a question by Jeff Singleton, Comerford explains that Hold Harmless is meant to be regarding enrollment, using 2019 numbers.
- Singleton states, "When you subtract a minimum contribution with almost no enrollment from one that has an exaggerated enrollment, it has a devastating effect, particularly on declining enrollment districts that are doing pretty well with their wealth. And this is a problem shared with many districts out here."

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- Kuklewicz states he would like the State and House to keep in mind that transportation for multi-town districts becomes very burdensome on the budgets

Bridge Repair Funding Program Discussion

- Kuklewicz states that we have three large bridges that connects the community to the outside work and the cost to repair them is "unbelievable."
- Ellis states that in Montague, we have 109 miles of roadway. DPW is also responsible for 60 miles of sewer lines. The infrastructure costs are over \$3 million. Our annual allocation for Chapter 90 is around \$400,000. We need to think about a preventative maintenance fund to keep the bridges in solid repair, and we need to have a clear understanding of emergency prioritization for bridges that are closed.
- Blais states that she is on the Transportation Committee and the administration has proposed funding the Chapter 90 program at \$200 million. She is hopeful that through the budget process, they will be able to get that up to \$300 million.
- Comerford shares that they were able to insert the Culvert Repair Program into the Small Bridge Program as part of the transportation bond. She will support an increase in that so that culverts and small bridges can be considered in one pot of money.
- Comerford shares that the Municipal Vulnerability Plan is now able to be used for municipal planning and action around water sewer infrastructure.

Redeveloping the Farren Care Center Discussion

- Ellis states that both Blais and Comerford have been advocates and advisors and counselors to him regarding political gains for this project.
- Comerford states that as part of DPH's agreement with Trinity Health Care, they must fund the Town of Montague's exploration for the next phase of the building. They also have to secure it so it isn't a health risk to the community.

Other

- Kuklewicz lists other concerns on the list: (1) Affirm that commercial scale solar facilities are taxable, (2) Create a funding program for rural water and waste water infrastructure projects and operational changes, (3) Ensure full funding of State PILOT program, (4) Police Department Collaboration with Mental Health Counseling and Support Service Providers, (5) Advocate for rural regional transportation funding, (6) Continue Remote Participation Options for Public Meetings, (7) Fund library building renovation projects in small communities, and (8) Continue to Advocate for Programs to Redevelop Distressed Historical Industrial Buildings and Areas.
- Comerford states she would like a deeper conversation about industrial solar development.
- Blais states she welcomes the opportunity to have follow-up conversations. She shares that many of the things listed are being worked on.
- Blais shares that an Act has been introduced to increase transit accessibility in the Commonwealth. If passed, this will look at interconnections between the RTAs and how we're making sure that the PVTA and the FRTA are maximizing connections to serve all of the communities.
- Comerford states that the connection between PVTA and FRTA in the Transportation Bond Bill and funded is something we got added in and is mandated that the PVTA and FRTA talk to each other and figure out interconnection and what's needed in terms of resources.

COVID-19 Updates and Action Items

Update on Montague COVID case counts

Active cases from March 7 to March 20 equals 10; cumulative cases from October 1, 2020 to March 20, 2021 equals 216; and total cases from March 1, 2020 through March 20, 2021 equals 245.

Update on Vaccine Eligibility & County Clinics

- Everything continues to be very fluid and evolving.
- We are waiting to hear more updated information from FRCOG.
- We will be getting an allotment of 100 doses and we will be assisting the Montague Housing Authority for their second vaccine clinic. That leaves us about 30 doses that we need to administer in our two clinics at the annex.

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- Ellis states that FRCOG believes that the most effective way to provide our county-level vaccination services is through a single larger county site.
- Nelson feels that other than working with the FRCOG, he doesn't envision any other means coming through to us to provide services at a large-scale dispensing effort.
- Boutwell feels we have to come up with a way to help people who have difficulty getting to the larger site.
- Stuart states that almost everybody she has spoken to is not willing to travel to the Eastfield Mall; they want to be kept local.
- Ellis states that transportation for those who need it is something that is on decision-makers' minds.
- Cummings states that the Tech School clinic starts on the 9th, Sunrise Terrace and Keith Apartments clinics are starting on the 7th and 8th.
- Singleton comments that the interface between the system for administering shots and how the people sign up for the vaccine is creating massive frustration and negativity, and he wonders if there is any discussion on the State level or FRCOG on how to deal with this.
- **Review of Updated State Guidance or Orders**

Step 1 of Phase 4 of the reopening plan takes effect today:

 - Larger capacity sports and entertainment venues can operate at 12% capacity subsequent to submitting a plan to the Department of Public Health.
 - Gathering limits for venues in public settings is increased to 100 people indoors and 150 people outdoors.
 - Outdoor gatherings in private residences will remain at 25 people; indoor house gatherings remain at 10 people.
 - The Travel Order is now a Travel Advisory (all persons entering Massachusetts are advised to quarantine for 10 days).
 - Residents 60 and over are now eligible for the vaccine.

Request License for Extended Use of Public Property for Outdoor Retail and Dining

- **Country Creemee, 52 Avenue A, Turners Falls**

Boutwell makes the motion to approve the License for Extended Use of Public Property for Outdoor Retail and Dining for Country Creemee, 52 Avenue A, Turners Falls, and authorize the Chair to sign it. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye
- **The Upper Bend**

Boutwell makes the motion to approve the License for Extended Use of Public Property for Outdoor Retail and Dining for The Upper Bend, 112 Avenue A, Turners Falls, and authorize the Chair to sign it. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye

Jon Dobosz, Parks & Recreation Director

- **Parks & Recreation Spring Programs**

Dobosz reviews upcoming Spring Programs: T-Ball, Youth Baseball, and Youth Soccer from the end of April until the beginning of June. He reports that the EMT has no issues with the programs.
- **Installation of portable toilet at Unity Park and sanitizing protocols**
 - Due to the nice weather, Dobosz asks if the installation of the portable toilet can be moved up to an earlier date.
 - Daily cleaning would cost about \$700/month. This expense would be CARES-eligible.
 - The Board decides to continue with the daily cleaning.

Boutwell makes the motion to adjourn the Board of Health. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Cummings - Aye

Walter Ramsey, Town Planner

- **Canal District Gateway Improvement Project:**
 - **Review Permitting Design Plans and project budget and schedule**

Ramsey runs through the updated design plans and gives an overview of the project budget and schedule.
 - **Authorize final permitting submittals to Conservation Commission, Mass DOT and FERC**

Boutwell makes the motion to authorize the final permitting submittals to Conservation Commission, Mass DOT and FERC, and authorize the Chair to sign the necessary documents. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye

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- **Downtown Turners Falls Rapid Recovery Plan**
 - **Review of Project Scope, announce Downtown Business Owner Survey for Recovery Plan**
 - Ramsey reports that the Town was awarded a technical assistance grant through the Department of Housing and Community Development.
 - The value of the contract is \$60,000 for an outside expert.
 - The State has assigned us Dan Hodge, an economic analyst of Hodge Economic Consulting.
 - We will be working directly with business owners downtown and there will be opportunity for public input and engagement.
 - **Designate Town Planner as Community Representative for Downtown Turners Falls Rapid Recovery Plan**

Boutwell makes the motion to designate the Town Planner as Community Representative for Downtown Turners Falls Rapid Recovery Plan. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye

Deb Bourbeau, Town Clerk

Request to change Town Election from May 18, 2021 to another date before the end of the fiscal year

Nelson makes the motion to change the Town Election from May 18, 2021 to Tuesday, June 22, 2021. Seconded by Boutwell, unanimously approved. Nelson - Aye, Boutwell - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye

Planning for Annual Town Meeting

- Ellis explains that none of the June dates are ideal, and May 29 is Memorial Day weekend.
- Ellis suggests May 18 and May 20 as potential dates for a remote Town Meeting, and May 22 for an outdoor in-person meeting (raindate: May 23). He suggests surveying the Town Meeting members to get their opinions.
- In response to a question by Collins, Ellis states that we could have two separate in-person dates depending on what the Warrant looks like. However, there would be complexities if one meeting was in-person and the other was remote.
- Kuklewicz suggests sending the survey out on the week of April 5th and getting them back on the third week of April (deadline on the 15th).
- Audley agrees with the plan. She states that it would be helpful to know when the Selectboard is going to open the Warrant, as well as when they are going to close it.
- Kuklewicz suggests reading preliminaries either the week of April 19th or the 26th, with the final reading being on May 3rd.

Town Administrator's Report

- **Parking Ban**

The Board decides to leave the Parking Ban as is to give the DPW a chance to sweep the streets.

- **FRTA Meeting Update**

- Ellis states that FRTA is continuing to proceed with plans to construct a new highway garage near the end of Sandy Lane. They have hired an architect, HTA; and hope to have it bid by early summer, have shovels in the ground in August/September, and see its opening by the following summer.
- Singleton reports that he presented the motion regarding weekend service to the FRTA Board and it passed unanimously.
- Singleton reports that he presented the motion to have the FRTA Board vote on the Five-Year Transit Plan and it passed it unanimously.

- **11 Power Street Update**

- EPA's clean-up action is ongoing. The project is off to a good start.
- Ellis thanks Mike Brown and the TF Water Department for their assistance.
- Ellis suspects that the project may be done as soon as the end of next week, but Bergeron will give a more specific update when he has that information.
- Bergeron has spoken with bridge company staff and experts and received full validation for the approach that we are taking.

- **Cannabis Impact Fee Update**

- Ellis reviews the 253 Farmacy Summary of Expense sheet.

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- Ellis suggests that the Board endorse adding Annual Town Meeting Articles to withdraw \$14,011.78 from the Cannabis Impact Fee Stabilization account for the purposes of reimbursing the Town for its services, and allocating \$5,538.12 to reimburse the TF Fire Department for its expenses.

Boutwell makes the motion to ask the Town Administration to prepare the necessary documents for the upcoming Annual Town Meeting. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye

- **Topics not anticipated in 48 hour posting**

None

Executive Session pursuant to G.L. c.30A, §21 (a)(6) to consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property related to the 5th Street Bridge construction where the discussion in open session would be detrimental to the Town's negotiation position.

Boutwell makes the motion to enter into Executive Session pursuant to G.L. c.30A, §21 (a)(6) to consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property related to the 5th Street Bridge construction where the discussion in open session would be detrimental to the Town's negotiation position. Seconded by Nelson, unanimously approved. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye

Due to technical difficulties we were unable to log back into the meeting.

Boutwell made the motion to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:15 PM. Seconded by Nelson, approved unanimously. Boutwell - Aye, Nelson - Aye, Kuklewicz - Aye