

*Minutes*

**SELECT BOARD**

Monday, March 23, 2020, 6:00 p.m.

Town Hall, 5 Academy Hill Road

**To call in: 413-369-1541; PIN 1541**

*Select Board present:* Phil Kantor; Bob Armstrong (by telephone); John O'Rourke, Chair

*Others present:* **Audio recording of meeting was produced by Chris Collins of FCAT;** Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Lisa Turowsky, Assistant to the Town Administrator; Roy Cohen, IT; Jan Warner, Treasurer

*Minutes*

*March 16, 2020*

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to approve the minutes of March 16, 2020, seconded by Kantor, the vote was unanimous in favor. Armstrong abstained, having been absent.**

*Meetings Attended by Select Board Members*

Kantor went to a Highway Facilities Committee meeting, where there was enthusiasm for Franklin County Tech School students doing the trades work for the new Highway Maintenance facility (Town garage). While it would be more work and logistics to utilize the tech school students as subcontractors, with faculty and 8-10 students working on any given day, there could be up to \$300,000 in savings if all the trades are subcontracted out to the tech school. Kantor also went to a finance conference where the wisdom of keeping the Town's investments in equity markets was discussed. Because the Town has investments which have actually increased in value, there has been only a 2% loss this year. O'Rourke couldn't make the Highway Facility Committee meeting on Wednesday, but he met with Walter Goodridge and Ron Sweet on Thursday about utilizing the Tech School as subcontractors for construction of the Highway Maintenance facility.

*Public Comments*

Priscilla Lynch submitted a letter to the Select Board today about the Town's participation in the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership, which was voted on and approved by the Select Board rather than the people of Conway. Lynch stated that the citizens of Conway should be making the decisions as to how town forests are managed or not managed. Lynch's letter introduced the concept of proforestation, an increasingly popular alternative to the cutting plans proposed by foresters. She noted that the timeframe for beginning the development of forest plans in April and completing it in June is insufficient. O'Rourke responded that there will be time for public meetings. He thinks the Partnership is a good thing for the Town to be involved in. Hutcheson added that he thought the Town has need of a forest management plan, the last of which was done 20 years ago. Hutcheson said he thinks it's important for people to voice their concerns/priorities for the Town forest. The current forestry management mechanism is for multiuse planning. Hutcheson also noted that the current, old management plan prioritized habitat. Kantor said he favors advancing proforestation into the discussion. He said when the MTWP plan was first advanced, it seemed that it would support carbon sinks in Town forests instead of forcing Towns to log. He was disappointed to see that not enough work was put into the proposal; he sees it as recycling the 1990 plan. The grant called for thousands of dollars for payments to two different foresters, as well as \$6,000 to FRCOG to administer the grant. The grant didn't advance the purpose Kantor thought the Town was joining the partnership for. Lynch said we won't get to climate change resilience if forests are being cut. These conversations need to include townspeople and not be conducted solely by foresters. Lynch insisted that a fair and open presentation of proforestation be done. She cautioned that four forests in Conway are now slated for extraction by foresters; throwing around terms like sustainable forestry was misleading. The goals

of the townspeople need to be addressed. O'Rourke said they'll talk to FRCOG and try to schedule some public meetings when restrictions on public gatherings due to Coronavirus has ended. Kantor told Priscilla that the Select Board voted on joining the partnership per the statute. He added that maybe the issue of the Town joining the partnership deserves a citizens' petition at a Town Meeting; such a decision at Town Meeting would be binding.

#### *Old Business*

##### *Report on post-emergency declaration Town operations*

Hutcheson gave an extensive report on Town operations to let people know what the Town is doing to keep things functioning smoothly. He stated that in general things are going smoothly. He and Lynn Kane are taking care of the mail. Lisa Turowsky is working from home. She continues to coordinate IT issues with IT consultant Roy Cohen. The Treasurer and Tax Collector had a conference call last Friday. The Town Clerk continues to work from the Town Office; she does a lot of work on the State computer which she hasn't accessed remotely. Laura Hutt in the Assessors' Office is now working from home with some phone access. The Board of Health has been at the center of State communications re: COVID19. Hutcheson has arranged for three conference lines for Town committees. There was a conference call with EMD, Board of Health, and Public Safety representatives last Friday. We'll have a weekly check-in going forward.

Decreased State revenues resulting from the COVID19 stay-at-home order could lead to decreased support for the Town. For example, Ch. 70 in FY21 could be adversely affected, and the schools are waiting for word from the State before finalizing their budgets. The Town side of the FY21 budget will fare better, as there's less state aid. However, the impact on the school side, which gets about \$1M in state aid, could be grave, and the Town might have to support the schools even more than it usually does.

##### *Discussion of State actions*

There have been a number of executive orders from Governor Baker. One such order that was released today prohibits indoor assemblages of more than 10 people. This information is up on the Town website, as is Conway's emergency declaration. Most of the action that is occurring to deal with the crisis has come from the Governor's office or from the Department of Public Health. The DPH website is excellent; a lot of official information is put on that website. [Mass.gov/COVID19](https://www.mass.gov/COVID19) is the website.

##### *Discussion of possible future options*

Hutcheson sought criteria for determining when to delay Town Meeting. Kantor noted we can't have it in the grammar school, which will still be closed to the public in early May. Hutcheson said a delay is legally the moderator's call, but Nick Filler is moving away sometime soon. When Town Meeting is held, a new moderator may have to be elected from the floor. We may be able to post the Town election warrant separate from Town Meeting. The question of appropriate messaging to the public came up; Kantor urged the Select Board to plan for and communicate a worst-case scenario. O'Rourke said we're nowhere near the worst case and declined to discuss a worst-case scenario further.

#### *New Business*

Appoint Veronique Blanchard as Assistant Emergency Management Director

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to appoint Veronique Blanchard as Assistant Emergency Management Director for a term ending 6/30/22, seconded by Kantor, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Appoint Hank Horstmann to the Town Hall and Town Office Renovation Committee

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to appoint Hank Horstmann for a term ending 6/30/21, seconded by Kantor, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Award contract to successful bidder for Town Hall Repair Project (cupola and front entrance)

There were five bids, one was nonresponsive, one was for more money than is available, and one quote was substantially lower than the two remaining. Hutcheson reviewed details of some of the quotes for the Select Board. He noted that the South Hadley firm that had the low quote was from South Hadley. They gave five references, and four of them reported the firm as doing “excellent” work. Since this firm responded to the request for quotes appropriately, and got good references, it should be considered both a “responsive” (to the quote) and “responsible” offer, and so the firm should be awarded the contract.

Kantor asked whether CPA was involved and if Malcolm Corse was duly impressed with the bid. He knows about the bids, said O’Rourke.

- **On a motion from O’Rourke to approve the contract with Larochelle Construction, Inc., for \$26,200, seconded by Kantor, Armstrong voted aye, O’Rourke voted aye, Kantor voted aye.**

*Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting*      *None.*

#### *Town Administrator update*

##### **Committees**

The Highway Facility Committee is continuing to meet, by conference call, and intends to move forward with the general bid April 9. At last report, the Committee intends to use the Franklin Regional High School community service program for the trades work—electrical, plumbing, and mechanical—all fully supervised, rather than accept any of the much more expensive trades bids, though what effect the recent order from the Governor will have is at this time unknown. We expect the notice of award to be April 21, 2020, with Contract Execution on April 30, 2020, and the project to be complete 180 days from then, or about October 30.

##### **Departments**

The Treasurer has requested a revision to the sick day policy, in order to simplify her recordkeeping—probably just earning the days back one-to-one, rather than half of the earned time relieving the deficit and half the time going to new hours, though this could leave a significant gap if someone has a new illness. I’m also considering requesting to cap the deficit to six weeks (the longest recovery period I’ve heard of).

#### *Concerns of Selectmen*

Kantor is concerned that the Select Board is not talking about/planning for worst case scenario. O’Rourke said we could talk about and plan for that.

O’Rourke is concerned about Conway Inn losing so much money; she can’t sell liquor off-premises, this interpretation was confirmed by Town Counsel. There seem to be others in the state who have requested that they be able to do that. O’Rourke asked residents to remember to frequent the Town’s food/drink establishments, the Conway Inn and Bakers Country Store.

- **On a motion from Kantor to send an official letter asking that Conway Inn be permitted to sell off-premises beverages and food, seconded by Armstrong, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

#### *Mail*

Priscilla Lynch’s letter about MTWP was already reviewed under Public Comments.

#### *Announcements*

*None.*

**Next meeting:** Scheduled for Monday, March 30, 2020 at Town Hall, 6:00 p.m., **and by conference call at 369-1541, PIN 1541**