

Minutes

SELECT BOARD

Monday, March 30, 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 (remotely); John O'Rourke, Chair

Others present: Chris Collins (remotely taping audio for FCAT); Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Lisa Turowsky, Assistant to the Town Administrator (remotely); Roy Cohen, IT consultant (remotely); Kimberly McPhee, FRCOG (remotely); Gisele Litalien, Michelle Sanger, Cultural Council (remotely); Janet Chayes, OSC (remotely)

Minutes

March 23, 2020

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to approve the minutes of March 23, 2020, seconded by Kantor, O'Rourke voted aye, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Warrants

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to approve the vendor warrant of \$25,792.39, the payroll warrant of \$121,997.15; and the payroll deduction warrant of \$30,938.18, seconded by Kantor, O'Rourke voted aye, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Meetings Attended by Select Board Members

Kantor attended a virtual school committee meeting. Armstrong had a ConCom meeting online to postpone some site issues that the Commission has been working on. O'Rourke met briefly with Police Chief Ken Ouimette re: security issues in Town and what might be planned for the future; he also attended an MMA conference call with Zoom; Armstrong and Hutcheson were also on the call. There were 255 participants on the call, and it went well, said O'Rourke. There will be similar calls every Tuesday from 1 to 2 p.m. for municipal officials. O'Rourke will forward Armstrong and Kantor the participant details.

Public Comments

None.

Old Business

Approve Hazard Mitigation Plan

Kantor asked if anything had been printed out, as this is a very long document. Hutcheson said no, and noted this is a draft; the FRCOG will print a final copy for the Town. McPhee thanked Committee members for all their work on the plan. FEMA will send a formal approval letter. Approval means that the Town will be eligible for pre- and post-disaster grant opportunities for a period of 5 years, such as the current proposal for Delabarre Ave., which depends on this approval. Robert Baker, George Murphy, Joe Strzegowski, Bob Armstrong, Tom Hutcheson, Ron Sweet, and Ken Ouimette were involved in putting this plan together. O'Rourke thanked them all. Kantor wanted there to be more about potential Ashfield dam failure. The plan can be approved and updated in the future as the Select Board sees fit. FEMA looks very favorable on this revision process, which the Town can convene and update as desired. McPhee would help if needed.

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to approve the hazard mitigation plan, seconded by Armstrong, O'Rourke voted aye, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Vote borrowing terms for Highway Maintenance Building

Treasurer's recommendation: 15-year note (with 10 years of supplemental free cash)

Kantor said he trusts Joe Markarian's judgment and would like to run Warner's recommendation by him. The vote doesn't need to be taken tonight. O'Rourke asked Hutcheson to call the FRCOG to seek out Markarian's opinion. The matter will be held in abeyance until the next Select Board meeting on April 6, 2020.

Letter supporting allowing retail alcohol establishments to sell beer and wine to go with a food order

Last week the Select Board expressed the intention to get a vote on bill HB 4580 which allows local establishments to sell food for take out and would include alcohol sales. O'Rourke said he hopes the Senate passed the bill this afternoon. There is one letter encouraging the Legislature to pass the bill, and another letter thanking them for doing so. Kantor asked someone to please call Barbara Llamas to let her know as soon as the bill passes.

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to sign the letter supporting allowing retail alcohol establishments to sell beer and wine to go with a food order, seconded by Kantor, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, O'Rourke voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor**

Revised sick pay policy

Hutcheson advised the Select Board that the new policy applies to all Town employees.

- **On a motion to pass the revised sick pay policy as amended for COVID-19-related illnesses and thereafter, O'Rourke voted aye, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

COVID-19 issues

Discussion of Town response and messaging

Hutcheson raised the issue of how the Town is talking to residents about the pandemic. He said that the Board of Health has a well-developed web page with helpful instructions; Turowsky is working on a more general page (things that people need to know) for the website. The Town has not dealt specifically with the urgency of the situation. O'Rourke asked if the website has links to state Department of Public Health information; the answer was yes.

Kantor reported that he looked at the President's disaster recommendation from last Sunday as it relates to specific programs providing for reimbursement if Towns incur costs for quarantining first responders that FEMA and MEMA will be carrying out. This issue is premature but Kantor stressed the importance of staying on top of reimbursement procedures if quarantining should become a necessity. Kantor also observed that people are hurting financially and things like tax bills are coming due. He asked if the Select Board has started planning for the worst-case scenario? He suggested looking at our budget to identify items that may not be necessary. According to the Department of Public Health, as of today, 49 people in Franklin County have tested positive for the corona virus. Kantor said people who are concerned about possible exposure are being told to go to Springfield for testing. As a result, there is no clear idea of how many people in Conway might have COVID-19; there have been no confirmed cases in Conway. Kantor would like to see more awareness of what's possible.

O'Rourke said all these things will be looked at carefully, and noted that social distancing is easier in a rural area like Conway. O'Rourke said he hopes fewer cases will continue to be seen in Conway. Armstrong said he thinks the Select Board should be actively setting a tone that people in Conway need to take this virus very seriously. At a minimum, people should go outside as rarely as possible, stay a good distance away from other people, and recognize that even things like going to the store are risky endeavors. Armstrong heard from a family member in health care that health care personnel are angry that people have not been taking the urgency of COVID-19 seriously enough. He gave examples of people being much more casual than they should be and stressed that we all need to respect what the state is asking us to do to slow the spread of the virus. Armstrong will work with Hutcheson on a statement for the Select Board to give to the Town's residents. The Select Board wants the tone to be helpful and not create undue anxiety. Kantor responded that there is nothing undue about the anxiety; the entire planet is involved, and people should be scared and anxious.

Resident Roy Cohen asked why the Select Board is still meeting physically. He opined that this practice showed a lack of appreciation of the longevity and duration of this virus. He reminded the Select Board that asymptomatic individuals could still be shedding virus particles. Cohen thought the practice of meeting together posed an unnecessary risk. Kantor pointed out that there were only three of them in a very large room and that he was sitting there with a mask on. The Select Board agreed that it was important to set an example for people in Town and decided to not meet in person going forward. Next week they will meet remotely.

Question of alternative housing for first responders exposed to virus

MEMA is beginning to arrange for housing/quarantine options for first responders who test positive for COVID-19. One big problem is that people have to go all the way to Shrewsbury to get tested, and testing can only be done if the person has one of the symptoms (cough, fever, aches) and tests negative for the flu. It would help if there were a place in western Mass. that people could go for testing. It might help if local legislators supported the idea of testing nearby. Either a whole wing or an entire building has to be involved, not just a few rooms, said Hutcheson. The current testing protocol for first responders calls for quarantine upon exposure, resulting in key people being quarantined away from where they work, thus taking people out of the work force.

Cultural Council grantees—request to pay for preparation if cancelled, in advance if postponed

Gisele Litalien said she would like to give out the Cultural Council grants in advance of the projects being completed, with the understanding that the projects would eventually be done. The Town would send checks to people who have already been granted awards but haven't received the money yet. O'Rourke asked how many grantees and how much money are involved. About \$4,000 will be given out to about 25 people. Cultural Council recommends that this money be given out in advance of projects being done. The Town is essentially a pass-through.

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to pay the vendors who have been approved by the Cultural Council for grants follow the practice of giving out the money before projects are done, seconded by Kantor, O'Rourke voted aye, Kantor voted aye, Armstrong voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Any related issues or policies

Armstrong said the Select Board didn't talk about why they're still having their meetings live. He thought it was the wrong statement for them to be gathering in person. Kantor said he was OK with meeting in the large General Purpose Room. Hutcheson opined that they should take the same social distancing precautions that other people are supposed to take. It was decided that next week's meeting will be totally remote. Anything that has to be signed, can be signed at the Town Office.

Electricity aggregation: compliance filing and other issues and updates

DPU has approved the electricity aggregation that Colonial will be operating. The subsequent meeting with Colonial has not been able to go forward due to the corona virus pandemic. There was a meeting with Colonial via teleconference. Electricity prices are falling now; by mid-May it will time for the towns to decide whether to join the aggregation or not. This will happen after Eversource has released their summer prices. Colonial is confident that aggregation prices will be lower than Eversource's prices. Colonial has to work out electronic signing of contracts with the towns.

New Business

Consider new Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership grant proposal

Janet Chayes spoke to the issue. She reported local State Forester Alison Wright had some ideas about the proposal. There is a maximum of \$20,000 available; this would be very useful. Chayes offered thoughts about trail improvements, in particular expanding onto Mohegan-Mohawk trail. Some trail improvements might be made from the end of Hoosac Road which crosses over the Deerfield River to Conway Station Road. The grant could help Chayes and others figure out what needs to be done. The purpose of the grant is to improve the forest, perhaps adding some recreational-based tourism. The focus should be on improving some trails and supporting some small businesses (biking, rafting). Chayes asked if FRCOG is going to prepare the proposal with OSC's input. There may be a regional angle too, including Deerfield and Shelburne in Conway's proposal. Hutcheson said it would make sense to reach out to FRCOG to see if other towns are doing similar things. It's not clear how competitive Conway would be as an individual town. Hutcheson said regional plans get more points when proposals are evaluated. Kantor had questions about the current grant award that supposedly went to Conway Town Forests. Chayes said it had forestry and outreach components that went to Conway and Rowe; she thought this grant looked good. As for the current grant, it doesn't specify if it's limited to public forests or if it could apply to private land too. There was discussion about carbon market aspects of the Partnership. The carbon market is complicated and expensive, according to Wright. It would be good to let private land issues as they relate to carbon market get hashed out in Vermont where a similar conversation is taking place. In any case, the Select Board has to make a decision on going forward at the next Select Board meeting. Everyone should get their ideas to Chayes, who will work with Peggy Sloan to have something to vote on next week. Recreation, trails, and other improvements Chayes spoke about earlier will all be considered.

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

Town Administrator update

Committees

The Newsletter Committee has done its job splendidly, and the newsletters should go in the mail tomorrow.

It seems a number of people did not read my memo to committee chairs and others regarding conference lines and picking up mail, so Lisa sent it again today, with an emphasis on communicating the contents to the members of their committees.

The Board of Health is managing state DPH and federal CDC information on their web page, and the Town is developing a page for more general information (along with a link to the BOH page).

Departments

The cupola contract was signed by the Accountant and I've sent it to Town Counsel for his signature as well (he has already approved the template contract). The Governor's order regarding construction exempts public infrastructure, so I assume it can go ahead if the contractor is willing. This would in fact be a good time, as no one else is using the building (except the Administrative Assessor, some evenings).

I've been in touch with Nick Filler. The closing on his house has been postponed, so it looks as though he'll be able to work with the Town should Town Meeting need to be postponed (which he can do for 30 days at a time).

There's a new amendment to the Family and Medical Leave Act for the pandemic that I'm sorting through with Jan and Susan Fentin. There's also a new two-week paid leave law for a variety of COVID-19 situations.

I sent e-mails to Rep. Blais and Sen. Hinds advocating for Section 17 of the Governor's municipal relief bill, allowing restaurants to also sell beer and wine together with food take-out orders, so the Town's advocacy would be heard even if the bill was signed before the Board got to sign the letter.

I sent a memo to staff regarding scheduling office hours and copied the Select Board for their information. It is difficult to maintain proper distances in the Town Office so schedules are being staggered.

I have included two handouts, one from the Board of Health and one a graph showing DPH numbers for COVID-19, which covers confirmed/presumptive cases reported to DPH. O'Rourke said reported cases are declining each day as testing is increasing.

Concerns of Selectmen

They emphasized the importance of patronizing our local businesses, Conway Inn and Bakers Country Store.

Mail

Announcements

Next week's meeting will be conducted remotely.

Next meeting: Scheduled for Monday, April 6, 2020 remotely at 413-369-1541, PIN 1541 at 6:00 p.m.