

MINUTES OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING DECEMBER 2, 2014

Chairman Smith called the meeting to order in the Senior Center at 6 PM with Mrs. Walter and Mr. Hevy also present.

Present in the audience were residents Trish Miller, Charles and Claudette Marshall, William Skrobol, and Ray Baillarger.

Mr. Smith reminded residents that the meeting would be both audio and video taped.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **November 18, 2014**
- **November 25, 2014**

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to approve the aforementioned minutes as written. So voted.

II. APPROVAL OF WARRANTS

- **School Officials Warrant #1027 for \$4,933.00**
- **School Warrant #1028 for \$125,854.75**
- **General Warrant #1030 for \$221,065.97**
- **Payroll Warrant #11 for \$323,902.28**

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to approve the aforementioned warrants. So voted.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- **The public has the opportunity to briefly comment on agenda items through the Chairman**

Mr. Smith noted that the residents in attendance could comment on any of tonight's agenda items through the Chair.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT

- **Tax rate approval**

Mr. Smith announced that the Department of Revenue has approved North Brookfield's FY15 tax rate at \$15.59. Mr. Smith congratulated the assessors for their efforts in the lengthy process of setting the tax rate.

- **Possible cuts in local aid by the governor**

Mr. Smith noted that Governor Patrick is considering budget cuts to deal with a \$300+ million deficit. He has said that he wants to cut local aid and some school aid funds. The House Speaker has rejected the cuts to local aid, but some of the school cuts may affect North Brookfield. In the meantime some Senior Executive staff and Legislative Staff as well as the Legislators may get salary increases. Nobody knows exactly what will happen, but it could be a problem for North Brookfield.

Mr. Hevy mentioned that the Town House funding of \$1,000,000.00 had been cut to zero, but with support from Senator Brewer was restored to \$500,000.00. Mr. Hevy thanked the Senator for his efforts.

Mrs. Walter mentioned that cuts in the Community Innovative Challenge grants will affect the Town. Mr. Smith concluded the discussion reading a list of potential cuts in education indicating that the Governor cannot act without the support of the Legislature in this case.

- **Update on Ch70 meeting in Holden**

Mr. Smith noted that all three Selectmen attended a forum in Holden two weeks ago to discuss the state's formula that is used to calculate Chapter 70 school district allocations. Mr. Smith pointed out that the Town's minimum local contribution is a factor in the calculation. North Brookfield and the smaller Towns that attended the Forum are all experiencing difficulty meeting the quota for this minimum contribution. There were approximately 100 local officials at the meeting, along with officials from the State's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The annual increases to the minimum local contribution of 6% to 7% far outstrip the ability of the smaller Town's to increase revenue to meet this obligation. This puts pressure on the general government side of a town's budget, or leads to override proposals that seldom pass at Town Meetings. Mr. Smith noted that a Commission set up by the State Legislature to study the Chapter 70 Formula and its components will hold a series of regional meetings. There is a meeting for Central Massachusetts proposed for some time in January.

As presented at the forum Mrs. Walter noted that the Chapter 70 formula is flawed as it uses two measures of wealth: aggregate personal Income levels and aggregate property values; to determine the minimum required contribution. Smaller communities like North Brookfield cannot absorb the financial impact of the use of these factors, as larger communities with larger aggregates in these areas are able to do.

Mr. Smith observed that the formula used by the Department of Education to determine a town's minimum local contribution is more than 20 years old. In addition, some of the people in attendance at the forum questioned the data used by the DESE to determine this minimum contribution and other items that impact the town's budget.

Mrs. Walter said that this meeting was an "eye-opener" for everyone who attended.

Forum information in more detail is included in Attachment # 1 of these minutes.

V. OLD BUSINESS

- **Town House Advisory Committee update/reduction in funding**

Mr. Hevy reviewed a letter from Ketav Patel, CFO for the state Department of Housing and Economic Development. (Attachment #2) The letter informs the Selectmen that a

\$1 million state appropriation to be used for the Town House has been reduced to \$500,000.00. Mr. Smith noted that Mrs. Walter worked on a scope of services and budget and drove the paperwork into Boston to be sure that it arrived in time.

Mr. Hevy reported that the Town House Advisory Committee (THAC) has been working hard on a game plan to address the issues at the Town House. The committee has developed an RFQ (Request for Qualification) that was sent to legal counsel for feedback. Town Counsel's proposed changes have been made, and it is ready to be sent to the Central Register. The committee hopes to have an architect on board by the end of January.

Mrs. Walter asked if the architect would serve as the Owner's Project Manager (OPM) and Mr. Hevy stated that he or she would.

Mr. Smith asked where the RFQ mentions that the Town would like an architect to have some experience working with historic buildings. Mrs. Miller pointed out that it is listed under Section 9 on Page 14. Mr. Smith stated that he would like to copy that entire paragraph verbatim and insert it right up front in paragraph two of the Introduction of the document.

Mr. Hevy stated that he was comfortable with Town Counsel's recommendations, and now that the information regarding the historic status of the building has been added he approves of the RFQ language. Mrs. Walter said that she was as well, so it was agreed to send the RFQ back to the THAC with the Board's blessing.

- **Accept donations to Police Vehicle Gift Fund**

Prior to reading the list of donations Mr. Smith commented that the donations were for the exclusive purpose of purchasing a police cruiser.

Mr. Smith reviewed the listing of people who have contributed to the Police Vehicle Gift Fund. (Attachment #3) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to accept the donations. So voted.

In response to a question from a resident, Mr. Smith explained that the difference between a police cruiser and a vehicle that is available to the general public. The Town cannot just go to a dealer and pick out any car.

Mrs. Walter noted that the base price of the cruisers has not increased all that much over the past few years; it is the cost of the enhanced electronics that keeps going up.

Mrs. Walter went on to say that the Town had the opportunity to do a capital exclusion to pay for two needed cruisers which would have increased the tax rate by .21 for one year. Mr. Hevy said that this capital exclusion was recommended by the Capital Improvement Planning Committee and the Finance Committee. Mrs. Walter stated that next time the town should provide more information through newspapers and other public media to better inform residents on Town ballot questions.

- **NBEMS contract amendment**

Mrs. Walter reviewed a proposed addendum to the Town's contract with the North Brookfield Emergency Squad. (Attachment #4) This is a regional agreement that will help three small towns have paramedic service 24 x 7. Mr. Hevy noted that it is very expensive to fund paramedic level; this will spread the cost among three towns; East Brookfield, Brookfield and North Brookfield.

Mr. Smith explained that this contract will be effective January 1st, and is contingent upon NBEMS having a valid contract with the towns of East Brookfield and Brookfield.

- **Finalize Budget Guidelines**

Mr. Smith reviewed the proposed budget guidelines for FY2016. (Attachment #5) Mr. Hevy moved, and Mrs. Walter seconded, a motion to approve the guidelines. So voted. Mrs. Walter noted that the Selectmen should plan on budget workshops for town officials and include the Finance Committee.

- **Project updates**

Mrs. Walter noted that she spoke was not able to speak with Steve Plonsker to ask about the progress with the Solterra project to be built at the abbey in Spencer.

There is a new solar project to be built on New Braintree Road. This will mean increased revenue for the Town.

The Town has not yet received the signed contract extension for the Murphy Road bridge project.

Mrs. Walter spoke with Erin Ryan from Senator Brewer's office today, and we hope to have the countersigned contract for the Town House money soon.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

There were no departmental reports.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

- **Appointment of William Skrobol to Cable Advisory Committee**

William Skrobol of 32 West Brookfield Road was present to state his interest in serving on the Cable Advisory Committee. He stated that he has lived in North Brookfield since 2007 and is looking to volunteer his time. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to appoint Mr. Skrobol. So voted.

- **Appoint Jakob Anderson as LPAC videographer**

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to appoint Jakob Anderson as a videographer for the Local Public Access Channel. So voted.

- **2015 License renewals**

Mr. Hevy read the list of alcohol licenses to be renewed for 2015. (Attachment #6) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to approve the licenses pending payment of all charges due to the Town of North Brookfield, and subject to approval by the ABCC. So voted.

The Selectmen took turns reading the remaining licenses to be renewed. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to approve the licenses pending payment of all charges due to the Town of North Brookfield. So voted.

- **Resident complaint**

Ray Baillarger of 6 Conroy Avenue told the Selectmen that he went to the transfer station last Saturday with a lot of cardboard. He was told that he could not leave all of it on a Saturday, but there is no limit to what he could bring on a Wednesday. Mr. Baillarger stated that he works during the week and he cannot go on Wednesdays. He suggested that the transfer station stay open longer on Wednesday afternoons to accommodate people who work. Mr. Smith stated that he will look into this.

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Town House collectibles**

Mrs. Walter showed various Town House items that would make ideal Christmas gifts. The "Ward Hollow: DVD is \$10, the Town House Memories book is \$10, and a wooden "Cat's Meow" replica of the building is \$20.

- **Planning Board hearing notice**

Mr. Smith reviewed a notice from the Planning Board regarding a hearing to be held on Wednesday, December 17th on the application of Borrego Sustainable Energy for a solar panel array at 107 New Braintree Road. (Available in the Selectmen's office) The hearing will be held at the Senior Center at 7:15 PM.

- **Winter parking ban**

Mr. Hevy reminded residents that the Winter Parking Ban is now in effect until April 15th. There is to be no overnight parking on town streets from 1 AM to 6 AM.

- **Toys for Joy**

Mrs. Walter announced that families wanting to participate in the Toys for Joy program must sign up at the Police Station by December 8th. Donations of money or toys are welcomed.

- **NBEMS Subscription Drive**

Mr. Hevy urged residents to return their subscription forms from the North Brookfield Emergency Squad.

- **Tree Lighting**

Mr. Smith announced that the annual tree lighting will be held in the center of town on Saturday, December 6th at 6 PM. Children may write letters to Santa at the Haston Library from 4 – 5:30.

- **CDBG at Senior Center December 16th**

Mrs. Walter announced that a representative from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission will be at the North Brookfield Senior Center on Tuesday, December 16, 2014 at 11:45 AM to talk about a FY 2015 Community Development Block Grant application with the towns of Warren and Brookfield. The proposed grant, if funded, can provide assistance to qualified residents who are in need of home improvements. Such improvements can include new roofs, windows, siding, weatherization, heating systems, septic installations, lead paint remediation or other necessary improvements to improve living conditions. In addition, North Brookfield will also consider advancing infrastructure improvements in the East Side Neighborhood area. North Brookfield was the recipient of one of these grants through the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development's FY 2013 program with the town of Spencer.

- **Notice from Charter re: surcharge**

Mr. Smith read a letter from Charter Communications announcing that effective January 1st the Broadcast TV Surcharge will go from \$5.00 per month to \$5.25.

- **Fire Department Turkey Raffle**

Mr. Hevy announced that the Fire Department will be holding their annual Turkey and Lobster Raffle on Saturday, December 13th at 6 PM.

IX. PENDING/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- **See attached list**

Mr. Smith noted that Albert Rex is planning to attend the December 16th Selectmen's meeting. It may be better to relocate the meeting to the Police Station to accommodate his presentation.

PENDING/FUTURE SELECTMEN'S ITEMS

Tucker Road beaver issues
Brickyard Road beaver issues
Murphy Road beaver issues
Murphy Road Bridge Project
Solterra Agreement
NBDDP
CDBG Infrastructure Study
Gilbert Street Stormwater issues
Police Chief Search Committee
Budget Workshop
Finance Committee recommendations
Town Offices server recommendations
Changes to health insurance tiers

Job descriptions
Cable license renewal Oct 2015
Water Superintendent Retirement
PDA Study
Purchase Orders
Vacancies on town boards
Creation of Financial Advisory Committee

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- **None**

There being no further business, at 8:05 PM Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Scott Burton
Administrative Assistant