

MINUTES OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING DECEMBER 16, 2014

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

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- **December 2, 2014**

Mrs. Walter asked that approval of these minutes be deferred until December 30th.

II. APPROVAL OF WARRANTS

- **School Warrant #1031 for \$47,845.08**
- **General Warrant #1032 for \$117,486.91**
- **Payroll Warrant #12 for \$329,508.92**

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 announced that people in the audience could comment on any of tonight's agenda items.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. Smith announced that at the next Selectmen's meeting on December 30th the Board would review all of the departmental budgets to make sure everything is on track.

Mr. Smith noted that there are two pieces of good news tonight; due to Mrs. Walter's efforts we have a fully executed contract for the \$500,000.00 Town House grant. Mrs. Walter worked on the paperwork over the weekend and drove it to Boston herself. We have already received the first payment of \$50,000.00 into the Town's account.

Also, when Mrs. Walter learned that the \$500,000.00 MassWorks grant funds might also be in jeopardy she made sure that this contract was secured as well. Mr. Smith and Mr. Hevy thanked Mrs. Walter for her diligence.

Mrs. Walter noted that the people in both of those organizations have been very willing to work with us; there is a very positive synergy with Administration and Finance (ANF). Mrs. Walter thanked Senator Brewer and Representative Gobi for their support.

V. OLD BUSINESS

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

Mr. Smith read a list of donations to the Police Cruiser Gift Fund. (Attachment #1) He also showed off a check for \$5,000.00 from North Brookfield Savings Bank, noting that this is the first corporate gift to the fund. Donations to date total almost \$9,500.00. Mrs. Walter noted that the bank has offered to do a fund raising campaign for the cruiser

fund in addition to their donation. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to accept the donations. So voted.

- **Sign Wendemuth Meadow paperwork**

Cynthia Henshaw, Executive Director of the East Quabbin Land Trust (EQLT) and Ann Hicks of the North Brookfield Conservation Commission were present to ask the Selectmen to sign a contract and other paperwork related to the Wendemuth Meadow property. (Attachment #2)

Ms. Henshaw reported that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has awarded the Town a Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant up to \$195,055.00 to purchase a Conservation Restriction on the Wendemuth property located on Bates Street.

Mr. Smith noted that the Selectmen have reviewed and approved the paperwork. He asked Mrs. Hicks how the fundraising efforts are coming along? Mrs. Hicks noted that the Friends of Wendemuth Meadow hope to raise \$50,000.00, and have already raised \$15,000.00 of that amount. She also stated that the group has not approached any businesses yet.

Mrs. Walter noted that even with the Friends fundraising efforts there will be a \$90,000.00 gap. Ms. Henshaw acknowledged that fact, and stated that EQLT will approach local foundations to try to close that gap. Donations that have already come in to EQLT have been earmarked, and when the Town is ready to purchase the Conservation Restriction the funds will be transferred to the Town. Mrs. Walter said that the Selectmen will be waiting for the Friends and EQLT to complete their fundraising before going ahead with the purchase.

Mrs. Walter went on to say that she knows that land under a Conservation Restriction may be used for "passive recreation," and she was wondering how this is defined? Ms. Henshaw stated that it is usually defined as "non-motorized" use. Mrs. Walter asked if horses would be allowed, and Ms. Henshaw stated that they would, but the Conservation Commission and EQLT could develop rules and regulations if necessary.

The Selectmen signed the state contract for the LAND grant, since this has already been approved by Town Meeting.

VI. DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

- **None**

VII. NEW BUSINESS

- **Presentation by Albert Rex**

Julie McCarthy, Chairman of the Friends of the Town House, introduced Albert Rex of MacRostie Historic Advisors. Mr. Rex reviewed a letter that he had sent to the Selectmen and the Friends earlier in the week. (Attachment #3)

Mr. Rex noted that he has been working with the Friends for almost two years to find a way to make the Town House financially solvent. The best way to do this is to figure out the cost of a renovation project, and then use tax credits to reduce the cost.

According to Mr. Rex, the Friends began applying for state tax credits in January of 2013. The program allows up to 20% of the project cost to be returned in the form of a tax credit. Based on the initial cost estimate, the project is eligible for \$966,000.00 in state tax credits. The Friends have been awarded \$900,000.00 in credits so far, and most likely will not receive any more.

The Friends will also put forth an application for federal tax credits by the end of the year. Mr. Rex is confident that the Friends will be awarded these credits. The federal tax credits can only be awarded to a taxable entity, which is why the Friends have created an LLC. This was done at no cost by the law firm of Nixon Peabody.

Mr. Rex noted that architect Dan Benoit is in the process of updating the floor plans and exterior elevations, and the firm of Dellbrook Construction has provided a revised construction cost estimate.

Now Mr. Rex and the Friends are considering what kind of prospective tenants make sense for the Town House in order to ensure a positive cash flow. Daniel Kirk of Kirk and Company will do a marketing study; the Friends are in the process of executing a contract with them, and the study should be done in February. This study should help figure out what kind of tenants would make the project work.

Mr. Rex noted that once the marketing study and federal tax credits are in place the Friends will begin their public capital campaign.

Mr. Rex said that it might be a good time for the Friends and the Selectmen to meet to discuss an MOU for transferring the Town House to the Friends, either by sale or lease. This would help determine the length of any lease, and terms such as insurance, and would identify potential uses and tenants. A 45 year lease would seem to make the most sense and would make everyone comfortable.

Mrs. Walter noted that the Town does have an attorney assigned to this issue, and their view is that we are waiting to hear a proposal from the Friends.

Mrs. Walter asked if Mr. Rex is aware that the Town must spend a \$500,000.00 grant by June 30th? Mr. Rex said that he does understand that, and thinks that the completion of that project would be an excellent trigger point for the Friends. The goal is to have a clear plan for the building in place by then.

Mr. Hevy told Mr. Rex that it would be helpful if there were a timeline for the project, which Mr. Rex said that he would provide. Mr. Hevy also asked how the \$500,000.00 renovation project would affect that timeline, and Mr. Rex stated that it would have no effect on the tax credit process.

Mr. Smith noted that we are now coming full circle with the building; the building was designed as a center for community activity, not a center of government. Now the building will be returned to that purpose.

Ms. McCarthy stated that the Friends will work on a “timeline” for the entire project, and will work on the lease with the Selectmen and legal counsel. Mr. Rex stated that he would like to start the talks with legal counsel in January regarding an MOU and/or lease.

Mr. Smith asked for more frequent meetings between the Friends and the Selectmen so that residents can know what is happening with the Town House. This should promote acceptance of the project.

Maureen Wesolowski, a member of the Friends of the Town House, said that it is important to remember that the Friends are trying to do this entire project with no tax burden on the Town.

Resident Dennis Trela asked the Selectmen what happened to the \$120,000.00 that was authorized at town meeting last year to address water infiltration issues? Mr. Smith explained that the perception that water is leaking throughout the building is not accurate. The money had not been spent pending restoration of the tower, and now we have received notice of the \$500,000.00 grant. We don’t have the ability to secure the building right now.

Mrs. Walter further explained that when we did not use the \$104,000.00 that was previously authorized to address petroleum contamination at the rear of the building because we received a grant for that, we returned that money to the town and thought that we might need some money to address water infiltration issues. That is why the Selectmen asked for authorization to borrow the \$120,000.00. That money is available if necessary, but so far it has not been necessary.

At 7:45 PM the Selectmen thanked Mr. Rex for coming, and Mr. Rex left the meeting.

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Planning Board hearing notice**

Mr. Hevy read an announcement from the Planning Board that they will be holding a public hearing on the application of Borrego Sustainable Energy to build a solar panel array facility at 107 New Braintree Road on Wednesday, December 17th at 7:15 PM in the Senior Center.

- **CDBG Forum on January 6**

Mrs. Walter announced that there will be a public forum on the CDBG project on Tuesday, January 6th during the Selectmen’s meeting. The purpose of the hearing is to discuss what has been done to date regarding the East Side Infrastructure Project.

- **Hearts for Heat**

Mr. Smith announced that the North Brookfield Hearts for Heat program is now accepting applications for winter heating assistance. Anyone wishing to donate to this cause should send their checks to Hearts for Heat at P O Box 44 in North Brookfield.

Mrs. Walter noted that the Chapter 70 hearing for Central Massachusetts will be happening January 4th, with a location to be determined.

The Selectmen showed off some Town House “collectibles” that would be great gifts. The Cat’s Meow wooden Town House is \$20, the Town House Memories book is \$10, and the Ward Hollow DVD is also \$10.

Mr. Smith offered the Board’s special thanks to Julie McCarthy and the Decorate Our Town group for decorating the downtown area, along with the Christmas Tree, for last Saturday’s visit from Santa. Also thanks to the Friends of the Haston Library for their tradition of writing letters to Santa before the tree lighting.

Mr. Smith thanked Town employees for their work over the past year to make life in North Brookfield better for everyone.

The Selectmen wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah.

IX. PENDING/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- **See attached list**

X. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- **None**

At 7:50 PM Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Hevy seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Scott Burton
Administrative Assistant

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**