

MINUTES OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MARCH 24, 2009

Chairman Foyle called the meeting to order at 7 PM in the Senior Center with all members present.

I. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to approve the minutes of March 16, 2009 as written. So voted, with Mrs. Walter abstaining.

II. OLD BUSINESS

A. Mrs. Walter read the updated list of candidates for the May 4th Annual Town Election. The final day to register to vote will be Tuesday, April 14th.

B. Water Superintendent Steve Jones reviewed a letter sent to the selectmen suggesting that the selectmen are the ones who should submit the town meeting article for the Horse Pond Dam project, since the selectmen have determined that the costs for the project should be borne by the taxpayers instead of the water users. He noted that there needs to be an article in May for engineering services in order to keep on schedule. Mr. Foyle asked that the selectmen take this under advisement for more discussion.

On the subject on USDA funding, Mr. Jones noted that the water department has completed the pre-application process, but the selectmen should apply for the funds since it will be tax dollars paying for the project.

Mrs. Walter and Mr. Jones pointed out that there may be grant funds available if the project is paid by water users, but not if the project is paid by the taxpayers.

Mr. Foyle stated that there is still a possibility that federal infrastructure stimulus funding will come through for this project or one of the other three projects that were requested by the town.

C. Mr. Petraitis read an announcement from the Friends of the Haston Free Public Library regarding a town-wide yard sale and book sale to be held on May 16th. Profits will benefit the library.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. Mr. Foyle read a letter from Charter Communications that was sent with check for the annual PEG Grant. This year the check was for \$16,390.91. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to accept the check on behalf of the LPAC Gift Account. So voted.

B. Mrs. Walter read a letter from former selectman Richard Chabot asking to be appointed to the Finance Committee. Mr. Foyle noted that Mr. Chabot would be a good, solid addition to the committee. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to appoint Mr. Chabot. So voted.

C. Geoff Rogers of Hampshire Power gave a presentation on how the town could save money by purchasing electricity through his organization instead of National Grid. Hampshire Power is a licensed electric provider that has been in business for three years, and currently services 35 towns in western and central Massachusetts.

Hampshire Power offers two programs, the first one is profit sharing, in which the customer pays the retail price, but potentially can receive a check at the end of the year if there is any profit. There is no guarantee, however, that there will be any profit or any rebate checks.

The second program is called real-time, in which the customer pays the wholesale price for electricity plus a mark-up of 2.4 cents per kilowatt hour. Mr. Rogers made a chart comparing what the town paid for the past twelve months through National Grid to what the town would have paid if they had been enrolled in this program. According to Mr. Rogers' figures, the town would have saved approximately \$18,000 over the past twelve months. The water and sewer departments are under contract with Constellation New Energy, another electric provider, and the savings with Hampshire Power would have been \$12,000 less.

Water Superintendent Steve Jones asked if the mark-up price would change. He was told by Mr. Rogers that the mark-up is fixed for the life of the contract. Mr. Jones inquired about the length of contracts, and was told that the contract could be one year, five years, or longer if desired.

Mr. Foyle thanked Mr. Rogers for his time, and asked that the selectmen be allowed to consider the information and discuss the matter fully.

D. Mike Tillotson, co-chair of the Local Public Access Committee, came in to discuss a proposal that would pay a small stipend to people who videotape the various town meetings. Mr. Tillotson noted that the group is running out of volunteers, and is hoping to encourage some new people to join.

Mr. Tillotson said that the committee currently has approximately \$80,000 in funds available, most of which are from grants from Charter. LPAC is hoping to use some of the money to upgrade the video and sound system at the elementary school, which would benefit the school and also the town.

Mr. Foyle asked Mr. Tillotson to provide the by-laws by which the LPAC operates, and financial statements.

Mrs. Walter asked if videotapes of public meetings are ever edited, and Mr. Tillotson said that they are not. He said that on occasion the camera operator may stop the tape if there is a pause in a meeting, for instance at a town meeting when people are casting paper ballots, but as a general rule meeting tapes are not edited.

Mr. Foyle stated that the selectmen would take the request under advisement.

E. There was no action on this item as Mr. Fiske did not appear at the meeting.

F. Mr. Foyle stated that he wants the selectmen to consider ways to increase revenue for the town. He proposed selling tax-title properties and harvesting town forest land. Mrs. Walter stated that she has met with a state forester regarding the town forest that covers both sides of Route 67. Mr. Petraitis stated that it is good idea to take out the larger trees in order to let the forest grow.

Mrs. Walter added that there are approximately 60 acres of unknown owner properties. The assessors should research these properties, and the town can take the land if there are no owners.

Mrs. Walter asked about raising fees. Mr. Foyle stated that town departments should research what is charged by other towns and set their rates comparably.

G. Mrs. Walter read an e-mail from Leigh Darrin asking for repairs to Old Stagecoach Road. Mrs. Walter reported that the highway department has taken 16 yards of gravel down and graded the road. Mr. Foyle asked if this is a private road, and if its current condition is prohibitive to the passage of emergency vehicles. He would like to see more input from other residents in the area. Mr. Foyle asked that the item be tabled in order to gather more information.

H. Mr. Petraitis read an announcement regarding an upcoming Boating Safety class at the high school in April and May. The course is sponsored by the police department and the Massachusetts Environmental Police.

I. Mrs. Walter read an announcement on the annual rabies clinic that will be held at the fire station on April 11th. The cost is \$13.00.

J. Mr. Foyle read a request from the North Brookfield Decorates group asking for permission to use the highway department for the annual Town-wide Cleanup Day on April 25th. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to approve the use of the highway garage, contingent upon permission from Highway Superintendent Gary Jean. So voted.

K. Mr. Petraitis read an e-mail from Mike Priest calling for all youth sports players and their parents to participate in a clean-up day for the ball fields on April 18th. Mr. Priest reported that last year over 100 people showed up to help and the work was quickly accomplished.

L. Mr. Foyle reviewed a letter from the Board of Health asking if there are any policies or processes in place to implement a sick-leave bank for town employees. Mr. Foyle stated that the selectmen will take this under advisement.

M. The selectmen reviewed anticipated spending reports submitted by the Assessors for stamps and map updates, and from the Collector for tax bill forms. The requests were found to be in order, and both departments have sufficient funds to cover the costs. Both requests were approved.

N. Mr. Foyle stated that bids have been received for the new police station, and he would like to send a letter to the building committee requesting an update.

Mr. Foyle also reported that Metcalf and Eddy will begin work on the site during the first week of April. Using EPA Cleanup Grant funds, work will begin to prepare the land for the new police building.

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to send a letter to the Police Building Committee requesting a status report. So voted.

At 8:30 Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing collective bargaining strategy. Roll call: Foyle, yes; Walter, yes; Petraitis, yes. So voted. Mr. Foyle announced that the Board would exit executive session only to adjourn.

At 9:45 PM Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Scott Burton
Administrative Assistant