

MINUTES OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING DECEMBER 15, 2009

Chairman Petraitis called the meeting to order in the Senior Center at 6:30 PM with all members present.

Also present were Senior Center Director Louise Bouchard and Council on Aging members Julie McCarthy, George Cross, Reedy and Anne Nealer, Rose Marchessault, John Lofgren, Celia Daniels, Catherine Strandberg, and Carolyn Los.

Mr. Petraitis thanked everyone for coming, and stated that the selectmen are looking for input from the COA in defining the roles of the director, outreach worker, and the council members. The selectmen would also like to assign one member of their board as a liaison to the COA.

Mrs. Walter noted said that everyone has been through a hard time with the departure of former outreach worker Barbara Harrington, and everyone needs to work together to put that behind us and make things better. The selectmen want to know how everyone views the senior center and the COA in order to bring the best to the seniors.

Ms. McCarthy stated that she was very happy to hear about the BOS liaison to the COA. They welcome the support.

Mr. Cross stated his belief that job descriptions and salary guidelines are needed for all town employees, not just senior center employees.

Mr. Filipkowski stated that the selectmen are working towards that goal, and would like to know exactly what the outreach worker does. Many COA members responded that the outreach worker helped the seniors sign up for fuel assistance or food stamps, or health insurance when necessary. She would also help with medicare or social security, or some online services like renewing drivers' licenses. Ms. McCarthy stated that the important thing is that the seniors feel comfortable asking for help; that is a difficult thing for many to admit.

Mrs. Walter asked the COA members in attendance what they believe is the role of the COA? Ms. McCarthy and Ms. Daniels said that awareness, support, and advocacy for the seniors and the senior center programs are part of their role as COA members.

When asked about how soon the town would hire another outreach worker, Mr. Petraitis stated that there is a hiring freeze in place. Mr. Filipkowski noted that the selectmen haven't even finalized a job description. The selectmen asked for information when the Water Department asked to hire another worker, this is no different.

Mr. Petraitis thanked everyone for coming and stated that the selectmen will review all of the information and get back to the COA as soon as possible with an answer on the outreach position.

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to nominate Mr. Petraitis as the ex-officio member of the COA. So voted. It was agreed that Mr. Filipkowski and Mrs. Walter would attend the meetings if Mr. Petraitis is unable to attend.

At 7:15 PM the selectmen began their regular weekly meeting.

I. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to approve the minutes of December 7, 2009 as amended by Mrs. Walter. So voted.

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to approve the release of executive session minutes from November 17th and 24th. So voted.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Board of Health Chairman John Alphin was present to discuss the town's H1N1 flu clinic that will be held December 17th at the school.

Mr. Petraitis read from a prepared statement: Last Friday afternoon I received a call from a member of NBEMA asking about their involvement in the H1N1 flu clinic to be held this Thursday. I wasn't aware of the clinic, or even that we were trying to schedule one. I was told that Harrington Hospital could not reach the Board of Health office. I'm not sure why Harrington couldn't contact Mr. Alphin personally, or call this board's office.

The two biggest concerns that I have are: 1. The Board of Selectmen was seemingly uninformed that these things were going on, and 2. This is just a flu clinic. If this were an actual medical emergency it does not appear that everyone knows the appropriate procedures. That being said, it is my understanding that the BOH is directly responsible for coordinating the response. However, no one else seems to know what that response will be, and since the BOH does not have the manpower to control a town-wide health threat, the other public safety teams, along with the BOS, need to be educated in that regard.

It has been this board's practice to cultivate teamwork amongst the several departments, whether elected or appointed. Since public safety ultimately rests with this board, we will attempt to make all necessary accommodations to partner with the BOH to bring about this awareness.

Mr. Alphin thanked the selectmen for the opportunity to address the issue. He stated that the good news is that the H1N1 flu has not been the pandemic that was predicted. If this had been a pandemic, North Brookfield is the regional dispensing site. The Boards of Health in the area have been planning for this for several years. The written plan is currently in its third version, and there have been large-scale tabletop exercises as well.

Mr. Alphin noted that all of the Boards of Health in the Brookfields met earlier this year to discuss the H1N1 flu, and they decided that they wanted to get the information out to residents, but not to scare people.

Mr. Alphin went on to say that this is has been a very difficult clinic; it is expected to be 3 – 4 times the usual number of doses given out. Harrington Hospital will be sending 5 or 6 nurses, and 1,000 doses of vaccine. The nurses can vaccinate approximately 75 people per hour. The Board of Health and the school do not have the manpower to assist in such a large event, that is why NBEMA was asked to help out.

Mr. Alphin gave a timeline of the communications among the Board of Health, Harrington Hospital, and School Superintendent Erin Nosek. Harrington originally contacted the BOH in October and stated that they needed an immediate commitment from the BOH in order to ensure that the town received enough vaccine for the school children and high risk individuals, not the general population. It has been a long process with Harrington setting up the clinic, and Mr. Alphin stated that he feels Harrington Hospital has been less than professional throughout. The Board of Health was forced to cancel the regular flu clinic in October because Harrington used up vaccine that was supposed to be committed to North Brookfield.

The selectmen expressed some concern that Harrington had breached their contract with the town by using North Brookfield's vaccine in other towns. Mr. Alphin noted that the Board of Health has sent an angry letter to Harrington about this.

Mr. Alphin thanked the selectmen for the opportunity to address the situation, and vowed to improve communications about future issues like this.

II. OLD BUSINESS

A. Mrs. Walter reviewed letters of authorization to be signed with the Chambers Advisory Group, who has reviewed the town's telephone services and made several recommendations that will save the town money. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to approve and sign the documents. So voted.

B. Mr. Petraitis noted that December 29th falls between Christmas and New Year's, and is not a warrant week. He asked if the other two selectmen would like to take the night off. It was agreed to cancel the meeting for December 29th unless something critical comes up.

On January 19th there will be a state election being held in the senior center, so the selectmen will not be able to hold their meeting there. It is a warrant week, so the board needs to meet. The day before the election is a holiday, and the selectmen cannot meet that day. It was agreed to meet on the 19th in the town offices at 215 North Main Street.

C. Mrs. Walter read minutes from the December 10th Regional Selectmen's Task Force Meeting. The task force has been charged with beginning to implement some regional services. The task force has agreed to pursue regional purchasing, a regional personnel board, and a regional hearings officer. Mrs. Walter reported that the next meeting will be held on December 22nd.

D. Mr. Filipkowski reported that the Safety Committee met last week, and discussed recent street lighting issues. The committee has agreed to review the request of the Angela Cavanaugh for a new street light on Spring Street first, the request of Dennis Trella for a street light on Evergreen Street second, and then the recommendations of Police Officer Chris Donais regarding eliminating some street lights in town. Mr. Filipkowski reported that each committee member is going to review the first two items individually and rank them. The group broke down the recommendations of Officer Donais by geographic area, but wondered about liability to the town if lights were shut off. Mrs. Walter noted that some of the lights recommended for elimination could be reduced in wattage instead.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. Mr. Petraitis reviewed the November police report as submitted by Police Chief Thomasian. He reported 33 incidents and 15 arrest/summons for the month. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to accept the report and place a copy on file. So voted.

B. Mrs. Walter stated that she wants to gather more information about a potential cleanup grant for the town house before discussing this item.

C. Mr. Petraitis noted that Finance Committee chairman Robert Smith has asked that he be allowed to contact town counsel directly, without going through the selectmen's office. In the past, town boards have contacted the selectmen for permission to speak with town counsel. After some discussion, it was agreed to continue the current practice of going through the selectmen's office to request permission.

D. This item was eliminated because Highway Superintendent Gary Jean reported that the situation is currently under control.

E. and F. The selectmen reviewed the attached list of licenses to be renewed for 2010. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to approve the alcohol licenses pending ABCC approval and payment of all charges due to the Town of North Brookfield. So voted. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to approve all other licenses pending payment of all charges due to the Town of North Brookfield. So voted.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

B. Mr. Filipkowski announced that the Conservation Commission will not be meeting next week, December 22nd.

C. Mr. Petraitis noted that Police Chief Thomasian has informed the selectmen that if there are any families that still need Christmas toys for their children, they should contact the Chief about the Toys for Joy program.

There being no further business, at 8:30 PM Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Filipkowski seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Scott Burton
Administrative Assistant