

Minutes of the Board of Selectmen Meeting

This meeting was called to order on Tuesday, May 11, 2021 at 6:00PM at the North Brookfield Police Department. Dale Kiley, Jason Petraitis, and John Tripp present.

Approval of Minutes: Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to approve the minutes from 2/17 and 3/2. So voted.

Approval of Warrants: Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to approve the following warrants, Payroll # 23 for \$390,233.74, General # 1060 for 298,164.38, CDBG # 1058 for \$32,758.71, General # 1057 Debt, for \$136,422.49 and School # 1059 for \$43,673.04. So voted.

Financial Items: Mr. Kiley spoke about the spending freeze and said that anything over \$1,500 has to come through the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to approve the following purchase requests: Treasurer postage \$600, Planning Board advertisement \$73.50 and BOS copy paper \$189.95. So voted.

Sign Tier 3 Complete Streets Application: Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to sign the application punch list. So voted.

Planning Board appointments: Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to appoint Kim Bent as Clerk to Planning Board, Sue Lyons to fill the term of Jason Spangenberg, and James Grace as alternate. So voted.

One day liquor license: Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to approve the one-day liquor license request from Fire Chief Joe Holway for the Pay Night Supper. So voted. Mr. Kiley noted that Joe should check the time advertised on Facebook.

Sign Easement-14 Bell Road-Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to sign the Easement for National Grid at 14 Bell Road. So voted. This easement was voted on, and passed, at Town Meeting on May 7th.

Karen Kiley stated that Zoning Board of Appeals would like to appoint Kim Bent as Clerk to the ZBA. Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to appoint Kim Bent as Clerk to ZBA. So voted.

Mr. Kiley reopened the Pole Hearing for North Main Street at 6:15PM. Mr. Tripp asked the National Grid representative if they had met with Tina Floria to go over pole location. They did. The representative told their supervisor of the sidewalk issue and it will be fixed by National Grid. Ron Ryel was present and agreed the new pole location would be fine. Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to approve the North Main Street pole in between 280-282 Main Street as written on map. So voted. The hearing was closed at 6:16PM.

Brian Hayes and Joseph Jablonski Jr. were present to discuss issues with the Beach Committee. Mr. Kiley said it would be more appropriate to do so in executive session. We will schedule that for May 25th.

Richard Lind and Maria Byter-Tucker were present to discuss the school budget. Maria acknowledged the addition of \$500,000 to the school budget, but wanted to talk about specifics and suggestions. Mr. Lind spoke about how to proceed with budget, currently at an 8.1% decrease. The School Committee

recommended a 5.6% increase, there is an \$800,000 gap between those numbers. People feel schools are a drain, but the school is the largest department in a Town/City. This cut will impact the children. Mr. Lind is focused on how we can reduce the impact on students. Academics and extracurricular activities get cut. The long-term impact will be school choice out numbers going up, no programs will prompt parents to seek out other schools. The school received pandemic relief funds, Mr. Lind knows the Town will receive ARPA funds between 1 and 1.4 million dollars, that could support the school and other departments, the purpose of the funds is to make up for lost revenue. Mr. Lind suggested an override of 1.5 million dollars, about 28 cents/thousand, a onetime cost for residents to support every Town department and to make life comfy and happy across Town, it's worth a discussion. As a parent, that's what Mr. Lind would want. Senior Citizens are on a fixed income, but they would still benefit as they use the Fire Department, Police Department and Senior Center. It's frustrating to scrim and scrap to get money. Mr. Lind would like to discuss this option with other departments/boards and committees. He asked what other funds can be found, not just for school but we need solutions, not just say we don't have it. The budget is tight and Mr. Lind is willing to go through budget line by line with anyone. He said he hopes a conversation can happen that will lead to solutions, we haven't done that yet, this issue will polarize and leave bad feelings.

Mr. Kiley said there's a lot to unpack. He said with the 6-million-dollar operating budget and the 2 million in benefits and debt service, the school's budget is 54% of all Town revenue. Everyone is making cuts to their budgets, Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen are frustrated too. Mr. Kiley explained that a debt exclusion is where the Town borrows money for a certain time, once it's paid the debt goes away. A debt override stays forever. Maria asked if/why we voted for two debt exclusions in one year. Mr. Kiley said there are a couple coming off. Maria asked about the Sewer, Mr. Kiley said we are under a consent decree. Maria asked why? Did the Sewer dept not do maintenance? Mr. Kiley said that phosphorate tolerances got tighter, DEP is mandating we comply or we will get fined.

Mr. Lind said he knows the difference between an exclusion and override and it is a possibility to do an override, we need to have a conversation about it. Mr. Kiley said we've entertained overrides in the past, it doesn't get passed at special election. Rich said it can pass if it's Town wide. Mr. Tripp asked Rich the amount he's looking to override. Rich said everything goes up, taxes, inflation, cost of benefits. Prop 2 ½ was 1979/1980 deal, you need to change or we won't keep up, we need to reset the clock.

Mr. Kiley said a significant portion of our population is older and on a fixed income, Mr. Lind referred to a study that said North Brookfield's population is on the rise and will go up 10%.

Matt Grant stated that we'll always have this hurdle, this is a small Town. In the private sector I don't get automatic raises. I appreciate the tight belt. Matt mentioned the \$20,000 stipend for Mr. Lind, Maria said it was a cost savings, two people co-share the position of principal. Matt said the perception when telling parents isn't clear, parents are getting pay cuts. Maria said that Mr. Lind is doing 3 jobs. Mr. Lind invited anyone to look at the school's budget and books. Mr. Lind said he puts in additional hours every night. Maria said Mr. Lind arrives at 7am and stays till 6pm or later and works weekends. Maria said she doesn't appreciate the perception that the school is leaching money from the Town. Mr. Kiley said his perception is that there are a lot of students that choice out. Maria said it was because they can't afford programs, Mr. Kiley indicated that the students that choice out are not asked why. Maria said they would do surveys.

Michelle Petraitis asked Maria why the School Committee refuses to meet with Finance Committee, Maria stated that Finance Committee doesn't come to School Committee meetings. Karen Kiley said the School Committee doesn't need an invitation to a FinComm meeting, they are always welcome.

Kim Bent talked about the teachers forgoing a raise last year, Mr. Kiley said the teachers gave up their raises last year, but are taking last year and this year's raise now, an 8% increase. Richard Lind stated the teachers cannot continue to forgo their raises as it's tied to their retirement. Mr. Kiley said that as a previous state employee he's been furloughed, and you have no choice, but gives credit to the teachers for giving up their raises the previous year.

Maria said she was sorry for not making an effort to go to Finance Committee meetings. Maria said the school staff is loving and great, it's not a failing school, just a struggling school.

There was more discussion about a potential override, Mr. Tripp mentioned it would be a strain on residents that live on a fixed income. Karen Kiley said that the medium income for North Brookfield is \$44,000, we are a low-income community.

Mr. Tripp asked Rich if he had looked into solar for the school, there was a plan to put up covered parking with solar panels. Rich said they are in the queue with National Grid. Mr. Kiley said the state has put a hold on solar projects. Mr. Tripp said direct meter would be a good work around, Rich said he would email the company tomorrow and get a status update.

Mr. Kiley reiterated that we are not solid on financial picture, we are still waiting on Cherry sheets from the state. Maria asked about changing by Annual Town Meeting, Mr. Kiley agreed and said it would have to be a by-law change.

Mr. Kiley said as far as an override, a group can put an article together for a special town meeting, Rich Lind encouraged the BOS and Fin Comm to explore it. Karen suggested asking department heads what they're needs are. Mr. Tripp asked how long the override would be in effect, Michelle Petraitis said in perpetuity, anything over the 2.5% tax rate. There was discussion about looking at surrounding town's tax rates. Rich said people moving into Town look at more than tax rate, they also look at programs, services, schools, senior activities, etc.

Jim Caldwell said he spoke with the Town Clerk and Superintendent, who spoke with the Chairman of the Quaboag School Committee, they feel one member of the Board of Selectmen or Finance Committee and one resident should be members of the School Reg. Planning Committee (it is required that one member of the School Committee join). Ideally, he thought a 5-member board would be good, but hadn't realized that each Town in the school region would have 3 members. If anyone is interested in serving on the regionalization committee please contact the BOS with your qualifications by noon on May 27, Jim will narrow it down to one person.

Jim Caldwell also discussed Article 16 from the Annual Town Meeting regarding water issues at the Arnold's property on Summer St. Jim wasn't confident in the vote and contacted Town Counsel for an opinion. Since the meeting was adjourned, we may be able to revisit it on June 4th. Mr. Kiley said there was a question as to appropriation vs. funding a special interest project. When someone amends a motion for appropriation they don't need identify where the money is coming, if there's a shortfall in the budget Free Cash should cover it. If the motion is for a stand-alone special interest project, they

must identify where the money is coming from. We need to wait to hear back from Town Counsel on this issue.

Casella/Waste Management Contract: Mr. Kiley got an email from Trevor Bruso with the contract for Waste Management, it is exactly what John Alphin said it would be. Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to approve and sign the contract. So voted. Note: The copy provided to the Board was not in the margins correctly, Ashley will get original and have BOS sign at next meeting.

Public Comment:

Kim Bent questioned a ditch in front of her house that has been filled with dirt. Mr. Kiley told her to contact Highway.

There being no further business, at 7:22PM Mr. Petraitis moved, and Mr. Tripp seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Barre