

MINUTES OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MARCH 26, 2013

Chairman Petraitis called the meeting to order in the Senior Center at 7 PM with Mrs. Walter also present. Mr. Chabot was present remotely via cell phone. Mr. Petraitis reminded those in attendance that the meeting was being both audio and video taped.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MARCH 12, 2013 APPROVAL OF EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES OF MARCH 12, 2013

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to approve the aforementioned minutes as written. So voted, with Mr. Chabot abstaining because he was not present at that meeting.

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Petraitis seconded, a motion to approve the aforementioned Executive Session minutes as written. So voted, with Mr. Chabot abstaining because he was not present at that meeting.

IA. APPROVAL OF LIBRARY INTEREST WARRANT #1049 FOR \$43,426.25 APPROVAL OF SCHOOL WARRANT #1050 FOR \$42,763.94 APPROVAL OF GENERAL WARRANT #1051 FOR \$219,457.04 APPROVAL OF PAYROLL WARRANT #20 FOR \$307,293.14

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

IB. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

There was no one present for the Public Comment Period.

II. OLD BUSINESS

A. SNOW PLOWING COMPLAINTS

Mr. Petraitis noted that two weeks ago the Board reviewed some complaints that were received after the big snowstorm on March 8th. At that time the Selectmen agreed to discuss the complaints again at this week's meeting. Mr. Petraitis stated that he has looked at the complaints, and believes that they have some merit, but noted that people should not compare North Brookfield to the other Brookfields. North Brookfield has more miles of road and less staff. In addition, the state maintains Route 9, which runs through the other three towns. Mr. Petraitis stated that the Selectmen can look into alternatives such as using more salt, but it will be more costly and may raise some environmental concerns.

Mr. Chabot stated that the state does plow and sand Route 9, including up to the North Brookfield/East Brookfield line. He noted that North Brookfield does have a very small crew, and the superintendent has been ill. He acknowledged that while there may be some room for improvement, there has been extenuating circumstances.

Mrs. Walter noted that the Highway Department is the only town department that has lost an employee since the economic downturn began. The salary for that employee was removed from the department's budget and never returned. The Board of Selectmen have an obligation to restore the Highway budget to a sufficient level.

Mrs. Walter also noted that the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (DOT) suggests a 2 to 1 sand/salt ratio. In 2006 the Board of Selectmen ordered the Highway Superintendent to use a 5 to 1 ratio. The Mass DOT recommends new de-icing procedures for town and homeowner use.

Mr. Petraitis explained that Mr. Jean's position was not filled when he moved up to Superintendent; in addition a worker who was severely injured was not replaced when he was forced to retire. Mr. Petraitis noted that all departmental budgets have been cut over the past few years, and most of the department heads deal with the budgets they are given without a lot of complaint. Mr. Petraitis reviewed a letter from Mr. Jean explaining the costs associated with decreasing the sand/salt ratio to 2 to 1, and increasing the rate of pay for part-time workers. (Attachment #1)

Mrs. Walter and Mr. Petraitis agreed that local aid revenues from the state have been cut 35% - 40% since 2008, which necessitated these budget cuts.

Mr. Petraitis stated that he does not believe that the Highway Department has a written policy for the order of roads to be plowed; he would like to look into this. Mrs. Walter stated that she disagreed, there are DOT recommendations that the Town follows. Mr. Petraitis stated that he meant a written policy that residents could look at.

Sheila Orsi of 12 Ward Street stated that we need better safety on the Town's roads in order for emergency personnel to get to resident's homes.

Sandy Johnson of 9 Nursery Avenue stated that twice this winter the entrance to her road was blocked.

Roger Shedd of 22 St. John Street said that he has elderly neighbors, and that emergency personnel need to be able to get to them. He stated that a sander got stuck going up the hill on Benoit Street during the big blizzard.

Mr. Petraitis thanked everyone for coming and letting the Selectmen know what is on their minds. He said that the Selectmen are going to look into these issues, and will keep the public informed.

B. EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Mr. Petraitis reviewed a letter from Police Chief Aram Thomasian, Jr. and signed by other department heads, recommending that the Town contract with Everbridge of Waltham, MA for an emergency notification system. (Attachment #2) The Chief noted that he and Chief O'Donnell of West Brookfield compared several systems, and chose Everbridge based on quality and price. The cost for North Brookfield will be under \$3,500 annually. The system will allow any town department to communicate information to residents and businesses.

Mrs. Walter stated that she has done a little research on the subject, and she pointed out a disclaimer clause in the proposed contract that seems to absolve Everbridge of any liability for anything that might go wrong. In addition, personal information goes into a large nationwide data center, it is not stored locally. The personal information is not free of possible unwanted exposure.

Mr. Chabot stated that the Town of Spencer did something similar to this, there are a lot of "pros" to doing this. Mr. Petraitis stated that he has some of the same concerns as Mrs. Walter, but he does agree that it is a good idea. Several residents have approached him and said that they would like to see this implemented.

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to send the proposed contract to Kopelman and Paige for their review, and to come back in two weeks for more discussion and a vote. So voted.

C. LETTER FROM PLANNING BOARD RE: FARM ANIMAL EXCISE

Mr. Petraitis read a letter from the Planning Board expressing their support for making farm animals exempt from excise tax. (Attachment #3) The annual amount collected is less than \$2,500.00. All three Selectmen agreed that this would be a good way to help the farmers in North Brookfield. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to place the question of exempting farm animals and equipment on the May 6th Annual Town Election ballot. So voted.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. JANET PIERCE FROM CMRPC RE: AMBULANCE STUDY

Janet Pierce of Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission was present to ask if North Brookfield would like to participate in a study of all of the ambulance services in the area. She showed a recent newspaper article from the Barre Gazette about the Hardwick Board of Selectmen asking CMRPC to conduct a study of their town's EMS needs, and the potential for regionalizing services with other towns. (Attachment #4)

Mr. Petraitis asked what the study will encompass, and Mrs. Pierce stated that call records, financial records, maps to determine the best locations for intercepts will all be considered.

Mr. Chabot noted that many of the private rescue squads in the area are struggling financially due to low Medicare, Medicaid and insurance reimbursements. He said a few years ago some of the EMS services in the Brookfields discussed having a “fly car” for a paramedic to provide ALS services where needed.

Mrs. Walter asked if the study will also look at billing practices, and Mrs. Pierce stated that it would.

When asked what other towns will be participating in the study, Mrs. Pierce said that Hardwick and New Braintree have already signed on, and she will be meeting with Oakham, Brookfield, and West Brookfield next week.

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to participate in the EMS/ALS study to determine how we can do things better and more cost effectively. So voted.

B. SIGN WARRANT FOR APRIL 30TH STATE PRIMARY

The Selectmen reviewed the warrant for the April 30th state primary election to replace Senator John Kerry. (Available in the Town Clerk's office) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to sign and post the warrant. So voted.

C. SIGN PROPOSAL FROM LYCOTT ENVIRONMENTAL

Mrs. Walter read a letter from Water Superintendent Steve Jones asking the Selectmen to sign a contract with Lycott Environmental for the treatment of algae at the Horse Pond Reservoir. (Attachment #5) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to approve and sign the contract. So voted.

D. COMPARISON OF SOLAR NET METERING PROPOSALS

Mrs. Walter stated that the Town was approached in December with a proposal for net metering credits. She explained that solar installations produce electricity for the grid for which they receive net metering credits. The solar producer can then sell the credits to electric users. The Town could purchase these metering credits at a discount. This is a way to save money, but it doesn't put any cash in our pockets. This requires a 20 year commitment, and town meeting approval.

The Selectmen have received three proposals, one from Solterra, one from Solventerra, and one from Hampshire Power. Each proposal has its own benefits and quirks. The School, Sewer, and Water Departments are the biggest electricity users, and they have been asked to evaluate the three proposals and get back to the Selectmen with their feedback and recommendations.

Mr. Petraitis suggested continuing this discussion again in two weeks.

E. RESIGNATION OF ROBERT SMITH

Mr. Petraitis read a letter from Robert Smith resigning from the Finance Committee. (Available in the Selectmen's office) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to accept the resignation with regret, and to send a letter of thanks. So voted.

F. RESIGNATION OF JESSE BERARD

Mrs. Walter read a letter from Jesse Berard resigning from the Police Department and as the Town's Animal Control Officer. (Available in the Selectmen's office) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to accept the resignation with regret, and to send a letter of thanks. So voted.

G. SET MAY 10TH @ 7 PM FOR SPECIAL TOWN MEETING, ARTICLES WILL BE DUE TO SELECTMEN BY FRIDAY, APRIL 5TH

Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to set Friday, May 10th at 7 PM as the time and date for a Special Town Meeting. This will be immediately preceding the Annual Town Meeting. Articles will be due to the Board of Selectmen by April 5th.

H. FEBRUARY POLICE REPORT

Mr. Petraitis reviewed the police report for the month of February as submitted by Chief Thomasian. (Available in the Selectmen's office) The Chief reported 27 incidents and 20 arrest/summons for the month. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to accept the report. So voted.

I. ACCEPT CHECK FOR LPAC GIFT FROM CHARTER COMMUNICATIONS

Mrs. Walter read a letter from Thomas Cohan of Charter Communications that was sent along with a check to the Town in the amount of \$18,000.00. (Attachment #6) According to Mr. Cohan, this is the amount of the annual PEG Access operating payment paid pursuant to the licensing agreement between the Town and Charter. Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to accept the check for the Local Public Access Committee Gift Fund. So voted.

J. LETTER FROM ACCOUNTANT RE: GASB 45

Mr. Petraitis read an e-mail from Town Accountant Nancy Nykiel regarding the need to perform a GASB 45 audit. (Attachment #7) Mrs. Nykiel has received a quote from USI Consulting to do the audit for FY12, 13, and 14 at a cost of \$6,400.00. Mr. Chabot moved, and Mrs. Walter seconded, a motion to approve the audit, and to ask Mrs. Nykiel to add a line item to her budget for this. So voted.

K. LETTER FROM HAMPSHIRE POWER RE: TOWN MEETING ARTICLE

Mrs. Walter read a letter from Hampshire Power asking the Selectmen to include an article on the next town meeting warrant to approve the Town's participation in a net metering program. (Attachment #8) It was agreed to forward the letter to Kopelman and Paige for their input.

L. LETTER FROM PLANNING BOARD RE: MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

Mr. Petraitis reviewed a letter from the Planning Board stating that they voted to abolish the Master Plan Implementation Committee and take on the duties themselves. (Attachment #9) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to accept the decision. So voted.

M. SIGN LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR PEP GRANT

Mrs. Walter read an e-mail from Jay Mooney asking the Selectmen to sign a letter of support for the school's application for a federal PEP grant. (Attachment #10) Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to sign a letter of support stating that the Selectmen will support all activities associated with the grant. So voted.

N. BUDGET RAMIFICATIONS OF O'NEILL SETTLEMENT

Mr. Petraitis stated that he would like to talk about the ramification of the recent court judgment against the town in the case of former School Superintendent Robert O'Neill. Mr. Petraitis explained to residents that a former School Committee gave Mr. O'Neill health insurance benefits for life. The Town appealed, and the state's Supreme Court recently ruled that the Town must pay. He stated that in his opinion it is the responsibility of the School Department to pay the judgment. Mrs. Walter agreed that the School Committee members who agreed to this were elected officials, they signed the contract, and they are responsible. Mr. Chabot agreed as well.

IV. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. TOWN WIDE CLEANUP DAY

Mr. Petraitis read an announcement from the North Brookfield Decorates group, who announced that the annual Earth Month Town-wide Cleanup day will be held on Saturday, April 27th from 9 AM to 3 PM. Residents are encouraged to pick up trash along their own roads, and to bring the trash to the Highway Garage on that date.

B. RABIES CLINIC TO BE HELD ON APRIL 13th

Mrs. Walter announced that there will be a Rabies Clinic on Saturday, April 13th from 9 AM to 11 AM at the Second Chance Animal Wellness Center. The cost is \$12, and the Town Clerk will be available to sell dog licenses.

C. DOG LICENSES ARE NOW DUE

Mr. Petraitis read a memo from the Town Clerk that 2013 dog licenses are now available. The cost is \$6 for dogs that are spayed or neutered, and \$10 for those that are not. There is a \$5 late fee after June 1st, and a \$25 late fee after September 1st.

D. MEMO FROM SEWER DEPARTMENT

Mr. Petraitis read a memo from the Board of Sewer Commissioners announcing the beginning of the West Side Sewer Rehabilitation Project. The project consists of high pressure cleaning of sewer lines, and the lining of 3,875 feet of sewer line during the months of April and May. Notices will be posted on homes in the areas to be worked on.

V. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

A. CIC STORMWATER GRANT

B. CMRPC TRAFFIC COUNT

C. CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS WITH POLICE OFFICERS

The Selectmen added the following items:

An update on the work being done at the Town House

Further discussion of the net metering proposals

Further discussion of the Emergency Notification System

At 8:05 PM Mrs. Walter moved, and Mr. Chabot seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Scott Burton
Administrative Assistant