

Approved Minutes
Town of Brookline Selectboard Meeting
Wednesday, December 16, 2020, 6:30 PM
(videoconference)

Present

Selectboard:
David Jones (Chair)
Gwen Tanza
Joseph Dutton
Shelby Brimmer

Town Officers:
Guy Tanza (Town Clerk, videographer)

Members of the Public:
David Parker
Peter Barus (Recorder)
FACTV (Videoconference recording)

Call the meeting to order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 PM.

Review changes to agenda if any

Archie Clark not expected.

The Chair polled the members, no changes requested.

Scheduled members of the public

David Parker

Mr. Parker was present.

Unscheduled members of the public (none)

Approve Minutes

Minutes from December 2, 2020 Regular Meeting

Mr. Jones moved to approve the minutes for December 2, 2020, as amended. Second by Mr. Dutton. All in favor.

Minutes from December 9, 2020 Special Meeting

Mr. Jones moved to approve the minutes for December 9, 2020, as presented. Second by Ms. Tanza. All in favor.

New Business

Consider Australian Ballot for 2021 Town Meeting

Mr. Jones introduced Mr. Parker as the usual Moderator and discussed a letter from Ms. Luskin to the town of Newfane supporting Australian balloting in the emergency.

Mr. Parker discussed the letter from Ms. Luskin to the Newfane selectboard, as laying out the three basic options provided by the legislature under Act 162 for temporary use of the Australian ballot for 2021, reverting to floor voting in 2022; noting the requirement for an Informational Meeting more than ten days prior to Town Meeting; the selectboard would conduct the meeting; candidates for election would submit a consent form to be on the ballot.

Mr. Jones noted an email from the Secretary of State's office covering the same points; and asked whether Mr. Parker supported the changes. Mr. Parker cited the Governor's guidance and suggested that public safety concerns would argue against public gatherings; that electronic means were not technically possible; leaving Australian ballot as the best option.

Mr. Jones noted that Town Clerks received the email from the Secretary of State, indicating that the Legislature might vote to provide some additional options to towns, such as

- permitting postponement until circumstances improve – noting that the progress of the pandemic does not seem predictable;
- mailing ballots to all registered voters – funding not expected from the Legislature
- granting the Secretary of State the same authority as last year, authorizing alternative procedures, such as drive-through polling places.

Mr. Jones explained that for candidates for public office, there was no longer a requirement for signatures, but there was a Consent of Candidate form that must be filed no later than the sixth Monday before the election; this would require filing by January 18, 2021; costs the responsibility of the municipality; ballots will contain the Articles as listed in the Warning; ballots must be prepared no later than twenty days in advance of the election – by February 9, 2021; voters may request ballots be sent to them or vote in person; an Informational Meeting must be held by the legislative body (the selectboard) within the ten days prior to the election; under the temporary rules in place this could be done by electronic means; this would occur between February 19 and 28, 2021; there must be a polling place open any time between 5:00AM and 10:00AM, closing at 7:00PM; that if done like every other town election this would be from 9:00AM to 7:00PM.

Mr. Jones noted that Reps. Carolyn Partridge and Leslie Goldman had said that legislators might provide the ability to reschedule Town Meeting, and polled the members. There was consensus that this would not be a practical remedy; it was noted that should the budget not pass, this would impose tighter time constraints. Mr. Parker was recognized, and concurred.

Mr. Jones suggested a vote to hold the Town Meeting by Australian ballot, and polled the members on this action. There was consensus in favor of voting on Australian ballot.

Mr. Jones **moved to hold the 2021 Town Meeting by Australian ballot.** Second by Ms. Tanza. Hearing no discussion, on the Motion, by voice vote, **all in favor.**

Mr. Jones noted that there would be an overview webinar on the process of the Australian ballot system on Thursday, December 17, from 2:00PM to 3:30PM. There was discussion.

Meeting Conduct

There was discussion of a VLCT publication on rules of procedure. Mr. Jones read a portion on "order and decorum," and suggested consideration of similar language; next meetings on January 6 and 20, 2021; Warning for Town Meeting will have to be voted by January 20, including a ballot with

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an unusual number of Articles; preparations take a high priority. Mr. Dutton cited serious concerns for member conduct. Mr. Jones suggested that the full selectboard should be present; that less than three members could discuss anything; and that the current rules of procedure neither prohibit the conduct of concern, or require an Executive Session. Mr. Dutton suggested that modifying the rules would not be likely to address the issues in question.

Further discussion was tabled until the full selectboard should be present.

Old Business

Treasurer Update

Mr. Jones recalled that Ms. Zwick had been appointed Acting Treasurer, and voted authorization to hire a nonresident bookkeeper; however, the candidate had found other works; that Mike Masters had expressed interest and was undergoing training as Assistant Treasurer, along with Mr. Tanza; that others were no longer available; that Ms. Zwick was completing the end of the last fiscal year; and that statutory deadlines would be reached, with effort.

Building Update

Summary / Update / Reports

Guy Tanza – Town Clerk Report

Mr. Tanza reported that he office had been very busy, with an unusual volume of real estate transactions across the state; that people have adjusted to visits by appointment, and things are running smoothly.

Highways & Roads

Mark Bills – Road Supervisor

Mr. Bills was not present. Mr. Jones noted that with snow imminent, other work would be on hold for the time being.

Communications

Email

- Solid Waste Management, re: a grant to assist communities improving waste management, listing several forms of assistance for towns.

Regular Mail

- WRC, re: check for about \$2,500 to reimburse a grant-in-aid, for which Mr. Bills had done considerable work to make the town eligible.
- Agency of Transportation, re: Certificate of Highway Mileage, to be done electronically henceforward.
- Valley Cares, re: solicitation
- Brattleboro Development Credit Corp. re: open submission process for projects through March 1, 2021

Pay Orders

Mr. Jones had signed the Payroll Warrant last week.

Payroll

There was discussion about Mr. Bills' timesheets, submitted for five months. No further questions were raised.

Mr. Jones moved to approve Payroll Warrant #2020-77, dated December 9, 2020, in the amount of \$7,278.99. Second by Mr. Dutton. All in favor.

Accounts Payable

Mr. Jones polled the members. There was discussion and clarification of the payment for road-milling, now paid in full; and accounting categories. No further questions were raised.

Mr. Jones moved to approve Accounts Payable Warrant #2020-78, dated December 16, 2020, in the amount of \$29,049.23. Second by Ms. Tanza. All in favor.

Set agenda for the next meeting – Wednesday January 6, 2020

- Budget
- Town Meeting/Australian ballot

FY 2021-2022 Budget Planning

Mr. Jones had circulated a spreadsheet, and discussed some of the changes; and discussed conversations with Mr. Clark, regarding the highway side of the budget; they suggested level-funding, no increases or decreases; and asked members for questions or comments. There was discussion. Mr. Jones noted that the numbers were not final, that Ms. Zwick was in the process of adjusting some account categories; and the possibility of a surplus.

Mr. Jones suggested more discussion on operating expenditures, and town remuneration; and thanked Ms. Tanza for information she provided. There was discussion. Ms. Brimmer had researched salaries in surrounding towns of more or less similar size, noting differences. Mr. Jones discussed the suggestion last meeting that the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer position pay rate be changed from \$19.75 to \$21.75, an increase of \$2.00 per hour; that 21 hours per week had been the basis for this rate; and suggested that the rate for the Treasurer not be changed, and that the expected hours should be revisited.

There was discussion. Ms. Tanza noted a conflict of interest, being married to the Town Clerk (and recused herself from such deliberations). Mr. Jones noted that no vote would be necessary. Mr. Dutton discussed the wages in the context of the job market as a whole, a cost-of-living increase of over 9% since the wage had last been set, and the possible precedents. Mr. Tanza suggested that a rate increase would enhance the job's attractiveness to potential candidates. Ms. Brimmer suggested that an increase was warranted; and noted the many hours Mr. Tanza works without pay, possibly raising productivity expectations for the position in the future. Mr. Jones suggested that a \$2.00 increase, while not reaching the probable market rate, would certainly be reasonable; and proposed raising the clerk's pay only, budgeting \$23,744. There was consensus.

Mr. Jones discussed the different roles performed by Mr. Tanza, as Town Clerk as well as Assistant Treasurer. Mr. Tanza discussed differentiating

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between the roles of Delinquent Tax Collector and Town Clerk when submitting time sheets.

Mr. Jones suggested:

- budgeting \$23,744 for the Town Clerk;
- addressing the treasurer and assistant treasurer as a group;
- budgeting \$3,600 for the Delinquent Tax Collector;
- budgeting \$3,000, ten hours per week, for Listers (no change);
- leaving Auditors unchanged.

Mr. Jones noted that further changes would need a more comprehensive analysis and more time. There was discussion of the Assistant Town Clerk position. Mr. Dutton noted that putting off increases could mean a big change later. Ms. Brimmer suggested a 2% increase across the board, and do a much more thorough analysis next year. Mr. Jones noted that this had not been done for a number of years; that there was a week to address the matter. Mr. Dutton suggested tabling the question, while planning a comprehensive analysis next year.

There was discussion; about the need for a more comprehensive analysis; about competitiveness in the larger job market; about time constraints.

Mr. Jones discussed recycling, to be Warned as its own Article; cost trends (reduced processing rate; that the voters had approved \$22,000 for the current fiscal year; slightly below the budgeted \$18,000 last fiscal year; closer to the \$22,000 this year, and might consider closer to \$25,000; that the cost of cleaning up the site and installing surveillance cameras should be included in the Article. There was discussion; members were in agreement that costs should be clearly reflected in budgeted amounts.

There was discussion of the costs of installing surveillance cameras against benefits; alternatives, like hiring a person to maintain the site.

Adjournment

Mr. Jones moved to Adjourn. Second by Ms. Brimmer. All in favor.

The meeting was Adjourned at 9:10PM.

Respectfully submitted, Peter Barus, Recorder, December 18, 2020