

Selectboard Meeting Minutes February 26, 2024 Zoom Teleconference 5:30 pm

Call to Order: Andrew Baker called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Others present: Selectboard member Rick LaPierre and Town Administrator Terry Narkewicz.

A motion was put forth by Rick to approve the minutes of February 12. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Rick – yes; Andrew – yes. Motion passed 2-0-0.

Department Liaison Reports:

Police Department – Rick reported that the department has discovered materials that have been stored at Cowell Gym for many years and is deciding what to do with them. Some things have already been removed from the gym. Last week’s test of the emergency backup generator was a success and the generator is now fully online.

Emergency Management – Rick attended a meeting of the Emergency Management Committee. It was the first meeting of the fiscal year. The focus of the meeting was discussing the formation, mission, and number of members of the committee. It seems that the committee was not given a specific charge or structure. That will be remedied. EMD Tom Williams had applied for MEMA funds following the floods of last July. The town was denied. Tom recently visited with a representative from Senator Paul Mark’s office and it was learned that a transcription error had led to Shelburne being denied the funds. Hopefully, funding will now be coming.

Appointments:

5:45 pm Alain Peteroy, Franklin Land Trust RE: Flaccus Conservation Restriction (Larry and Susan Flaccus) – Larry and Susan have worked for several years to conserve the 152-acre property, which has been in Susan’s family for 100 years. The land has been in Chapter 61 for decades. The CR would conserve the land in perpetuity while allowing for forestry, agriculture, trails, and recreational use. The CR will stay with the property even if it is sold. The house and other buildings will be in a six-acre envelope within the CR. The Conservation Commission has signed off on this project. Because the land is already in Chapter 61, the taxes will not change. A motion was made by Rick that the Selectboard supports and will sign the Conservation Restriction for the Flaccus property as outlined. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Rick – yes; Andrew – yes. Motion passed 2-0-0.

6:00 pm Jake Eberwein, Berkshire12 Org. RE: MTRSD Sustainability Study Phase II (Willow Cohen, School Committee, Sheryl Stanton, Superintendent) – All the school and towns in the Mohawk and Hawlemont districts have been looking at sustainability since 2008. Phase one of this most recent study updated the data collected in 2015. Now it is time to analyze the data and get community input, while looking at long-term solutions. Jake explained that the problems are declining enrollment, rising costs, flat state aid, and the increasing needs of the student body. Enrollment in the Mohawk district has fallen from 1,724 in FY97 to 727 in FY25. Berk 12 brings educators and community partners together to collaborate on projects, for professional development, networking, and research to form partnerships. The plan is to clarify the current state of the districts and to come up with viable alternatives that will be sustainable and will be supported by the community. The final report of this study should be completed in the spring of 2025. Selectboard members are being asked for their thoughts as the process begins. Matt Popoli asked for examples of results of this sort of study in other communities. Jake said in southern Berkshire County the recommendation was to combine two school districts into one. By next summer there

will be a report of sustainability ideas that have high promise. In the fall, Berk12 will be asking for feedback on the most likely options. In the meantime, a monthly update on the project will be widely circulated. Willow said the school committee is very much in favor of this project.

6:30 pm Juli Moreno, Senior Center Budget Presentation (Jim Burnham, Todd Dubreuil, Jay Readinger, Matt Popoli, Terri Mitchell Finance Committee) –The assessments for the three towns that are members of the Senior Center are based on service units. Shelburne has 46.5% of the units, Buckland has 32.1%, and Ashfield has 21.4%. Based on increases in salaries, benefits, operating and facilities expenses, the budget is projected to rise by 3.08%. Shelburne’s assessment is to go up by 1.66%. Juli explained how participation is calculated and how the budget is derived. Andrew questioned why Buckland and Shelburne have such a difference in participation. It is thought that the center is used the most by people who live the closest. Shelburne is also the location of Highland Village. Ashfield seniors seem to want to take care of themselves. Juli said a goal was to reach more people with mailings and marketing.

7:00 pm Karen Tonelli, Assistant Assessor & Assessors RE: Assessor’s Budget (Jim Burnham, Todd Dubreuil, Jay Readinger, Matt Popoli, Terri Mitchell Finance Committee; Maya Winfrey, Assessor) – The assessors were asking for approval to hire an outside consultant to appraise the dams and substations owned by Great River Hydro, as well as the associated transmission and distribution facilities owned by Eversource and New England Power. Shelburne owns half of the Gardner Falls dam, half of Deerfield #2 dam, half of Deerfield #3 dam, and the Deerfield #4 substation. The last time these were independently appraised was in FY’22. The DOR will require an independent appraisal in the next reval year. The assessors want a full appraisal not a restricted appraisal, which would not provide enough data if it was needed in court. Karen has contacted Sansoucy Associates. A one-year contract, with Sansoucy, would be \$45,000. A three-year contract covering FY’25, FY’26, and FY’27 would be \$27,500 per year. Karen had only contacted one company. Terry will find out if this needs to go to bid. When independent appraisals are done, companies often contest the assessment and it could go to court. Assessors Maya Winfrey and Joel Dwight are in favor of an independent appraisal. Matt Popoli asked how much tax revenue might be gained by this. Karen had not calculated that. Karen said the overlay account contains about \$120,000 and the assessors could vote to release some of that to pay for the appraisal. Some discussion followed about asking the other towns, Conway, Charlemont, and Deerfield who own portions of the dams, to join in the appraisal. That idea didn’t work when it was tried a few years ago. The options are to do nothing and keep the current values; wait until the next reval year, 2027, when an independent appraisal will be required; or bid now and choose a one or three-year plan. Jim Burnham pointed out that Shelburne may own more of the dams than was thought as some town lines are in the middle of the river, but others are on one bank or another. Rick thought the multi-year plan made sense and that it did not make sense to get the other towns involved as time was too short. Once budget hearings are complete this will be discussed further.

Old Business:

Proposed Solar Array for Highway Pole Barn Roof – Terry and John Walsh have created a draft RFP and are now awaiting comments from the Selectboard.

MassDOT Traffic Calming Speed Sign Grant Award – Mechanic Street (Police Chief Greg Bardwell) – It was Andrew’s feeling that whenever placing infrastructure into the community the public should have a chance to comment. The sign grant was applied for, approved, and the signs are ready to be installed. Greg said the public discussion should have occurred before applying

for the grant. Rick said the board voted to pursue the grant and the signs are a public safety measure. The state mandates the configuration and size of the signs. The signs are larger than some because they are solar. Rick showed a rendering of the signs showing how they would look. Andrew felt there were already several signs and a flashing light at a crosswalk, and wanted public opinion on adding more signs. He thought the signs were advisory only and if the goal was to actually slow speeds, speed bumps could be used. Terry said that one person had complained about the placement of the signs. One sign was moved and the new placement has been approved by the nearest resident. Rick said in the future public discussion should happen before applying for grants, but since the Selectboard already voted for these signs they should be installed. Terry said a drawing showing what the signs would look like was submitted with the memorandum of understanding, which was signed by Andrew and Margaret Payne. The installation will go ahead.

New Business:

Roselli, Clark & Associates RE: Offer to Meet GASB 34 Compliance – New standards had been initiated in 1989. Shelburne has not complied with those standards for 35 years. The standards only seem necessary if the town were to seek a bond rating. Some area towns have complied, others have not. The Finance Committee feels it important that the town comply with the standards. Terry asked the recently hired auditing firm, Roselli, Clark and Associates, for an estimate. They came back with an estimate not to exceed \$10,000 to do a complete audit of all town assets including roads, buildings, vehicles, and personal property. The board wanted to discuss this with the Finance Committee.

MTRSD RE: Use of Surplus Funds for Enhanced 911 System (Bill Lataille, Mohawk Business Manager) – The school district is asking member towns to use surplus funds from already completed projects to help pay for mandated 911 phone system upgrades in each school. Shelburne currently has \$20,155 in surplus capital. Shelburne's share of the Mohawk upgrade would be \$3,626 and its share of the BSE upgrade would be \$13,483. This would leave a meaning surplus of \$3,051. The board could vote to have that sum returned to the town or have it applied to future capital projects. The enhanced 911 system would allow responders to know exactly where in the buildings the 911 call originated. Jay said the law was passed in 2009. Rick said it didn't seem like the town could opt out of this upgrade and using surplus would be re-allocating funds, rather than starting it as a new project. The school district is asking towns to get the opinions of Town Counsels to see whether the use of surplus funds can be done by a vote of the Selectboard or if it needs a Town Meeting vote. Terry will contact Town Counsel and the project will be discussed at another meeting by the Finance Committee and Selectboard.

H.4138 The Affordable Homes Act – FRCOG is looking for towns to sign on to a letter of support for this act, which is designed to give local towns options for more revenue, from real estate transfer fees. Rick did not think that Shelburne would benefit from the act and felt that more information would be needed before he would agree to support it. Both Rick and Andrew felt there were better things that could be done as a town to support affordable housing. It was decided to let other towns take the lead on this.

Any Other Business:

Electrical Service to Pole Barn – Two quotes have been received. Mark Shippee had tried to get a third, with no response. The quotes are for \$10,900 from Current Electric and for \$16,740 from Palmeri Electric. Mark's recommendation was to go with Current. A motion was made by

Rick to accept the bid for installing electrical service to the highway department pole barn to Current Electric. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Rick – yes; Andrew – yes. Motion passed 2-0-0.

Next Meeting – The next Board meeting will be on March 11, at 5:30 pm via Zoom.

Correspondence:

Mary Lou Gallop RE: Cowell Gymnasium Concerns – A letter from Mary Lou expressed her concerns about problems not addressed in the proposed Rec Committee budget. Andrew responded by telling her that the committee gets advised on how to participate in budget and capital requests. He recommended that Mary Lou work with the rest of the Rec Committee toward consensus as to what the committee brings forward for budget requests.

Sgt. John Richardson RE: Fire Chief John Taylor's Recent Training – Sgt. Richardson, of the Bernardston Police Department wrote thanking Chief Taylor for his participation in a recent regional class.

Public Comment:

Mary Lou Gallop said she has reached out, feeling that communication with the Rec Committee has broken down. She has questioned how the committee is to function, and who creates the budget and when the budget is created. She said she has received conflicting answers. She said her recent letter raised safety issues that she thinks should be discussed.

Jeff Boettner said the Energy Committee will be having an Energy Fair at BSE, on April 27. Workshops will be held on solar, mini splits, Mass Save, etc. Jeff also asked about the procedure for applying for a grant for the street light project. He will bring information on that to the next meeting. Jeff also asked if Selectboard permission was need for the streetlight committee to hold an informational talk. Terry thanked him for running that past the board but saw no problem with it.

Adjournment: At 8:43 a motion was made by Rick to adjourn the meeting. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Rick – yes; Andrew – yes. Motion passed 2-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Faye Whitney, Recording Secretary