**Select Board Meeting Minutes January 27, 2025 Zoom Teleconference 5:30 pm**

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

A motion was put forth by Andrew to approve the minutes of January 13. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Andrew – yes; Tricia – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Department Liaison Reports:**

**Emergency Management:** The committee met recently. The emergency operations team is now prepared to handle an event but still would like to meet on a monthly basis. A CPR/AED class is being held today. EMD Tom Williams is looking for a grant for an emergency generator, he has ordered clothing for the team, and is continuing discussions on using Cowell Gym as an emergency shelter.

**Town Hall** – Excise bills will be going out soon. Property taxes are due on February 1. Terry has been collecting DLTA information from boards and committees. Census forms have been sent out. The Town Clerk is getting teams together for the annual town election.

**Council on Aging** – The group met recently and will be asking for a line item in the FY’26 budget to cover some expenses that have previously been covered by volunteers.

**Highway Department** – Todd Senecal has submitted his resignation from the road crew in order to take a job in Plainfield. He did an exit interview with Superintendent Jeff Johnston. The position has been posted, with no responses so far. A MIIA grant has been received for road signs indicating closed roads, detours, etc. A storage space for the new signs has been created. Jeff is concerned about the maintenance budget possibly running out, due to some large expenses. The hope is that it will not need to be replenished before annual Town Meeting. Jeff is working on the budget for FY’26. Two new trucks will need replacement and will be included as part of the department’s capital requests.

**Police Services Advisory Committee** – The wage and salary study has been completed. The draft wage and salary draft document is expected to be delivered this week.

**Appointments:**

**5:45 pm Joe Judd RE: Opt-Out Mail-In Ballots for Early Voting** – Joe would like to opt out of the early voting mail in ballots for the annual town election, which will be held on May 20. This would save the cost of sending postcards to all registered voters asking if they would like a mail in ballot, then sending out the ballots themselves. Absentee and overseas ballots will still be available and early in-person voting would still take place. The opt-out option would only be for this one election. There are seldom contests in town elections and voter turnout is usually very low. Andrew said the benefit would be to engage citizens and encourage them to serve on town boards. Joe agreed that the money saved by opting out of mail-in ballots might be better used to send postcards informing citizens of the election and the positions that are available. Tricia asked about the cost of mailing mail-in ballots and notifying people of that opportunity. Joe said it costs $1.01 to mail each ballot. Postcards would need to be sent to all 1,563 registered voters. He was not sure of the cost of that. Rick noted that time and labor involved in the mailing must also be considered. Joe said a public hearing was required to be held before opting out, to give the public a chance to voice their opinions. The hearing was tentatively scheduled for the next Board meeting.

**6:00 pm Jessica Atwood, FRCOG RE: Rural Downtown District Report** – Many rural downtown centers need support for business owners. FRCOG received a grant to look into the challenge of having a person to help businesses. Shelburne, Northfield, and Turners Falls have shared this grant. Meetings and discussions have been held about what model to use for support and how to fund it. The model developed would be to have a full-time professional downtown coordinator shared with the three towns. That person would be guided by a steering group composed of representatives from each town. The position would require funding from the three towns as well as from business owners. In the beginning, the funding could come mostly from grants as the scope and tasks of the coordinator would develop. Future phases would require increased levels of town and business support. A presentation of the finding of this report will be given at Trinity Church, on January 28.

Jessica announced that FRCOG has received a grant to initiate a pilot of the rural downtown coordinator position. The grant will fund the position for 12 months and it is hoped that can be stretched to 16 to 18 months Each town will be asked to contribute $4,000 in FY’26, this also includes Buckland. Andrew was thinking the coordinator could be primarily a grant writer. Jessica said that was not the current vision for the position but it could be part of it. The coordinator’s task will depend on cues from the business community.

**6:15 pm Karen Tonelli, Assistant Assessor RE: HERO Act** – Statutory exemptions from property taxes exist for veterans, as well as for elderly people meeting certain income requirements, and for people who are blind. The HERO Act would add two new clauses, 22I and 22J to the veteran’s exemptions. Towns need to vote on whether to accept either of them or both. This has to be done at Town Meeting. Clause 22I would increase the exemption amounts by means of a COLA. Otherwise the exemption amounts remain the same every year. Clause 22J can increase the amount of exemptions, up to a 100% increase, depending on what the town wants. Shelburne currently has nine qualifying veterans in three different exemption categories. A portion of the exemption amount is reimbursed by the state. If the new clauses are voted in, the amount reimbursed by the state will remain the same. It will not increase. The amount of exemptions currently given is only a few thousand dollars per year. The Board of Assessors has not discussed this but Karen will put it on the February agenda. The Selectboard will wait for the assessors’ recommendation before making a decision on this.

**Old Business:**

**Community Action Food Pantry Services RE: Possible Funding Source** – When this was last discussed, Community Action has been encouraged to look for other funding sources. Late today some information had been received about user towns. The Board needs some time to study that information. At the last meeting, housing trust funds were thought to be a possible source of funding. The amount of money in the housing trust was not as great as it had been thought. It is about $95,811. Buckland’s Town Counsel has said it would be possible to use those funds. The Board is now waiting for Buckland’s thoughts on this matter.

**Department of Veteran’s Services RE: Hero Act, Chapter 178 of the Acts of 2024** – See above 6:15 pm appointment.

**New** **Business**

**FRCOG RE: 2025 District Local Technical Assistance Request Form (DLTA)** – This form was sent to all boards and committees, but no feedback was received. The form must be returned to FRCOG this week. Tricia had several categories she thought might be useful. These included Business and Industry/Sector Assistance providing support to expand promote and/or preserve important economic sectors, Public Information and Warning, Regional Sheltering Plan Update, Rural Policy Plan Implementation and Update, Municipal Service Sharing specifically grant administration/management, and Comprehensive Plans specifically conducting a community survey. Andrew was interested in Municipal Service Sharing for grants and in Downtown District Support. Terry expressed the same interest as Andrew and also in EMS Regionalization. Rick’s choices were Municipal Service Sharing and Downtown District Support. Some projects were not considered because boards or committees that should have shown an interest in pursuing them, did not show any interest. A motion was put forth by Andrew to recommend Municipal Service Sharing for grant administration and management, and Downtown District Support as DLTA projects to prioritize. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Andrew – yes; Tricia – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**FRCOG RE: 2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Plan (CEDS)** – This is for large economic development projects that will be done in the next five years. Terry did not foresee a project that would meet the qualifying criteria of the CEDS Program. Tricia suggested possibly doing a feasibility study to promote the film industry in this area. Rick was not sure that her suggestion would fit the criteria. Tricia thought the Memorial Hall renovation project might be leveraged to fit into a development plan. Andrew will see if he can make that fit the criteria.

**Memorial Hall Theater Renovations RE: Disposal of Theater Chairs** – Andrew said that bid packets are being created for the Memorial Hall floor and ceiling repairs, and the wall painting. A contract has been signed, with Highland Seating, for removal of the old chairs and replacement with new ones. The chairs belong to the town. The Memorial Hall Association is still fundraising for the renovation and had some ideas, which would need the support of the Board. The first is Take a Seat, which, for a small donation, people could take one of the old seats. The Board would need to declare the seats as surplus. The other idea is Name a Seat, whereby for a suggested donation of $500 people could put a name on a small plaque on a seat as a memorial or legacy. Terry saw no issues with declaring the seats as surplus but said the town accountant wanted to talk with the DLS attorney concerning tax deductions for naming a seat. A motion was made by Tricia to declare the old theater seats in Memorial Hall to be surplus and give them to the Memorial Hall Association to dispose of as it sees fit, prior to the Highland Seating project. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Andrew – yes; Tricia – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0. The Name a Seat project will wait until the DLS attorney is consulted.

**Any Other Business:**

**Support for META Grant** – Jeff Boettner asked for a letter of support for a META grant, which would be drafted by Weston & Sampson, for an energy study of the police station. The town has very little data on that building and that would be needed to get the building into Green Communities. A motion was put forth by Tricia to approve a letter of support for a META grant for the police station. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Andrew – yes; Tricia – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Policy for Agenda Items** – Tricia asked for the policy regarding getting items on the agenda. She had asked for an item to be on this week’s agenda and it did not appear. The policy is that Terry makes the agenda and reviews it with the Chair. In Tricia’s case more information was being gathered before bringing the item to the Board.

**Interpretation Services** – Tricia brought up the idea of the town providing interpretation services for residents with limited proficiency in the English language. She felt interpretation services should be in place, on an as-needed basis, to protect the town from future legal issues. The specific reason for this was an upcoming Planning Board public hearing that may affect an individual who is not proficient in English. Rick felt as the hearing was not specifically involving the individual and it was an open hearing for everyone’s feedback, he did not believe the interpretive services were needed. Andrew said it was a Planning Board hearing and the Selectboard should not be telling another elected board what to do. The Board also realized that part of the proposed bylaws that would be discussed at the hearing were general bylaws, which are enforced by the Selectboard. Andrew asked what the Board’s role was in the hearing process. Terry said the enforcement might be up to the Selectboard, but the approval process was up to the Planning Board. Terry had sent a message to all cities and towns in the Commonwealth asking how they handled interpretive services. Only one response had been received so far and that town did not provide such services. Terry said she was uncomfortable singling out one individual who had not asked for assistance. In this case, family members have been doing the translations as needed. The Board agreed that this was a good thing to have on its radar but took no action.

**Next Meeting** – The next Board meeting will be on February 10, at 5:30 pm via Zoom.

**Correspondence:**

**Todd Senecal, Highway RE: Letter of Resignation** – Todd resigned his position with the highway department, effective as of January 24, in order to take other employment. The Board thanked him for his good service and good work and said his departure is a loss to the town.

**F.C.DPW Assets & Needs Assessment** – The Board acknowledged receipt of this report.

**Public Comment:**

Margaret Payne said she read the newspaper account of the Planning Board information meeting regarding mobile food establishments and Asma’s Kitchen in particular. Margaret said she had a lot of experience with minorities and said that while the proposed bylaw was not directly about Asma, it was about her. Margaret felt that while Shelburne does not have a lot of non-English speaking residents, the town should deal with what they do have. She felt that how this issue was handled would reflect the heart of the town.

**Adjournment**: At 8:10 pm a motion was made by Andrew to adjourn the meeting. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Faye Whitney, Recording Secretary