**Selectboard Meeting Minutes March 10, 2025 Zoom Teleconference 5:30 pm**

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

A motion was put forth by Tricia to approve the minutes of February 24 and the executive session minutes of February 27. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Andrew – yes; Tricia – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Department Liaison Reports:**

**Town Hall:** TheExecutive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS) will be coordinating access to Town Server via Northeast IT in order to conduct database vulnerability testing. Quotes are being sought for a generator for Town Hall. The street light replacement project was completed on March 6. The Cowell Gym Director position has been advertised and the highway laborer position has been re-advertised.TheCowell Gym RFQ for insulated mechanical shades has been advertised.  Proposals are due by April 4. A META grant application for energy assessment at the police/municipal building has been submitted.Excise taxes are due on March 26. Nomination papers for town offices are available.

**Emergency Management:** The EMD attended the Franklin County EMD meeting held in Ashfield on Feb. 27, where they discussed: (1) developing a more robust regional communications protocol, which Tom will work on; and (2) the need for consistent and uniform training across EM Committees to avoid problems like what was experienced during a local wildfire a few years ago when ICS protocols were not followed and precious time (about 24 hours) was lost. Also, a grant application for an update of the Hazard Mitigation Plan has been submitted. Work continues on a comprehensive three-year emergency management plan for the town. Tom will be meeting with the Recreation Committee on March 12 to review request for designating the Cowell as the town’s primary emergency shelter. Coming up will be working with MEMA Regional Coordinator on the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) for the Town in the event of an emergency.

**Senior Center:** The FY’26 budget has been updated to reflect rising insurance costs. The software company has been asked about initial rates and ongoing costs, with no response as yet.

**Highway Department** – Andrew and Jeff Johnston met to discuss the temporary bridge, the Maple Street culvert, overtime, salaries, the one-ton truck, and snow cleanup in the village. There has been no word from Eversource about the location of poles near the temporary bridge, but it was Jeff’s opinion that neither the current nor proposed location pose a flood hazard risk.

**Mohawk Trail Regional School District Personnel Negotiations** **Subcommittee**: Executive session meetings with the Unit B - Paraprofessional’s Team are in progress and will continue frequently until negotiations are complete.

**Police Department:** Rick joined members of the Energy Committee to do a walk-through of the police station building, in advance of filing for the META grant, which is the Municipal Energy Technical Assistance program, for a study for an energy savings plan for the building.  Concerns observed were the +/- 30-foot ceilings in many areas and finding out the current insulation levels.  Initial thoughts were the back side of the main building roof is large, perfectly pitched and facing due south.

**Franklin Regional Transportation Authority Advisory Board:** Next meeting March 20.

**Police Services Advisory Committee:** Next meeting April 16.

**Pioneer Valley Veterans Services Advisory Board:** Chris Demars, Director of the Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans’ Services was pleased to hear we voted to bring adoption of the Hero's Act to town meeting for a real estate tax adjustment for disabled veterans. Next meeting October 7.

Rick thanked Jeff Boettner for all his help with the installation of the new streetlights. Jeff worked with the installer, helping the proposed four-day project get done in less than three days.

The Board held a brief moment of silence for Jim Richardson, who passed last week. Jim was an assessor for 42 years and the tree warden for 26 years.

It was noted that nomination papers are available for elected town officers and that there are many vacancies on appointed boards and committees.

**Appointments with Finance Committee Members: (**Jim Burnham, Terri Mitchell, Finance Committee)

**5:45 pm Tom Williams, Emergency Management Budget** – Tom’s capital request was for $5,000 for engineering plans and drawings for the purchase of a backup generator. It is not certain where the generator would be located. Andrew asked how plans could be done without knowing a location. Tom said the requested funds should be enough whatever site was chosen. He said the money needed to be available so that when a site was decided upon, the plans could be made. Rick asked if the town didn’t have the funds for a generator, how could money be set aside for plans? He added that Town Hall was already wired for a generator, perhaps that should be addressed first. Rick said the generator at the police building did not have engineering plans and the bids went through without one. Tom said the police building generator had to have engineering plans done, in a rush, at the last minute. Tom said the work got done but the correct process was not followed. Tricia asked if a generator could be used at more than one location. Tom said he was proposing a generator be permanently installed at Cowell. Terri Mitchel asked if Fellowship Hall had been considered as an emergency site. Tom said it was on the list but Cowell was easier for village residents to access. More discussion followed about whether the first step should be identifying a location or getting funds for engineering plans.

**6:00 pm MTRSD BERK12 Presentation** (Sheryl Stanton, Martha Thurber, Willow Cohen) – The goal of this meeting was to gather input from Shelburne officials. Five models have been analyzed by BERK12. The models show a wide range of savings from $400,000 to $5.3 million. There are educational benefits to consolidation and there comes a point where small is too small, said Sheryl. The models with larger consolidation would require capital investments and most of the models will require changes in the regional agreement, which will require all district towns to approve. A statement of interest to the MSBA will be done this April, because the timeline for projects is six to eight years. A statement of interest is not a binding process. The first model is to do nothing. Some savings could be made but town assessments will continue to rise. Model two is to merge the Mohawk and Hawlemont Districts. This would provide modest financial relief. The current Mohawk towns would see their assessment rise, while the Hawlemont towns would see lower assessments. Model three would bring sixth grade students to Mohawk, resulting in modest savings. This idea was floated before and did not get community support. This time there is more of a sense of urgency, as buildings are aging and enrollment is dropping This model would not result in financial savings. Model 4 would close one or more of the elementary schools, leaving only one or two elementary school still operating. This model would require sixth grade students to move to Mohawk. Capital investments would be required but overall there would be savings. Model five would create a single campus for all students, located at Mohawk. All students would then be able to access all specialized services and supports, the school would have updated technology and environmental standards. This model requires the largest capital investment. Using models four or five would require large capital investments and the resulting debt service. Once a model is selected, there will be a better sense of the true costs. Martha Thurber said that while there are costs to the models, there are also costs to doing nothing. Sheryl spoke about transportation and mentioned various scenarios including using vans, having all students on the same buses, and bus monitors. Consolidating schools would not only save on costs but would also allow equitable access to all programs and services to all students. The best parts of each elementary school could be brought together in one school. Sheryl and Martha emphasized that no decisions have been made, all towns will have to agree, and this process will take years. The next steps depend on what comes out of the current ongoing community meetings. Andrew asked what if the final choice results in a lot of students leaving the district. Could an attractive resource be created to retain and possibly attract students from other districts? Sheryl said new buildings generally attract students. The question for everyone is what is the best way to educate all our students.

**Old Business:**

**Community Action Food Pantry Services RE: Possible Funding Source** – Community Action responded to questions saying that it needs $40,000 per year to keep the West County Food Pantry open. They also said that the other communities that use the pantry have never been asked to help with funding. It was noted that 48% of the users are from towns other than Shelburne or Buckland. It was assumed that many of the other towns have no way of funding the pantry. Andrew asked if Shelburne was planning to use the CDBG program in the future. Linda Overing is willing to come to a meeting to discuss that, but the town would need to have a project ready to go. A motion was made by Andrew to place an article on the town meeting warrant saying that Shelburne will fund the West County Food Pantry for up to $20,000 as matched by the town of Buckland. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Ted Harvey, FRCOG RE: FY’26 Rural Downtown Coordinator Pilot Project – Agreed $2,000 Allocation for Buckland and Shelburne** – It had been asked that the project be extended from 12 to 18 months. That seemed reasonable. Shelburne was asked to provide an additional $4,000. Since the Shelburne Falls business district spans two towns, it was felt that Buckland and Shelburne should each contribute $2,000 to the project. Buckland has agreed to this plan. A motion was put forth by Andrew to support the Rural Downtown Coordinator Pilot Project for 18 months and allocate up to $2,000 as matched by the town of Buckland. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Overtime Policy Discussion** – It was Terry’s understanding that this discussion would be paused until Andrew had spoken with Jeff Johnston. Andrew has had the conversation and there is no change to Jeff’s proposal for an eight-hour overtime policy. Andrew said he had previously voted both for and against such a policy and would not be willing to vote again. Rick said he saw no reason to change the current 40-hour overtime policy and would not support any changes. Tricia was in favor of overtime after an eight-hour work day. The policy has to be for all employees, not just the highway department. In reality, only the highway and police departments would be affected. A motion was made by Tricia to allow town employees to get over time after eight hours of work in one day. This was seconded by Rick. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – abstain; Rick – no. Motion failed 1-1-1.

**FY’26 COLA Reconsideration** – The Selectboard had previously voted for a 3% COLA . Andrew felt it was important to stay ahead of inflation and wished to offer a 3.5% COLA. FRCOG is offering 3.5%. The Finance Committee had made their recommendation based on the CPI, which is now 3%. A motion was put forth by Andrew to increase the COLA for FY’26 to 3.5%. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**New** **Business:**

**Bridge Street Bazaar RE: Shelburne Falls Porch Festival, Request to Waive Permit Fee(s)** – The event will be held on Sunday, July 13. It is free to the public and is a well-run event. A motion was made by Andrew to waive the permit fees for the Porch Festival. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Cowell Gym Window Replacement Project Bids** – Three bidders responded and two of the bids were considered. The recommendation of John Walsh and Terry was to go with Window Depot of South Boston for $45,405 with an added fee for lead paint mitigation. John has checked some of the references and they have all been good. This amount falls within the amount appropriated at Town Meeting plus the ARPA funds. A motion was made by Andrew to accept the bid of $45,405 plus lead paint mitigation from Window Depot of South Boston, pending the final review of references. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Sylvia Smith RE: Clarifying Vote to Accept Section 3 of C 402 Acts of 2022** – This vote would allow the Board of Managers to get contracts in place for the transition so all is ready to go on July 1. Town Counsel said this vote was needed by all three towns. A motion was put forth by Tricia to accept Section 3 of Chapter 402 of the Acts of 2022 which authorizes the Board of Managers of the West County Senior Services District to act during the transition from the Senior Center Consortium between the Towns of Ashfield, Buckland and Shelburne to the West County Senior Services District. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Community Preservation Committee RE: Request to Hire Susan Durkee as CPC Clerk** – The CPC voted to recommend Susan as their clerk. Having read her application a motion was made by Tricia to hire Susan Durkee as Clerk to the Community Preservation Committee. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**John Taylor, Fire Chief RE: Proposed Town Bylaw for Address Assignment** – It is the responsibility of the fire chief to assign house numbers. The proposed bylaw seems to formalize what is already happening. Assistant Assessor Karen Tonelli is agreeable to this bylaw as the assessors are the ones who update the database with addresses. Terry thinks this bylaw may require holding a public hearing. The Board would like John to come in and discuss this.

**Any Other Business:**

Tricia announced that she will not be running for re-election and thanked the voters for giving her the opportunity to serve on the Selectboard.

**Next Meeting** – The next Board meeting will be on March 24, at 5:30 pm via Zoom.

**Correspondence:**

**Governor Maura Healy RE: Chapter 90 Apportionment for FY’26** – Pending budget approval, Shelburne could be receiving $369,244.67 in Chapter 90 funds. Andrew said that Chapter 90 has almost doubled and the town is also expecting $112,000 from the Fair Share amendment. Jeff Johnston has identified a number of road projects, which would be eligible for the Chapter 90 funds. Jeff has also created a snow policy, which will be discussed at a future meeting.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Adjournment**: At 7:55 pm a motion was made by Tricia to adjourn the meeting. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Faye Whitney, Recording Secretary