

**Norwell Board of Selectmen  
Remote Open Meeting  
5/27/20**

TOWN OF NORWELL  
TOWN CLERK  
2020 JUN -4 PM 12:10

**Present:** Ellen Allen, Alison Demong, Jason Brown, Joe Rull, Bruce Graham, Peter Morin, Bob Galvin, Bill Coffey

**Open Session**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Ellen Allen at 7:02pm. She announced that all votes will be roll call votes as the meeting participants are using remote access software. The meeting was recorded and the audio file will be available on the Town website. Ms. Allen noted that this meeting will be conducted pursuant to the Executive Order dated March 12, 2020 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, Gen. L. c. 30A §20 et seq. and 940 CMR 29.01 et seq.

**Approval of Agenda**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to approve the agenda as presented. Unanimously voted by roll call vote*

**BOS Reports**

Ms. Allen announced that residents may apply for mail in ballots for the Town election on June 27<sup>th</sup>. Contact the Town Clerk's office for information. Ms. Demong thanked Veterans Officer David Osborne for his fine organization of a remote celebration and remembrance of our veterans on Memorial Day.

**Town Administrator Report**

None

**Update on Enacting Reopening Phase I in Norwell**

Mr. Morin updated the board on the Gov. Baker's 4 phase program. The level of activity at Town Hall has increased. Mr. Morin and department heads have done a safety assessment of each office and identified physical and structural changes that need to be made. The facilities manager will order materials and various barriers, door changes, etc. as well as masks and protective gear. Mr. Morin has asked that every office be occupied for at least part of each work day. Some offices will have more than one employee if it's feasible. Town Hall is getting ready and acclimated to serving the public in this new environment, while remote work continues in almost every office. He hopes to have the modifications completed by early to mid-June. When it is appropriate to open to the public we will do so. At that time, we'll be requesting that all visitors wear masks. Disposable masks will be available. Masks from the state were distributed to each office by the Fire Department.

All COVID related purchases will be reimbursable through the CARES Act. Their website opened on Friday with a brief introduction to the Act. The first reimbursement application will probably be submitted around June 5<sup>th</sup>, with subsequent applications being filed as needed.

**Annual Town Meeting 2020 – discussion and planning**

The Annual Town Meeting is currently scheduled for June 15<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Allen gave the board an update from Town Moderator Bill Coffey. Mr. Morin listed the numerous challenges to holding this meeting under the new social distancing guidelines:

- State guidance for the month of June calls for virtual gatherings (as in graduations) and postponing large gatherings until July with prescribed social distancing. Legislative bodies are exempt, so it would be possible to hold Town Meeting. Mr. Coffey's concern is how meaningful participation will be with these restrictions?

- Is there a facility that could accommodate this size meeting? Town Meeting would be awkward inside. Is there an area outside that is adequately accessible to all? Per Mr. Coffey and Mr. Morin, there is nothing really pressing on the Warrant that needs to be done by June 15<sup>th</sup>.
- The Town could submit a 1/12 budget to the DOR/DLS based on FY20's approved budget and make estimated lump sum payments for items (instead of actual amounts) that are normally submitted in July. Such payments could be split up and paid in periodic amounts at the Town's discretion. The Town doesn't need to comply with negotiated contract raises, etc. in this current situation. Mr. Morin will propose a 1/12 budget to the BOS next week.
- The Town could approve the flood map regulation adoption, or the BOS has the power to approve this instead of a vote at Town Meeting.
- Town Meeting could be continued into July, which has the advantage of allowing time to learn from other communities' experiences.

Questions:

- What is the benefit of postponing? Answer- learn from other communities' experiences (Hingham, Duxbury, etc.). Mr. Morin gave examples, adding that other towns are also meeting remotely
- Ms. Allen noted that Mr. Coffey was only available on Tuesday, July 7<sup>th</sup> if necessary. He would like to wait to hold Town Meeting.

The board will decide tonight whether or not to postpone. The date could also be pushed out another 30 days by Mr. Coffey.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to recommend the suspension of the current Special and Annual Town Meeting on June 15, 2020, to reconvene on July 7, 2020. Unanimously voted by roll call vote.*

### **Fiscal 2021 draft budget update**

Mr. Morin reiterated that he will submit a 1/12 budget based on FY20 to the BOS for review next week, with additional assessments for pensions and other costs normally covered in July. This budget will take the Town through the first month of the new fiscal year. On 6/1/20, the DOR will release the forms to be completed and filed with DLS, which Mr. Morin will provide to the board for review. For the remainder of FY21, Mr. Morin will use:

- A current projection of tax revenues, unemployment costs and his best read from talking to the state administration to recommend a budget that reduces revenues by \$1.4M. The total budget would be recalculated to absorb this reduction.
- Reductions will include a number of different items, from requesting COLA freezes to maybe furloughs, leaving positions vacant, etc. Per Mr. Morin, this is not an endorsement of the status quo, which is not advisable.
- Other communities are laying off personnel; the Town is not in that position. We are in good shape for the remainder of the fiscal year and can get through FY21.
- Mr. Morin is not planning to use the stabilization fund to close the gaps. If the levy doesn't yield adequate collection of property tax, we might have to tap in to the stabilization fund at that point.
- The Town might "borrow" the motion used by the town of Scituate for their 1/12 budget. We are well prepared and know how to submit a budget to the DOR.

In response to a question from the board with regard to the contemplation of structural changes, i.e. reducing positions and level of service to the residents, Mr. Morin noted that if Town employees forego the COLA increase the Town would probably not have to lay anyone off. He will review calculations in detail at next week's meeting.

### **CPA Surtax Articles – BOS discussion**

Ms. Demong led the discussion about the citizens petition Article to eliminate the CPA surcharge and CPA Article from the BOS to reduce the surtax from 3% to 1.5%. She asked

each board member for their feedback on each Article, referencing the 2013 Town Meeting vote for construction of the new Police Station and that BOS's mixed opinions.

In response to resident Don Mauch's suggestion to put both CPA Articles on the upcoming election ballot, Ms. Demong stated that it is not what the law intended, citing both the section of the MA general law and the mandated procedure.

- She personally supports the continuation of the CPA surtax, adding that the average household pays \$280 per year in surtax on a \$600K house assessment.
- The state match is changing for the better; as of 1/1/20, the deed registration fee increased from \$20 to \$50 per transaction. About \$400K would be expected annually from the state match.
- A surtax reduction to 1.5% would yield about \$1M per year in annual revenue.
- With an expected decline in state revenue, it might be wise to keep the 3%.
- Ms. Demong spoke to both Town Counsel and the Town Moderator about putting the 2 Articles on the ballot with no Town Meeting approval. Town Counsel's suggestion was to present both options at Town Meeting and ask voters to choose one. If voters choose to repeal the surtax, then the reduction Article could be indefinitely postponed.
- Ms. Demong presented and discussed the BOS Article with the Advisory Board at their recent meeting.
- Ms. Allen reviewed the history of these two Articles on prior Town Meeting Warrants. She noted that they have most often appeared together, which is why the board decided to offer their own Article for a reduction of the CPA surtax percentage as an alternative to the citizens petition Article for the revocation of the surtax.

The board discussed overrides and procedure at prior Town Meetings. These questions could be on an election ballot 35 days after Town Meeting, so the eligible election would be the one held in September. If passed, the change wouldn't take place until 2021 no matter when the question is on the ballot, even up to June of 2021. The board continued this discussion at length, clarifying the question of whether or not to include the BOS Article on the Warrant.

Mr. Mauch questioned the placement of his citizens petition Article in the Warrant and gave his own preference for how the Articles should be presented.

Ms. Allen asked for the opinion of the board on the inclusion of the CPA reduction Article in the Warrant. The board made the following key points:

- Mr. Brown – not an advocate of the repeal, doesn't support the Article to reduce the percentage as it is not meaningful. Residents should choose for themselves – repeal or continue, which is less confusing than two Articles.
- Mr. Rull - would like to keep the BOS Article. Some residents might want even this small amount of tax relief.
- Mr. Graham – supported the CPA Article when it passed originally. Thinks the CPC needs a master plan for the fund, rather than just approving and spending its entire annual revenue. He cited comments from some constituents that athletic field projects should be part of the school budget. Supported the purchase of the Whiting Fields. Partial to open space projects.
- Ms. Allen – noted that support seems tepid for the BOS Article. People can choose; if repeal passes the BOS Article can be indefinitely postponed, which would avoid the ballot confusion.
- Mr. Graham – didn't agree, could have a different outcome with higher numbers of voters at the election.

After further discussion. Ms. Allen summarized that there are many weeks to discuss this further and make a decision.

Mr. Mauch made additional comments supporting putting the questions on the ballot even without Town Meeting.

**Town meeting postponement, cont'd.**

Town Moderator Bill Coffey joined the meeting. Ms. Allen asked Mr. Coffey for his comments, and updated him on the BOS Town Meeting discussion points. He gave a quick overview of the law, adding that after 6/15/20 the rules might change. The proposed continuation date of 7/7/20 may not be enough of a delay, but this is a good time to learn from other towns' experience. There is no compelling reason to hold Town Meeting right now, and it is in the best interest of the residents to make sure that everyone is comfortable when the meeting takes place.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes - 4/22/20 and 4/28/20**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to approve the Open Meeting minutes for 4/22/20 and 4/28/20. Unanimously voted by roll call vote.*

**Future Meeting Agendas**

The board will meet next on 6/3/20 at 5:30pm.

**Adjournment**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Alison Demong, to adjourn at 8.23pm. Unanimously voted by roll call vote.*



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Ellen Allen, Chair

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TOWN OF HADWELL