

**Town of Norwell
Select Board
Open Meeting Minutes
7/20/22**

TOWN OF NORWELL
TOWN CLERK

2022 AUG 18 AM 10:45

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Present: Jason Brown, Bruce Graham, Andy Reardon, Pete Smellie, Peter Morin
Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to approve the agenda as presented. Unanimously voted.

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to approve the 7/13/22 Open Meeting minutes. Unanimously voted

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to approve the 5/25/22, 7/6/22 and 7/13/22 Executive Meeting Minutes. Unanimously voted

Town Administrator Reports

Mr. Morin received the proposed budget from the State House for local aid to the Town. The proposed amount is about \$31K more than the Governor's proposal, which confirms that the fiscal 2023 budget approved at Town Meeting is good.

Mr. Graham asked if the board could vote to delegate pole hearing review and approval to the Town Administrator. Per Mr. Morin, pole hearings are not delegated because the level of public interest in pole placement warranted including them on the SB agendas. Some proposed pole locations are controversial, and residents need the hearings to get these issues resolved.

Special Police Officer Appointments

Deputy Chief McDevitt and Sgt. Resnick were present to give a summary of the candidates' backgrounds for the board.

John Collins recently retired as a sergeant from the Plymouth County Sheriff's Department.

William Kenney is retired after a 30 year career with the Massachusetts State Police. These two additional Special Police Officers will augment the regular staff for tasks on a per diem basis: traffic details, transporting prisoners, etc.

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to appoint John Collins as a Special Police Officer for a term expiring 6/30/23. Unanimously voted

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to appoint William Kenney as a Special Police Officer for a term expiring 6/30/23. Unanimously voted

Update: IRS mileage rate as of 7/1/22

The IRS revised the mileage rate on 7/1/22 to 62.5 cents per mile.

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to approve the new mileage rate consistent with the personnel bylaw and Town's practice.

Unanimously voted

Select Board Reports

Citizens Comments

Mr. Graham read a prepared statement from Don Mauch, who urged the Select Board to reembrace their policy of civil discourse and offer a sincere and genuine apology to Vice Chair Jason Brown, Brian Greenberg and Lois Barbour for the "board's behavior" at the July 6th meeting. The board plans to schedule an Executive Session for August 3rd to discuss this issue further.

7:15pm National Grid Public Hearing – Circuit Street

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to open the public hearing at 7:15pm. Unanimously voted

Mr. Smellie read the notice of public hearing published in the Mariner.

The board discussed the email comments made by the Highway Surveyor Glenn Ferguson and the Water Superintendent Jason Federico, both expressing concerns with the pole placement and National Grid's pole maintenance schedule in the Town. Mr. Graham updated the board on subsequent comments from Mr. Ferguson and believes that any highway department issues have been resolved. Mr. Brown noted that he is not prepared to vote on this application until hearing directly from Mr. Ferguson on the topic.

National Grid Senior Design Engineer Bill Gillespie was present to answer questions about at this pole hearing. As he was not able to answer all of the questions raised by the board, this hearing will be continued to a future Select Board meeting.

Mr. Reardon asked about the low hanging wires on poles at specific locations in the Town, citing at least 10 different poles with maintenance issues. Mr. Gillespie was not prepared to address this topic but will pass the information along to the appropriate engineer. Hopefully that person will attend the continued pole hearing to discuss this at the August 3rd meeting. National Grid rep Joe Carroll, who was present at this meeting for another discussion offered to attend the continued hearing to address the board's questions.

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to continue this hearing to the Select Board Meeting on 8/3/22 at 7:15pm. Unanimously voted

St. Helens Property – Neighborhood Concerns/Comments from Residents

Mr. Graham apologized to all present at the meeting for not being able to provide any updates or invite comments last week.

Residents Joe Carroll and Brendan Fogarty gave a brief introduction to the board, thanking them for the opportunity to have a discussion. The neighborhood group has created a collaborative proposal of ideas for this property if the Town were able to purchase it.

The group gave a power point presentation of their ideas for property use. A copy of their handout is attached. Mr. Carroll stressed the neighborhood's desire to be part of these conversations. Discussion continued, with the group reiterating their concerns about the increased traffic that would accompany any housing construction projects.

Questions were asked and answered about the proposal. As the St. Helen's property is comprised of 2 parcels, the proposal includes options to purchase one or both. Rezoning the property, funding and a potential revenue stream to help offset costs were discussed. The group would like Town use/mixed retail/residential with height restrictions if possible, which the board thought were reasonable requests. Options included recreation use, a new COA building, and some affordable housing.

Mr. Brown stated that the board would like to help these abutter neighborhoods but reminded all that it is not known at this point if the Town can even consider buying this property. The residents offered various suggestions for the property and reiterated their desire to work collaboratively with the Town on a purchase.

Mr. Smellie thanked everyone for coming and providing a thoughtful proposal.

Mr. Reardon thanked all for taking into account the challenges that this project faces.

Mr. Brown would be happy to get to the point where this will be a viable alternative.

Mr. Graham reassured the group that Route 53 will never be a 4 lane road because of the prohibitive construction costs and the width of the way itself.

Ken Petersen, 40 Washington Park Drive; attended the Cushing Center meeting and had questions about the Town's 10% minimum AH status. He asked if the most current report numbers could be released so all would know the standing. Mr. Graham recapped the projects that provided safe harbor and their potential expiration dates depending on the project status. He highlighted the Simon Hill and High Street AH projects as examples.

Mr. Peterson also cited a pole issue on Washington Park Drive; Mr. Reardon will check it out.

Mr. Graham thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Highway Surveyor: Request for Additional Funds (\$3M) – Highway Barn project

Glenn Ferguson was present to bring the board up to speed on his highway facility project, which has been in the planning stages for 3 plus years. \$5.097M (under the levy) has already been set aside in a bond in 2020. \$493K additional funding from other sources will pay for the \$5.5M project. Per Mr. Ferguson, about \$600K has been spent/allocated for the project design and plans. He added that project bids are coming in around \$7M - \$8M.

With Mr. Morin's assistance, he has trimmed the project down, but can't make it any smaller. There is too much interference with the first responder building. Mr. Ferguson is requesting a Special Town Meeting (STM) vote for \$3M in additional project funding.

Mr. Brown opined that an override for this project would not be received well, and it would be better to look for additional money under the levy. Discussion ensued about Mr. Ferguson's role as the OPM and doing a project rebid pending a fall STM. Mr. Ferguson continued to petition the board for the additional funding. He cited building materials costs and world issues that are driving prices up.

Mr. Brown noted that he is very familiar with building costs and wages, asking the following questions; what is the percentage increase for materials and for prevailing wage on this project? Was the original plan underestimated? Per Mr. Ferguson, it was a good estimate, but there are across-the-board increases. He calculated an average bid

price of \$7.5M by throwing out the highest and lowest bids and averaging the remaining four bids.

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Mr. Brown asked about reworking this as a multi-phase/year project. The Town's appetite for a debt exclusion override will be slim to none and this would be a really hard sell. Residents are still dealing with unemployment and higher prices due to inflation. This would be yet another addition to their tax bills, and it's not like adding a field or a new library.

Mr. Ferguson was adamant about not wanting to do a piecemeal project. He would rather step out as the OPM so the Town can take over. Mr. Reardon asked what happens to the bond already committed? More discussion ensued about Mr. Ferguson's role in this project, with the board acknowledging Mr. Ferguson's hard work.

The board would like Mr. Ferguson to construct a building within the original scope since the \$5M has already been bonded. Mr. Ferguson was adamant in his refusal to do that.

More discussion ensued, with the board reiterating that the Town has no appetite for an override. The Town Meeting vote for the \$5M was evidence of support for this project and Mr. Ferguson, but an ask for more funding would probably fail. The only way to do this project is in phases. There are too many upcoming projects in the pipeline ahead of additional project funding; a new Town Hall location, school upgrades, the potential St. Helen's purchase.

In response to Mr. Reardon's question about the possibility of upgrading the existing building, Mr. Ferguson answered yes, but he won't be involved. Mr. Reardon agreed with fellow board members; no override at an STM as the DPW is not at the top of the list. He recapped the history of the police and fire building construction, adding that Town projects move slowly. He is troubled by Mr. Ferguson's statements that the project be done his way or not at all. He doesn't think this is the right thing to do. The completed building plan is usable.

Mr. Ferguson stated that the question before the board is yes or no to an override at an STM in the fall. He is not backing down from his ask.

Mr. Brown would like time to think. Right now, the answer is no, as there is more to consider.

Mr. Morin made the following comments:

- The building design cost was \$258K, not \$600K. There was additional funding of \$138K from a prior TM Article.
- He reviewed resources allocated to Highway/Tree & Grounds from 2010 to 2015, then from 2015 to the present (the period of time when strategic planning for capital needs began).
 1. 2010 to 2015: \$700K total (not much was spent prior to Mr. Ferguson's election as Highway Surveyor).
 2. 2016 to 2022 (YTD): \$8.6M
 3. It was not easy to find the \$5.5M for this project.

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- He is disappointed that we are at a point in time where the original plan is not feasible
 - The options are to shelve the plan, accomplish as much as possible with the current available funding, or modify the plan to fit the budget.
 - The shelved plan to rehab Town Hall is an example of a different solution to the original idea. Looking for a new location will cost the Town less money.
 - Mr. Ferguson has done a great job but taken on way too much responsibility. Regardless of an override, the burden of this project should be shifted to a hired OPM.
 - The decision on a debt exclusion needs more time. The project's actual budget amount needed is unknown at this point. World economics are changing daily and pricing is fluid for commodities like lumber and construction costs.
 - The current available funding is: \$5.5M, plus some Capital Stabilization funding, modified Article money of about \$500K and change to augment the \$5.5M. There are other Articles that could be retired, along with spending avenues that could be explored.
 - The best option would be to scale the project down to a smaller scope that first addresses the needs of the people who work in the department. They should be treated with the respect they deserve.
 - Address the plan in phases, starting with the headquarters building. Explore what can be done with the current resources.
 - Hire an outside OPM for the project.

In conclusion, the board and Mr. Morin respectfully requested that Mr. Ferguson not consider a debt exclusion, which won't be a palatable option. All agreed that the project should take care of its personnel first and equipment second. The \$5.5M could certainly do a big portion of the project and a team change with an outside OPM could be beneficial.

The board will consider and address this request at a future board meeting.

Adjournment

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Pete Smellie, to adjourn at 8:25pm.

Unanimously voted.



Bruce W. Graham, Chair