

**HOLDEN BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MEETING MINUTES
April 26, 2021**

6:20PM

Senior Center

Present: Anthony Renzoni, Tyler Gibbs, Chiara Barnes, Geri Herlihy, Robert Lavigne

Others Present: Peter Lukes, Town Manager (6:30)
Stephanie King, Assistant Town Manager
Stephen Madaus (6:22)
Liz Fotos, Town Recorder

Chairman Lavigne called the meeting to order at 6:20PM. The Board stood to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Sel. Renzoni suggested that the Board passed over the Executive Session without objection.

Chairman Lavigne called recess until 6:30.

Chairman Lavigne called the meeting back to order

1. Citizen Address

Lee Hill, 19 Bascom Pkwy, Holden was present at the meeting. She stated that they had attended a Board of Selectmen meeting several years ago and were left with the impression that Seven Saws would not be using the back lot for entry or exit and no one would be parking in the lot. She stated that they also indicated that if there were any noise concerns that the neighbors could reach out and they would work together. She stated this worked until Covid. She stated that they were understanding about the outdoor space however it has not escalated. She stated that she spoke with one of the owners; however they can not sit on their deck or leave their windows open any longer because of the noise. She stated that she is hearing impaired and this is still too loud for her. She stated that she was understanding if the owners were trying to maintain livelihood however they all have other jobs and they are impacting her (Hill) livelihood. She stated she was unable to hear a class she was taking because of the noise. Ms. Hill stated that they had been very inconsiderate and disrespectful and they told her that she would have to wait until November when their new facility was ready.

Ms. Hill stated that as unhappy as they are with Seven Saws they are equally as disappointed with Town officials. She stated that they have lived there for 32 years and all pay taxes and serve the community in various ways. She stated not one of the Selectboard members responded to emails or phone calls until she finally spoke with one Board of Selectmen member and he encouraged her to come to the meeting.

Ms. Hill stated that they were immediately asking for no outdoor music. She stated that while she is sorry for Covid impacting their business and construction of their building it is not the neighbors fault or problem and it should not effect the quality of life either.

Chris Buck, 2046 Main Street was present at the meeting. He stated that he was present to discuss the brown water situation and that he knows that they had spoken about it at length but there was another incident on April 17, 2021. He stated that he received no response and that he bought in a sample of the brown water so the Selectboard could see it.

Chairman Lavigne stated that the Selectboard does not go back and forth during Citizens Address but they will follow up later in the meeting with a response.

2. Appointments, Licenses, and Permits

None

3. Eagle Scout Recognition, Nicholas Miles Ertel

Newest Eagle from Troop 182.

The Board invited Nick up to the podium to talk about his project.

Mr. Ertel stated that he went to Paxton Center School from 6th-8th grade and that the outdoor classroom was always in disrepair with benches knocked over, etc. He stated that he felt a good project would be to give back to the community he spent his middle school years in. He stated that the project took about 2-3 weekends with help from the troop.

Chairman Lavigne presented Mr. Ertel with a Certificate of Recognition and the Board stood to recognize his accomplishment and pause for a photo.

4. Council on Aging Update, Covid-19, Susan Sullivan

Ms. Sullivan was present at the meeting she stated that she was the Chair for the Council on Aging and wanted to give the Board an update on what the seniors have had provided for them even with the center being closed.

Ms. Sullivan stated that a newsletter went out with regular information about Covid, information on activities, coping in a pandemic, and scams that were on going. She stated that there was also information on medicare, staying healthy, track usage, voting, farmer's markets, boosting immune systems, open enrollment, taxes, Help at Home, vaccinations, and more.

Ms. Sullivan stated that as far as activities went, they kept the vans in use, had free legal consultations, outside exercise, flu shot clinics, some senior meet ups, group meetings on

the porch or bandstand, informal hot coffee and donuts, exercise on public access tv, puzzles on a cart, grab and go garden projects, hiking groups, meal preps, rotary clubs, and distribution of 6600 meals coordinated by staff, grab and go lunches and more.

Ms. Sullivan also stated that there has been cook out to go, power week lunch to go, Thanksgiving to go, Holiday lunch to go, home cook meal to go, winter to go and March corn beef to go.

Ms. Sullivan stated that they have also provided seniors and others in the community with vaccination support with help scheduling appointments.

Ms. Sullivan stated that one thing that is on going is loneliness and that the Senior Center is a place to get together. She stated that it has been closed a long time and she wants to bring some normalcy back. She stated that they will practice social distancing and wearing maskd but they unanimously voted to open the Senior Center back up and ask the Board of Selectmen to do the same.

The Board thanked Ms. Sullivan for the impressive list of what has been going on in the Senior Center.

Mr. Lukes stated that it was his intention to open the Town Offices mid may once staff is vaccinated and he was unaware of anything preventing opening of the Senior Center. He stated that the majority of seniors in Town are vaccinated and it would be up to the patrons if they wished to go to something.

Ms. Sullivan thanked the Board and Town Manager.

5. Finance Committee Budget Discussion/Presentation

Paul Challenger, Fin Com was present at the meeting.

Mr. Challenger stated that it was Fin Com's job to oversee the Towns finances and annual budget and make recommendations about how to vote. He stated there were 11 public hearings and they met with the Superintendent and asked a lot of questions to come up with a budget that they could recommend to the Town. He stated that the Town Manager presented a lean budget and put off all that could be put off so there was not a lot to dissect on the municipal side. He stated that the budget for municipal services, not debt or education is less than 1%. He stated that debt was a little more because they were building the new DPW Building but that was debt excluded. He stated that there were two dispatchers added but that it was being paid in a different manner; he stated that it was to withdraw from the Worcester Regional Alliance so it was essential the same cost with better service.

Mr. Challenger also stated that buying a vehicle for the Building Inspector would also save money in the long term. He stated additionally they refinanced the outstanding debt for Mountview and saved a million dollars over the life of the loan.

Mr. Challenger stated that they had excess levy of \$400,000. He stated that in FY17 they had 2.3 million and over the last five years they had chewed into this with budget requests that were larger than the taxes that were raised. He stated that after this budget the levy capacity is zero. He stated that we are taxed to the max this year and we will be taking overrides or making cuts next year presuming education stays the same.

Mr. Challenger stated that the education assessment is at a 5.3% increase. He stated that it was not really their fault, the state is cutting back funding and passing cuts along to wealthier communities. He stated that they lost 2.6 million in state funding. He stated 400 students were removed from WRSD and that they get paid per student; he stated that maybe that will come back but that is unknown. He stated that for the last 10 years they have averaged over 6% increase and at this moment the School Committee Finance was meeting to lower the assessment. He stated they do have some money for Covid relief and that if they agree on the new proposal it will go to the full committee.

Sel. Renzoni stated he knows that they wanted to spend one time revenue to decrease the assessment but that it only helps this year and it would hurt twice as bad next year.

Mr. Challenger stated that they used federal and state one time money and did save a lot in transportation.

Sel. Renzoni stated that this is a recipe for disaster and is not good news. He stated that it was a band aid and next year would be very bad.

Mr. Challenger stated that Fin Com recommended no vote as it stands. He stated that they can not support it and that he thinks that the Superintendent is well aware of that. He stated that they were going to vote yes on all other articles and they have no control over the school budget. He stated that everything else on the budget they can modify as needed and they do recommend approval of everything else. He stated as a point of comparison; WRSD 5 years ago took up 54% of the budget and it is now 62%. He stated that Moni Tech has stayed flat and the only increase they have seen is with the number of students.

Mr. Challenger stated that a 5.3% increase is about \$260/ house with an average house about \$350,000. He stated that it is pretty consistent but that we are at the max of levy capacity.

Sel. Renzoni asked about the capital items.

Mr. Challenger stated that they need to keep deferring things with DPW vehicles. He stated that there is a balance of keeping things and wasting money when fixing. He stated windows need to be replaced in the library, HVAC at Senior Center, DPW vehicles, he stated that some things could be put off but you can't do that forever.

Sel. Renzoni stated that they were getting to the point of no return and things like the Chaffins substation, sidewalks, and other things that benefit the community. He stated

that they were getting to the point of no return and we are looking at 70% of schools / education taking up the budget. He stated two sister communities are already there and there are two courses of action; they get more money or they change how they do business.

Sel. Herlihy stated that next year they will be looking at a \$2 million override even with level funding if school budget comes in \$1 million over. She stated that she knows that we are in a bad place with the state and transportation funding. She stated that there are contested seats and it would be up to those seats to find creative and innovative solutions to this problem as we can not erode municipal services. Sel. Herlihy stated that looking at the Starbard Building they were going to have an emergency if they don't do something. She stated she wants people to watch the debate and ask questions to get to know the candidates.

Sel. Renzoni stated that the budget and business model of the school is going to fail and its going to hurt. He stated it was his understanding that it was only going to increase our teachers by 1.

Chairman Lavigne stated that his frustration with the district is boiling over. He stated that they play games and are not making cuts, they are offsetting different things while the Town keeps putting things off. He stated that it will be a balloon that will pop and they need to take a position and send a message to the district.

Sel. Renzoni stated that Fin Com mentioned a 1x revenue of \$900,000 which is another band aid. He stated that they will now have no more safety and it is a bad way to run a budget and will fail. He stated that the district gives a lot of head nods but he would like to see something for the \$1.5 million. He stated the only way to stop this is with Town Meeting and that they need to go and inform the public about what this means.

Mr. Challenger stated that May 17, 2021 is Town Meeting and the publics chance to vote on the budget.

6. Follow Up Citizen Address

Chairman Lavigne stated that he received a letter before he went away and asked Mr. Lukes to look into the legalities. He stated that they have not spoken about it yet.

Sel. Renzoni stated that he spoke with Mrs. Hill and one of the owners at length who assured him that he would be more respectful. He stated that he understands that it is a business but they are trying to work through it and the Board does hear the neighbors loud and clear. He stated that the Board is not allowed to go back and forth in Follow- up but that he is glad they came in and he will follow up with everyone on this matter.

Mr. Lukes stated that the outdoor extension was to last as long as the State of Emergency was in effect.

Chairman Lavigne and Sel. Renzoni both indicated they were looking into the other issue.

7. Town Manager Update

See attached

8. Vote to Layout Streets

Motion by Sel. Renzoni, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED THE INTENT TO LAYOUT STREETS FOR ACCEPTANCE AND TO PROVIDE NOTICE OF SAME, AND REFER THE PROPOSED STREET LAYOUTS TO THE PLANNING BOARD FOR A REPORT/RECOMMENDATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH MGL c. 41, SECTION 811: SHAYS Lane and Oak Hill Subdivision/ Jordan Road and Stanjoy Road.**

9. Vote ATM Recommendations re: WRSD FY 22 Budget

Sel. Renzoni made a motion to oppose the WRSD FY 22 Budget. He stated this budget will cripple town services next year and they will never recover.

Sel. Herlihy stated that she has a different opinion. She stated that it is a very frustrating budget and there is not a lot of transparency. She stated that most of the Board has children and they have all seen district services eroding; no school psychologists, no nurses in the buildings, buildings in disrepair, AP classes, lack of teachers, etc. She stated there is a Foundation Budget Commission but nothing has changed and there is no regional transportation, no state funding and the health increase increasing by 10% + cripples the budget. She stated that this is unsustainable but it is not the Selectboard's job to tell the district what to do.

Chairman Lavigne stated that he did agree with Sel. Herlihy but that the bottom changed and the top did not and that the funds they were using would not be there next year.

Sel. Herlihy replied she agreed with Chairman Lavigne and that was where the transparency and accountability should be. She stated every year the district seems to find money and she would like to know more about that. She stated that it was very frustrating to have all these School Committee members that did not ask. She stated that it is up to the citizens to elect the School Committee.

Chairman Lavigne stated that he agreed they don't have say over the budget but that he thinks that the Board needs to speak up for the rest of the Town. He stated that to the best of his understanding the School District has a number of offset accounts and when they have a line item that they don't use it goes into an offset account so the towns do not receive those funds back. They then pull money from that account in order to get a budget passed. He stated that is not how Holden runs their budget, you come in with what you need and should not use all these games for negotiations as people's lives are

being impacted. He stated that he thinks the Board does have an obligation along with Fin Com to say they don't recommend or endorse this.

Mr. Lukes left the meeting at 7:50PM.

Sel. Renzoni stated that everything in the community is important not just the schools.

Mr. Lukes returned to the meeting at 7:52PM.

Sel. Gibbs asked why the Board was taking position this week instead of waiting on the election of the new Board.

Mr. Challenger stated that he believes the vote tonight is to quiet any rumors. He state the Director of Finance was invited to speak to the School Committee so they know that the budget was being rejected formally.

Sel. Herlihy asked if there was consensus to how much would have to be cut.

Mr. Lukes stated that Rutland needed about \$400,000 of their assessment cut to break even and he was not sure about Paxton, but he thought around \$200,000.

Sel. Renzoni stated that the overall budget would have to be cut by about \$2 million. He stated that the School District was not talking about cutting the budget, they were talking about cutting the assessment. He stated that he thinks they will try to get money from other places so it doesn't hurt as much and will trick the budget.

Chairman Lavigne stated that the matter. did not make sense to go to teacher layoffs. He stated there is a million dollars in savings for transportation, 3 million for full day kindergarten and people don't know where money was spent.

Sel. Herlihy agreed and stated that they do not want to micromanage the District but they do want transparency and to see the accounting for these funds.

Chairman Lavigne stated that the Board voting no was not micromanaging, it was them defending their needs because otherwise the District will continue to increase.

Sel. Renzoni stated if the Board does not vote no; they will not be able to run the government.

Motion by Sel. Renzoni, seconded by Sel. Barnes, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED TO RECOMMEND TO ANNUAL TOWN MEETING THAT THEY OPPOSE WRSD FY 22 BUDGET AS CURRENTLY PRESENTED.**

10. WRSD REGIONAL AGREEMENT DISCUSSION

Chairman Lavigne stated that at the Pubic Hearing he spoke and was clear he was speaking for himself not the Board. He stated that his comment was about changing the membership to no more than 10 members with weight given to population. He stated another was about the ability to withdraw with 2/3 towns; so majority.

Chairman Lavigne stated that the budget should also be provided with detail to Fin Com, Town Management and Selectboards. He stated this will help the conversation start earlier. He stated that some other comments were regarding to use of buildings by groups and reduction of dollar amount for improvements to be lowered.

Sel. Herlihy stated she was interested in a withdrawal policy as well and that other ideas she had were not quite as laid out such as transportation within 1.2 miles. She stated she would also like to see the committee membership lowered.

The Board had no objection to these items and Chairman Lavigne would send follow up communications to the District.

11. Open, Set, Close ATM Warrant

Motion by Sel. Renzoni, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED TO OPEN THE 2021 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING WARRANT AS PRESENTED.**

Mr. Lukes stated that in front of the Board there was the Warrant Articles for consideration. He stated that Fin Com had suggested a number of changes.

Mr. Challenger explained the changes and reason for combining the motions and renumbering the Warrant Articles. Mr. Madaus, Town Counsel, stated that he had no objections to this.

The Board agreed.

Motion by Sel. Renzoni, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED TO SET THE ATM WARRANT ARTICLES AS AMMENDED.**

12. WRSD Budget Regional Task Force

Mr. Lukes stated that the region had met and discussed this in order to address issues and make sure that there is a unified response. He stated that the Board asked him to organize a collection from Town Administrations, representatives of the Selectboards and other Town Managers. He stated that at this point he had reached out and heard back from three or four and now it was Holden's turn to nominate a person to sit on the task force.

Chairman Lavigne asked for volunteers.

Sel. Renzoni stated that he was interested and would service pending election results.

Sel. Herlihy stated that she was happy this was moving forward and did not object to Sel. Renzoni serving pending results.

Mr. Lukes stated all management wanted to be a part of this and that several of the towns have been feeling the heat and wanting to get organized.

13. Selectmen Minutes

The Board passed over the minutes

14. Selectmen Miscellaneous

Sel. Gibbs: none

Sel. Barnes: none

Sel. Herlihy stated that the School Committee debate would be 6-7:30 on HCTV.

Sel. Renzoni congratulated Mr. Ertel on his Eagle Scout accomplishment.

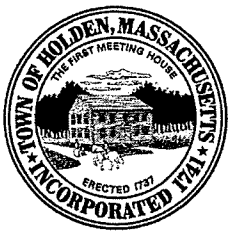
15. Sel. Subcommittee

Chairman Lavigne stated that Eagle Lake is cleaning up.

Mr. Lukes stated the School Committee was not open to the public but would be live streamed. He stated there were six candidates that would answer and debate six different questions.

Motion by Sel. Renzoni, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED TO ADJOURN THE APRIL 26, 2021 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING AT 9:04PM.**

APPROVED: September 20, 2021



TOWN OF HOLDEN
MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

Peter M. Lukes
Town Manager

April 23, 2021

TO: Board of Selectmen

FROM: Peter M. Lukes,
Town Manager

SUBJECT: *Town Manager Update*

1. **Covid Vaccination Update** – as of last Wednesday, 10,540 Holden residents have received at least one dose of Covid vaccination (55% of the total population). We have only about 150 remaining out of nearly 3,400 residents who are 65+ who have not yet received any vaccination, which accounts for less than 5% of the senior population. About 6,750 residents have been fully vaccinated with both shots (35% of the total population). Those 16 years and under are not yet eligible for vaccinations and they account for nearly 25% of our total population, so this is the main factor holding us back from higher numbers at this point. However, those aged 16 and under are also the least likely to suffer any serious effects from Covid 19, so we are fortunate in that we have the key demographics well protected at this point (over 80% of 65+ are fully vaccinated).

Information ☒ [X]

Vote ☐ []

Signature ☐ []

2. **New Starbard Drop Box** – We will be installing a new dropbox at the Starbard building that will be similar to the Town Clerk's drop box on the side of Town Hall. The old Starbard dropbox had become rusted and was too small to accommodate the amount of materials that were being collected. The new box will be larger and will be placed at the bottom of the handicapped ramp as you enter the Starbard building, closer to the parking lot.

Information ☒ [X]

Vote ☐ []

Signature ☐ []

3. **Town Buildings Re-Opening** – We have set a date of May 17 as the date for re-opening town buildings to walk-in traffic. Buildings have been open by appointment only since the beginning of the Covid restrictions. After May 17 we are confident that all town employees who want vaccinations will have had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated, and should therefore pose no problem with walk-in visits from the general public. We will be maintaining social distancing guidelines until they are lifted by the Governor, and have installed plexiglass barriers where needed.

Information ☒ [X]

Vote ☐ []

Signature ☐ []

4. **ECC Property/ State Budget Amendment** – We have been working with Representative Kim Ferguson's office to insert an amendment into the FY22 State budget for the amount of \$250,000 to remediate hazardous materials and rehabilitate the ECC property on Princeton Street. It remains to be seen whether the amendment will pass but I'd like to thank Rep. Ferguson for her attention to this issue and assistance with filing the amendment.

Information ☒

Vote ☐

Signature ☐

5. **Water Sewer Advisory Board** – My office has been soliciting applications for those interested in serving on the Water/Sewer Advisory Board. The board has seven seats, and we had six very qualified individuals who I am expecting to appoint, but unfortunately one is now leaving town, so this leaves us two short of the required seven. We are still accepting applications and I would like to appoint the new members by the end of April. Those interested in applying should fill out a Do-Something Questionnaire at HoldenMA.gov.

Information ☒

Vote ☐

Signature ☐

6. **Election Ballots** – Absentee ballots are available to voters who will be absent from Town on the day of the Annual Town Election – Monday, May 10th. All requests for absentee ballots must be in writing and received in the Town Clerk's Office no later than 5 p.m. on Tuesday, May 4. Voters may choose to have the ballot mailed or you may call the Town Clerk's Office at 508-210-5530 to make an appointment to vote in person. On May 10, the polls will open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Information ☒

Vote ☐

Signature ☐

7. **Annual Town Meeting** –. The Annual Town Meeting is set for Monday, May 17 at 7:00 PM at Wachusett Regional High School auditorium. We will again be using the cafeteria for spillover seating if necessary. Depending on Covid rules at that time we may be seating attendees with whatever distancing is required. As you will recall, we used the same setup last year during the height of the Covid pandemic and everything went smoothly and without issue. We expect the same outcome this year.

Information ☒

Vote ☐

Signature ☐

8. **Personal Property and Real Estate Taxes** – Due Monday, May 3. Payments can be made online at HoldenMA.gov, deposited in the drop box (no cash) or mailed to 1204 Main St, Holden 01520.

Should you have any questions regarding these matters, please feel free to contact my office.



Town Manager's Update -4-23-2021

Peter M. Lukes
Town Manager

Cc: Department Heads