

**HOLDEN BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
MEETING MINUTES  
April 6, 2020**

**6:30PM**

**Zoom Meeting**

Present: Anthony Renzoni, Tyler Gibbs (remotely participating), Robert Lavigne (remotely participating) Geri Herlihy (remotely participating), and Chiara Barnes (remotely participating.)

Others Present:       Peter Lukes, Town Manager  
                              Stephanie King, Assistant Town Manager  
                              Stephen Madaus, Town Counsel (remotely participating)  
                              Liz Fotos, Town Recorder (remotely participating)

Chairman Renzoni stated that due to the new regulations put in place because of Covid-19 there were strict limitations on the amount of people that are allowed to be present for a meeting, members of the public could view the meeting live on Channel 191, live streaming on the Holden website or as a recording the next day.

Chairman Renzoni called the meeting to order at 6:30PM and rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**1. Citizen Address**

Opened Citizen Address; no citizens were logged in; the Chairman also provided his cell phone number for public comment.

**2. Appointments, Licenses, and Permits**

None

**3. Town Manager Update** (See attached)

Motion by Sel. Lavigne, seconded by Sel. Herlihy, **IT WAS UNANIMOUSLY VOTED TO APPROVE THE DONATION FOR HOLDEN DAYS AS PRESENTED.**

COVID-19 UPDATE (SEE ATTACHED)

**CITIZEN ADDRESS REVISIT**

NONE

**4. Vote to Layout Streets for Acceptance: Wachusett Valley Estates  
Subdivision: Liberty Circle, Freedom Lane, and Patriot Way**

Motion by Sel. Lavigne, seconded by Sel. Herlihy, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO SET THE PUBLIC HEARING TO LAYOUT WACHUSETT VALLEY ESTATES SUBDIVISION; LIBERTY CIRCLE, FREEDOM LANE, AND PATRIOT WAY ON APRIL 27, 2020 AT 7:05PM.**

(Lavigne: yes; Gibbs: yes; Herlihy: yes; Barnes: yes; Renzoni: yes).

Mr. Lukes stated that Mr. Madaus typed out that these are all developer streets and they have rights and ways and they can each participate remotely at the Public Hearing.

Chairman Renzoni stated that the Town Manager's Office or Ms. Harding would reach out and notify the owners of the process to participate.

#### **5. Public Hearing Water and Sewer Rate Increase**

Motion by Sel. Lavigne, seconded by Sel. Barnes, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO OPEN THE PUBLIC HEARING FOR WATER AND SEWER RATE INCREASES.** (Lavigne: yes; Gibbs: yes; Herlihy: yes; Barnes: yes; Renzoni: yes).

Mr. Woodsmall was present at the meeting. He stated that they were present to discuss the proposed rate increase to raise approximately \$100,000 for the upcoming fiscal year 2021 budget. This is total increase of about 1.4% from rate revenue collected last year. He stated that they are focusing on the sewer fixed fee. He stated they are recommending a rate increase of 6.5%: \$22.98 to \$24.44/ month. He is stating that they had been to the Finance Committee for the overall budget. Mr. Woodsmall stated that originally water and sewer was going to be slightly negative, but based off the sewer fund operation to cover the fixed cost there was an increase that led to the need to raise that fixed fee.

Mr. Woodsmall stated that because of Covid-19, court cases have been delayed and the cost for the lawsuit would be pushed to next fiscal year as they don't think they will go to trial until later in the year. That necessitated some changes to the overall budget, but it did not change the rate increase. The money from that account is from retained earnings and does not impact the rate revenues.

He stated the changes are due to large increases in assessment from Blackstone, as well as changes in other things including debt payments and chemical usage. Mr. Woodsmall stated that it is a relatively small increase. He recommends that the Board votes to put the rates into effect for July 1, 2020 as shown on the rate sheet in their memo.

Sel. Herlihy asked for a new projection for the next 3-5 years and a proposed increase over the next 3-5 years. She also brought up that in 2018 it was projected that there would be a 0% increase in 2020 and a 12% increase in 2022. She asked what the projections would be going forward with this adjustment.

Mr. Woodsmall replied that a lot of the projections from 2018 have been based off the expected favorable ruling of the sewer case. He stated that those have continued to be

pushed out and for the next several years he was looking at a 4-5% increase for next year and a minimal increase beyond that. He stated that he could send the Board his 5 year projected plan, but it was not with him tonight.

Chairman Renzoni asked for him to email the projection plan through the Town Manager's Office.

Sel. Lavigne asked about using retained earnings.

Mr. Woodsmall replied that they are using a fair amount of retained earnings for temporary rate relief and it was ultimately decided that it is a small increase that makes a large difference and it would not deplete the ability to use the fund in the future. He would have liked to recommend no increase but for the long term and in good faith he couldn't recommend any more than this.

Sel. Lavigne asked what is remaining in the fund.

Mr. Woodsmall replied between \$200,000 and \$250,000.

Sel. Lavigne asked if any of those monies were used to offset the increase.

Mr. Woodsmall replied that the \$200,000 was what was left over. He stated those funds were not allocated to anything except covering expenses.

Sel. Lavigne asked if that was the profitability not the stabilization fund.

Mr. Woodsmall replied that the way that the system was set up; the reserves are carried over through retained earnings. He stated that there was a small stabilization fund but the rate reserves float year to year for retained earnings. He stated that it is the savings bank for water and sewer.

Sel. Lavigne asked if those funds were based on the profit that the Town makes for selling water and transporting sewer.

Mr. Woodsmall replied it was not. He stated that the budget was created so that the profit is between \$2,000 and \$10,000 annually. He stated that the retained earnings are the other savings and revenues that come in throughout the year.

Chairman Renzoni stated that when the Water/Sewer Fund was restructured many years ago one of the intentions was to fix the fund so that there is a fixed fee that showed revenues coming in rather than guessing how much revenue a commodity would generate. He stated that they discussed having one months' rates and one months' operating costs, 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the budget, be set aside. He stated that he thinks that this is what Sel. Lavigne was looking at and questioning.

Mr. Woodsmall replied that the retained earnings are more than 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the budget. He stated that they appropriate one emergency fund that used to hold around \$450,000 but now it is \$250,000. He stated that the change was that if there was an emergency and they had to expend \$450,000 there would be something else going on so that they felt \$250,000 was sufficient and that was what they hold in savings.

Mr. Woodsmall stated that many other places that don't have a fixed fee set up are in a tough position right now budget wise. He stated that because others are set up based on usage and there has been a change in usage, they are concerned with their revenue finishing out the fiscal year. He stated the way that DPW is structured, we do not have these issues.

Chairman Renzoni stated that he thinks this is a discussion for a later time, it seems they are getting away from the way that they had set up the fund years ago. He asked what the total amount in there was.

Mr. Woodsmall stated that they began the year with approximately \$1.3 million in retained earnings for the previous year and apply \$1.8 million for the upcoming budget. He stated that the emergency reserve gets appropriated and that includes \$250,000.

Chairman Renzoni stated that he thinks this is a conversation that the Board needed to have in person or in a forum that was more conducive to back and forth conversation. He stated that the Board had wanted the ability to have two months operating costs.

Mr. Woodsmall replied that this was the way they had always done it.

Chairman Renzoni replied that this was a shift from how the Board as Water/ Sewer Commissioners set up business some time before Mr. Woodsmall was the Director. He stated that there was currently less reserves than the Board had anticipated.

Sel. Lavigne agreed.

Chairman Renzoni suggested that they turn the conversation back to rates and when the Board could have an in person forum, they should return to this conversation about stabilization. He stated that he supported the budget and the rate increase at this time.

Chairman Renzoni offered his cell phone number and zoom forum to open for public comment; no members of the public came forward.

Chairman Renzoni called a five minute recess to address technical difficulties.

Chairman Renzoni called the meeting back to order.

Mr. Woodsmall and the Board continued to discuss the rates and stabilization fund.

Chairman Renzoni stated that he proposed supporting the rate increase as presented, the professionals in town along with the Town Manager and Finance Committee all recommended the increase. He stated that he also intends to call for a new rate hearing when the Board can get back together physically. He stated right now, they need a rate structure that supports the budget in order to move to Town Meeting.

Sel. Lavigne suggested tabling the matter until they could obtain more information.

A motion was made by Sel. Lavigne and seconded by Sel. Herlihy to table this discussion until April 27, 2020.

Chairman Renzoni stated that if the Board did not support this budget then DPW would have to cut something from their budget.

Mr. Lukes stated that if the Board chose not to support the increase and cut the revenue then they should also suggest where the cut should come from.

Motion by Sel. Lavigne, seconded by Sel. Herlihy, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO TABLE THE VOTE TO SUPPORT THE WATER/SEWER RATE INCREASE UNTIL THE APRIL 2, 2020 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING.** (Herlihy: yes; Gibbs: yes; Barnes: yes; Lavigne: yes; Renzoni: yes).

Chairman Renzoni stated that if any individual Selectman had a question they should reach out via the Town Manager's office prior to the meeting.

## **6. Water Meter Replacement Project**

Ryan Mouradian, Water/Sewer Superintendent was present at the meeting.

Presented: **System Wide Water Meter Replacement Program Presentation** Dated April 6, 2020 (Attached Presentation)

Mr. Mouradian opened it up for questions after his presentation.

Sel. Lavigne asked the timeline for putting the meters in.

Mr. Mouradian replied that he wanted to get them all in within a year and as quickly as possible.

Sel. Lavigne asked about the cost of the system.

Mr. Mouradian replied that it would be done over a fixed network and that the cost would ultimately be shared with the Light Department because it is a shared system.

Sel. Lavigne asked what the data would be used for.

Mr. Mouradian replied that the data would provide them with a snap shot that they would be able to use to analyze usage. He stated that they would be able to track this over several days, weeks, or months and be able to track percentages of usage. He stated that they would be able to see UAW trends or spot issues or leaks. He stated that they need to replace these meters and this technology is now available and will be beneficial.

Chairman Renzoni asked about the cost of the unit.

Mr. Mouradian replied that they do not have a solid cost yet because they have not chosen a meter. He stated that they were present in order to discuss this smart technology with the Board and receive the Board's support, a program like this has a lot of public interaction and they want to be on the same page.

Mr. Woodsmall stated that the money for this was already borrowed and would be realized in debt going forward like a water main project.

Mr. Mouradian stated that the meters needed to be replaced and this conversation was to discuss the technology aspect around it.

Chairman Renzoni stated that he supported these new smart meters, but that he wants a sound policy in place that outlines data collection and a policy for communication. He stated that he also thinks that a customer portal should be available for the data collected.

Mr. Woodsmall stated that he understood there were real concerns about this and that they will propose a policy supporting these questions.

Sel. Gibbs asked how they would connect with customers and suggested online appointments.

Mr. Woodsmall stated that they would start with letter campaigns and social media and are hoping to have a 3<sup>rd</sup> party schedule calls. He stated that they know that they need to be flexible with nights and weekends and stated that online appointments is a great idea.

Sel. Herlihy asked if there was a plan if people would not let them in their homes.

Mr. Mouradian replied that it is generally only a small handful of people that would not and that it would be dealt with on a case by case basis. He stated that they do have the Town bylaws behind them to help gain access.

Chairman Renzoni stated that they would schedule a vote for the April 27, 2020 meeting, but that they would like more information on a policy pertaining to what the data would be used for before the vote took place.

## **7. Scheduling of Annual Town Election and Annual Town Meeting**

Jeanne Survell, Town Clerk was present at the meeting. Sel. Lavigne recused himself as he is on the upcoming ballot.

Ms. Survell suggested moving the Town Elections to June 22, 2020 and the Town Meeting to June 29, 2020. She stated that the Act of 2020 from the Governor allowed early voting and absentee voting and she suggested that this be encouraged to reduce the amount of people at the polls. She suggested that the polling hours be set for 12pm – 7pm. Many of the poll workers are elderly and some have underlying health conditions, there could also be an issue with election workers at this time.

Chairman Renzoni asked how they certified people to be election workers.

Ms. Survell stated that they would be appointed by the Board of Selectmen.

Chairman Renzoni felt that they could encourage people to vote early and that they could advertise for election workers as well.

Mr. Lukes stated that he felt that they would get a good response with early voting.

Motion by Sel. Gibbs, seconded by Sel. Herlihy, it was **VOTED 4-0-1 BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO CHANGE THE ELECTION DATE TO JUNE 22, 2020 WITH THE POLLING HOURS TO BE FROM 12PM -7PM.** (Gibbs: yes; Herlihy: yes; Barnes: yes; Renzoni: yes; Lavigne: abstain)

Ms. Survell stated that the Town Moderator would be the one to call for the postponement of Town Meeting.

Mr. Madaus stated that the legislation signed by the Governor allows the Board of Selectmen to change the date of Town Meeting but stated that it would not be bad practice to consult with the Town Moderator as well.

Motion by Sel. Gibbs, seconded by Sel. Lavigne, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO SCHEDULE THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FOR THE TOWN OF HOLDEN FOR JUNE 29, 2020 AT 7PM AT WACHUSETT REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL.** (Gibbs: yes; Herlihy: yes; Barnes: yes; Lavigne: yes; Renzoni: yes).

#### **8. Vote to Set Ballot Question for Proposition 2 ½ Debt Exclusion to Pay Costs of School Capital Projects**

Mr. Lukes stated that this was a debt exclusion question that needed to be put on the ballot for 4 projects all of which were capital improvement projects to the elementary schools. He stated that they were each identified as vitally necessary within a 1-3 year period of time as all systems were reaching their end of useful life. He stated that this required a 2/3 vote of the Board of Selectmen and also needed to be passed at the polls.

Chairman Renzoni stated that because this was for the schools this would end up being a hot button issue that drove people to the ballots when they were talking about how to have less people at the ballots. He asked the Board for their thoughts.

Mr. Lukes asked Mr. Madaus for a time line of having this on the ballot.

Mr. Madaus stated that there was a proximity issue and that because there was an election scheduled this should go on the ballot with the election.

Motion by Sel. Lavigne, seconded by Sel. Herlihy, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO PLACE THE PROPOSITION 2.5 DEBT EXCLUSION TO PAY COSTS OF SCHOOL CAPITAL PROJECTS ON THE BALLOT FOR THE JUNE 22, 2020 ELECTION.** (Herlihy: yes; Gibbs: yes; Barnes: yes; Lavigne: yes; Renzoni: yes).

Chairman Renzoni stated that this was something that the Board could take positions on another night however by approving this vote it allowed it to get on the ballot.

#### **9. Open, Set, and Close Town Meeting Warrant**

Chairman Renzoni postponed this to a future meeting as the Town Meeting date had been delayed until June 29, 2020.

#### **10. Response to Citizens Address**

None

#### **11. Selectmen Minutes**

Motion by Sel. Herlihy, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 16, 2019 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES AS AMENDED.** (Herlihy: yes; Gibbs: yes; Barnes: yes; Lavigne: yes; Renzoni: yes).

Motion by Sel. Herlihy, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **VOTED TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 2, 2019 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES BY A VOTE OF 4-0-1 AS AMENDED.** (Herlihy: yes; Gibbs: yes; Barnes: yes; Lavigne: abstain; Renzoni: yes).

Motion by Sel. Gibbs, seconded by Sel. Herlihy, it was **VOTED 4-0-1 TO APPROVE THE MARCH 2, 2020 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES AS PRESENTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE.** (Gibbs: yes; Herlihy: yes; Barnes: yes; Lavigne: yes; Renzoni: abstain).

Motion by Sel. Gibbs, seconded by Sel. Lavigne, it was **VOTED 3-0-2 TO APPROVE THE MARCH 16, 2020 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES AS**



**PRESENTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE.** (Lavigne: yes; Renzoni: yes; Gibbs: yes; Herlihy: abstain; Barnes: abstain).

Motion by Sel. Herlihy, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **VOTED 4-0-1 TO APPROVE THE MARCH 21, 2020 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES AS PRESENTED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE.** (Gibbs: yes; Herlihy: yes; Barnes: yes; Renzoni: yes; Lavigne: abstain).

## **12. Selectmen Miscellaneous**

Sel. Lavigne stated that the HCA Walk/Run is postponed until October 17, 2020.

Sel. Herlihy stated that she had been approached by a few people with regards to social distancing inside places of business and she wondered how the Town was going to address that.

Mr. Lukes stated that in general the Town was going to leave it up to business owners. He stated that the Town was not going to police people but that they would give friendly reminders and inform them of best practices. He stated that they did not have any intention of citing businesses unless they were repeat offenders or a flagrant disregard of the rules.

## **13. Selectmen Subcommittee**

None

### **Town Manager Update Cont.**

(See attached)

Motion by Sel. Lavigne, seconded by Sel. Gibbs, it was **VOTED TO ADJOURN THE APRIL 6, 2020 BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING BY A UNANIMOUS ROLL CALL VOTE AT 9:42PM.** (Herlihy: yes; Gibbs: yes; Barnes: yes; Lavigne: yes; Renzoni: yes).

**APPROVED:** \_\_\_\_\_ **June 8, 2020** \_\_\_\_\_