

MINUTES OF THE SELECT BOARD

Monday October 19, 2020, 7:00 PM

Via Zoom

Present: William Stewart, Chair, Tom Maher, Selectman, Dave McGuckin, Selectman, and Jennifer Smith, Administrative Assistant to the Select Board and Recording Secretary.

Public Participants via Zoom: Senator Tom Sherman, Tom Smith, Treasurer, Ken McDonald, Dick Spaulding, Brad Greeley, and Curt Springer.

Chairman Stewart opened the meeting at 7:02PM. Selectman Stewart explained the nature of the meeting, indicating it is considered an Emergency Meeting which meets all the State requirements of posting, and noted the availability of a phone number to call if a participant could not connect via Zoom. Selectman Stewart explained the criteria for Emergency Meetings, and stated that all votes by the Select Board would be roll call votes.

1. Approve Select Board minutes of October 5, 2020

Selectman Maher made a Motion to Table the Approval of the minutes of Select Board Meeting of October 5, 2020. Selectman McGuckin seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Public Questions and Answers.

Selectman McGuckin offered a reminder that Trick or Treat hours are to be 3pm to 6pm on Saturday, October 31, 2020.

Chairman Stewart stated that Mr. Irwin Blau had submitted a letter to the Select Board requesting they address the matter of re-opening the Rec Building to indoor tennis. Chairman Stewart requested that the Board not vote on the matter until he is able to discuss the best protocols and practices for indoor sports with the Deputy Heath Agent, Dr. Kathleen Hollister.

Selectman Maher agreed, citing the recent closure of indoor hockey rinks by the Governor.

Selectman McGuckin stated he has reservations as well and would like to hear what Dr. Hollister would advise.

Brad Greeley, a volunteer at the Library, asked if there are any current plans for the lights at the Library.

Selectman Maher responded that the Town does have some quotes for the lighting and that the project is moving forward.

3. New Business.

a. Senator Thomas Sherman

Chairman Stewart introduced Senator Thomas Sherman to the meeting. Senator Sherman informed the Board that has been doing an update with all the towns in his territory and that this was a precedent setting year. The Senate was able to enact a great number of bills that were tabled due to Covid. The Senator stated that he started meeting with town leadership, Parks and Rec, DOT and Superintendents back in March weekly to facilitate communication among the groups and has continued to do so to date. The Senator further stated that the Senate was able to return 40 million of 138 million of State monies in educational aid to communities and that New Castle was able to receive \$20,000 in municipal aid through the CARES Act.

Selectman Maher asked the Senator if CARE Act monies are still available to the Town.

Senator Sherman responded that funds are available and that the Governor has just opened up the remaining 100 million of the original 200 million.

The Senator discussed the Coakley Land Fill and its drainage effects on Little Harbor. He stated that Bill # SB-287 sets maximum contaminant levels as fixed and there is an attached bond of \$50 million to help any necessary remediation.

The Senator stated that the Governor had asked him to serve on the 2020 Elections Committee and this board was able to implement the allowance of Covid 19 as a reason to vote absentee ballot.

The Senator also stated that he sits on a number of commission boards, one being the New Castle/Rye Bridge Community Advisory Board. The old bascule bridge in Hampton is being converted to a fixed bridge.

Tom Smith, Treasurer, asked if there has been a decision with regards to the New Castle/Rye bridge being a fixed or a bascule bridge.

Senator Sherman responded that at the present time, it appears the Commission is leaning towards the New Castle/Rye bridge also being a fixed bridge. Originally, when the Dover bascule bridge was taken down and replaced with a fixed bridge, the decision was made to leave one of the two remaining bascule bridges in the state for historical reasons. The present hurdle to this is the much greater cost and maintenance of a bascule bridge. Commercial entities have filled a complaint that a fixed bridge blocks access to the back channel and bay area projects and larger vessels. Sea level rise and Coast Guard concerns are also matters that are being discussed.

Chairman Stewart stated that while he feels there is some validity to climate change and sea levels changes, dredging is also a concern and there was a prior commitment to a bascule bridge. He further stated that he would be interested in hearing why the Commission would move to a fixed bridge.

Senator Sherman explained that there is about a \$10 million dollar difference in cost and maintenance is a concern. Currently, the Coast Guard does not allow remote lift even though technology exists that would make remote operation possible. The bridge would have to be manned.

Senator Sherman thanked the Select Board for allowing him to speak and offered his cell phone number and asked any constituents with questions or concerns to call him at 603-828-9620.

b. Seacoast Regional Disposal District 53B

Chairman Stewart stated that the Select Board has issued a letter to the Seacoast Regional Disposal District 53B requesting they consider re-admitting the Town of New Castle at its next board meeting scheduled for October 21, 2020 at 6pm at the Atlantic Grill.

Curt Springer, Cranfield St., expressed his belief that the Town of New Castle is currently a member of the District.

Chairman Stewart informed Mr. Springer that the Town had previously withdrawn from the District and is now asking to be re-admitted.

c. Town Projects Update

Selectman Maher stated that Town Hall is currently being scraped and during this process it was determined that additional work will need to be completed. Some areas need repair of rotting wood and clapboard and some areas need to be vented. The building will be primed and the painting will take place in the spring. The Town is still finalizing the work to be done on the east side of the building. This construction will most likely take place in the spring as well.

Selectman Maher acknowledged the fantastic work of Russ Bookholtz, the Building Inspector, throughout the process.

d. Water/Sewer update

Tom Smith questioned whether the Goat Island road repair would remain patched or be addressed in the foreseeable future.

Chairman Stewart said the patches will be ground down and paved now with the rest of the road.

Chairman Stewart stated that there will be a change order of \$15,000 for work to be done at the Sawtelle Bridge to address the transition of the AC pipe to connect to the water main. This additional amount spent will still leave the project under budget.

Chairman Stewart stated that there will be \$450,000 allocated to be lent out to the Neighborhood Water Improvement Program and that he would like the Board to officially open this program within the next week. Private roads wishing to participate would be repaying the loan through betterment fees. The proposed plan is to have a 45-day period for applicants to provide sign offs from every resident of the road seeking to participate in the program.

Ken McDonald, asked if Chairman Stewart could share what the requirements would be for the private roads to turn over their water pipes to the city of Portsmouth.

Chairman Stewart stated that first, they would need to indicate interest in doing so and the Town of New Castle would then hire an engineer to provide the ball park specifications to the City of Portsmouth for what it would cost. This example is specifically for participants of this program looking to convert new piping over to Portsmouth ownership, so effectively the private roads get out of the “water business”. Chairman Stewart further stated that he had no knowledge as to whether Portsmouth would be willing to take over older infrastructure but felt that would need to be a different conversation with the City.

e. Covid Update

Selectman Maher stated that there has been an alarming rise in Covid cases throughout the state over the last two weeks. Previously, the cases were predominately along the Route 93 corridor, but are recently increasing along the Route 95 corridor. Hospitalizations remain low at this time with only 16 hospitalizations statewide. That’s a small glimmer of positive news, since hospitals are not being overwhelmed by cases that require substantial treatment. The Town will continue to recommend residents be vigilant and extra cautious. New Hampshire has 1020 current cases statewide as of Monday, October 19. That’s up from only 492 cases two weeks ago.

Chairman Stewart asked Selectman McGuckin if he had any knowledge about if and when the elementary school is anticipating using the Rec Building for gym.

Selectman McGuckin stated that the school will not be using it before December 1st and he is waiting to hear back again from the Principal.

4. Old Business

a. CARES Act Grant – signing authority

Chairman Stewart added an item to the agenda stating that the Select Board needs to authorize the Town Accountant, Christiane McAllister to be a designated signing authority for the GOFFER grant.

Chairman Stewart made a motion that the Select Board authorize Christiane McAllister, Town Accountant, to be the designated signing authority for the Primary - Cares Act Grant. The motion was duly seconded by Selectman McGuckin and carried unanimously with a vote of 3-0.

b. CIP

Ken McDonald asked if there has been any outcome regarding CIP.

Chairman Stewart responded “no”.

c. Requested Proclamation for Duncan Robinson

Dick Spaulding, requested the Select Board consider drafting a proclamation to commend Duncan Robinson, NBA player for the Miami Heat, for his performance in the NBA finals.

Selectman McGuckin opined that it would be a nice idea.

Chairman Stewart agreed that it is a great idea and that the Select Board will look into it.

Selectman McGuckin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:02pm. Said motion was duly seconded by Selectman Maher and carried unanimously 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Smith
Recording Secretary