

MINUTES OF THE SELECT BOARD

Monday January 4, 2021, 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: James Cerny- Historical Society, Thomas Smith-Town Treasurer, Dr. Kathy Hollister-Deputy Health Agent, Ken McDonald-Admin Project Coordinator, and Curt Springer.

Chairman Stewart opened the public session meeting at 7:05PM. 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 December 21, 2020

Selectman Maher made a Motion to approve the amended minutes of the Select Board Meetings of December 21, 2020. Selectman McGuckin seconded the motion. Chairman Stewart abstained and the motion carried unanimously, 2-0- abstain.

2. Public Questions and Answers.

James Cerny, 44 Portsmouth Avenue, offered a reminder that 2023 will be New Castle's 400th Anniversary. He asked the Select Board to consider what should be budgeted in the near future for the celebration. Mr. Cerny said he agreed with a phrase he heard regarding Portsmouth's anniversary which said they wanted to do more than just blow out the candles, meaning one-time things like parades. Portsmouth is hoping to create something that will last beyond the year. Aside from the Garden Club planting Daffodils and the Historical Society sponsoring the book A New History of New Castle by Dennis Robinson not much movement in the form of planning has taken place. The Historical Society is planning to have the book available for sale in the Fall of 2022 for holiday gift giving and so forth.

Chairman Stewart agreed that the Town should start formalizing plans.

Selectman McGuckin asked if Mr. Curt Springer would spread the word at Men's Coffee this week.

Mr. Springer, 98 Cranfield St, agreed to bring the matter up at the next gathering of the group.

Selectman Maher suggested that the Town consider engaging the State in the plans as Fort Stark and Fort Constitution could be included in the celebration.

Mr. Cerny agreed that would be a good idea and felt a lot could be done if the State wants to be involved.

3. New Business.

a. Special Town Meeting - Approve Warrant Article and times of the meeting

Chairman Stewart explained that the Special Town Meeting to be held January 20, 2021 is a single ballot initiative and the vote is required to accept the proposed changes to the FEMA Zoning Flood Maps. He stated that the times for the Special Town Meeting on January 20, 2021 and Warrant Article language need to be accepted by the Select Board.

Chairman Stewart read the proposed Warrant Article into the record. He stated that the proposed hours for the meeting are 10am to 6pm.

Ken McDonald, 254 Wentworth Rd, asked if the Town Meeting would start at 7pm.

Chairman Stewart responded that there can be two parts to the Town Meeting, the business section and the ballot. There is no business section associated with this Special Meeting, so it will just be the ballot section from 10am to 6pm and will then close for tabulating. He further stated that there is no absentee balloting for this meeting. If people are uncomfortable, they can contact the Town Moderator to make arrangements to vote outside the building vs. inside.

Selectman McGuckin asked if Select Board members will need to be present in shifts.

Chairman Stewart responded that technically the Select Board members have no role, but historically they have participated as observers and should be available for this meeting as well.

Selectman Maher asked if the Town is precluded from providing guidance to voters to support this matter? He further questioned if the Town will be out of compliance if the article fails.

Chairman Stewart stated that it is his understanding that if the matter fails it will preclude those residents who currently purchase flood insurance from doing so in the future. There is no risk in adopting these maps.

Selectman Maher asked if it is for certain that absentee ballots are not allowed.

Chairman Stewart stated that absentee ballots are not required.

Selectman Maher made a motion to set the January 20, 2021 Special Town Meeting hours as 10am to 6pm. Selectman McGuckin seconded said motion and it carried unanimously 3-0.

Selectman Maher made a motion to approve the Warrant Article language as presented. Selectman McGuckin seconded said motion and it carried unanimously 3-0.

The Selectman agreed that Selectman Maher would be present during the voting hours of 10am to 12:30pm, Selectman McGuckin for the hours of 12:30pm to 3:30pm and Chairman Stewart for the hours of 3:30 to 6pm.

The Selectman agreed to move their normally scheduled meeting of January 18th to January 20th via Zoom at 7pm due to the Monday holiday.

b. Approve yearly Lease Agreement – Historical Society

Chairman Stewart stated that historically the Historical Society annually leases 120 Main St. from the Town for the fee of \$1 and they maintain the building and handle the expenses associated with that.

Mr. McDonald stated that it is a two-part lease with \$1 for the rental of 120 Main St. and the other \$1 is for the lease of the old fire station for storage and they need insurance on both properties, each listing the town as additional insured.

James Cerny stated that in the past they have actually had 3 insurance policies, one that is mandated by the lease for public liability, one for contents of the building and one protection for the board members.

Mr. McDonald asked if the new insurance policy clearly lists both properties.

Mr. Cerny said it was his understanding that they did not need a fourth policy, but he would check to make certain both addresses are covered.

Selectman Maher offered a motion to approve and sign the yearly lease agreements with the Historical Society for 120 Main Street and for the old Fire Station location.

Selectman McGuckin seconded and said motion carried unanimously 3-0.

c. Accept Safe Path Fund donation – New Castle 10K Race - \$500

Selectman Maher offered a motion to accept the New Castle 10K Race donation of \$500 to the Safe Path Fund.

Selectman Maher seconded and said motion carried unanimously 3-0.

d. Accept Safe Path Fund donation – Peter Reed - \$2,000

Selectman Maher offered a motion to accept Peter Reed's donation of \$2,000 to the Safe Path Fund.

Selectman Maher seconded and said motion carried unanimously 3-0.

e. Statewide Education Property Tax (SWEPT)

Selectman McGuckin stated that a subcommittee of the State Legislature just completed a 180-page study to theoretically bring back what is commonly known as "Donor and Receiver Towns". There are four line items that make up New Castle's \$6.30 tax rate and one of them is called State Ed and it is currently \$1.93. The proposed plan would be for that amount of money, times the assessment of the town, to be

returned to the State of New Hampshire. Potentially, that means that the town would have to make up the difference. That would roughly equate to a third of the tax rate being increased, with a rough number as much as 1.2 to 1.3 million dollars extra that the residents would have to raise to accommodate the Town. Selectman McGuckin stated that he brings the information up to make people aware of this potentially happening sometime in the future and that one small group is looking into hiring a lobbyist and that if New Castle decides to become involved it would be sharing part of that cost.

Mr. Smith stated that in the year 2000, his tax bill doubled because New Castle was considered a “donor” town.

Chairman Stewart stated that this could potentially increase the tax rate in New Castle by roughly \$2.00 and that we, as a town, are promoting the state legislature to look carefully at this before moving forward.

f. Town Projects Update

Selectman Maher stated that it has been determined that the Town Hall’s electrical panel has more than enough capacity for the proposed projects for the building. Additionally, it has been determined that the ancient beach tree right outside Town Hall has contributed to some of the building’s rot and the tree itself has significant rot and may be seriously compromised.

Chairman Stewart stated that the BOS will need to consider hiring an arborist in the spring to take a look at the tree.

g. Covid Update

Selectman Maher gave a brief Covid-19 update stating that on December 21 there were 6688 positive COVID-19 cases in New Hampshire, with 278 hospitalizations and a positivity rate of 9.1%. As of January 4, 2021, there were 6200 positive cases, with 319 hospitalizations and a positivity rate of 8.7%. He further stated that while the numbers have gone down some, we are still in the thick of things, and should remain vigilant in following CDC guidelines.

Dr. Kathleen Hollister, Deputy Health Agent, stated that the last ICU bed in the State was taken this past weekend, Phase 1A of the vaccine roll out is slated to continue through early February and that 1B (persons 75 and older and essential workers) are planned to start in February/March and that the hope is the vaccine will be available to everyone come May or June. Dr. Hollister further stated that while two new highly contagious strains of the virus have been dedicated in the U.S., neither one is predominant in the States. Dr. Hollister closed with stating the students and staff at the elementary school continue to do well, with most families “playing it safe” and staying home if there is even a remote chance of having been exposed.

Chairman Stewart thanked Dr. Hollister for her updates.

4. Old Business

No old business was discussed.

5. Committee Reports

No committee reports were submitted for review.

6. Adjourn

Selectman Maher offered a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:54pm.

Selectman McGuckin seconded and said motion carried unanimously 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Smith
Recording Secretary