

MINUTES OF THE SELECT BOARD

Monday May 3, 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: Sen. Tom Sherman, Rep. Kate Murray, Rep. Jaci Grote, Dr. James Zuckerman- Health Officer, Dr. Kathy Hollister- Deputy Health Officer, 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 April 19, 2021

Selectman Maher made a motion to table the minutes of the Select Board Meeting of April 19, 2021. Selectman McGuckin seconded and the motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

2. Public Questions and Answers.

Curt Springer, 98 Cranfield St, asked who individuals interested in working for the Town in the Common should contact.

Selectman Maher stated interested parties should contact Christiane McAllister in Town Hall.

New Business

a. Covid Update

Selectman Maher stated that the good news is that the State reported that there are currently 1979 active cases in New Hampshire. This continues the downward number of cases in the state. There are 80 hospitalizations, but number is also trending in the right direction. The positivity rate for the last 7 days has been 3.5%. These numbers are lower than they were two weeks ago.

Dr. Kathy Hollister, Deputy Health Officer, stated that she would like to touch base briefly on the consensus guidelines from the New Hampshire Medical Society, the CDC and the New Hampshire Department of Public Health Services in terms of guidance for discontinuing mask wearing within 6 feet of others.

First, we need to meet a community wide immunity of at least 70%. Right now, we have 25.9% of the total population, which is not just adults, vaccinated in the state. Approximately 60% have had their first shot. The second component is that the communities' spread of covid continues at a minimal

community transmission level, which is less than 50 new infections per 100,000 population over 14 days. Currently, the number is 200+, which is not quite there yet. The third component is the 7-day daily PCR test positivity level below 5%, which we are lower than that. Nationally, cases were under 50,000, today there were just over 40,000. This is the first time since October that the numbers have been this low. The FDA is close to deciding on expanding the usage of the Pfizer vaccine on for children ages 12 to 15. There is a travel ban being enacted from India for non-US citizens. The Indian double variant has 13 mutations.

Over all, things are going much better.

Sen. Sherman commended Dr. Hollister on her beautiful summary and stated that the any other thing that he would add is that what we are seeing statewide is a slow down in vaccinations and an increase in vaccine reluctance. The concern is that we will not receive an adequate number to reach herd immunity. Sen Sherman asked anyone hesitate contact him or DHHS to make certain they are basing their decisions on real facts.

Dr. Hollister also offered to personally speak to anyone with questions or concerns about the vaccines.

Chairman Stewart thanked both Dr. Hollister and Sen. (Dr.) Sherman.

Chairman Stewart stated that the Select Board would like to deviate from the agenda for a moment and to take the opportunity to recognize Dr. James Zuckerman, Health Officer for the Town of New Castle.

Selectman McGuckin announced that Dr. Zuckerman is retiring after 14 years of service to the Town effective June 30, 2021. Selectman McGuckin shared the story of how Dr. Zuckerman was one of the key people who convinced the Select Board to contact DOT to lower the speed limit in the center of town from 25mph to 20 mph, further stating this was just one contribution among many that the town is grateful for. Selectman McGuckin thanked Dr. Zuckerman for his service and stated that there would be a formal announcement of Dr. Zuckerman's retirement at Town Meeting.

Selectman McGuckin also stated that he is also pleased to announce that Dr. Kathy Hollister will be moving from her role as Deputy Health Officer to fill Dr. Zuckerman's position.

Selectman Maher thanked Dr. Zuckerman for his great knowledge in the beginning of Covid when things had not yet been closed down and the town was searching for answers. At the last in person meeting of the BOS, Dr. Zuckerman was able to come in and be the voice of experience and reason regarding what we were about to face. Selectman Maher thanked Dr. Zuckerman and opined that the Town was very fortunate to have someone so intelligent and talented to speak to them on that night.

Dr. Hollister also took this opportunity to thank Dr. Zuckerman for his wonderful training, his knowledge of the school and his many involvements with town projects. Dr. Hollister closed by saying she has very big shoes to fill.

Dr. Zuckerman thanked everyone for their comments and thanked Dr. Hollister for her magnificent job and contributions. Dr. Zuckerman especially thanked the School Board, Principal David Latchaw and the school nurse at Maude F. Trefethen elementary for taking such wonderful care of the children during Covid.

Chairman Stewart thanked Dr. Zuckerman for his service.

b. Legislative Update – Senator Sherman, Rep. Kate Murray and Rep. Jaci Grote

Rep Jaci Grote began the presentation with a brief update of where the house currently is, stating that at the end of March they had “crossover”. During this 4 day session, the House attended to the budget bill and the auto path bills. These type bills are recommended by their committees to be passed, either as is or amended. House Bill 20, the voucher bill, was retained by the Education Committee so that did not need to be voted on. The House is now dealing with the Senate bills. SB130 was retained by the Senate and did not come to the House for a vote. Rep. Grote stated that a lot of bills have to do with the Governor’s orders regarding Covid. The next House Session will be on June 2nd and 3rd, and will most likely be at the State House.

Rep. Grote closed by saying she did not vote for the budget. Rep Grote stated that she felt there were too many missing pieces and House Bill 2 had too many policies inserted in it that she felt were inappropriate for New Hampshire, as well as an inappropriate way to handle those policies.

Selectman McGuckin asked for an update on the SWEPT bill.

Rep. Kate Murray stated that somewhere 100 million dollars was found which the House is billing told was intended to reduce the state wide education property tax. If this 100 million stays in the budget, it will be dispersed across towns. One unintended consequence of this program (it is not a bill as it was actually just put into the budget) is communities like Rye and New Castle would actually end up with less money from the cuts and the state would fill in the gap and give the communities the additional monies to make them whole again. The other side of this program is the poorer communities, who would also lose funds, would not receive that extra money. Rep Murray opined that it is very strange and confusing why the wealthier communities would be the ones to receive additional funding.

The budget is currently in a weird place because it has so many policies included in it.

Rep. Murray stated that the House does not have the votes to pass the budget if they take the policies out and they are currently waiting to see if the Senate will remove some of them.

This will be an either a “yes” or “no” note for the Governor.

Rep. Murray closed by saying she does not support the budget or doing an end run around of the committees by placing policies in the budget.

Sen Sherman stated that the most concerning bill on the senate side was SB158, which was the “Donor Town” bill. Sen, Sherman stated that he voted against the bill and it was defeated.

Now, the Senate is strongly supporting that the funding formula for schools be based on the 2019 numbers, not on the year of Covid numbers. You can’t base your public school funding on the numbers that came out of this past year when many of the schools were closed or in a very difficult hybrid position.

Sen. Sherman stated he opposes voucher bills. The two reasons for opposing the use of public monies for private or religious schools is because of the lack of oversight and there is virtually no oversight of where these funds go. Sen. Sherman opined that one problem with school funding bill SB130 is if you take the monies out, but don’t take away the brick-and-mortar needs, your overhead stays up with a significant amount of public funding pulled out. That translates into an estimated 60 million dollar increase in the first 3 years in property taxes across the state. This will be up to \$7,000 per child lost to the towns. Sen. Sherman stated he has huge concerns with that.

Sen. Sherman explained that what has been done here is essentially what they had done with the Housing Appeals Board in the last biennium. This proposal was passed through the Senate and then they tabled it. The House will never vote on this and will never have a chance to look at this at a

committee level, it will just go into the budget and then go into a Committee of Conference. It is very likely to pass. This is one to watch closely.

Rep. Murray confirmed that this bill will raise property taxes and this bill is considered one of the most egregious, extreme voucher bills in the country.

Rep. Grote explained that once the Senate passes their budget bill, a Committee of Conference is put together, and representatives from both the House and the Senate will negotiate the differences between the bills and come to an agreement. This agreement will then be voted on by Senate and the House.

Chairman Stewart asked for clarification on where the 100 million is coming from.

Rep. Murray stated that they are not sure where the money came from. It would appear Ways and Means has held back money but she stated that no one really knows where the money came from.

Chairman Stewart asked what the likelihood that vouchers would be included as part of this budget.

Sen. Sherman responded that it is probably greater than a 95% probability because it has passed along party lines on the Senate, it's already been supported by the House and the Governor said he would sign it.

Sen. Sherman opined that there is some evidence of the ability to influence policy with the public being very upset and making their voices heard. A most recent example of which would be when the Governor was not going to vaccinate out of state students, there was just a complete public rebellion against that idea and the Governor reversed course days after making the announcement. Town officials should reach out to Sen. Daniels, Chair of Senate Finance, and let him know how concerned you are.

Sen. Sherman stated that the benefit the senate has over the house is that they get updates on state revenue. Currently, we are doing far better than we anticipated. Unemployment is coming down. The State is reopening and planning for a robust summer.

Chairman Stewart requested that Sen Sherman provide the Select Board with information on these particular items and who the best points of contact would be to be heard.

Sen. Sherman stated he could provide a resource email and that the Committee on Finance meetings are posted on the Senate calendar.

Chairman Stewart questioned whether there have been any impact studies on the voucher bills.

Sen. Sherman responded that Reaching Higher in NH did one.

Chairman Stewart thanks the Senator and Representatives for the time and presentations.

c. Town Meeting – Election Day

Chairman Stewart stated that the Town Election will be held on May 11, 2021 from 8am to 6pm. Town Meeting will commence at 7pm.

The Select Board each agreed to be present at the voting location for the following hours:

Tom Maher –	8am to 12pm
Dave McGuckin -	12pm to 3pm
Bill Stewart -	3pm to 6pm

d. Green Bean Liquor License

Chairman Stewart stated that Jeff Turner, of the Green Bean, is requesting the Select Board provide the business with a letter of support for its liquor license for the State of New Hampshire Liquor Commission.

Selectman Maher offered a motion to provide the Green Bean with a letter of support for its liquor license.

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

e. Town Projects Update

Selectman Maher stated that the painting is still being done at Town Hall It has been a little hampered by weather, but things are close to finishing up.

f. Neighborhood Water Improvement Program Update

Chairman Stewart stated that the Select Board held its public hearing relative to the bond issue on April 19th for funds to be used for this project and the next step is the bond will be voted on at Town Meeting on May 11th. The information on the warrant is in the Town Report and the town will also be issuing a one page flyer that may explain it in less confusing language.

g. Old Business

Chairman Stewart reminded all that the Common will be officially opening for the season on May 15th and the rental of the wedding area and pavilions will begin on May 18th at Town Hall from 9am to noon.

Chairman Stewart announced that as of June 7th the Select Board will begin meeting in person at the Macomber Room in anticipation of the state lifting the emergency mandates. There will be social distancing and masks will be mandated.

h. Adjourn

Selectman McGuckin offered a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 pm.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Smith
Recording Secretary