

MINUTES SPECIAL SELECT BOARD MEETING
6:00 P.M. Tuesday, February 23, 2021
VIA ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE

Select Board

Eric Remick, Chair
Elizabeth Dow, Vice Chair
Lucian Avery
Shari Cornish
Ceilidh Galloway-Kane

Others Present

Shaun Fielder, Town Manager
Casey Rowell, Business Manager
Aaron Cochran, Police Chief
Alberta Miller, Town Clerk
Mary Gagnon
Jake Lester
Rachel Kane
Ruth Gaillard
Bobbie Nisbet
Orise Ainsworth
Mark McAndrew

Others Present

Laurie Bellizzi
Anna Pirie
David Kreindler
Paul Fixx
Carol _____
Lusana Masrur
Ruth Marquette
David Gaillard
Leif Goldberg
Mary Ellen Reis

Special Meeting:

6:01 P.M. Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, called the meeting to order.

6:02 P.M. Set/Adjust Agenda – Shari asked about putting up the appointments after the Organizational Meeting on the website so people might want to fill them. She would like to add an item to discuss this.

Upon motion by Elizabeth Dow, seconded by Shari Cornish, the Select Board voted to add this at the end to discuss better ways to get the word out for appointments for Town meeting.

6:03 P.M. – 6:20 P.M. Pre-Town Meeting updates including budget / related. Presented by Eric Remick

Eric asked people to use the raise hand function or a message in the chat. This is an informational meeting, so we cannot make decisions on the things that have been warned or modify warnings, etc. It is to help people with the ballot.

Orise asked some clarifying questions about the ballot. She said overall the ballot is clear and came out good.

Paul Fixx asked about the fields on the ballot that do not have names, what criteria would be looked at to determine who to write in. Alberta explained that anyone who wanted to be on the ballot had to complete a Consent Form. The positions that are missing on the ballot are typically picked at Town meeting and get elected. Eric thanked Alberta for getting us this ballot and while it is not perfect, it did come out well.

Eric explained that all the articles in the warning are being voted on the ballot that was sent out to all registered voters. Eric went through the articles individually. He explained that the Select Board made a strong effort to keep the budget increase as minimal as possible. The expense increase is 1.75%, however, our revenues are projected to decrease about 3.10% due to the Greensboro Police contract and the COPS grant being in the last year of funding. With the estimated increase in grand list, it looks like the taxes will go up about 3.16% or approximately \$40.95 per \$100,000 of home value (if all appropriations are approved).

6:20 P.M. – 6:28 P.M. Questions/comments from the audience

Orise asked why the Greensboro revenue is going down so much. Eric explained the prior three-year contract and that it was ending as of June 30. It is going to be based on a percentage of the PD expenses, while the other one was built on fixed amounts with increases built in. It will be more aligned with actual PD expenses. As of now, we do not have a signed contract with Greensboro for FY22.

Orise asked about the Town's Common Level of Appraisal (CLA). Alberta indicated we were at about 94%. We had our last town-wide appraisal in 2016. They happen about every 10 years. Values drift down over time. We are required to do a reappraisal when we near 85%.

Eric commented that he feels the budget that was put forth is one that does not have any onerous increases or anything that is not necessary.

Shari asked about any new appropriations or ones that fell off. Alberta said that the Hardwick Community Restorative Justice Center was removed due to the services being moved to St. Johnsbury. We did not take on anyone new. Craftsbury Community Care Center was new last year, but no others.

Shari asked about the tax exemptions properties. Alberta explained that they must be reviewed every 5 years. Elizabeth asked about the Mason's tax exemption and if it qualified because they have the preschool always occupying the building, which generates revenue. Currently, it does still qualify. Alberta said that the voters decide in the articles set forth if they want to keep it as tax exempt.

6:28 P.M. – 6:56 P.M. Agencies requesting appropriations to speak about their organizations request for funding at Town meeting.

Eric proceeded to go through the appropriations Articles one at a time. If there was representation from the agency, they had an opportunity to speak or have people ask them questions.

Bobbie Nisbet from Greensboro Nursing Home spoke briefly about the need for the Town appropriation. She reported that there were no cases in residents or staff. All residents and staff who wanted to, have been vaccinated. The money will be used for COVID related safety protections.

Anna Pirie from AWARE thanked the Town for their support. She indicated the \$ is used to support all their programs.

Elizabeth Dow, President of the Hardwick Historical Society, indicated that the funds help with their operating expenses. They are still active, just not public events due to COVID.

Ruth Marquette, with Northeast Kingdom Human Services, spoke about using Telehealth over the last year with COVID. They are still serving community members. A report was provided in the Town report of how many people in Hardwick were served.

Jake Lester from the Food Pantry reported that operations continue and there has been a 30% increase in visits. They need volunteers for deliveries, and they are expanded to include Craftsbury and Albany in their service area.

Leif Goldberg, from Hardwick Community TV, said they really appreciate the support from the Town. Shaun thanked them for their continued efforts in keeping the meetings posted to their website.

Lusana Masrur, from North Country Animal League, spoke about their efforts over the last year. While adoptions have been down, they have remained open. Lusana encouraged Jake Lester to reach out to her about connecting for pet food that could be provided to the Food pantry.

Eric mentioned that Articles 19-22 are about exempting properties from taxation for the next 5 years.

Craftsbury Community Care Center representative, Mark McAndrew, reported that sadly, they did have an outbreak at the facility and lost 2 residents to COVID. They were impressed by the massive response from the State, Community, and staff to help get them through. No new cases since the beginning of January.

6:56 P.M. – 7:11 P.M. Discussion about informing voters about the available positions within the Town.

Shari would like to see us follow up after the Organizational meeting with posting to the website and give people opportunities to see what positions are available. People might be interested if they were aware of the need and what the responsibilities are.

Eric suggested that maybe we put up a list of the positions that are not assigned to a Select Board member.

Shari mentioned that the Library made public posts that two of their current trustees Elizabeth Rossano and Jodi Lew-Smith wanting to continue to serve as Trustees. They asked people to write these names in on the ballot.

Paul Fixx asked if we would be notifying incumbents of their re-election. Shaun went over the list of appointments from last year and how we would handle this at the organizational meeting. Shaun indicated that we could make a post about the available positions.

Paul asked if there would be notices in the Gazette for letters of interest. This will continue for some but not all. Shaun indicated that it is a mixed tactic depending on when the vacancy happens. Shaun let everyone know about the Board assignment positions that we anticipate following Town meeting.

Lucian asked if we could get the positions on HCTV for announcements. He also mentioned that we need to add a Select Board member to appoint to the Equity Committee.

Shaun thanked Elizabeth and Lucian for their community support, serving on the Select Board. This is their last regular meeting before stepping down from their roles as Select Board members.

7:12 P.M. Eric Remick, Chair, adjourned the Special meeting.

Minutes approved by: _____
Eric Remick, Select Board Chair

Minutes taken by: _____
Casey Rowell, Business Manager