

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES OF MEETING
APRIL 21, 2020**

In accordance with Governor Baker's March 12, 2020, Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c.30A, §20, the meeting was held remotely in an on-line conference mode hosted on Zoom.com and members of the public were not able to physically attend. The meeting was broadcast live on Comcast channel 12 and was able to be viewed via live stream at WHCA.tv. The meeting was subsequently broadcast on YouTube.com.

In attendance were Chairman Carl F. Kowalski; Vice Chairman Daniel L. Salvucci; Clerk Brian J. Bezanson; Member Randolph G. LaMattina; Member Justin R. Evans; and Town Administrator Francis J. Lynam. Chairman Kowalski opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Town Treasurer-Collector Mary Beth Carter and Town Clerk Dawn Varley were also in attendance.

Chairman Kowalski asked everyone to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. This was followed by a moment of silence dedicated to Joyce Lucier, mother of Assistant Town Administrator Lisa Green.

Chairman Kowalski announced the meeting is being recorded and televised by WHCA.

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to approve bill and payroll warrants. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote revealed: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. LaMattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.**

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to accept correspondence in the Read File. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote revealed: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. LaMattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.**

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to approve the Open Session minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, March 24, 2020. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote revealed: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. LaMattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – abstain; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 4-0-1.**

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Update: COVID-19

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that town departments are continuing to function with very few interruptions. Two employees were quarantined due to possible exposure and have since returned to work. He went on to say that by the end of the year, we will be expensing some costs associated with COVID-19. Chairman Kowalski asked if there have been any COVID related deaths reported in Whitman. Mrs. Varley stated there has been one person who resided at St. Joseph's in Brockton, MA and listed her residence as Whitman. Mr. Lynam noted there are currently 79 cases in Whitman. He also noted that school has been cancelled for the remainder of the year.

Extending Bill Due Dates

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that bill dates can be extended to June 1, 2020, with a due date of June 29, 2020. In addition, any fees from March 11, 2020, forward could be waived as town counsel feels the DOR guidance allows us to waive fees and charges for any bills issued after March 10, 2020, that are paid by June 30, 2020. Any bills paid after June 30, 2020, will incur fees. Mary Beth Carter confirmed this and recommended the Board vote to authorize waiving interest and fees on bills due on March 10, 2020, and paid by June 30, 2020. Mr. Bezanson asked if this will apply to sewer/water bills that were just issued. Mrs. Carter said the due date of June 1, 2020, remains the same but fees will be waived for those paid after June 1, 2020, and before June 30, 2020. Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to waive interest and penalties regarding late payments of bills with a due date of March 10, 2020, or after, when such bills are paid late but paid on or before June 30, 2020. **Second** Mr. Bezanson, **so voted 5-0.**

FY2021 Capital Spending

Mr. Lynam stated the capital committee will be meeting on April 30th and will be reviewing capital requests and making recommendations. Mr. Lynam expressed concern with the \$850,000 payment to the MSBA for the WMS feasibility study, but understands that we need to move forward. He has spoken with representatives of the MSBA who feel there will not be any changes due to the pandemic. Mr. Lynam noted he plans to move forward with the expectation that an article is presented to use free cash; however, we are facing signs of reductions in revenue this year based on the full year receipts in 2019. In addition, the original projection for local receipts was \$4.5 million and that projection has been reduced to \$3.8 million.

Town Meeting Warrant

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that the warrant is under construction and the revenue sources we are projecting to use are updated. Some issues remain that still need to be reviewed and some articles may be removed.

Bond Payment for Street Lighting

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that the Treasurer-Collector was concerned that we may have to deficit spend in order to make the payment that was due for the street lights. We are not in a position to make the payment and the Treasurer-Collector is suggesting we use the \$50,000+ that is in the street light account and bond the difference. An article for the bond payment will be placed on the Town Meeting warrant. Mr. Lynam explained to the Board that this payment is to pay off the project; however, the problem with the wiring in the street lights still needs to be addressed with National Grid.

BUDGET REVIEW

Discussion on this subject was tabled until the next regularly scheduled meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Consider Date for Annual Town Election

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that he met with the town clerk earlier and her target date for the Annual Town Election is June 27, 2020, however, she would like to change the hours of the election. Mrs. Varley stated that she is concerned with people coming into the Town Hall to vote

if the public health emergency has not been lifted. She feels it is important to limit exposure and is suggesting reducing the hours of the election to 4 hours, or possibly 6 hours as suggested to her by Mr. Lynam. All residents will have the option to vote by mail, which is being encouraged by the state. Mrs. Varley has spoken with the Chief Grenno about providing PPE for the election workers. She has also spoken with the custodian about 6 feet of separation when setting up the polling place. Her plan is to advertise in order to educate people about voting by mail. Mr. Evans stated that he is not in favor of restricting election hours; and suggested the possibility of splitting employees into 2 shifts, with special hours for senior voters. Mrs. Varley advised Mr. Evans that voting hours for seniors cannot be restricted. She feels the only way to protect people is to do what she is suggesting. Mr. Evans stated that he does not like the idea of limiting the options to vote. Mrs. Varley advised the Board that this issue does not have to be voted on this evening. Postponing the vote will allow her to see how many early voting ballots she receives; and will allow her to speak with the election workers and see who is available to work the election. She is concerned with the safety of everyone and she would be in favor of the polls being open for 6 hours. Mr. Bezanson stated that he would be in favor of 6 hours also. Mr. Evans stated that he is in favor of 6 hours as well, as long as Mrs. Varley plans to push early voting. He would also like to review guidance from the state. Mr. Lynam suggested revisiting this issue on May 5, 2020, or May 19, 2020. All members of the Board were in agreement.

RAAC Agreement

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that the last meeting of the committee was not productive. Representatives from MARS will be attending the next meeting to discuss provisions in the agreement. He noted that Whitman is not prepared to propose a number and Hanson is not prepared to offer a solution. The next meeting will take place tomorrow and representatives from MARS will be available to answer any questions. Mr. Evans suggested anyone with questions email them to him before 4:00 p.m. tomorrow. Mr. LaMattina noted that he listened to the meeting and noticed that Hanson continues to contest the breakdown of local aid. He has also spoken with Christine Lynch of DESE today and she said most regional districts will be going into FY21 with a 1/12 budget due to COVID. Mr. Bezanson asked if Hanson will have to pay more if a 1/12 budget is used, due to the statutory method being used. Mr. LaMattina stated that he asked that questions and did not receive a direct answer.

Set May Meeting Schedule

The Board set their May meeting schedule for Tuesday, May 5, 2020, at 7:00 p.m. and Tuesday, May 19, 2020, at 7:00 p.m.

OLD BUSINESS

Further Extension to Town Meeting

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that he has spoken with Town Moderator Mike Seele and he does not have an issue with Town Meeting taking place any time after June 6, 2020. He then reminded the Board that a tentative date of June 3, 2020, was previously set. Mr. Lynam stated there is no need to act on this tonight; therefore, it can be revisited at the next meeting. Mrs. Varley noted that 20 days in advance of the meeting date are required for voter registration. Mr. Lynam stated that he feels it would make sense to schedule the meeting for June 22, 2020, and noted the date can be changed if necessary. Until the warrant is published, it remains the

purview of the Board of Selectmen to change the date. Chairman Kowalski stated this issue will be revisited at the May 5, 2020, meeting.

Feasibility Study for Middle School

Mr. Lynam expressed concern with cash flow and whether free cash should be used. Mr. Evans stated that the suggestion to bond does not fit into our plan moving forward. This needs further review and will be revisited on May 5, 2020.

At 8:04 p.m. Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote revealed: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. LaMattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.**

Brian J. Bezanson, Clerk