

Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
November 16, 2016
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

Convened: 6:30 pm

Present: Walter F. Alterisio, Leah D. Basbanes, member(s); Tracey Hutton, Town Administrator; James Dow, Interim Chief of Police; Richard Nalewski, National Grid Representative; Mike Martin, Peter Gove, Roads Commission

Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:

- Vendor & Payroll Warrants

Open Forum

Mr. Alterisio, as acting chair, briefly explained the purpose of the public forum and went over the Boards agenda which included appointment of Public Records Officers under the new Public Records law, a Pole Hearing, the adoption of an Inspectional Services Policy, Cemetery Worker Job Descriptions, review of the Personnel Wage Chart, and continuing preliminary discussion of the FY18 budget.

Pole Hearing

Mr. Nalewski started off by explaining the location of the new pole. The pole placement will be rather close to the MA/NH state line and is the result of a homeowners (26 Hollis Street) requested for underground service. In order for National Grid to respond to this request this, they need to install a new pole. There are some small trees near the location, and likely some minor tree trimming will be necessary. Mr. Martin inquired as to how far up the street it is. Mr. Nalewski responded that the location is near the intersection between Hollis Street and Robins Farm Road. The Board inquired as to whether Pole 52 (the existing pole) would be removed. Mr. Nalewski responded that it would not be, the new pole would be in addition Pole 52 and solely for the purpose of allowing 26 Hollis to have underground service. It was noted that National Grid does not trench under roads, due to the cost and the lengthy legal process. Therefore, the policy is to run an overhead crossing the public way approximately no less than a height of 17 feet. The petition is a joint one with Verizon. The Board inquired as to whether the pole is on a curve or not. Mr. Nalewski responded that it is on a straight away and is not near any driveways. There was some ensuing discussion of service with the Board noting that at a previous hearing with a similar request from a property owner in that region of town, it was to change service from NH to MA. Mr. Nalewski explained how that might come to pass and noted that this is not the case in this particular situation. Seeing no reason not to approve the Board moved to accept and approve the petition.

A motion was made by Mr. Alterisio to approve the petition by National Grid. The motion was seconded by Ms. Basbanes and passed without objection.

Inspectional Services Policy

Ms. Hutton reported that she was unable to find any previously adopted policies regarding the payment of the Electric and Plumbing & Gas Inspectors when called by the town for emergencies. She further reported that having consulted with the Inspectors; she believes that a reasonable rate would be one that is equivalent to that of the minimum permit fee, which represents a single inspection. Ms. Hutton then provided the Board with a formal policy to this effect for consideration and possible adoption. There was some discussion of emergency response and how the process would impact such services. This resulted in a question of what the minimum is. Ms. Hutton elaborated further on the matter. It was determined that a formal written policy need not be adopted at this time. The existing understanding is acceptable.

Approved and adopted on 11/30/16

CORI's

The Board inquired with Chief Dow regarding the conducting of CORI's. Chief Dow elaborated on how the Police Department handles CORI requests. The Board then expressed a desire to see town officials and other related persons whom come in contact with the public undergo CORI checks. Chief Dow agreed to review the matter and report back to the Board.

Appointments

Ms. Hutton started off by discussing a letter from Town Counsel regarding changes to the Public Records law. Ms. Hutton has consulted with both Town Counsel and the Town Clerk. The new law makes the Town Clerk a Public Records Officer, but allows the Board to appoint up to three additional officers. It would seem prudent to therefore appoint several individuals to be Public Records Officers. The recommendation to the Board is that they appoint the Town Administrator as well as the Board's administrative assistant and the Police Chief as Public Records Officers. The role of such officers is primarily to coordinate public records requests. The records may be held by individual departments, committees, boards or commissions. Therefore, having some centralized authority to coordinate and ensure proper steps are taken to respond to requests in a timely manner is essential. Especially given the time frames delineated under the new law and its related regulations. The reason for including the Police Chief revolves around the volume of public records requests made with the Police Department. Ms. Hutton advised it would be prudent to have one person for coordinating such requests for that specific department. Contact information for each of the officers will be posted on the town's website in order to facilitate public records requests. There was some discussion regarding whether the Police Chief's Administrative Assistant should be also appointed. Chief Dow responded that it is not necessary at this stage and all such inquiries always go through his office anyway.

The Town Administrator is appointed as the Primary Public Records Officer

Motion by Mr. Alterisio, seconded by Ms. Basbanes, passed without objection

The Chief of Police is appointed as a Public Records Officer

Motion by Mr. Alterisio, seconded by Ms. Basbanes, passed without objection

The Administrative Assistant to the Board of Selectmen is appointed as a Public Records Officer

Motion by Mr. Alterisio, seconded by Ms. Basbanes, passed without objection

Cemetery Worker Job Descriptions

Ms. Hutton reported to the Board that the Personnel Board determined that Cemetery Workers were not included in the Wage & Compensation Chart. Seeing this as an oversight, the Personnel Board updated the chart to include them. Ms. Hutton reported she has already done the necessary research and has added them to the chart. She then informed the Board that the Personnel Board has approved the recommended classification and descriptions which were prepared with the assistance of the Cemetery Superintendent. Ms. Hutton noted that direct comparisons with other communities was challenging since most towns include their cemetery workers in other departments such as DPW or Highway. It was determined that the Superintendent would be assigned as a Grade 3 and the laborers would be assigned as Grade 2. There was discussion of the current wages for these employees and the impact this process will have. Ms. Hutton elaborated that the current wages are very close to the new grade rates. She then finished by reporting that the job descriptions are now ready for the Boards review and approval.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to accept the cemetery worker job descriptions. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

Personnel Wage Chart Review

Ms. Hutton started off by noting that the Board has now been presented with the latest and most up-to-date version of the Wage & Classification Chart. The Personnel Board is asking the Board to review the chart and
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recommend whether or not they should review the grade 5's further. The Personnel Board has done the research and data comparison including considering community job descriptions. They continue to recommend keeping the classification as is. However, the supervisors of the individuals in this grade feel the grade is too low for some employees. At their last meeting the Personnel Board discussed the fact that they have to have a system for comparison, and once an individual has been pulled out of a classification it can lead to other employees requesting the same treatment. This, they feel, ends up trickling down to no longer having an equitable system. The Board responded that while the matter should not be oversimplified, the fact is that the grades were developed by looking across a number of communities and comparing positions to other similar positions. In most cases the wages were higher than those currently being paid. The goal is to make wages competitive in order to attract and keep good people. The Board stated that one of the good things to come out of this whole process is the tremendous support among most supervisors. There has been a great vocal element seeking to ensure this process is fair and that employees are advocated for.

The Board then noted that under this Wage & Compensation Chart, employees will receive higher wages than what they would have received had the town continued to only offer COLA's as done in the past. What must be appreciated is that if we take a look at all of the communities used as comparisons, the closest one to Dunstable has \$7 million more in revenue. It should not be forgotten that the rate paid must fall within the ability of the town to pay. The wish is to see wages be competitive, but we must not forget the levy limits. As such the Board is happy with the proposed Wage & Compensation Chart. Mr. Martin addressed the Board to express some disagreement with the chart, current assignment of grades, and job descriptions. He questioned some of the metrics noting some concerns, in particular, with the process and the way other towns come to conclusions on what rates to pay. He noted in particular the pay for the Highway Secretary, stating that the Roads Commission would like to see her classified as a grade 6 at least. Under the chart she is currently a grade 5. Mr. Martin asserted that there are only two people on grade 5 and no one on any grades lower. Ms. Hutton clarified that there are in fact others assigned to lower grades, such as Transfer Station attendants and Cemetery workers, noting in particular that there are four people assigned as grade 5.

The Board then responded noting that the problem becomes that until this process was started, jobs and personnel policies evolved over time. That is, there was a need for something and because of this the need, a policy evolved. In many situations employees had to rise to the occasion and do more than what they might otherwise do in another town. As a result, there are certainly differences between what an employee does in Dunstable and what they do in other towns. Similarly, through evolution, personnel policy has advanced leading to confusion as to what employees were or were not granted. There must be consistency. The Board stated that moving forward, the town will not be hiring employees and assigning them duties through pure necessity in the same manner as the past, rather each position will be carefully considered and appropriate job descriptions utilized. There was some ensuing discussion of whether accommodations should be made to deal with specific situations. Ms. Hutton elaborated on some of the thorny problems with making these kinds of accommodations. The Board agreed noting that there has to be some sort of standard backed by concrete data. Unfortunately, there is no town that is identical, but there has to be a starting point. Discussion then ensued regarding the amount of work done by the Highway Secretary.

It was noted that while this employee does indeed do work in addition to that position, the employee holds multiple positions for which they are in fact compensated for. As for the Highway part, the matter is one more of semantics than of material difference from other towns. Highway Secretaries usually do cover multiple related areas such as supporting Tree Wardens and FEMA paperwork. The fact remains that the employee in question is compensated for their work in Highway and will receive an increase even as a grade 5 from their current rate. The attempt is to make the numbers more comparable and similar to other towns, in short, data driven. There was discussion regarding whether Highway Departments are short changed and whether this means that Highway employees are short changed in data driven scenarios. Ms. Hutton responded by noting that in many towns Highway and DPW budgets are the highest or second highest in the town. In fact, in the Town of Harvard the DPW is the biggest by budget. Mr. Martin contended that those budgets are only larger due to snow and ice issues and also due to larger payroll. Mr. Gove noted that the uniqueness of the position has to be taken into consideration. He contrasted Dunstable's Highway Secretary with three of the comparison towns and noted some considerable differences and areas where Dunstable's employees do more. Mr. Gove then noted another employee that was always compensated closely to the Highway Secretary but who under the Wage & Compensation Plan will be compensated more and set at a higher grade.

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The Board turned to Ms. Hutton to elaborate on why there is a difference between the two employees. Ms. Hutton explained that the other employee in question works for the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, as well as the Water Commission. While the Highway Secretary is supervised by the Highway Superintendent, the other employee has a greater level of autonomy and answers to the three bodies over her directly whereas the Highway Secretary answers to the Highway Superintendent and through him the Roads Commission. The Board noted that there really is no way to look at this other than by position and what each position requires, the skill set, the experience, and the requisite knowledge. The specifics of training, knowledge, and manage many elements. This is why there is a difference. The employee receiving a higher grade has greater autonomy and very little daily management which is the critical difference in this case. Ms. Hutton noted that the difference in grades is not enormous, but the problem becomes where it stops. The process has to be data driven in order to be a fair process for all. There has to be a baseline. The town is looking at the job, how is it paid, and asking what the comparison is. Mr. Martin finished by reiterating the Roads Commission's official position that the Highway Secretary should be a grade 6. Ms. Hutton reminded the Board that the Personnel Board is holding a meeting on November 21st, 2016 to finalize the Wage & Compensation Chart. Chief Dow then noted that the process has to be fair and data driven or the town will slip back into old habits. He stated that everyone in town knows he advocates for all employees being paid the highest they can be, but again, the process must be fair and equitable. The Board agreed.

FY18 Budget

Ms. Hutton started off discussion by providing the Board with a breakdown of technology costs in the budget regarding technology. Annual costs include the cost of maintaining the towns website, which is about \$2,895 a year, domain registration which runs about \$125 per year, GIS software which costs about \$500 per year, email services which cost \$700 per year, online mapping costs which total about \$3,000 per year, the cost of Inspections tablets which is \$600 per year, and IT services for the Town Hall, Highway Department, Police Department, and Fire Department which come out to about \$9,600 for the year. There's also a small annual maintenance cost for Pictometry software used by the Police Department, Conservation Commission and Planning Board. Additionally, non-annual equipment costs which will be felt in technology this year include a new server for the Town Hall which will cost approximately \$2,520 and a new firewall for the Town Hall which will come to \$1,630. Miscellaneous equipment and services for repairs and maintenance is about \$2,450. Ms. Hutton then elaborated on some of the different parts of the technology piece of the budget noting new items and items that were grant funded. All grant funded projects already have commitments from the Board and Advisory Board for ongoing funding. There was some ensuing discussion of technology problems and the constant fight to update and stay current. Ms. Hutton noted that the server in particular has had problems given its outdated operating system, which is why the town is purchasing a new one.

School District

The Board discussed some of the ongoing issues with the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District. One of which concerns the budget. Ms. Hutton stated that most of the information relating to the district's budget may be found on their website. Discussion turned to the issue of funding for the district and the problems surrounding the matter of sustainability. Not just for Groton, but for Dunstable. It appears that the district is moving towards considering its needs assessment over a period of time rather than attempting to address all issues at once. This led into discussion regarding maintenance of facilities and equipment owned by the district and the compounding problem which could emerge if things continue to be deferred.

Building Use

The Board reviewed an application by Susan Tully for use of the Town Hall on December 17th, 2016 for the Annual Cookie Swap. The Board saw no reason not to approve use of the building for this annual event that is enjoyed by many in town.

A motion was made by Mr. Alterisio to approve the application for use of the Town Hall on December 17th, 2016. The motion was seconded by Ms. Basbanes and passed unanimously.

Approved and adopted on 11/30/16

Administrators Report

Ms. Hutton started off by talking about the December 14th meeting of the Board. The meeting happens to coincide with an important school district meeting that Ms. Hutton needs to attend. Ms. Basbanes will also not be in attendance. The question then is whether the meeting should be canceled. The Board determined that the meeting otherwise scheduled for December 14th will be canceled. Ms. Hutton then turned to a written complaint that has been received, which was unsigned. The complaint regards some incidents that occurred during the Summer Concert series. The complaint also includes dogs on the common. Ms. Hutton inquired whether Parks or the Board has authority to regulate the Town Common. The Board responded that it regulates the Town Common directly rather than it falling under the authority of Parks. There was some ensuing discussion of related issues on Larter Field, which does fall under Parks. Ms. Hutton agreed to put some ideas together to address the issues. There was, Ms. Hutton finished by noting, another element to the complaint regarding the Town Common and Summer Concert Series. This was related to the consumption of alcohol. Ms. Hutton reported she is working with Chief Dow to address that particular matter and noted that there is generally a police presence at the Summer Concert Series.

Minutes

The Board considered the minutes for November 2nd, 2016. It was noted that the minutes mistakenly did omitted Ms. Basbanes as being in attendance. The Board determined to approve the minutes pending modification.

A motion was made by Mr. Alterisio to approve the November 2nd, 2016 minutes pending the modification to reflect Ms. Basbanes attendance. The motion was seconded by Ms. Basbanes and passed without objection.

Warrants & Mail

The Board reviewed the vender and payroll warrants and went through their mail.

Executive Session

Walter F. Alterisio made a motion to enter Executive Session for a Real Estate related matter in accordance with MGL Chapter 30A §21(a)2, and with the intention not to return to ordinary session afterwards. The motion was seconded by Leah D. Basbanes. The motion was adopted without objection by Walter F. Alterisio and Leah D. Basbanes.

The Board entered into Executive Session at 8:07 pm

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Basbanes at 8:30 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Hamm
Admin. Assistant to the Selectboard & Town Administrator

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