

**Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**January 11, 2017**  
**Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827**

**Convened:** 6:30 pm

**Present:** Walter F. Alterisio, Leah D. Basbanes, member(s); Tracey Hutton, Town Administrator; James Dow, Chief of Police

**Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:**

- Vendor & Payroll Warrants
- Common Victuallers Licenses for Farmhouse Café & Dunkin Donuts
- Standard Commonwealth Contract signed for Council on Aging

**Open Forum**

Mr. Alterisio, as acting chair, briefly explained the purpose of the public forum and went over the Boards agenda which included use of Town Property Requests, Common Victuallers Licenses, and the adoption of Public Records Guidelines.

**Common Victuallers Licenses**

Ms. Hutton provided the Board with the Common Victuallers Licenses for Casual Café LLC, doing business as Farmhouse Café, and Dunkin Donuts. Both applications are in order with the appropriate paperwork. The Board saw no reason not to approve the applications and issue the licenses.

A motion to approve and issue the Common Victuallers License for Casual Café LLC dba Farmhouse Cafe was made by Ms. Basbanes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

A motion to approve and issue the Common Victuallers License for Dunkin Donuts was made by Ms. Basbanes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

**Public Records Guidelines**

Ms. Hutton started out by discussing the work she and Town Counsel have done on the matter. This includes a guidance document. The document is guidance and not a policy, so the Board doesn't need to formally approve it. The Board considered the document and inquired with Ms. Hutton as to compliance with the new law. This prompted light discussion over the new law and how it functions. It appears that much of the early requests are of a testing nature. There was a question over what cost or burden the town will ultimately bear for compliance with this new law. Ms. Hutton elaborated on the actions being taken by the town to track and follow through on requests. She then elaborated on several requests received so far including one regarding gas leaks. The request appears to be of a testing nature since it is vague and attempts to work with the requesting party to narrow the scope or make the request more easily producible have been largely ignored.

**Unpaid Bills**

Ms. Hutton reported on several unpaid bills from the prior fiscal year. One of the bills involves a landscape bill for the mowing of Larter Field. There was also a Board of Health bill which the town may not be bound to pay legally given the circumstances, but which Board of Health feels we ought to pay. There is also a bill from the Town Hall's pest inspectional services which was not received until after the statutory period for payment of prior fiscal year bills had passed. These bills will need to be authorized for payment at the next Annual Town Meeting in accordance with MGL.

**EMS Radio**

*Approved and adopted on 2/8/17*

The Board inquired with Ms. Hutton as to the ongoing status of the towns EMS radio situation. Ms. Hutton reported that the town has received several grants for repeaters, but a broadcast tower solution has not yet emerged. In the meantime, the Fire Chief continues to work on how to solve the issue. Chief Dow reported that he and Chief Rich have been working with the regional dispatch to seek further grant funding through the Commonwealth to solve the problem. More often than not, EMS is on the portable radios and the repeaters are extremely helpful as a temporary solution. The Board expressed concern over the exposure do for the town under any possible emergency situation. Chief Dow responded that this was a bigger problem when it initially occurred, but now with the repeaters the matter has been improved significantly.

### **Upcoming Budget**

The Board turned discussion to the old business matter of the upcoming budget which Advisory Board is working on with Ms. Hutton. This included some discussion of matters in Groton who's Finance Committee and Town Accountant recently met with the Advisory Board. Ms. Hutton noted that conversations are ongoing between the school district, Dunstable, and Groton. She has continued to meet with her counterpart in Groton and the Superintendent. Groton is planning on \$750,000. Dunstable is looking at around \$223,000 with a possible additional \$30,000 depending on the student population ratio. The Board inquired as to whether the town still has a student going to Essex Agricultural. Ms. Hutton reported that the student has one more year left. Discussion turned back to the GDRSD budget. Ms. Hutton elaborated further on the assessment including the problems occurring as a result of decreases in funding from the Commonwealth and the impact of unfunded mandates. The \$223,000 maintains level services and takes into account the some of the budgetary needs of the district including the hiring of 4 new positions to help alleviate the districts needs assessment for personnel. There was then some discussion of Groton's ability to pay beyond the constraints of Prop 2 ½. Ms. Hutton responded by elaborating on the ways that the two towns and the school district are seeking to improve the school's finances without overburdening Dunstable. This includes ways that Groton can increase its funding without increasing the overall assessment.

There was some discussion of what occurred last year and ways to avoid discord between the towns on how to fund the district. There was then a follow up question regarding what the assessment will be. Ms. Hutton reported it will be the same as last year but with the increase of approximately \$223,000 to \$253,000. In the meantime, the town is waiting for DOR's report to the town on forecasting into the future to see what the towns finances are and what steps may be taken to stabilize the towns budget and pay for the educational needs of the town. There was a question of whether the town will receive income from the solar installation going in on the old Georges Landfill. Ms. Hutton reported that it will be approximately \$12,000 per year. The Board then turned discussion back to the town's budget. Ms. Hutton elaborated on the preliminary budget noting areas where some trimming has occurred and the plan to double the reserve fund noting that the town has historically underfunded the reserve fund. Departments that saw some trimming included the Highway Department and the Police Department. The Library budget remains under discussion and Ms. Hutton has further meetings with the Library Director and the Library Board of Trustees. It was noted that the Police Department budget now reflects the new leadership structure of three Sergeants rather than a Lieutenant.

Discussion then turned to Capital Planning's recommendations and several large capital projects in the works. Safe Pathways is asking for the engineering to build a pathway or sidewalk from High Street to the Library. Ms. Hutton reported that although engineering was done in the past the engineering firm that did it did not design it to DOT standards. So that project has to be done from scratch. The idea of this project would be to tie it into the Main Street Project which includes sidewalk due to the requirements of the Commonwealth in order to secure DOT funding. From there Ms. Hutton elaborated on multiple related issues such as improving crosswalk visibility and other pathway projects. The Board noted that many in town have sensitivity towards the advent of sidewalks and pathways and how they would impact the appearance of the town. The reality is that the volume transiting through the town necessitates the improvement of safe travel for pedestrians. Traffic on Rt. 113 alone is significant, especially during rush hour. Ms. Hutton turned discussion back to free cash noting some of the needs that will likely have to be covered by it. This prompted some discussion of the school districts needs for capital stabilization. The school district would like to bring the matter of capital stabilization before the town again since it has passed in Groton in the past. This led to some discussion of school buildings that need repairs, the High School in particular is in need as it is experiencing issues with the glazing on its windows as well as problems with its water supply. The Board noted the consequences of last year's override and the resulting public perception. Ms. Hutton responded by elaborating on the school districts situation with

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its buildings noting that unlike the town the district has not really done a lot to assess its needs and determine how to grapple with it. The town has done building maintenance plans, emergency analysis, and other similar projects which have all been funded by grants. The school district does not appear to have sought much funding outside of the assessment in regards to these issues. The Board turned discussion back to the preliminary budget for the town. There was a question regarding a capital request for a \$310,000 fire truck. Ms. Hutton responded noting that Capital Planning only supports the purchase if the Fire Department can store the truck. The town will not be selling the truck that will be replaced, rather it will be reassigned. There was ensuing discussion of where to store the truck. Ms. Hutton reported that it would probably go into the old Highway barn. The truck to be purchased is a fire engine of the first tier and would be first response for most calls. The current truck is inadequate and too small. Discussion then finished on the preliminary budget and any revisions that may still need to be made to it.

### **Police Budget & Sick Time Buyback**

Chief Dow reported on how the budget process for the Police Department has worked this year and the collaborative work he's done with Ms. Hutton. It was then reported that the police budget is at approximately 43 percent, but that number is probably larger once you include some training and other expenses. Since the change in leadership the department has been working on finding ways to reduce costs while still increasing safety and providing for appropriate backup. Discussion then turned to the sick time buyback for retired Chief Downes. Ms. Hutton reported on the work that's been done so far. She and Chief Dow feel that the buyback can be paid out of this fiscal year's budget with the police budget only getting tight in June. If the budget is short at all, it would likely only be by a few thousand. Chief Dow elaborated on multiple factors with overtime and other dynamics that impact the department's budget. This past year there have been a number of off duty details so full time officers have been working those while overtime has been covered more by reserve officers. Discussion turned back to how the sick buyback would work. Former Chief Downes would like to see the funds go into a health savings account. Since the town does not have health savings accounts, request is not doable. So the funds will be paid by the town as wages. The funds will have to come from salary lines since salary funds and operation funds cannot be mixed together. There should be sufficient funds in the salary lines.

Chief Dow expressed a preference for taking the cost for the buyback out of overtime. The Board expressed concern regarding how sick time buyback currently works and how the town should deal with the accrual of sick time. Ms. Hutton responded that the town is working with the payroll company so that from July 1<sup>st</sup> forward sick accruals will appear on employee paychecks and the town will monitor sick time accrual more closely. Chief Dow made some counter points regarding the expenses of sick time. Even encouraging employees to use sick time has costs since for some departments that means overtime coverage. There was some ensuing discussion of how sick time maxes out under the personnel policy. An employee can only accrue 150 days and can only buy back 25 percent of the sick days accrued up to that limit upon separation. There was some discussion of alternatives to the way sick time is handled by the town and some of the complexities involved. This included how the town budgets for sick time and the legalities surrounding the benefit. The Board turned back to the specific issue of the sick time buyback. The Board reiterated its desire to dispense with this matter and pay. Chief Dow agreed with the only request being the commitment of the Board and the town to cover if the department's budget comes up short. The Board agreed. Ms. Hutton then stated she would clear the plan for the pay out, including from the department's overtime line, with the Treasurer/Collector.

### **Administrators Report**

Ms. Hutton started off by informing the Board of a letter written by the Town Clerk to Roads Commissioner Wes Goss. Mr. Goss was elected at last year's Annual Election but has yet to be sworn in and has missed approximately 10 meetings of the Roads Commission. The Clerk has requested Mr. Goss appear before her for swear in or consider submitting a resignation to her office. The Board was troubled by the matter, but noted that the Board should not interfere with the Road Commissioners and this is a Road Commissioner matter. However, the Board is sympathetic with the duties of the Town Clerk in regarding the matter. Should a resignation occur the Board will be prepared to appoint a person to fill the resulting vacancy until the next election. In the meantime, the Roads Commission has maintained a quorum and continues to function. Ms. Hutton then updated on 135 Pleasant Street. The property has been sold and the zoning violations appear alleviated. There is still a complaint regarding some piles of earth, but the Zoning Enforcement Officer has concluded that these piles are not in violation of zoning. Ms. Hutton intends with the Board's approval to

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inform the complainant that no action can be taken on the issue of the earth and that the property is now no longer in violation. The Board agreed noting that if there is no violation, there is no action for the town to take.

Ms. Hutton then turned to the issue of the elevator and emergency access. As it stands the Fire Department would have to severely damage the doors should someone become stuck in the elevator due to malfunction. Past quotes were upwards of \$4,000; however, the current elevator company has proposed a solution that would cost approximately \$1,800. With the Board's blessing Ms. Hutton would like to implement that solution. The Board agreed noting the cost of repairing the elevator after such an emergency would be far higher. Ms. Hutton then turned discussion to the wage chart. She provided the Board with a chart showing only the steps, grades, and rates on it. She elaborated on the function of this version of the chart and how it will be kept on file with the Town Clerk. Discussion then turned to the Library and cutbacks that occurred as a result of the budget cuts from last year in response to the school district's budget crisis. There was some discussion of possible increases to the Library's budget and how that would be handled. Ms. Hutton noted any increase would have to come out of free cash. There was then some ensuing discussion of the Library's current waiver application before the Mass Library Commission. This prompted discussion of the complex process by which library budgets are formulated in Massachusetts and the impacts of budget increases. Ms. Hutton then finished her report by noting her vacation and her absence from the Board's next regularly scheduled meeting. The Board was not aware of any major matters that would require the Board's attention that cannot be re-scheduled for a later meeting. It was determined that the Board would cancel that meeting unless something arises.

### **Use of Town Property**

The Board reviewed an application Council on Aging to use the Town Hall on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 for an antique appraisal program. The Board also considered an application for use of the Town Hall by the Swallow Union APT for the purposes of holding a fundraiser on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017. Seeing no reason to deny either application the Board determined to approve.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the application for use of the Town Hall on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017 for the COA's antique appraisal program. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the application for use of the Town Hall on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 for a fundraiser to be held by the Swallow Union APT. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

### **Minutes**

The Board considered the minutes for the meeting held on December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The Board seeing no necessary changes or adjustments determined to approve the minutes as drafted.

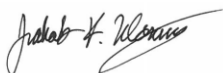
A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

### **Warrants & Mail**

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

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Basbanes at 8:00 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

*Approved and adopted on 2/8/17*