

Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
May 3, 2017
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

Convened: 6:30 pm

Present: Daniel F. Devlin, chair, Walter F. Alterisio, Leah D. Basbanes, member(s); Tracey Hutton, Town Administrator; James Dow, Chief of Police; Brian Rich, Fire Chief; John Greenhalgh, Animal Control Officer; Barbara Blanco, Lower Dam Way; Jon Swift, Dunstable Theater Collaborative, Inc.

Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:

- Vendor & Payroll Warrants

Open Forum

Mr. Devlin explained the purpose of the public forum and went over the Board's agenda which included an update from the Animal Control Officer, use of Town Property Requests, Acceptance of a Resignation, and Evaluations.

- *Dunstable Theater Collaborative*

Mr. Swift introduced himself and his group. He is new to town, having moved to town in the last year. He recently started his theater group with the hope of bringing even more arts and culture to the community. His group is a nonprofit incorporated entity. They intend to have their first meeting on June 9th, 2017 at the Town Hall. The plan is to have as many people involved as possible. The Board thanked Mr. Swift for his work so far and lauded the goal of bringing arts and the humanities at large to the town. Unfortunately, the town has not had any theatrical performances on the stage in the Grand Hall in some time, but the Board noted it would be pleased to see such performances resume.

Update from Animal Control Officer

Mr. Greenhalgh started off by reporting to the Board about where things currently stand with his department. He then elaborated on his primary reason for coming before the Board is to start discussion regarding needed updates to the town's by-laws for dogs and animal control. The town's dog by-laws were last touched in 1989. He has spoken with counter parts in the area and determined that the town's fines should likely be increased. He also outlined a need for a leash law elaborating on several cases where citizens have been injured or harassed by unleashed dogs including a runner who was attacked. He also noted the issue of excrement and suggested the town consider a by-law to address the problem as well. He highlighted the case of Ms. Blanco as an example of why both the fines and new by-laws would help. Mr. Greenhalgh noted that the last time the town addressed the topic the town was still mostly rural and agricultural. Today, there are many subdivisions going in and the town has had substantial population growth. Now is the time to consider tightening the by-laws. The Board inquired as to how this would correlate with enforcement of licensing. Mr. Greenhalgh responded that it should be and has been in other towns. He also noted that Dunstable should probably organize a rabies clinic. The Board agreed that the by-laws should probably be looked at.

The main issue is with implementation and enforcement. In all likelihood there will have to be a phase in period and a necessary public information campaign prior to any "hammer" coming down. Mr. Greenhalgh responded that this wouldn't be anything out of the ordinary. Ms. Hutton noted that this topic should be considered for discussion, at the very least, at a fall Special Town Meeting. She suggested that with licensing expiring in December, it would be a good time to start making the public aware of the matter. The Board generally agreed noting that the town will likely have to hold a Special Town Meeting this fall. The Board did caution that few things create controversy in Dunstable like a leash law. However, the topic hasn't been considered in a number of years and the public may very well have a different opinion today. From there the Board turned back to a general update inquiring with Mr. Greenhalgh about how things are with his department and whether there are any things the Board can do specifically to assist his department with its

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general mission, whether this would include help with kennels, or any other similar matter. Mr. Greenhalgh responded that a kennel solution would be ideal. So far he hasn't had the need for it yet, having always found the dog's owner. But it would certainly not hurt to have it. He then praised the Police Department for all of their assistance. The Board finished discussion by thanking Mr. Greenhalgh for his work.

Appointments & Resignations

The Board received a notice from the Town Clerk informing them of the resignation of William Moeller from the Board of Health. The resignation is effective May 16th, 2017. The Board accepted Mr. Moeller's resignation. Mr. Moeller's elected term was not set to expire until May 2019. The Board determined it would revisit the matter at its normally scheduled meeting to be held on May 17th, 2017. It was noted that the Board of Health will need to hold a concurrent meeting with the Board in order to nominate a replacement for the Board to appoint. The replacement would sit only until the next annual election in May 2018. Ms. Hutton noted that the Board of Health has already posted a meeting on May 17th in anticipation of the Board's determination of how to proceed. The Board expressed regret at seeing Mr. Moeller retire and thanked him for his years of service to the town.

Ms. Basbanes made a motion to accept William Moeller's resignation effective May 16th, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed unanimously.

Employee Evaluations – Police Chief, Fire Chief & Town Administrator

➤ *Town Administrator*

The Board noted that Ms. Hutton has been with the town for two complete fiscal years, nearly three years since the start of her employment and the Board expressed general satisfaction with Ms. Hutton's performance. This has been a long learning process for the town itself to become accustomed to having a Town Administrator, and for the Board to settle on the parameters and goals of the position. The Board expressed satisfaction with Ms. Hutton for her problem solving, ethics, willingness to provide multiple solutions for the Board to consider, and the time and investment she has put into motivating and supporting other committees, boards, and commissions. Feedback to the Board from other bodies and officials in the town has been favorable. The Board acknowledged that there have been the occasional bumps, but most of those kinds of issues are related to personalities and are resolvable. The Board then considered some of the future goals. Greater collaboration and coordination will be necessary as major public projects loom on the town's horizon. Much of the necessary work will be herculean.

The Board would like to see administrative relationships improve, as they will be integral to achieving the town's goals. The Board would also like to see a refined budgetary process. The current process to date has improved and includes many of the stake holders. But the Board would like to see the process continue to improve and to see an emphasis on ownership. The Board then noted some of the thorny issues of compliance with both the Commonwealth and the Federal government. So far, the Board is pleased with Ms. Hutton's work but noted that this issue is ongoing. The Board noted that Ms. Hutton is very much up to speed on a great deal of municipal process and law, there is perhaps a small criticism that at times it may appear that Ms. Hutton is belabored in expressing this. But in general, again, the review is positive. Ms. Hutton thanked the Board for the review. She noted that she has joined a number of public professional organizations in an attempt to broaden her network of contacts in Massachusetts. She stressed that change is coming, even if it seems to be progressing slowly. Ultimately, the pace of change has to be adjusted to fit the community. She continues to work as hard as she can with department heads and various bodies of the town to accomplish the goals set out before her and to provide any needed professional support.

➤ *Chief of Police*

The Board started out by noting that Chief Dow has not yet been chief for a year. The town had not anticipated the early retirement of Chief Downes last August, but Chief Dow has responded exceptionally and transitioned from Lieutenant smoothly into the role of Chief. The Chief has worked hard in the last budget season to find efficiencies and trim the budget. His vision for the department is

one that is congruent with the Board's and the Board expressed full faith in him. The Board noted some of the work done so far and praised Chief Dow for his public relations and maintenance of the high standards of the department inherited from Chief Downes. The Board further highlighted the Chief's willingness to change and adjust course while problem solving. Looking at other communities reminds the town that Dunstable remains a small town. The Board expressed the general feeling that Chief Dow fits the character of the town, and small town community policing. The needs of Dunstable are far different than the needs of a Chelmsford, Dracut, or Lowell. This by no means discounts the level of professionalism the town expects or that it receives.

The Board determined the principal goals for the next year should focus on maintaining the town's professionalism and certifications, as well as looking at equipment, regionalization, dispatch, and related matters. The town is by and large ahead of the curve compared to surrounding towns on the issue of equipment for the department considering its size, but certainly this is an area to keep an eye on. The matter of dispatch and regionalization may need to be considered given changes in law and incentives from the Commonwealth. The Board also sees revision of command structure as a goal for the next year and agrees generally with Chief Dow's proposals in this arena. Another goal is to review and assess current community safety standards, requirements, and guidelines. Continuity is key to this effort; after all elected officials are here today and gone tomorrow. Chief Dow thanked the Board for its praise. He then sought clarification regarding the issue of regionalization for such things as dispatch. And stated that he would like to discuss this matter in greater depth with the Board in due time. The Board gave some clarification of what it is looking for, but agreed that this will be an ongoing discussion.

➤ *Fire Chief*

The Board started out by inquiring with Chief Rich as to his tenure as Chief. Chief Rich responded that he has been Chief for 5 years. The Board praised Chief Rich for his work ethic, his high standards for his department, his willingness to go above and beyond what is required, and his efforts to educate the town and the Board about opportunities to improve the department. Management has been excellent. Efforts to train volunteer firefighters, to improve moral, and plan for the future are all excellent. For goals, the Board focused on maintaining response times, and keeping active firefighters. Chief Rich noted that most of the 6 most active members are facing mandatory retirement under MGL. As a result, the department faces a lot of challenges. The Board praised Chief Rich for his willingness to be a team player, for being creative when needed, while also not being afraid to speak up when the department truly needs something. The Board expressed concern about having local volunteers who are available to respond. Chief Rich responded that the commitment even for a volunteer is in excess of 288 hours.

Part of the problem is finding people who live in town. Unfortunately, due to the issue of affordable housing, there isn't a very big pool of people. He noted that other towns with similar populations have more people in town. Ashby has nearly 50 firefighters available. Dunstable only has about 7 able to respond who live locally enough. The problem is further compounded by the issue of cancers and other hazards of the work. Regardless, there are a devoted few who do and will continue to serve the town as long as they can. The Board recognized that the likely solution to the responder issue will probably rest with adding fulltime staff to the department in future years. This may be unpopular, but may very well come to pass. Chief Rich responded that his goal is to adopt a 6-year plan to implement small increases and per diem shifts to help solve the problem. There was then discussion of the staffing issue and how it relates to community aid. Chief Rich noted that aiding other communities by and large is where the firefighters get the bulk of their experience and training. Additionally, Dunstable responding to other towns is an investment in their response to Dunstable.

He also noted that when the department is responding out of town, other communities like Nashua provide coverage to Dunstable to ensure that there is always local response. There was brief discussion of the ambulance situation. Chief Rich reported that Trinity Ambulance has worked closely with the town. Many calls are resolved with the town being able to cancel the ambulance response. Discussion shifted to grant funding. Chief Rich outlined what the town has accomplished and what future goals he envisions on that front. The Board then turned to the proposed public safety building. There was light discussion of the goals and timetables for the new building, as well as how to maintain the current building in the interim. Chief Rich noted some concerns about the existing Fire Station and some of the

challenges of maintaining the building. He agreed to keep the Board informed of any needs. The Board then finished by thanking Chief Rich for his work and expressed confidence in achieving the town's goals.

FY2017 Budget & Where Things Stand

The Board noted that expenditures are at about 66 percent expended. There are still a number of outstanding projects. The town would ordinarily be at 83 percent or higher. Generally, the town is in a good place. Discussion shifted to the upcoming proposed budget, and the impact this will have as the town transitions from the current fiscal year (FY2017) into FY2018. The Board expressed satisfaction with where things stand and with the future outlook. There was some discussion regarding funding for training and some department specific wages. Chief Dow responded to questions regarding Police, including overtime and wages. He noted some of the work he's done with Ms. Hutton. This includes different dynamics which impact the budget and the rate of exhaustion of what is budgeted. Ms. Hutton outlined some of the changes this year in department budgets. One of the biggest changes is pairing down department budgets, such as the Police Department, on the front of emergency funds. Instead of having departments have extra funds set aside for unexpected expenditures, the budgetary process has been to move any padding to the Reserve Fund. Both to find efficiencies, and to help better gage the impact of emergencies and what kind of funds the town should have on hand for the unexpected. She noted that the Advisory Board is in favor of the changes.

Administrators Report

Ms. Hutton started off by informing the Board that the Town Hall will be closed on May 5th, 2017 in order for several floors to be resurfaced as part of repair work being done by the town's insurance company. The Town Hall will resume normal hours on Monday, May 8th, 2017. Friday, May 5th was chosen because only two employees, the Treasurer/Collector and the Board's Administrative Assistant, were scheduled to be in the building. She then reported on the success of Candidates Night, an event organized to help citizens meet candidates running for office and become more informed. Most in attendance were pleased with the format. She then reported on her efforts on the new Dunstable Forum. She, Ms. Muir the chair of the Advisory Board, and Chief Dow will be present at the forum to answer any public questions and provide what information they can. The Board was pleased with the idea and expressed support for it. Ms. Hutton then reported on the setup for the Annual & Special Town Meetings on May 8th, 2017. The Board proposed working with the Administrative Assistant before the meeting on some of the details. Discussion then shifted to the issue of the Inspections Fee Schedule. There has been some discussion of possibly modifying the schedule. The Board noted that it will be reorganizing at its next regularly scheduled meeting which will be held after the election.

Police Hiring

Chief Dow reminded the Board that he has been interviewing for new reserve officers and expects to be seeking appointments at the Board's next regularly scheduled meeting. The Board was pleased to hear it.

Use of Town Property Requests

The Board received multiple applications for use of town property. This included one from the Lake Massapoag Rod & Gun Club for use of the Town Hall on September 20th, 2017, for their annual meeting, another from Dunstable Democratic Town Committee for use of the Town Hall on May 15th, 2017 for a committee meeting. One from DIG, the Dunstable Gardening Group, for use of the Town Common for their Annual Plant Sale to be held on May 20th, 2017, and one from the Dunstable Theater Collaborative for use of the Town Hall for a meet and greet on June 9th, 2017. The Board saw no reason to deny any of the applications.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the Lake Massapoag Rod & Gun Club's application for use of the Town Hall on September 20th, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

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A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the Dunstable Democratic Town Committee's application for use of the Town Hall on May 15th, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the Dunstable Gardening Group's application for use of the Town Common on May 20th, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the Dunstable Theater Group's application for use of the Town Hall on May 20th, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

Banner Application

The Board received an application from the Summer Concert Series to hang a banner across Main Street from June 14th, 2017, until August 12th, 2017. The Board saw no reason not to approve the request.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the Summer Concert Series application for permission to hang a banner across Main Street from June 14th, 2017 until August 12th, 2017. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

Minutes

The Board considered the minutes for the special meeting held on April 12th, 2017 to approve the Special Town Meeting Warrant. Seeing no necessary changes or modifications the Board determined to proceed with adoption of the minutes.

A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the minutes of April 12th, 2017 as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alterisio and passed without objection.

Saying Goodbye to Mr. Devlin

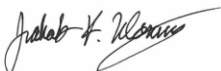
The Board finished by thanking Mr. Devlin for his service on the Board and wishing him well in his endeavors. Mr. Devlin retires from the Board this month. The impact of Mr. Delvin's service cannot be understated, and the Board hopes that he continues in his service. Mr. Devlin noted that he served for two terms, a total of 6 years. He thanked the Board and stated he wouldn't be disappearing from public service any time soon. He noted that this retirement is bittersweet as he enjoyed his work. He thanked the staff for all of their support and personally thanked Mr. Alterisio and Ms. Basbanes for their support during this last year of his service and wished them well in the years to come. He also thanked Ms. Hutton for all of her support for his final year as chairman.

Warrants & Mail

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

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Devlin at 8:02 pm. The motion was seconded by Ms. Basbanes and passed without objection.

Respectfully submitted by



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

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