

Town of *Dunstable* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
January 2, 2018
Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827

Convened: 6:30 pm

Present: Walter F. Alterisio, chair, Leah D. Basbanes, vice chair, Ronald J. Mikol, member; Tracey Hutton, Town Administrator; James Dow, Chief of Police; Brian Rich, Fire Chief; Maria Amodei, Board of Health; Alan Chaney, Conservation Commission

Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:

- Vendor & Payroll Warrants

Open Forum

Mr. Alterisio explained the purpose of the public forum and went over the Boards agenda which included Appointments, Board of Health Update on Transfer Station & Possible Curbside Pickup Options, Discussion Regarding 91 River Street, Recommendations on the Open Space & Recreation Plan, and Further Discussion Regarding the Market Study Proposal.

Board of Health Update on Transfer Station & Possible Curbside Pickup

Ms. Amodei started by updating the Board on where things stand with the Transfer Station and the research that the Board of Health has done to consider the possibility of curbside pickup. The Transfer Station has become a bit of a white elephant. A large percentage of the town is already using private curbside, with three different companies serving the community. Only a small group uses the Transfer Station with most of the stations costs fixed. As a result, grant money has been procured to help the town investigate curbside. The average cost in Dunstable is over \$418 per household. Comparable towns have gotten the costs down to about \$200 per household. The town would seek grant funding to help. Some towns have big cans. Dunstable would have a 96 gallon recycle bin and about a 36-gallon trash can. The idea would be to start curbside and to close the Transfer Station. With three different companies operating, there are three trucks driving on town roads going to different houses. It would be far more efficient to have one company serving all households. Further the town is unable to open the Transfer Station on more days then Saturday, and usage has been declining in recent years. Initially, the town would charge about \$300 per house per year. There are some questions about how billing would work for pickup. The town has also been awarded grants for bins and cans; there are some restrictions, such as on recycling grants. There will likely be pushback from some residents.

Ms. Amodei noted that from conversations with the public, there are certainly those who will be apprehensive. But the costs of running the Transfer Station are too high, and increasing the rates will only lead to a greater decline in usage. The Board inquired as to how the \$418 figure was determined. Ms. Amodei went over the numbers behind it and how the research that produced them worked. She explained that the metrics come from taking the citizens of Dunstable, combined, from Transfer Station permits as well as those on private pickup and other options, and averaging them. On average households are paying about \$418. Unfortunately, the Transfer Station is not currently cost effective. The population density and miles of roads are not conducive to having multiple trash haulers in town. The idea would be one truck serves every house in town instead of three. Prices have been obtained from DPS, and the Board of Health is looking to get prices from the other haulers as well. There was a question of whether the town has to go out to bid. Ms. Hutton noted that the curbside is exempt under MGL 30B, so the answer would be no. There was then some ensuing discussion of the differences between smaller companies and larger ones. Many larger companies have newer trucks that are computerized in some of their function. Ms. Amodei agreed, explaining that the Board of Health will not only consider smaller local companies, but also seek out larger trash haulers like Allied Waste, and Republic. The Board noted some of the challenges with switching to curbside, which include the driveways in the town. The town has many narrow roads and long driveways. Further, the issue of cost isn't the only one; there is also the question of convenience. Ms. Amodei noted some of the discussions that the Board of Health has had with existing haulers.

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This includes how they handle things, how they deal with narrow roads, and what the best practices are. This prompted some questions about how things would function in winter. Mr. Chaney noted that several towns in the area use curbside, and seem to manage during winter. Ms. Amodei reiterated that most people in town are using curbside already, and this is demonstrated by the shrinking usage of the Transfer Station. At the moment only roughly about 225 people are using the Transfer Station out of around 1,200 households and a population over 3,000. Ms. Hutton agreed, stating that the more the population grows, and demographics change, the more people want the convenience of curbside. There was then a question about common driveways, which are popular in Dunstable for small developments. Having a number of cans and bins down at the end could be problematic. Ms. Hutton noted some possible issues with a town service going down a private way. There would have to be some indemnifications. There are, unfortunately, not homeowner associations to help handle these kinds of issues and hammer out agreements. Ms. Amodei felt that this could be addressed. Ms. Hutton explained that doing this would mean having to change the proposal because of the road miles and number of citizens. Year one, citizens would pay for the curbside pickup individually and the Transfer Station would close. Assuming it all works, then in year two the program would expand town wide and put the cost on the tax rate. There was a question of how the costs are determined for that year one. Ms. Hutton reiterated that in the first year, those converting to curbside will pay for it. It would not go to the tax rate until the second year. The grant, Ms. Amodei explained, would cover as many bins and cans as needed so the more people sign up initially the better. And the bigger the trash hauler company, the better able to absorb increases in usage.

There was then a question of how to put the cost on the tax rate. It would require, Ms. Hutton noted, an override. The Advisory Board does not yet have a consensus or majority in favor of putting the cost on the tax rate at this stage. Ms. Amodei then turned to the education and how that component would work. The goal would be to have this in place July 1st, 2018 starting with FY19. Most private haulers are quarterly, so it wouldn't be too hard for citizens on private trash curbside pickup to switch to a public option in that first year. The Board expressed the feeling that the sale of this to the public would have to come from the Board of Health. There were then questions of how to get the service started and pay for it outside of the tax rate and whether that could be accomplished by a service fee, an assessment, or a betterment. It simply might be better to offer curbside as a service to the whole town from the get go and pay for it by creative means. Ms. Amodei noted again that the household average is high, and if town wide participation is achieved, the cost will decrease significantly. That means residents will ultimately save money. There was a question as to what the cost would be to make the Transfer Station sustainable and viable. Ms. Amodei responded that the station is able to continue functioning, but it is not efficient, and if usage and participation continues to drop, it won't remain sustainable. The idea for the curbside is that the cost to the town is around \$275, with a \$300 yearly bill to residents. That extra \$25 would pay for administrative costs. But those costs may end up being lower.

Meanwhile, the yearly cost for households currently for the Transfer Station is about \$300 per year for most of those 225 users (Seniors have a discounted rate of \$200 with less bag tags). Again, the average per household of all options, with most being on private pickup, is \$418. Discussion shifted back to local haulers versus big haulers. Ms. Hutton interjected with three questions. How much would it take to make the Transfer Station viable, what the cost of implementing curbside would be, and what indemnifications or other costs would there be? The Board generally agreed those are the questions, noting that the third really pertains to the shared and common driveway questions. Chief Rich noted a few areas where there could be problems, especially in winter. He's had a few ambulance calls where the ambulance has had issues traversing some of the private ways. Ms. Amodei admitted that would be a concern. This prompted some discussion regarding how Tyngsborough and Westford have dealt with these kinds of challenges. Ms. Hutton suggested that some stake holders get together to drive through the town and get good metrics. Chief Rich agreed to be part of that with Board of Health. Highway would likely need to be involved as well. Ms. Amodei then turned back to education and what initiatives can be used, stating that there needs to be a clear vision of what the change means and how it will be achieved. Discussion ended there.

Appointments & Resignations

Ms. Hutton started off by reminding the Board of the resignation in November of Mark Cullen from the Water Commission. The Commission has requested, in writing, that John O'Brien be appointed to fill the vacancy. The Commission previously approved of and endorsed Mr. O'Brien at its last meeting held on December 19th, 2017. The Board was amenable to this recommendation trusting the good judgment of the Commission as to its membership. There was light discussion regarding Mr. O'Brien's background. From there Ms. Hutton

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Market Study Proposal

Ms. Hutton explained the latest changes to the proposal in response to the Board's thoughts and ongoing discussion. She then updated the Board on the final costs, and what will be included for the budgeted \$17,500 as well as what won't be included and how any extras might be paid for. The idea has been to marry the recommendations of the Master Plan with what can be determined to be viable development interests for the town. A final presentation would be included, but additional presentations would be extra, roughly running \$500 to \$1,000. There was some discussion on diversification of talent, expertise, and experience. The firm, it was noted by the Board, appears after review to have all three of those things and the Board expressed comfort with the firm. As far as the presentation goes, it should be asked that it be significantly identified so that it is clear that the first one is indeed included in that final cost. It was noted that the proposal was previously revised, and instead of focusing on the town center and a possible business district there, it will focus more on the town essentially being the Route 113 corridor. The cost remains \$17,500.

For Future Pole Hearings

The Board proposed that for future Pole Hearings, there be more consideration concerning topography, including the possibility of a site visit prior to the hearing. This would give the Board an opportunity to consider any possible questions about the pole's location prior to the hearing. Ms. Hutton agreed to look into the matter further and see what can be done to work these concerns into the process

Update on Water Engineering

The Board noted that the town has previously used an engineering firm and after parting ways with that firm has lost the engineering due to a bad contract and no provision for intellectual property. There has been some loss of funds by the town in engineering as a result. The Board would like to consider possible options regarding making a complaint to appropriate authorities. Ms. Hutton noted some of the deficiencies with the contract besides the intellectual property, and what the current engineers are looking at and considering. The engineering done by the prior company is not likely of much use to the town. Regardless, the Board would like to pursue the options noting that the loss of funds was not insignificant. Ms. Hutton noted that part of the problem was signing contracts that favored the engineering firms and not following the proper process under procurement law. Thankfully, these mistakes are not being made now that the town has a functional Town Administrators office. Previously various volunteer and elected boards, committees, and commissions were vetting these contracts with limited legal assistance. That has changed. Having a professional Administrator overseeing the process who is licensed and trained in procurement has greatly improved the situation and should prevent these problems from reoccurring. The Board felt that it is important to fully understand what went wrong, and be certain that it doesn't happen again. Further, the town's options should be fully considered. The contract with that engineering firm may not have been legal in the first place, and that may provide options to the town. The only question there is, if the town has options, such as filing suit, what would the costs be to the town? Legal costs could be prohibitive. Ms. Hutton agreed noting that there may not be enough of a benefit if there are legal costs. But it is worth investigating to determine if that's the case. Some effort should be made. Litigation may not be in the cards, but if there is any way to recover funds, then that should be pursued

Administrators Report

Ms. Hutton started by reporting that snow fall predictions for Thursday, January 4th, 2018 look likely to lead to cancellations. The town's official snow policy follows the school district. If GDRSD closes for the day town buildings do as well. The main impact to the town is the Advisory Board's meeting which was scheduled for January 4th. This may prove challenging since Ms. Hutton is scheduled for vacation the week of January 8th. Ms. Hutton then reported on a proposal to burn Christmas Trees. Chief Rich interjected that due to the cold, this may not go forward. With temperatures dipping into the negatives and snow on the horizon, it's less likely. Ms. Hutton then reported that following her return from vacation, there will be a number of meetings, which will include a joint meeting of the Board and Advisory Board on January 17th, 2018 at 7 pm. The Board's next regular meeting will be January 23rd, 2018. Master Plan will be meeting on January 16th, 2018. Ms. Hutton then finished by noting the hours she has been putting into the water system and meeting the requirements of

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DEP. About 40 percent of her time is going to the ongoing problem. There was brief discussion revolving around the water systems problems, the demands of DEP, and what solutions are being investigated.

Minutes

The Board also considered its minutes from December 18th, 2017. Seeing no necessary changes or modifications the Board determined to approve the minutes as written.

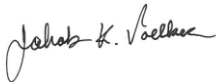
A motion was made by Ms. Basbanes to approve the minutes of December 18th, 2017 as written. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikol and passed unanimously

Warrants & Mail

Mr. Alterisio reported on the warrants he has signed. This included highlighting the sums spent, including some of the larger payments made to vendors as well as brief discussion of the payroll. The Board then reviewed its mail.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Basbanes at 8:00 pm. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mikol and passed without objection.

Respectfully submitted by



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