

Board of Selectmen
Minutes of 10/16/06
Approved 11/27/06

I. Call to Order

Chair Emily Creighton called the meeting to order at 1:08 p.m. There were also present Mr. Donald Gould, Selectman, Mr. Henry Marsh, Selectman and Michael Pardue, Town Administrator. Mr. Pardue served as the Recording Secretary for this session.

II. Selectmen Items

A. Aquarion Water Company Issues

Ms. Creighton addressed the fact that the Aquarion Water Company had contracted a firm to conduct a telephone survey of North Hampton residents regarding certain town services with a strong focus on water company matters.

Mr. Marsh stated that he had received a call from this same survey company and that he had declined to comment to them due to his role as a member of the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Creighton stated that she received a call from the survey firm and when asked if she was Ms. Creighton, the caller hung-up on her.

Mr. Gould stated that he received a call from the pollster and that he took note of some of the questions he was asked.

Mr. Gould stated that he has great concerns related to the wording of many of the questions.

Mr. Gould, with the permission of the Chair, addressed a number of questions to Mr. Adam Torrey, the Operations Manager of Aquarion who was in attendance.

Mr. Gould asked Mr. Torrey if Aquarion is indeed the sponsor of the survey. Mr. Torrey responded "yes".

Mr. Gould asked about the purpose of the question in the survey that asks the respondent if they are satisfied with the current tax rate. Mr. Torrey stated that he did not know the purpose of this question.

Mr. Marsh asked if Mr. Torrey has seen the survey being discussed. Mr. Torrey stated, “yes”. Mr. Torrey went on to say that he would see that the Town receives a copy of the survey along with the survey results.

Mr. Gould asked if the Town will receive all iterations of the survey, stating that it is the Board’s request to receive a copy of each of the scripts used in the polling.

Ms. Creighton asked Mr. Torrey to send a copy of the questionnaire to the town via email as soon as possible. Mr. Torrey stated that he would do so.

Mr. Gould asked Mr. Torrey if he thought the nature of the questions was potentially damaging with a pending Town meeting.

Mr. Torrey stated that he thought the questions were not intended to be a “scare tactic” but more educational in nature.

Mr. Gould asked Mr. Torrey about the approach being used by Aquarion in sitting down with selected Town residents to solicit their comments and likely their future support. Mr. Gould asked Mr. Torrey to take the steps necessary to insure that this approach cease.

Ms. Creighton reiterated that it appears to her that Aquarion has a campaign going on with a strategy to influence residents to not be supportive of the exploration regarding the possible purchase of Aquarion.

Ms. Creighton stated that the actions demonstrated by Aquarion fail to give her confidence in its management.

Mr. Gould summarized Mr. Torrey’s comments to include that one of the objectives of the phone survey is to influence potential voters.

The Board further expressed their great displeasure with the tactics used by Aquarion.

B. Draft Letter of Response From Board of Selectmen to Attorney Klasnick Re: Verizon Lawsuit Withdrawal

The Board discussed the verbiage of their letter of response to Attorney Klasnick.

Motion / Vote: Mr. Marsh made a motion to accept the letter of response as amended. Mr. Gould seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous and so moved 3-0.

C. Coalitions Communities Survey of Political Candidates

The Board discussed the Coalition’s survey and the suggested survey soliciting political candidate response to certain key issues related to education funding.

Motion / Vote: Mr. Gould made a motion to forward the Coalition Communities survey to political candidates as requested by the Coalition. Mr. Marsh seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous and so moved.

D. Donald W. Little Lawsuit Announced

Ms. Creighton announced that the Town has been “served” with a lawsuit as filed by Mr. Donald W. Little. The related documents will be forwarded to the Town’s insurance carrier and legal counsel for review, comment and needed action.

E. Questions and Comments

Mr. Ron Dupuis asked the Board what the nature of the vote is to be in relation to the Aquarion matter.

The dates for the deliberative session and ballot vote were discussed.

Mr. Dupuis asked the Board how many petitions were circulated in relation to the Aquarion Water Company matter. He also asked about the number of signatures required to advance a petition.

Mr. Dupuis asked the Board about where the money comes from to pay for legal counsel and experts related to the Aquarion matter. The Board explained that such fees are typically expended from the Town’s legal line of the operating budget.

The Board explained that approximately \$15,000 has been spent thus far on this matter for legal counsel and related experts.

Mr. Dupuis further asked if the funds for lawyer and expert consultants were expended before or after the petition was received. The Board stated that the Water Commissioners had come to the Board for legal support and guidance and that they, the Board, had granted the Commissioners request.

F. Recreation Department Budget Revisited

The Board reviewed the proposed recreation department budget, discussing the benefits associated with now being able to use the revolving fund dollars.

G. Town Clerk / Tax Collector Combined Position

The Board discussed compensation options for the combined position of Town Clerk and Tax Collector.

Discussion included whether or not the current (retiring) tax collector, Ms. Margaret Neves, would have an interest in serving as the Deputy Tax Collector following her retirement from her current position.

H. Budget Committee Schedule

The Board discussed the meeting schedule as proposed by the Chair of the Budget Committee.

III. Adjournment

Being no further business to come before the Board, Mr. Gould made a motion to adjourn at 9:12 p.m. Mr. Marsh seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous and so moved 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Pardue
Town Administrator