

June 22, 2011

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
JUNE 22, 2011**

Present: Thomas Creamer, Chairman
Mary Dowling
Mary Blanchard
Priscilla P. Gimas
Angeline Ellison
Shaun Suhoski, Town Administrator

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. following the Pledge of Allegiance.

T. Creamer announced that a member of the press was recording the meeting. He announced that the meeting was not being broadcast due to technical difficulties that were being addressed, but the meeting was being recorded and would be broadcast in a day or two.

T. Creamer said that this was a special meeting to update the people who were impacted by the recent tornado. S. Suhoski provided an update on what the Town has been doing to help the residents. He said that utility crews from National Grid have been working to clear roads and get power restored. Efforts are continuing. DPW crews have been working hard to clear debris in the Holland Road and Stallion Hill area. He noted that there is a debris removal plan in place, the schedule has been distributed and is available online on the Town's website. The Town Administrator, department heads and staff have been working on getting a disaster declaration for Worcester County. Worcester County was included in the individual assistance programs for FEMA. There may be low interest loans available for those with uninsured expenses. People can get detailed information seven days a week on a walk-in basis at the public safety complex. There is a MEMA assistance center there. They can meet with individuals to discuss their particular concerns, and discuss programs that are available. The Board of Selectmen authorized deficit spending for the emergency, as is done for snow and ice removal during the winter. The costs are still being tallied but we are probably in the \$125,000-\$150,000 range right now. He noted that a lot of debris still needs to be removed. If Worcester County is declared a disaster area for public assistance, the Town can access up to 75% federal reimbursement for removal of the debris. An initial estimate from the statewide vendor, the Ashbritt Company (in a publicly bid contract that could be executed immediately) estimated at least 20,000 cubic yards of material just at the side of the street would cost well over \$600,000 to haul that off. That does not include the access road to the town barn fields, it doesn't count clearing the roads to the Stallion Hill water tank, well number three or to any of our public lands. Staff has been working on documenting with photos, spreadsheets and GIS mapping the full picture of the public damage in Sturbridge. He said that

June 22, 2011

when FEMA came through couple of weeks ago, they did not inspect the entire Town, and the damages are more extensive than first thought. Staff has been working on getting that disaster declaration to get access to 75% funding. The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee will schedule a special town meeting in the coming months. The debris in the roads needs to be removed as soon as possible, and it will be necessary to find funding to do that. There was a very productive meeting with MEMA along with the public assessment director. The governor put forward a revised application to trigger the federal declaration, and it will be pursued diligently by our state representatives.

T. Creamer said that approximately \$500,000 worth of work has been done by the volunteers. He asked for comments from the residents. He suggested that the residents read through the fact sheet and note that individual assistance is extremely limited. He informed them that FEMA will not cover tree removal.

John Trahan, 22 Willard Rd., expressed concern about the height of the brush and the speed at which people have been traveling down his road. He requested that the speed limit be reduced (and enforced) see on his road, and that "children playing" signs be put up. He also expressed concern about the wetlands behind his road, and said that the stream has been encroaching on his backyard. T. Creamer said that they have been trying to get the removal of the brush expedited, as it is dangerous for people coming in and out of their driveways. He said that Chief Ford sent his regrets, as he wanted to attend the meeting but was unable to. As the Emergency Management Director, Chief Ford is concerned about public safety. T. Creamer told Chief Ford that any questions specific to traffic or safety would be forwarded to him. He will address any concerns that the residents have.

S. Suhoski gave a brief overview of MEMA's response regarding wetlands. He said that there is a separate program outside of disaster declaration that can deal with streams. He will reach out to those individuals through the Conservation Agent to get residents some help with that. T. Creamer said that Erin Jacque, Conservation Agent, has been out there and will tag trees that she feels need to be immediately removed in order to help the stream to stay where it belongs. He said that he would dedicate cutters to go into that area to relieve as much of the pressure as possible.

A woman in the audience said that it was impossible to haul some of the heavy logs out to the street. T. Creamer said that they are going to look into getting a commercial chipper donated by one of the volunteers and then have volunteers load the logs onto a flat bed to take them out. He didn't know how much could be taken, but assured her that the Town would do as much as possible.

Neal Campbell, 21 Willard Road, said that he was very impressed with all that the Town has done.

June 22, 2011

Randy Redetzke expressed concern about the speed of traffic and safety issues, and the amount of debris. T. Creamer said that he would pass it on to Chief Ford.

Colleen Overly asked if it would be another time for debris pickup as she does not have even half of her debris out on the road ready to be picked up. T. Creamer said that neighborhood liaisons have been established. He said that it was a policy decision by the Board to set those dates, and speaking as an individual member of the Board, he noted that policy can be modified to address significant situations that are out of the norm. P. Gimas noted that the whole community has been affected by the tornado, and it is everyone's effort to help with the situation.

T. Creamer read into the record what FEMA would actually cover. FEMA will give you a certain amount of money to replace or repair your home for those things not covered by insurance. He said that it then goes on to say, however, that their goal is to repair the home to a safe and sanitary functioning condition. FEMA will not pay to return home to its condition before the disaster; they will just make it habitable. They will deal with structural parts, well or water systems, windows, septic or sewage systems, HVAC, utilities, entrance and exit ways, and anchoring of a mobile home. They will not cover landscaping or tree removal.

Neal Campbell asked whether the National Guard could be mobilized on the state level to perform some services. S. Suhoski said that when the state of emergency was declared, the Governor did call 1000 members of the guard to provide assistance, primarily in Hampden County, and they had provided some traffic control assistance on Willard Road. They needed to return to their regular jobs.

Dianne Harper expressed concern about a fire hazard in open space. She suggested that the National Guard be used to remove some of the debris that is in the forests. She asked whether the fire marshal had been consulted. S. Suhoski said that according to FEMA, removal of debris in forest land and conservation land was not reimbursable. He said that they may, under a hazard mitigation program, provide some assistance in putting firebreaks. He said that this concern had been raised with the FEMA representative but has not been resolved as yet. T. Creamer said that the question had been raised regarding the potential for fire, and will be a significant concern next year; this year much of that wood is still very wet. He said that FEMA does not do fire hazards.

P. Gimas asked whether it would be possible for communities that have not been affected by the tornado to send a truck with DPW crews one day a week on the staggered basis to be paid by their own town to help expedite the cleanup of the brush. T. Creamer said this would be a mutual aid agreement outside of our own district. He said it would be worth pursuing. He said that he would draft a letter for the Board's approval to be sent out to other communities, asking if they would

June 22, 2011

be willing to engage in a mutual aid agreement such as that to provide a resource.

A woman in the audience said that speaking for her neighbors on the room 131 side of Willard road and there is debris dangling over 131 how will that be handled. T. Creamer instructed her to leave the debris there. He said that Greg Morris indicated to him that the state had targeted 131 to begin clean out right around the last week of June. He said that there were a lot of volunteers wanted to get in there to haul that stuff out. He said that if the state was going to delay beyond the 28th, at that point the Town will be asking for some level of detail or a small barrier to get the volunteers to start cutting and pulling stuff down and cleaning up those lots. S. Suhoski noted that the burning season would not be extended, as DEP has a concern about air quality in the summer. T. Creamer suggested advocating that they consider allowing burning in early fall.

T. Creamer said that the Board of Health indicated that anyone who lives within the impact zone should provide them with their name and address, and if they show identification they will be allowed to leave demolition debris at the recycling center for free.

T. Creamer said that the Conservation Agent had put together a list of tree companies to identify people but she has had some experience with in the past and feels, comfortable recommending. He noted that there are some very good contractors in the town.

C. Blanchard suggested going out for a lump sum bid on removal of debris. S. Suhoski said that he met twice with Ashbritt, and their price would clearly be higher than other methods to be considered. He said that other information was being weighed. He noted that assessments are being done for FEMA, and he did not want to provide low assessments to them. He did not want to underestimate the property damage; at the same time he needs to consider the best value for the taxpayers.

T. Creamer said that the Board of Selectmen had waived the fees for the building permits and the Town's share of fees for electrical and plumbing inspections for those people impacted by the tornado.

P. Gimás said that Carol Goodwin will be rounding up volunteers for the fall regarding the replanting of trees and she is looking for donations from florists and garden centers to help those whose properties have been damaged.

T. Creamer announced that there will be another update meeting for residents on July 13, 2011 at 6:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

June 22, 2011

Judy Knowles

BOS Clerk

Date