

December 12, 2011

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
DECEMBER 12, 2011**

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

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

T. Creamer expressed condolences, thoughts and prayers to the City of Worcester firefighters and public safety officials over the death of firefighter Jon Davies.

MOTION: That the Board approve the letter to be sent to the City of Worcester and family of Jon Davies, by M. Blanchard.
2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

Thomas Chamberland, Tree Warden

Thomas Chamberland, Tree Warden, appeared before the Board. He spoke to the replanting effort to take place during spring 2012. He said that \$4,000 from betterment and \$10,000 from the state grant would cover the cost. He said that free trees are available, but residents need to place their orders by the end of December 2011. He noted that trees may be planted up to 20 feet from the right-of-way.

A. Ellison asked whether the trees could be planted deeper into the property. T. Chamberland said that the law limits the plantings to be done within 20 feet from the right-of-way.

M. Dowling asked whether larger trees could be planted. T. Chamberland replied that the trees are limited to volunteer capacity, but at some street locations larger trees could be planted, although the preference is to use bare root trees.

T. Creamer asked whether the Town could "reclaim" the Route 131 area. T. Chamberland said that it could, within 20 feet.

Regarding the Recreational Trails Master Plan, T. Chamberland noted that the survey is available online, and has been posted in a prominent place on the Town's website. He said that the survey would be open until January 20, 2012.

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He noted that the Recreational Trails Master Plan Committee hopes to have the draft plan available for the public in April 2012.

T. Creamer said that the display boxes would be relocated.

Regarding trail signage, T. Creamer said that the Chairman of the Conservation Commission had expressed concern about the delay in the trail signage. T. Chamberland said that the trails consultant felt that signage and kiosks could be better organized, and suggested that some have the "TREK Sturbridge" logo, and some with the Town seal. He said that the format is good for ACE; Opacum, DCR so all similar. #1 Trail markers; #2 Informational with "Goodbye" and "Remember" guidelines; #3 Directional; #4 Caution (leaving marked trail). He said that he would explore the Heins Farm directional.

MOTION: That the Board approve the signs as outlined in the December 6, 2011 email from Erin Jacque, Conservation Agent, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimás

Vote: All in favor.

Discussion re. Proposed Changes to Regional School District Agreement

S. Suhoski submitted to the Board the September 7th memorandum from Superintendent Daniel Durgin requesting all member towns of the regional school district to place an article on the next occurring town meeting warrant that would change the method of filling vacancies for elected positions from the respective boards of selectmen to a joint vote of the respective board of selectmen and the remaining regional school committee members of the relevant town.

S. Suhoski said that that the current process – whether followed by all of the member towns or not – provides an "as equal" basis for filling vacancies in each of the member communities. For Sturbridge, the proposed change may create a different balance in the appointing authority relative to the other communities based solely upon the number of school committee representatives versus the number of selectmen. He noted that this may not be an important distinction, but it is a distinction from the other member towns nonetheless.

T. Creamer distributed a handout to the Board with various regional school district agreements, with a table showing the number of the Selectmen and School Committee members of each town. He said that Sturbridge is the only town in the district where the Board of Selectmen can be unilaterally out voted. He stated his belief that the process should be equitable and the number of votes should be equitable.

M. Blanchard felt that the joint appointment has always worked well, and that numbers vary for other joint appointments. P. Gimás said that she had no

problem with the joint appointment, but with the inequity of it. A. Ellision said that she was struggling with the current language and its inequities, given this recent appointment and its politics. M. Dowling said that she still would embrace a joint appointment, and that it should not be adversarial. She suggested that requirements for posting be added to the agreement.

Following a lengthy discussion, it was the consensus of the Board to agree on the language, and the equitable district vote.

Appointment to Housing Partnership Committee

S. Suhoski informed the Board that Sturbridge Hills resident Bob Lucier has expressed interest in serving on the Housing Partnership Committee. He has a longstanding interest in housing issues and has knowledge of various subsidy programs and the real estate field.

MOTION: That the Board of Selectmen ratify the Town Administrator's appointment of Robert Lucier to the Housing Partnership Committee for a term expiring in 2014, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas

Vote: All in favor.

S. Suhoski noted that this appointment still leaves this committee short by two members despite several advertisements. He asked for an outreach to the community for other interested persons.

Appointment to Senior Municipal Service Program

S. Suhoski said that Nancy Giroux has been qualified by the Assessor's office for participation in the SMSP. Her services are also desired by the COA Director. This would bring the program to 23 participants, a record high.

MOTION: That the Board of Selectmen approve the above-named applicant for participation in the Senior Municipal Service Program and to be designated to assist at the Council on Aging, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas

Vote: All in favor.

Fire Department Presented with Fire Marshall's Award

On November 30, S. Suhoski had the pleasure of attending the annual fire service awards at the Hanover Theater in Worcester. Sturbridge Fire Chief Leonard Senecal and Fire Capt. John Marinelli accepted the Fire Marshall's award – presented by Governor Patrick – on behalf of the Sturbridge Fire Dept. for their service in the aftermath of the June 1 tornado.

Update: Walker Road Engineering

S. Suhoski said that further to the Board's authorization, a notice to proceed was issued to CME Associates for survey and design of the proposed Walker Road upgrades. He said that following a pair of site visits between the engineers and the DPW Director, CME has completed wetlands flagging and one day of survey. They anticipate another one or two days of survey are required to complete the project mapping, and the teams will be on site Monday to continue this work. He said that by mid-January, CME will initiate the design process and will work closely with the DPW Director and Conservation Agent to ensure compliance with applicable regulations after which a progress meeting can be held to update the residents and Board if required.

Update: WWTP Noise Concerns

S. Suhoski said that some residents at Sturbridge Hills condominiums have expressed concern over noise potentially emanating from the wastewater treatment plant during evening hours. He said that representatives of the condominium association have agreed to a meeting on site with the project engineer, plant operator, DPW and Town Administrator to discuss the concerns and troubleshoot for answers. If the sound is coming from the plant, or from redesigned components, the project engineer will seek to develop appropriate mitigation measures. He said that the residents have asked to attend the January 9, 2012 Board of Selectmen's meeting if the issue is not abated.

Approval of Minutes

MOTION: That the Board approve the minutes of November 14, 2011 as amended, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas

Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: That the Board approve the minutes of October 11, 2011 as amended, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas

Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: That the Board approve the minutes of June 13, 2011 as amended, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas

Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: That the Board approve the minutes to June 20, 2011 as amended, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: That the Board approve the minutes of July 5, 2011 as amended, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: That the Board approve the executive session minutes of July 5, 2011 as amended, and to hold as confidential, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

Correspondence

M. Blanchard read the correspondence list into the record.

Miscellaneous Items

S. Suhoski provided the following updates to the Board:

- **Farquhar Road Drainage:** This project reached substantial completion this week. DPW crews installed the under-road structures in Blueberry Lane, the 18-inch drainage pipe and constructed the swale at the pipe's inlet area. Paving was hoped to be completed by the end of the week. There remained some grading and cleanup of the property, weather permitting.
- **Disaster Debris Removal:** Curbside debris removal from the October 30th snowstorm was completed. Grinding and disposal from the Route 15 site (old Howard Johnson's) was substantially completed. Total costs are being tabulated but are within the approved budget and STM actions. S. Suhoski also approved debris plans and contract documents prepared by the Conservation Agent for the Stallion Hill area, and for the access road to the Town Barn ballfields. He also requested FEMA approval of a plan to have the state vendor grind and haul the remaining tornado stockpiles, but had not yet received approval.
- **Tropical Storm Irene – FEMA Reimbursement:** S. Suhoski had a conversation with the FEMA representative handling this event. The Police Chief's administrative assistant is compiling the information with the Finance Director to complete this filing in one package.
- **Riverlands Environmental Monitoring:** Tighe & Bond reported that the drilling rig was re-scheduled to December 19-22.

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- **AAB Variance Update:** As reported previously, there were no vendor responses to the detailed specifications, prevailing rates and request for written quotes for this project. S. Suhoski contacted various vendors directly, and at the suggestion of the Town Hall / COB building committee, will inquire whether students at TRHS may be able to assist in this project.
- **Town Hall and COB Building Project Update:** The Town continued to hold just over \$15,000 in retainage to encourage completion of all outstanding items. Still remaining on the list were repairs to cracks in plaster on the first floor of Town Hall, repair of a scratch in the flooring on the first floor of Town Hall, and in the spring, completion of remedial actions to the HVAC systems. The main entry doors (rear) of Town Hall continue to require readjustment of hardware relative to proper closing.
- **New Ambulance:** Following Special Town Meeting action, the Fire Chief ordered the vehicle and it is expected to arrive within the next 21-30 days.
- **Veterans Services Director:** S. Suhoski conducted a final interview with the selected candidate and was in the process of completing the reference checks. The individual is a very promising candidate and S. Suhoski would like to schedule him to come before the Board at the December 19th meeting.
- **Solar Power RFQ:** Conducted further individual research into the respondents and met with the Chairman of the Energy Advisory Committee at length (lack of quorum at December 8 meeting) to discuss status and develop final points for clarification by potential vendor. The EAC Chairman polled the committee for a series of dates to finalize the recommendation and a presentation to the Board of Selectmen. The strong desire was for the EAC to complete this phase of the process before the holidays.
- **Visitor Center Dumpster Enclosure Fence:** The dumpster enclosure at the Route 20 visitor center was in a severe state of disrepair and is in the process of being replaced by Fence Co. Plus of Auburn for a cost just under \$1,800. S. Suhoski noted that the old fence has been removed and work has begun for the replacement enclosure. The materials for the new fencing have been received and work will start in the immediate future to complete this project.
- **FY13 Budget, Capital and Betterment Planning:** No change. The budget message was released last month. Although the STM continued with the June Annual Town Meeting date, S. Suhoski and the Finance Director were working to have all budget documents provided to the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen in a timely and efficient manner.
- **Group Health Insurance:** Conducted substantive meeting with Finance Director and MIIA representative relative to claims history, premiums and conceptual “plan design” changes to town’s health insurance plan. The Town’s

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Insurance Advisory Committee will be reconstituted and activated to review, discuss and take action on a plan to reduce costs through reasonable plan design modifications that are anticipated to be initiated for FY13 and not further delayed. Given that costs increased by over 16 percent last year, S. Suhoski's goal is to mitigate any such increase to no more than single digit increases through reasonable reform efforts. The Finance Director will be working with him on this initiative.

• **Department Head Performance Evaluations:** Scheduled performance evaluations and goal setting with all direct-report department heads. Conducted several evaluations this week with balance scheduled for next week so that merit pay may issue prior to the holidays. As documentation is signed S. Suhoski will have a copy placed in a folder on top of the Selectmen's mailboxes so that they may review same in confidence. A spreadsheet indicating all merit payments will be provided to the Board once reviews are complete.

• **Meetings and Other Participation:** Met with Ash-Britt (state debris vendor) representatives relative to tornado stockpiles and contracting requirements; conducting final interview with candidate for Veterans Services Director; attended Shaw's supermarket re-opening with Selectman Blanchard; attended Town Hall / Center Office Building committee meeting; met with Police Chief, Building Inspector and Town Counsel concerning ongoing litigation; met with department head regarding disciplinary matter; met with water/sewer project manager regarding customer concern; discussion with health agent regarding ongoing project; participated in impact bargaining session re: collective bargaining matter; attended site visit with DPW Director regarding private road drainage concerns; attended Special Town Meeting; attended regional town administrator's luncheon meeting to discuss regional stormwater grant program and issues of mutual concern.

Old Business

P. Gimas expressed disappointment in the service provided by Charter Communications, and noted that their prices were high.

M. Blanchard asked about the status of the response to Mr. Brousseau regarding water on Route 131.

M. Blanchard asked about the alcohol compliance policy. S. Suhoski said that he would provide it to the Board.

T. Creamer noted that the Town Administrator's self-evaluation is due by December 19th, and the Selectmen should provide their comments to the Chairman by December 30th; the Town Administrator's evaluation will be conducted on January 9, 2012.

- MOTION:** That on the evaluation form, “poor” be replaced with “needs improvement,” by A. Ellison.
2nd: M. Dowling
Vote: Two in favor; P. Gimas, M. Blanchard and T. Creamer opposed.

New Business

- MOTION:** That Schiller Brothers be removed from the DPW plow list, by M. Blanchard.
2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

M. Dowling announced that following the fire at their home, the Chabot Family Fund has been established at the Southbridge Savings Bank; donations will be accepted at any branch of the bank.

M. Dowling requested that residents try to shop at local businesses.

Ask the Selectmen/Citizens’ Forum

A. Ellison fielded a call about the process for incentive pay for the Town Administrator.

A. Ellison reported that a resident said that regarding the Tantasqua Regional School District, the Town pays higher assessment.

T. Creamer said that a resident had informed him that while watching some of the meetings, Greg Morse, Tom Chamberland and the Board of Selectmen stated that there were some concerns during the power restoration. G. Morse and his crews were out trying to clear some area, while National Grid crews were going to other locations that had not been cleared yet. He noted that there was a disconnect between what the Town had considered priority areas and what National Grid was focusing on. He said that the Town was in a better position to determine what the priority areas were. A concern was expressed that the Town find some way to express it at tomorrow night’s meeting with National Grid. Another point was in terms of maintenance around the trees. G. Morse had mentioned that they maintained roughly 10 feet above the trees and 3-5 feet outside the trees. The resident suggested that the virtual rectangle be expanded to a much larger area of tree clearing and limb clearing around some of the wires. He noted that there is still a great threat of trees coming down on wires, which should be discussed with National Grid. A third point made by the resident was that in reading the local newspapers, he noticed negativity being directed at the Town of Sturbridge and the Board of Selectmen from the Regional School Committee and neighboring Boards of Selectmen. He suggested doing something to improve the climate from these other communities. P. Gimas said that if more people start watching and paying attention, more people should

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attend these meetings and raise questions in a public forum. She said that once the members of the School Committee realize that people are watching and listening, it could change that negativity. M. Dowling said that once there is closure regarding the joint appointment process, some of the negativity will go away. T. Creamer stressed the need for communication and dialogue with the Boards of Selectmen from other communities, and with the School Committee.

Carol Childress, New Boston Road, asked about the status of conservation restrictions on various parcels including the Riverlands property. Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife (Brandon Kibbe) conveyed to the Conservation Commission that hunting must be allowed on the Shepard parcel. S. Suhoski said that the Riverlands is under the care and custody of the Town Administrator and the environmental process should be completed before limiting options and uses available to the Riverlands. He noted that the Conservation Commission is working on these issues. T. Creamer stressed the need to make sure that conservation restrictions on properties are aggressively and actively sought.

MOTION: To adjourn, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas

Vote: All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Knowles

BOS Clerk

Date