



Town of Bellingham

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

10 Mechanic Street

Bellingham, Massachusetts 02019

Tel: 508-966-5800 * Fax: 508-966-4425

March 6, 2023

The Selectboard meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chairman Don Martinis. All Board members were in attendance and participating in the Arcand Meeting Room. Also actively participating in the meeting was Town Administrator Denis Fraine and Administrative Assistant Hilarie Allie. This meeting was accessible to the public either in-person or via the Zoom online option.

Chairman Don Martinis opened the meeting with a moment of silence for Glenn Gerrior, resident of Bellingham, owner of Charlie's Tire and former Planning Board member. Glenn and his family contributed to the Town and local sports over the years and will be missed by his community.

Public Hearing – Larry Sposato, Town Clerk, will discuss Local Election requirements pursuant to Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2022 (Votes Act) and whether the Town will vote to opt out of certain non-mandatory features such as Voting-by-Mail and In-Person Early voting for annual municipal elections.

Chairman Don Martinis opened the public hearing and stated it would be continued until after the committee interviews were conducted.

Jennifer Russo – Historical Commission Interview

Ms. Russo introduced herself via the Zoom online option and stated she has lived in Bellingham since 2014. She stated she is an active volunteer in youth football and currently writes for the Bellingham Bulletin. She stated she is passionate about history and memory and is fascinating with Massachusetts as a whole and is excited to learn more about Bellingham. She stated she is a Mayflower descendant as well as a descendant of two women hung in the Salem witch trials. She is very much into genealogy and excited to be a part of the Bellingham Historical Commission.

The Board thanked Ms. Russo for her time this evening and her interest in the Bellingham Historical Commission.

Jeffrey Prescott – Historical Commission Interview

Mr. Prescott introduced himself to the Board and stated he has been a resident of Bellingham for 56 years. He stated now that he is closer to retirement, he is interested in volunteering his time and sharing his love of genealogy. He would like to help the Bellingham Historical Commission with their online presence. He has relatives in Maine who are actively involved in their Historical Commission and would look to them for guidance.

The Board thanked Mr. Prescott for his time this evening and his interest in the Bellingham Historical Commission.

James Dixon – Zoning Board of Appeals Interview

Mr. Dixon introduced himself to the Board and stated he has been a resident of Bellingham since 2011. He stated he has been focusing his time on his career and children and has volunteered as a youth soccer and basketball coach but is now ready to focus on himself and learn more about his community. He stated his professional career is in costumer engagement in AI Technology. Mr. Fraine asked him why he is particularly interested in the Zoning Board and Mr. Dixon stated he has a friend on the Board and he recommended that he apply as they were in need of help. Mr. Connor asked him if there was anything in his neighborhood that was currently with the Zoning Board that would force him to accuse himself from votes and Mr. Dixon stated there was not.

The Board thanked Mr. Dixon for his time this evening and his interest in the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Public Hearing Continued

Larry Sposato, Town Clerk, presented before the regarding recent Acts that have become Law. He stated the new “Voter Law” (Chapter 54, §25B) provides for municipal options regarding the manner in which residents vote in local elections. The choices given to local authorities are whether voting by mail and/or in-person early voting will be allowed. He stated there are 12,000 registered voters and if either early voting or vote-by-mail are adopted, the Town would be responsible for mailing out 12,000 cards asking if the voter wanted a ballot, then ballots would have to be mailed. These costs would be absorbed by the Town. Mr. Fraine stated that registered voters still and always have absentee ballots that are available. It was the consensus of the Board to not authorize early voting or vote-by-mail for the upcoming municipal election. Mr. Sposato confirmed that this topic requires a vote for every election in Town.

On a Connor/McNulty motion the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to close the Public Hearing.

On a Connor/McNulty motion the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to have no early voting nor voting-by-mail for the upcoming Municipal Town Election.

Election Hours

Mr. Sposato stated that for the past two years the polls were open from 12PM until 8PM and was requesting the Board vote to keep these polling hours. The Board was in favor of continuing this request.

On a Connor/McNulty motion the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to open the polls from 12PM to 8PM on Tuesday May 2, 2023.

On a Grant/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to allow police presence at the Municipal Town Election on Tuesday May 2, 2023. Under discussion the Board asked Mr. Sposato to use his discretion and limit the number of officers he thought was necessary.

Housing Authority

Mr. Sposato stated a recent change in the law now allows the Board of Selectmen to appoint a tenant member of the Housing Authority. The Housing Authority will consist of 5 members with 5 year terms, (3 elected residents at Town Elections, 1 resident member appointed by Governor and 1 member Appointed by BOS (the BOS appointee must be a resident of one of the facilities). The applications will be sent in to the Town Clerk and then forwarded to the Board of Selectmen’s office and the Board will interview applicants in the same process they conduct for other Boards and Committee applicants.

Mr. Sposato stated a notice has already been posted in the facilities and he has received 3+ application so far. He will let the applicants know the process and the Board will interview the candidates for the position.

School Department Budget Update

Ms. Joanne Rebelo and Mr. Peter Marano appeared before the Board to provide an update on the school department budget. They began by explaining that the process starts in October/November by meeting with department heads, principals and directors where they look at wants and needs for each school. Those budgets are then brought to the central office for review in December and then brought to the School Committee for a budget workshop on two Saturdays in January/February. Tonight they will be presenting an overview of where they are now in the FY24 budget process.

Ms. Rebelo stated they look at several factors while building their budget. For example, there were some reductions in positions, new position requests that were not fulfilled and reductions in non-salary items (such as supplies, uniforms and iPads). She pointed out that the biggest part of their budget is salaries. She stated the proposed budget for FY24 is \$30.2M (not including transportation). Of this proposed budget, \$24.4M of it comes from salaries, which is an increase of \$1.3M over last year. Ms. Rebelo stated the total transportation budget for FY24 is \$3.1M. The two combined budgets results in a 4.62% increase over last year. Contractual increases resulted in a 3.58% increase and the remaining 1.04% resulted from all other expenses. She wanted to point out that each year the state sets a limit of the percentage that private schools where the Town sends students out of district can increase and this year that percentage was set at 14% and historically it has been between 3-4%.

Mr. Fraine stated that this budget request is a little higher than the balanced budget presented to the Selectboard at the budget workshop but with the preview of State Aid numbers he and Mrs. MacKinnon are confident that they will be able to honor this request. Mrs. MacKinnon asked if this budget includes funding from the Special Education Reserve Fund and Ms. Rebelo confirmed that it does not.

Mr. Connor questioned the increase that has been given to the schools over the past four years. Mrs. MacKinnon stated it's hard to compare each year like that because of the fluctuating cost of assessments which is the reduction taken right off the top of State Aid. These costs need to be factored into the increases. She stated \$3M each year is going towards the Charter School and school choice schools. Mr. Sahin asked what the Town could do to keep families from choosing the Charter School. Mr. Marano stated that is a hard question to answer. He had met with a group of parents a few years back and the answer he received were they things like they felt the culture was better there and perhaps better programing at the lower level. He said the schools are continuing to build programs to retain children but unfortunately many families just gravitate to the Charter School.

ARPA Vote

On a Grant/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to approve the projects as listed herein, with said expenditures to be under the direction of the parties notes.

Amount	From	For/Purpose	Spending Authority
\$15,000	ARPA funds	Grants administration	Finance
\$66,482	ARPA NEU funds	Cedar Hill Road Water Main and road improvements Design	DPW

On a McNulty/Grant motion, the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to award the Well 12 Replacement Project to the low bidder Barbato Construction Company, Inc. of Middleboro, MA in the amount of \$386,669.00.

On a Grant/Connor motion the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to approve the New England Country Club Seasonal All Alcohol Restaurant, Common Victualler, Weekday and Sunday Entertainment licenses.

Old Business

Mrs. McNulty stated she received a text from Bryan Hall asking her if she knew if the Town assessed fees for littering. Mr. Fraine stated theoretically the police or BOH could issue fines but they would need to catch someone in the act of littering. He was unaware if that has ever happened. Mrs. MacKinnon stated the BOH did recently issue a hefty fine to two businesses recently for littering. The Board discussed plans for cleaning up the litter around Town and Mr. Fraine stated that he has had discussions with Jesse Riedle and they plan to have the summer parks department help dedicate one day a week to pick up trash.

Town Administrator Report

Mr. Fraine stated he would be meeting with Congressman Auchincloss to discuss earmark funding provided by Congress for PFAS.

Mr. Fraine stated the Red Mill Project will be underway soon and there is a preconstruction meeting scheduled for March 7th.

Mr. Fraine stated the demolition of the old Primavera school is scheduled to start this week.

Finally, he was asked to announce that the Senior Center will be having a Yellow Dot program hosted by the Norfolk County Sherriff's Office on Thursday March 9th at 1PM. The Yellow Dot program provides first responders with quick access to critical medical information about the occupants of an automobile in the event of an accident or health emergency. Participants place a Yellow Dot Decal on the driver's side rear windshield of their cars.

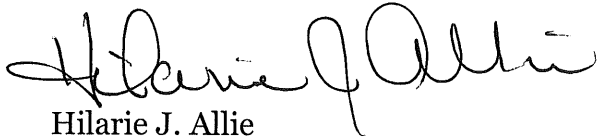
New Business

Mr. Martinis inquired about who is responsible for the SNETT trail as he has noticed an exorbitant amount of dog waste and would like barrels and bag stations installed to help the residents clean up after their dogs. Mr. Fraine stated that would be DCR and he would look into this.

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On a McNulty/Grant motion the Board unanimously voted 5-0 to adjourn the meeting at 8:30PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hilarie J. Allie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "H" and a distinct "A".

Hilarie J. Allie
Administrative Assistant