



Town of Bellingham

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

10 Mechanic Street

Bellingham, Massachusetts 02019

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November 20, 2023

The Selectboard meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM in the Arcand Meeting Room by Chairman Michael Connor. Actively participating in the meeting were the following Board members: Mr. Connor, Mr. Sahin, Mr. Hennessy and Mrs. Odabashian. Also actively participating in the meeting was Interim Town Administrator Denis Fraine and Administrative Assistant Hilarie Allie. This meeting was accessible to the public either in-person, via the Zoom online option or ABMI Cable TV.

FY2024 Tax Classification Hearing

On an Odabashian/Hennessy motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to open the Tax Classification Hearing and postpone it until after the next agenda item.

Cemetery Commission Interviews:

Mr. Connor welcomed William Beaudette and Jeffrey Dias both of Bellingham to discuss their interest in joining the cemetery commission. Mr. Beaudette stated he has been a resident of Bellingham for 29 years and is retired and has been working part time at Cartier's Funeral Home for the past 2 years and would like to give back to the Town. Mr. Dias stated he has lived in Bellingham for a short time but his wife grew up in Town and her father is Francis Cartier. Mr. Dias is the intown director for Bellingham soccer and enjoys volunteering his time and would like to continue to do so by serving on the cemetery commission.

On a Hennessy/Odabashian motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to appoint William Beaudette and Jeffrey Dias to the Cemetery Commission effective January 1, 2024 to fill the unexpired terms of Alan Bogan and James Haughey who will both be stepping down. Under discussion, Mr. Cartier stated he would have Mr. Beaudette and Mr. Dias attend the December meeting to get a feel for how the commission runs.

FY2024 Tax Classification Hearing Continued

Mr. Connor explained that before the tax rate can be set, the Selectboard must hold a public hearing each year to consider the tax rate options available to the Town. The hearing is held after the assessors have determined final values and reported this information to the Massachusetts Department of Revenue. The purpose of the hearing this evening is to determine the percentage share of the tax levy that each class of property will pay. Mrs. MacKinnon, CFO, Betsy Cournoyer, Administrative Assessor, and the Board of Assessors joined the Board this evening to provide data relevant to this process so that the Town can adopt parameters for the Fiscal 2024 tax bills.

Mrs. Mary MacKinnon presented an overview of the tax classification process and explained to the Board now that Town Meeting was over, and the final budget has been voted on the goal of the evening was to adopt a factor, to adopt a percentage of small business exemption and to adopt an amount of exempt debt.

Mrs. Cournoyer stated that single family homes have gone up 6.5% since last year which is based on sales. She stated the Town had tremendous growth this year and stated new growth as of June 30th exceeded expectations coming in at \$1.4M. She stated key factors that contributed to this new revenue were the addition of twenty-one new single family homes on the tax roll, a portion of the Curtis Pond Apartments and a portion of the warehouse on Depot Street. Mrs. Cournoyer stated she is excited about next year with all of the current development and is confident it will be another great year.

Mrs. MacKinnon explained the difference between a single tax rate and a split tax rate and explained Bellingham is currently using a split tax rate. She stated what this essentially does is put more of the tax burden on businesses and gives residential tax payors a little bit of a break. She stated Bellingham has a very strong business base, roughly 30%. Mrs. MacKinnon explained the current split is .89% and explained shifting left (or closer to a single tax rate of 1.0) would close the gap between commercial/industrial and residential and shifting right (as far down as a .85) would put more of a tax burden on commercial/industrial properties. Mrs. MacKinnon pointed out that the Town continues to have the lowest tax bills in Norfolk County. She stated her recommendation is to maintain the current factor of .89% and maintain some consistency across the tax base and all Board members agreed. Mrs. MacKinnon explained that the Board must also vote on whether or not the Town will continue to adopt the Small Business Exemption of 10%. She stated a business is considered for this exemption if their commercial value is under \$1M and they have less than 10 full time employees. If a business meets these qualifications, they are eligible for a 10% reduction on their tax bills. There is currently active legislation at the state level that would increase the \$1M threshold to \$4M. Mrs. Cournoyer stated she would follow up on that.

There was no public input.

Mrs. MacKinnon directed the Board to the required motions for consideration.

On an Odabashian/Hennessy motion, the Board voted 4-0 to accept a residential factor of .89 for FY24 tax classification purposes.

On a Connor/Hennessy motion, the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to accept an FY24 small business exemption of 10%.

On a Connor/Hennessy motion, the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to not accept a residential exemption for FY24.

On an Odabashian/Hennessy motion, the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to accept an exclusion for FY24 of \$700,000 for water debt repayment.

On an Odabashian/Hennessy motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to continue the Public Hearing to Tuesday November 28, 2023 at 12PM.

PILOT Extension with Northeast Energy Associates (NEA)

Mr. Fraine stated the PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) agreement between the Town and Northeast Energy Associates expired June 30th and the Town hired a tax consultant that specializes in the inspection of power generating plants to determine a value. Mr. Fraine stated the Town was able to negotiate an agreement that he feels is very favorable and is asking the Board to sign the agreement this evening.

On an Odabashian/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to approve the PILOT agreement as negotiated and presented this evening.

Bid Awards

On a Hennessy/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to award Contract 2023-DODS, DPW Offices Depot Street to the low bidder Construction Dynamics Inc., of Clinton, MA

On a Connor/Odabashian motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to award Contract 2023-OBSU, Old Bridge Sewer Upgrades to the low bidder R.H. White Co., Inc. of Auburn, MA.

MBTA Community Committee

Mr. Fraine stated that a committee needs to be formed to identify rezoning of 50 acres of land for the MBTA Housing proposal due by the November 2024 Town Meeting. The parcels do not need to be contiguous if they are a minimum of 5 acres but have 15 units per acre. The committee will start meeting in January and they will need a representative of the Selectboard and Mr. Sahin stated he would like to do it. The entire Board expressed interest and Mr. Fraine stated these will be open meetings so anyone is welcome to attend. Mr. Hennessy stated he does not agree with this as it will put a strain on public safety and questioned what the penalties would be for not complying with this legislation. Mr. Fraine stated the Town needed to make a good faith effort and go through with the process. Mr. Fraine pointed out that the Town was one of 93 communities in the state to be designated a Housing Choice Community. This designation is based on housing creation and affordability over the past five years. This designation has allowed the Town to benefit from exclusive Housing Choice Community Grant preferential treatment for many state and capital grant programs, including state revolving funds for water and sewer infrastructure, MassWorks, Complete Streets, and Community Development Block Grants. The Board discussed all of the great development in Town as well as the fact that the Town has met their 40B criteria. Mr. Hennessy made a motion to send an invitation to Governor Healy to invite her to the first meeting of the MBTA Community Committee meeting. This motion was seconded by Mrs. Odabashian with all Board members voting in the affirmative.

Minutes

On an Odabashian/Hennessy motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to approve the October 30, 2023 minutes as submitted.

Executive Session Minutes

Mr. Connor stated that Mrs. Allie has provided the Board with a list of executive session minutes that require approval and are ready for release.

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On a Connor/Odabashian motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to release the executive session minutes of April 11, 2023 and May 1, 2023.

On a Connor/Odabashian motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to approve and release the executive session minutes of June 26, 2023 and July 17, 2023.

New Business

Mr. Hennessy stated that it was comforting to have Mr. Fraine back at the table with the Board as he is the voice of reason and acknowledged the great job Mrs. Cornell-Smith did in his absence.

Mr. Connor stated that at a previous meeting the Board took no action on a Town Administrator search and suggested each Board member speak to Mr. Fraine individually and then reconvene as a Board to discuss next steps.

Mr. Connor stated he had a conversation with the Charles River Water Shed Association regarding the project at Maplegate Country Club and during their discussion the Conservation Preservation Act was discussed. He stated he would like the Board to think about possibly adopting the CPA next year during the tax rate discussion. The additional 1% tax would be used to do projects in Town and the tax rate increase could be offset by a shift in the split tax rate.

Mrs. Allie reminded the Board that the annual renewals of the Selectboard licenses will be happening next month and asked the Board's opinion on Sandy's Ice Cream. The consensus was they would like the owner of Sandy's to come in to discuss the events that occurred this past Fall.

Town Administrator Report

Mr. Fraine stated the library had a boiler break down and Mr. Aicardi is working with Ms. Rivard on getting it replaced as soon as possible as the backup boiler is just as old. Mr. Fraine stated he was able to come up with some funding options which would allow the project to start immediately.

Mr. Fraine stated budget season is underway and budgets are due mid-December to allow the Selectboard ample time to look through them this year.

Mr. Fraine stated that paving was just about complete at the South Main Street Center Street intersection and there is still a utility pole that needs to be moved. He is working with the utility company to see when that will be completed but in the meantime the Town will be sure to protect it.

On an Odabashian/Sahin motion, the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Hilarie J. Allie
Administrative Assistant