



Town of Bellingham

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

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September 18, 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 and Mr. Hennessy and newly elected member Ann Odabashian. Also actively participating in the meeting was Interim Town Administrator Beth Cornell-Smith and Administrative Assistant Hilarie Allie. This meeting was accessible to the public either in-person or via the Zoom online option.

Mr. Connor welcomed newly elected member Ann Odabashian and recognized the recent resignation of Kelly Grant. Mr. Connor stated Mrs. Grant left a lasting impression and was an instrumental Board member and will be greatly missed.

Cultural Council Interview

Mr. Connor welcomed Mr. Gavin Fiske and asked him to introduce himself and explain why he was interested in serving on the Cultural Council. Mr. Fiske stated he is a new resident of Bellingham and has a 2 year old and wanted to become involved and help out in Town. He stated he works for the Town of Dover as the assistant treasurer collector and feels his municipal background would be beneficial. The Board thanked him for wanting to become involved and there were no other questions or comments.

On an Odabashian/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to appoint Mr. Gavin Fiske to the Cultural Council for a 3 year term.

Community Garden Update

Mr. Connor welcomed Micky DeFosses, garden manager, of the Bellingham Community Garden. He stated Ms. DeFosses would be giving the Board an update on the most recent growing season. Ms. DeFosses stated the garden had tremendous growth and development over the past year and shared pictures of the wonderful things that were grown. She stated there are a total of 40 plots and 26 of those plots are rented. She stated the communal members are very happy and the garden has made some various improvements which include the addition of a greenhouse as well as upgrades to the farm stand. She stated the challenges the garden faced this past year included the weather as well as the individual care of the rented plot spaces. She stated all members sign a plot agreement and she suggested a price increase for those not following the rules. Mr. Connor stated he would like to look at the agreement and vote as a Board. Ms. DeFosses stated she has managed the garden for 3 1/2 years and would like the Town to find a new garden manager. This is a volunteer position with an advisory board that supports the manager. She has someone in mind that she feels would be a great fit for this position but stated that person needs a little convincing. She asked that the Town advertise the opening for the garden manager on the website. She would like to stay involved as the farm stand manager.

Veteran's Services Update

Mrs. Ana Milot and Mr. Art Campbell appeared before the Board to provide an update on the Veteran's Services operations. Mrs. Cornell-Smith stated the program is funded by state and local funds under Chapter 115. The Department of Veteran Services pays 75% of the benefit and the Town pays 25%. Currently the Town is offering needs based benefits to 10 residents. Mrs. Milot stated she recently completed an audit with the state and has closed out the books for Fiscal Year 2023 and all accounts are now in balance. She will work with Lindsey Gentile, the Town's Treasurer/Collector, to ensure that all records going forward are certified and checks are mailed out to the veterans at the end of each month. Mr. Campbell explained that he is a VA accredited Veteran's Service Officer which allows him to provide services to veterans and their families and survivors in allowing them access to benefits from Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration and the National Cemetery Administration. He stated the office is now open 5 days a week and since July 1st they have had an intake of 36 new veteran cases (23 of which were Bellingham residents). Mr. Campbell stated that they are planning a Veterans Outreach event this November at the VFW in Town.

Mr. Hennessy congratulated them and stated he is nothing short of impressed with what their office has been able to do for local veterans.

Introduction of new Board of Health Agent

Mr. Connor welcomed Vinny Forte, Chairman of the Board of Health, and new Health Agent Dylan Labonte and stated he met Dylan about 7 years ago while Dylan attended Bellingham High School. Mr. Forte stated the BOH hired Dylan at the beginning of September. Dylan is a lifelong resident of Bellingham and a recent graduate of UMass Lowell with a degree in Public Health. Dylan added he is excited to incorporate what he has learned and to make Bellingham a better and healthier place to live.

Town Administrator Search Update

Mrs. Cornell-Smith welcomed John Petrin from Community Paradigm. Mr. Petrin stated his firm received 27 applications for the Town Administrator position and the next step is to put together a professional panel to interview and vet the applicants in order to present the Board with the finalists for interview at the Town level. They will do background checks and reference checks on each of the finalists they present to the Board. Mr. Petrin reminded the Board that these interviews are the Board's interviews and he will be there to assist and can ask the questions if that is the preference of the Board. This process will allow the Board to sit back and listen and interject with follow up questions if need be. The goal is to hold this meeting at the end of October.

Mr. Connor asked how his firm gauges the seriousness of the applicants. Mr. Petrin stated one of the reasons his firm went through the process of developing the position statement was to make sure the applicants knew what the Town was seeking in a candidate. Mr. Petrin stated in addition his firm did a recruitment process not simply an advertisement, so he has spoken to several of the candidates and understands their level of seriousness. With regard to the CFO position, his firm received 5 applications. He stated a couple of them are worth interviews and have a strong background. He suggests setting up an interview panel with a couple of the Board members and a few other people. The Board agreed as in the past they will have the Chairman and Vice Chairman sit on the panel and

in addition, the HR Director and the Superintendent. They will speak about times and getting the process started.

Appointment of Administrative Assistant in the Assessor's Office

Mrs. Cornell-Smith stated this is the newly defined administrative assistant position in the Assessor's office. She stated Michelle Nowlan applied for the job and she was interviewed by both she and Betsy. Ms. Nowlan has worked for the Town since 2005 and has been the payroll administrator since 2010 and is looking to expand her knowledge. She is recommending the Board appoint Ms. Michelle Nowlan to the administrative assistant position in the Assessor's office.

On a Hennessy/Odabashian motion the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to appoint Michelle Nowlan as the administrative assistant for the Assessor's office.

Minutes

On a Sahin/Hennessy motion the Board voted 3-0-1 with Mrs. Odabashian abstaining to approve the August 3rd, August 14th and August 21st minutes as submitted.

Special Election Discussion

Mr. Connor stated with the recent resignation of Kelly Grant the Board needed to once again make a decision on having a special election to fill her seat. Mr. Sahin stated the special election to fill Mrs. McNulty's seat cost the Town \$13,000 and he thinks this Board can work together until June without having another special election. Mrs. Odabashian agreed and stated she feels the Board is quite capable of managing the Town's affair and preparing the budget. She added that she has sat on a four person Board many times and it has worked. Mr. Hennessy stated it would be fiscally irresponsible to hold another special election and that the Board just needs to work together and get the work done. Mr. Connor stated the Board has been in this situation many times where a Board member has resigned and a special election was not held.

On an Odabashian/Sahin motion the Board unanimously voted to take no action due to the recent Board member resignation and not hold a special election and to remain a four member Board until the next local Town Election.

Under discussion Mr. Sposato pointed out that the voters could petition for a special election.

Emergency Deficit Spending

Mr. Connor explained the Board held a meeting in August to discuss the emergency engine needs of the Fire Department after it was discovered that Engine 3 was in dire condition and the lead time on a receiving a new engine would be 18 months. The Board was tasked with determining if this warranted emergency deficit spending as the Town can only spend what has been allocated at Town Meeting. Mrs. Cornell-Smith explained she had had a conversation with Mrs. Mary MacKinnon regarding funding options and what circumstances would determine emergency spending status. Mrs. MacKinnon explained to Mrs. Cornell-Smith that typically emergency spending is a result of an act of God or nature. But Mrs. Cornell-Smith stated if the Board agreed that the spending was needed, she would make a request to the Department of Revenue for review and approval. The Board determined this circumstance was an emergency and therefore Mrs. Cornell-

Smith requested the approval of deficit spending. Unfortunately this request was denied and this spending authorization will now come before the voters at the Fall Town Meeting.

Upcoming Events

Mr. Connor stated the Board would be working on quite a few things over the next few months including the search for a new Town Administrator, CFO, hearing the Capital Requests, setting the annual Tax Rate, working on the Budget Process and finally, a review of the Enterprise Budgets for Water/Sewer/Trash which will be done via a public hearing. Residents will be notified in advance of any rate changes as a result of the public hearing.

Old Business

Mr. Connor stated a resident had requested an opportunity to come before the Board to discuss an issue with a neighbor. Mr. Connor stated Town Counsel has been involved and determined that this is a civil matter and there is nothing further the Town can do for the resident. Mr. Hennessy stated he has spoken to this resident several times and simply put the resident would like to be heard but Mr. Hennessy stated they have been heard and further, Mr. Aicardi has done everything he could to help them. Mr. Hennessy told the resident that they are welcome to come to a Selectboard meeting but it would be the discretion of the Chairman to allow citizen input. Mr. Connor stated this is the purpose of this discussion and the Board came to an agreement that Town Counsel has weighed in on the matter and determined that this is a civil issue and nothing further can be done by the Town.

Mr. Connor stated that it has been brought to his attention that although Bellingham Days has been a huge success that perhaps the Town go in a different direction and not host a carnival but instead do a farmer's market/vendor fair along with the fireworks on Saturday night. He asked that the Board support whichever direction this event goes.

Mr. Connor stated Mrs. Grant was the Selectboard representative of the Charter and Bylaw Review Committee and he would be stepping in to take her place. He stated no further votes would need to be taken so he would be there for representation.

New Business

Mrs. Odabashian publicly thanked Mr. Riedle and Mr. Harrington at the DPW, Fire Chief Miller and Police Chief Fitzgerald who all took the time to sit with her and explain what was happening in their departments.

Town Administrator Report

Mrs. Cornell-Smith announced that Mr. Fraine is doing really well and has been stopping in once a week to visit the staff.

Mrs. Cornell-Smith stated that bids for the new DPW building opened on September 13th and will be opened on September 25th at 2PM.

She stated the handicap ramp upgrades on Harpin Street have been delayed due to the rain but confirmed it is not causing an issue with the start of school.

The line striping of the whole Town will be completed this year.

The Bellingham Power Choice brochures will be coming out in October. If a resident takes no action they are automatically put into the program.

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Mrs. Cornell-Smith publicly thanked all the employees, the staff and all the Boards for their support and hard work throughout the summer and she truly appreciates it.

Mr. Connor read the request for an executive session and all members of the Board were polled by Mrs. Allie and all voted in the affirmative.

On an Odabashian/Sahin motion, the Board unanimously voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at 8:11 PM with no further business to be discussed at the conclusion of the executive session.

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 long, sweeping underline.

Hilarie J. Allie
Administrative Assistant