

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
APRIL 1, 2020
REGULAR MEETING

Members Present: David Andrade, Nelson Almeida, David Viera,
Chris Zorra, Justin Sullivan

Town Administrator: Shawn E. Cadime

Chairman Andrade opened the meeting at 7 pm. The meeting was conducted via teleconference due to COVID-19.

In accordance with M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 21(f), Chairman Andrade announced that nobody was taping due to the circumstances. The Board of Selectmen was recording via audio and video.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE OPENINGS UPDATE

Mr. Sullivan announced that volunteers are needed on the Capital Improvement Committee (1 Board of Selectmen appointment), Commission on Disability (5-13 BOS), Economic Development Committee (4 BOS), Energy Committee (1 BOS), Historical Commission (3 BOS), Recycling Committee (up to 3 BOS), Zoning Board of Appeals (2 alternates).

Chairman Andrade requested that residents interested in any of the 18 open positions should submit a talent bank form to the Town Administrator's office.

PRIORITY MATTERS

Consider Changing the Date of Annual Spring Town Meeting

Chairman Andrade stated it is necessary to postpone the Spring Town Meeting as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Cadime recommended Monday, June 22, 2020.

Mr. Almeida asked if the town clerk was consulted.

Mr. Cadime explained that isn't necessary when setting a date. It should be all set.

Town Planner John Aubin advised the Planning Board is all set to conduct public hearings on May 12, 2020.

A motion was made by Mr. Viera, seconded by Mr. Sullivan, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To move the Annual Spring Town Meeting to Monday, June 22, 2020.

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The vote: Mr. Viera – Aye; Mr. Sullivan – Aye; Mr. Almeida – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Chairman Andrade – Aye.

Consider Approval of the Housing Choice Community Designation Reauthorization

Mr. Aubin explained this is consideration of the designation received in 2018. Basically it was a review of a five-year period 2015-2020. The town has experienced a growth rate greater than 5% which qualifies for automatic designation. The classification allows additional points in state grants and qualifies us for housing choice grant initiatives.

Chairman Andrade clarified that in no way does it commit the town.

Mr. Aubin said it basically just adds points to grant application and opens the opportunity to apply for housing grant initiatives. The deadline for submission is May 8. It was pushed back from March 23. He coordinated with the Town Administrator and the Building Department. It requires the signature of the highest elected official.

He said there was a certification process in 2018. It was a look back to see how much the town grew over a five-year period. We are now looking back to 2018. It is looking at a two- year designation.

Mr. Aubin said it is a look at residential development. It is a snapshot of residential over the last ten years.

A motion was made by Mr. Viera, seconded by Mr. Almeida, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To approve the Housing Choice Community Designation Reauthorization and authorize the Chairman to sign.

The vote: Mr. Viera – Aye; Mr. Almeida – Aye; Mr. Sullivan – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Chairman Andrade – Aye.

Consider Approval of the Project Funding Agreement between the Town of Seekonk and the Massachusetts School Building Authority for the Aitken School Project

Mr. Cadime said this is the agreement that has to be signed for the school project. It is for the window project.

Chairman Andrade said it is \$1.3M in funding for the project with a matching total facilities grant of \$620,000.

Mr. Sullivan motioned, seconded by Mr. Viera, and it was unanimously

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VOTED: To approve the Project Funding Agreement between the Town of Seekonk and the Massachusetts School Building Authority for the Aitken School Project.

The vote: Mr. Sullivan – Aye; Mr. Viera – Aye; Mr. Almeida – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Chairman Andrade – Aye.

Mr. Viera asked for an explanation of the criteria to get these grants.

Chairman Andrade said the overall financial scope of the town and ability to fund the project is looked at.

Mr. Cadime said there are a number of factors. This is for the accelerated project. The percentage reimbursement goes into the ability of the community to fund it and the number of students gets factored in. It is a percentage for eligible costs.

Update on the Town's Finances

Chairman Andrade felt it is necessary and it was requested by Mr. Sullivan to keep residents updated on the town budget with regard to the COVID-19 and the decline in revenue.

Mr. Cadime advised the town is in good shape to date. It is still early to evaluate the impact due to COVID-19. He assured that the town is in good shape for this fiscal year. They will have to reassess revenue numbers going into the next fiscal year. This year will end with a surplus.

Chairman Andrade advised that the Board had directed Mr. Cadime to anticipate an increased budget and to be prepared to have a neutral budget and a budget showing a 2 1/2 % reduction. It seems this is the perfect year to have that challenge.

Mr. Cadime advised a level-funded budget would see a reduction. Planning to see what a 2 1/2% reduction over FY'20 would be. The budget prepared would be submitted with department head requests as a balance budget.

There are currently vacancies – police chief, fire chief, and deputy fire chief. A clerk position in the Assessor's office was filled. There were two mid-year positions filled at DPW.

Mr. Cadime asked department heads to put a spending freeze on non-essential purchases. Purchases would have to be approved by Mr. Cadime and/or Mr. Alexander.

Third quarter commitment on real estate is \$40,498,685 and 76% or \$30,615,006 collected. Personal property commitment is \$3,048,062 and 81% collected.

Mr. Cadime noted that not all revenue numbers have been posted through the end of the quarter. There are still more to be posted.

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Motor vehicle commitment is \$2,800,000 with 42% collected (\$1,171,336). Motor vehicle excise tax was pushed back and due on March 31, 2020.

Mr. Cadime noted that meals tax, hotel tax, state aid, and Chapter 70 coming from the state will be a concern.

The town just received the third quarter payment on meals tax; about \$13,000 more than last year. That money was from June 2019 to February 2020. The closure of the businesses will have an effect.

Hotel numbers are slightly lower than last year. Last year, \$625,000; this year \$53,000 off that mark. We budgeted less than FY 19 so we are on the cusp of reaching those numbers.

It is not a big concern right now. Other revenue numbers are at 80%.

Mr. Sullivan asked if Mr. Alexander will make a projection of what the meal tax and hotel tax will be for the 4th quarter. It could be a 75% to 80% loss.

Mr. Viera agreed. They have no idea as to what the shortfall will be.

Mr. Cadime said he spoke to Mr. Alexander today. There are no official numbers from the state. They are anticipating a significant reduction for the last quarter on hotel and meals taxes; about a total of \$1.2M. As a worst case scenario, Mr. Cadime assumed about a quarter of what was anticipated for the 4th quarter.

He said the major concern is what the state is looking at from revenue loss and the money handed out to support local businesses. Chapter 70 and local aid was big numbers. We are not relying on that. He wants to be prepared in case the state changes the amount of money coming down.

The numbers for FY'21 have not changed that much. It's uncertain when the state will review those numbers.

Mr. Sullivan expressed concern about unemployment continuing to rise and the economic impact. He felt the state will keep as much money as possible.

Mr. Vieira asked Mr. Cadime to look at level service budget as well.

Mr. Cadime said the 2 ½% reduction figure has to be identified and that is the starting point.

Mr. Sullivan said the School Committee has approved their budget. It would behoove them in May to be level funded and level service.

Mr. Viera said businesses might close. People won't be able to pay taxes.

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Mr. Cadime advised the state allows the town to budget for 100% of the tax revenue based on the 2 ½%. The concern is local receipt numbers on hotel and meals tax and local aid. Chapter 70 funds go directly to the School Department.

Mr. Viera said Chapter 90 may not be as well funded.

Mr. Cadime said the state goes out for bondages for Chapter 90. There might be a reduction in circuit breaker reimbursement for special education.

He noted that revenue numbers don't come until July. Town Meeting is usually in May. They are making assumptions and will be prepared.

With respect to salaries, the Town is at 68.1%. Mr. Cadime noted that is the result of a number of vacancies which was a struggle for us but ended up being a benefit because of what we are going through.

Expenses are at 76.3% which is below where we should be. That is before the spending freeze.

Education is at 83.5%. Bristol Aggie was paid in full and Tri-County in quarterly payments.

Under Environmental, there is a salary line item at 109%. This is a slip for Conservation that goes into revolving account. Monies from the general account are expended first and then transfers are made into revolving account. That should happen in six months.

Debt & Interest – 79.6% on the high side. About a \$75,000 surplus is anticipated

Mr. Cadime said he has been talking to the treasurer/collector. She will provide weekly updates on cash flow. Currently doing very well with cash on hand.

Other fixed costs 78.9%. The biggest costs are health care and pensions.

The bottom line is 68.1% salaries and 76.3% expenses. Anticipated budgeted salaries was \$9.1M. It is at \$8.2M. Expenses are slightly higher.

Mr. Viera asked about fuel.

Mr. Cadime said it is looking good. Prices are good right now. He noted that some of the vehicles are not being used, other than public safety.

The spending freeze for non-essential expenses went into effect on Monday.

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OTHER BUSINESS

Discuss Other Topics not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chairman 48 Hours before the Meeting

Chairman Andrade inquired about a plan to bring employees back to town hall.

Mr. Cadime noted they are being very cautious. They are doing a rotating schedule and trying to minimize people going in.

Chairman Andrade said doing town business remotely is not the best situation but it is working. There is no rush to bring people back in but conversations are taking place.

Mr. Viera noted that employees are being paid.

Mr. Cadime advised that he received notification from ABC Disposal today. For the safety of their drivers, they will not get out of the vehicle. They will be using the automated arm on the trucks. They will not pick up bags.

Chairman Andrade urged residents with any questions or concerns to call town hall, public safety or contact a member of the Board of Selectmen.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – None.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Mr. Viera, seconded by Mr. Almeida, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn at 7:51 p.m.

The vote: Mr. Viera – Aye; Mr. Almeida – Aye; Mr. Sullivan- Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye Chairman Andrade – Aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Prepared by:

David Viera, Clerk

Patricia Gamer, Secretary

Items Distributed at the April 1, 2020 Board of Selectmen Meeting

Housing Choice Community Designation Reauthorization
Project Funding Agreement for Aitken School

