TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JULY 20, 2020
Virtual Meeting/Remote Access

Present: Gail Gramarossa, Jen D. Turner, Jámes A. Barry, Nicholas O'Connor, Ed Boscher

Call to Order: Chairman Gramarossa called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

***Ms. Gramarossa mentioned that during the Mass Municipal call she was on last week it was recommended that roll call votes be taken during the virtual meetings. Therefore going forward roll call votes will be done.

2) Sign Documents:
   a) Warrant #2103 was signed for $1,293,760.54
   b) Routine documents
c) Approval of Minutes: Mr. O'Connor moved to accept the minutes of June 1, 2020. Motion seconded by Ms. Turner. Motion passes 4 – yes, 1 – abstain (Barry).

3) Appointments:
   • 6:35 p.m. – Verizon & National Grid Pole Hearing #2020-05, Eskett Road: Mr. Barry read the public hearing notice and opened the hearing.

   Diane Clowes from National Grid spoke about the pole placement. It is two mid-span poles that are being converting to standard voltage. They are requesting the mid-span poles at this location due to the long spans between poles.

   There were no public comments,

   Mr. Barry moved to close the public hearing. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Roll call vote: O'Connor – yes, Boscher – yes, Barry – yes, turner – yes, Gramarossa – yes. Motion passes.

   Ms. Gramarossa moved to approve petition #2020-05. Motion seconded by Mr. Barry. Roll call vote: O'Connor – yes, Boscher – yes, Barry – yes, Turner – yes, Gramarossa – yes. Motion passes.

4) Discussion/Action Items:
   a. Appoint Representative to Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation: Ms. Gramarossa provided the details to the board. Ms. Gramarossa moved to re-appoint Krista Wilson as the representative to the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation, term to expire June 30, 2021. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Ms. Turner questioned if Ms. Wilson wanted to be re-appointed. Ms.

b. Sewer Abatement Request – 178 Federal Street: Gary Brougham, Town Administrator provided the details to the Board. The property owner is seeking the abatement as the restaurant has been closed due to covid-19. Usually a demolition permit is required in order to allow sewer abatements. The wastewater treatment plant is run on an enterprise system and relies on the fees it collects to run it. The Town by-law gives the Board of Selectmen authority to allow abatements under financial hardships. He questioned how far reaching that could be if the Board were to agree to it. He questioned who gets relief and who doesn’t. Again, giving relief effects the enterprise system. He sympathizes with the business but asked the Board to be wary. He questioned how the Board could single out food establishments and not everyone else.

Mr. Brougham thought a better idea might be for the owner to reach out to the Treasurer-Collector’s office and see if a plan could be made in order to catch up on their arrears.

Steve Williams, Director of Public Works felt that Mr. Brougham’s presentation was accurate. He agreed that the User Charge system does allow the Board of Selectmen the authority to abate with financial hardship. He recommended the Board wait and see what happens.

Ms. Boscher questioned if the money that the State made available to cover covid-19 costs could be used for the abatements. Mr. Williams did not know if it was possible. Ms. Turner responded that some of the loans given out to small businesses could be used for utilities.

Mr. O'Connor feels that it opens a potential problem. There are couples in town where both lost their jobs. How can we not give abatements to residents if we do it for the restaurant? We will be operating in arrears if we do this.

Ms. Turner agreed with Mr. Brougham. The owner should talk to the treasurer-collector’s office to come up with a payment plan.

Mr. Barry also agreed the abatement is not the right path for the Board to take,

The Board of Selectmen asked the Town Administrator to respond to the applicant letting him know the request was denied for the reasons stated.

c. Appointment of Building Custodian: Steve Williams informed the Board that he has no recommendation for this position. He will have a recommendation for the Board at their July 27th meeting.

d. Set Storm Water Fees: Steve Williams presented the details to the Board. He reminded the Board that last year at the Town Meeting the town passed the by-law amendment allowing the town to create a storm water utility fund. The amount came in a little higher than expected. A billing unit equals 1,000 sq. ft. at $9.60.
The average bill is five billing units. It will only billed one time a year Mr. Williams recommends the board accept this fee.

Mr. Barry asked for a definition of impervious area. Mr. Williams indicated it is anything that doesn’t allow water to absorb through it such as a roof, garage, patio, compacted driveway, cement driveway. It is not a tax but a utility so state property, schools, and churches will all be charged.

Mr. Barry questioned the average bill. Mr. Williams indicated that the average bill is 5 b.u. $ 9.60 = $48. The utility will only be billed once a year.

Ms. Gramarossa questioned what happens when the bills go out and someone has a hardship. She was told they should contact the treasurer-collector’s office. Ms. Banner’s office will send the bills out at the end of August.

Ms. Gramarossa moved the Board set the rate as requested. Motion seconded by Ms. Turner. Roll call vote: Gramarossa – yes, Turner – yes, Barry – yes, O’Connor – yes, Boscher – yes. Motion passes.

e. Endorse Common Victualler License – Joseph’s At Cold Spring: Ms. Gramarossa indicated this restaurant plans to be open year round.

Mr. Brougham commented that right now the only license the Board is approving is the Common Victualler license. There will most likely be other licenses in the future including a liquor license. The previous liquor license holder is not giving his license up. ABCC and Town Counsel have advised the Board that this is a private issue and the Town should stay out of it.

Mr. Boscher questioned if the former restaurant still had the lease for that facility even for the food part of it. He questioned if the victualler license is tied with the liquor license from the previous owner. Mr. Brougham explained that the common victualler and amusement licenses are tied to a business not to an address like the liquor license. We are assigning a common victualler to a new business and not the location.

Mr. Boscher asked for confirmation that there is no lease with the former business and the landlord. Mr. Brougham confirmed that there is not, that lease expired early this year. There is a legal issue between the former business and the landlord regarding the liquor license which both ABCC and our Town Counsel have advised the Town to stay out of.

Ms. Gramarossa asked for confirmation that Joseph’s is aware of the issue with the liquor license and still want the common victualler to operate with food only. Mr. Brougham responded that both the husband and wife contacted him and he advised them on the situation. They also spoke with office staff and seemed to understand the issue with the liquor license. They asked about Bring Your Own Booze (BYOB). Years ago town counsel advised the town to take no action on those
requests. Last week the conversation shifted to the liquor license again. He has been clear that there is no license available at this location.

Mr. O’Connor questioned if the restaurant or golf course does not have a liquor license does it stop people from having alcohol on the golf course. Mr. Brougham did not know the answer to that question. Mr. O’Connor stated it’s not relevant to the common victualler license but he was curious.

Mr. Boscher commented that the Hanna Devine owners make great food and it would be great to have food at that location. As long as the owners are aware of the issue with the liquor license he is okay with approving the common victualler license.

Mr. Boscher moved to approve the Common Victualler license for Joseph’s At Cold Spring. Motion seconded by Mr. O’Connor. Roll call vote: Gramarossa – yes, Turner – yes, Barry – yes, O’Connor – yes, Boscher – yes. Motion passes.

f. Discuss Public Comment Period: Ms. Gramarossa questioned if the Board should allow time for public comments during the board meetings. It would be a defined time and limited to discussion items on that week’s meeting.

Mr. O’Connor questioned if this would be only during the remote meetings due to Covid or if this would include future meetings as well. Ms. Gramarossa was thinking it would become part of the regular meeting agenda. Mr. O’Connor is not opposed to the idea but business needs to be the priority. These are the Board’s meetings. He would be more inclined to have an agenda where they take public comment on a bunch of things. He doesn’t want public comments to drive the agenda. He has concerns because people come to meetings when there is something on the agenda that they are interested in or opposed to and the opposing view may not be represented.

Mr. Barry doesn’t think the Board can only do it once a month as the comments need to be limited to what is on the agenda. He thinks the time should be limited for the speakers.

Mr. O’Connor still has concerns. He’s concerned that people don’t pay attention to the agendas and then will want something back on it so the Board instead of making a decision when it’s on the agenda will be extending their decision out many weeks.

Ms. Turner is open to the Board discussing this further. She feels it should be open to not just agenda items.

Mr. Boscher feels there are lots of ways for the public to get in touch with the Board. The Board now has their new @belchertown, residents can call them and he has even received mail at home.
Ms. Gramarossa will consult with the Mass Municipal Association for further information on how the Board should proceed.

Ms. Turner commented that prior to becoming involved in volunteering and then becoming a member of the Board it was intimidating not know who to contact on committees or the Board of Selectmen. She feels it will be friendlier toward the community to allow public comments.

Mr. O'Connor feels it needs to be an agenda item or it will be all over the place. He also commented that the Board can't meet without having an agenda posted unless there are extenuating circumstances.
Mr. Barry mentioned that Heidi Gutekenst from the school committee is online and asked for her comments as the school committee takes comments from the public during their meetings. She commented that there was a recent court ruling that the school committee has to hear any comments that the public wants to give. They can't just limit it to agenda items anymore.

The Board is agreeable to further discussions regarding allowing public comment. Ms. Gramarossa will consult with MMA to obtain more information regarding allowing public comments.

g. Set Strategic Planning Dates: Ms. Gramarossa questioned if there is an interest in setting future strategic planning dates. Mr. O'Connor commented the he liked having strategic planning on Saturdays. Mr. Boscher commented that August 15th @ 9:00 a.m. was a good time. He also commented that he felt holding it in the auditorium of Lawrence Memorial Hall would allow the Board to socially distance. It will be up to Board members whether they want to be there in person or participate remotely. They also agreed to the August 15th date @ 9:00 a.m.

h. Follow-up Green Community Discussion: Mr. Barry presented the details. He, Steve Williams and Eric LeBeau from the School Department agreed to apply for funding for an energy audit and Lawrence Memorial Hall and possibly the Belchertown High School. Rough estimates will be obtained and hopefully both audits will be done.

i. Miscellaneous Matters:

5) Town Administrator's Report:

- Updated the Board on the construction schedule for the Maple/State Streets project.
- On Wednesday there was a virtual meeting with Mass Development and EDIC regarding building demolition at the former State School. Those buildings are the kitchen, laundry and storehouse and permitting is in place. The project will take about four to six weeks. This will greatly increase the building envelope of the property.
- On Thursday he had another online meeting regarding the progress being made at Sportshaven. All of the necessary documents have been signed and returned appropriately. The State has been asked to release the funding in order to move forward. Jim Mazik from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission retired in June and
Erica Johnson has taken named to take over the project. The RFP for design services will be out and available for response with the deadline being around the 10th of September. The proposals will be reviewed and a recommendation made.

6) **Individual Board Members’ Reports:**

**Ms. Turner:** She spoke with the town planner and Claire O’Neill from Mass Development last week. There was talk about some of the buildings as well as the trails and connecting Christopher Heights with Foley Field. They also discussed Tadgell building which is not being fully utilized. So with the DLTA there may be discussions about the buildings in that area.

- The Recreation Dept. had the drive-in movie theater last week. It was very successful. There is a Commonwealth Places Grant that could be used to pay to expand the screen or projector. It could be a non-profit group, a volunteer group or the Friends of the Rec that look into it. She and Mr. O’Connor have talked about the Friends of the Rec applying for it. Anything under $10,000 is non-matching. We are eligible for applying for it. If we are going to apply we need to do it as soon as possible.

- Several of her liaison groups are talking about stopping meetings virtually. She wanted to remind people that we are still in the middle of a pandemic. If groups need training they should be reaching out for help. She does not know when town buildings will be reopen.

- She is eager to talk about a human rights commission.

**Mr. Boscher:** DPW finally got their third quote for the paving in front of the old tennis courts. Hopefully there will be some activity in August.

He is looking for guidance from the Board. Last year the Board voted to implement a human resource function and there is a lot of work that needs to go into it. He questioned how the Board works with Gary to get things moving along. He wants it sketched out prior to the August 15th meeting.

Ms. Gramarossa feels it will be helpful to have some information to build on in the meeting. Maybe we should look at other communities and their job functions if they have that position.

Mr. Boscher asked for the town administrator’s thoughts. Mr. Brougham feels he is able to develop a time line. Ms. Gramarossa will follow-up with the town administrator.

**Mr. O’Connor:** He will be on vacation next week.

He had a couple of meetings with the rec. director, conservation administrator as well as several members of the Rec. Committee and the disk golf vendor. They walked the property. They got the quote and service agreement which he has no problem with. There will be three ADA holes in the front of the course. It is behind the soccer field at Constantino Field. They are hoping to get several hopes up this fall.
They are looking for sponsorships. There is a website developer who is doing the website for them. The grand opening looks to be slated for spring of 2021. Pathfinder will be doing some clearing this fall. Foliage needs to be done before the clearing can begin. There will be lots of parking. Once the course is there the gate will be down permanently.

Mr. Barry: He is getting to meet his new liaison groups. He spent some time with the Chief of Police last week. He met with the Fire Chief today. He is meeting with the assessors this week and with the recreation department next week. He has emails out to the rest of his groups. He wants to be a listener in his first meetings. He asked Mr. O'Connor asked if he should leave the disk golf in his hands. Mr. O'Connor will meet with Mr. Barry following vacation to fill him in. He will continue on with the disk golf project.

Ms. Gramarossa: She has been sitting in on the school committee and school departments conversations regarding school reopening. They have been working tirelessly.

The Belchertown Fair has been cancelled it is the first time in over 100 years. She recognized the Fair Committee and all the work that they do.

She reminded folks that town buildings are still closed. She questioned if emails should go out as a reminder to all chairman’s of committees that the buildings are still closed.

She has had residents question the Board’s follow-up up about their statement to structural racism post the murder of George Floyd. Hopefully that can be part of the strategy session.

She also mentioned the passing of Judy Gillan from NESFI. She was dedicated to the issue of small farms and gardening, getting people outdoors to grow food. NESFI will continue with that work.

7) Questions from the Press: Melina Bourdeau from the Sentinel had a couple of questions. She was curious about public comments and if the Board has a way of sending transmissions to each other whether it’s an email or a letter. Is it sent to the entire board or given to a Selectboard member. Ms. Gramarossa commented that when something comes in to the selectmen@belchertown email it will be forwarded individually to each board member. The board is in the process of getting set up with their own @belcherotwn.org email. Members can be called. There is also the incoming mail folder that the board receives. Mr. O’Connor commented that he was in agreement.

Ms. Bourdeau also questioned what project the PVPC was working with the town on. Mr. Brougham informed her that it is the Sportshaven Mobile Home Project. The park
is in need of updated infrastructure. He went into detail regarding the project for her.

8) Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Gary L. Brougham, Town Administrator

Board approved/endorsed: August 24, 2020

Board of Selectmen - Town of Belchertown

Endorsed by a majority:

Gail Gramarossa, Chairman

Nicholas O'Connor

Jen D. Turner

James A. Barry

Ed Boscher