



Board of Selectmen

Date of Meeting: Monday, December 18th, 2023
Time: 6:30 PM – 9:11 PM
Members Present: Chair Jamie Underwood, Selectmen Matt Mecum and Seth Ridinger; April Steward, Town Administrator; and Alison Mack, Administrative Assistant to the Board
Members Absent: Town Counsel Stephen Madaus

The meeting commenced at 6:30 PM.

Financial Warrants were signed in agreement.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of meeting minutes: 12/04/23

Matt Mecum made a motion to approve the meeting minutes 12/04/23 with edits, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Reports: On File in the Board of Selectmen's Office

Town Administrator:

1. Feasibility Study Committee: The FSC is scheduled to meet on 12/28/2023
2. Holiday Party: We are having our Annual employee Christmas party tomorrow. Please come if you are able.
3. Building Commissioner: Berlin, Boylston, West Boylston, and Sterling are all looking at creating a shared position with the current Building Commissioner we have on staff and hiring another position in addition. We have a meeting planned for tomorrow afternoon to discuss this further.
4. Human Resources Position: I have partnered with the school to hire a FT person to be shared between the two departments.
5. Heat Issues in MOB 2nd Floor: We had one of the six gas furnaces fail last week and replaced the furnace at a cost of \$10,000 last week. C&C HVAC suggested that we contact an electrical engineer to look at redesigning our heating system as all of the furnaces are coming to the end of their life expectancy. Bob and I met with Rise Engineering last week and were advised that the first step is to reach out to Eversource for an energy audit, which is in the works. We are anticipating the energy audit to be performed in January and to receive quotes in February.
6. Fair Share apportionment: I received notice that the Town of Boylston received \$117,563 as our Fair Share apportionment for Fiscal 2024. The letter on this announcement is

included in your packet. The money is supposed to be used towards education and roadway.

7. Animal Control Officer: I met with the towns interested in this endeavor and have included the notes from the December 12th meeting in your packet. There is a proposed shared service model on the table with CMRPC working to develop an IMA for each town to consider. The cost distribution would be split evenly between the 5 towns, amounting to \$17K per community. The amount may change if towns decided they do not want to opt in. We are scheduled to meet again on January 18th. Does the town have any interest in being the host community? Since we do not have a location for the ACO to work out of, I did not offer Boylston up as an option. \$17K would be for a full-time person and a part-time person.
8. Salt Shed Roof: Two panels have blown off the roof today due to the storm. Bob is looking to secure them in place either today or tomorrow.
9. Berkshire Eagle – Read in the Berkshire Eagle – 6% increase.

BES Roof: Bob Bourassa and April went to check out the roof. He wasn't surprised by anything that he saw and believes it is structurally sound and is seeing the leaks where the flashing is on the roof or where there's windows, or different materials meeting each other. They are having someone come out who previously worked on the roof and meeting with Bob and the school facilities tech. It's been discouraging for the school committee and superintendent to see the water coming in. Today's storm was 60 mph and angled at 40 degrees. Matt asked if we can call Greenwood Industries and ask for a budgetary number to look at the roof and give us a range. April responded that we are supposed to have it all specked out and know what we are asking for. Tony Z was telling April that Sterling Elementary School just had their roof redone and believes it was \$100,000, so he said he'd be shocked if ours was over \$300,000. Matt sat on a WebEx meeting with the Mass Building Authority and there is a significant amount of money that's coming available going into next year. Looking to have a ballpark figure of the cost for this project. April suggested that since we own the building, she would like to see us partner with them on some of these large capital requests to be kept in the loop and know what we are buying; making sure we are not being taken advantage of. Matt added that it would be irresponsible of us to go to the town meeting and say we want x millions of dollars to do these repairs and we have to pay 100% of it, when if we waited a year to 18 months, we could get 50% paid for potentially. Until we know what the real cost is, we can't make any of those decisions. April stated she will check into it more.

Highway Superintendent Steve Mero joined the discussion and stated there is one issue that just arose and another water issue that has been ongoing for a few years.

- Central Street – after repaving. #126 – Pavers are supposed to meet existing grades. There were some issues on a couple driveways and those have since been fixed. Issues come down to stormwater.
 - Met with Joe McGrath: Going to try to collect all the storm water that we can, and not have runoff, so we placed asphalt on certain parts of the road where the road is elevated. Steve asked the board to invite the resident to come in and hear his concerns.
 - Joe would be happy to attend a meeting with the BoS and speak to the homeowner.
 - Steve has tried to explain this to homeowners. Rain events are growing.

- Looking to get water to go to the right side of driveway into pond. He has water running into his property right now. Steve's solution was to put a 4-inch-high bump. Resident asked him if he would put curve cuts in to get water to dump off before his driveway. It was against what Steve wanted to do, but he did it. The left side is now pooling water and covering his driveway. Steve suggested a bump, and the homeowner stated he will only allow a bump if they repave 20 feet into his driveway. The area is within the town's right of way, but Steve wanted to see if they could come to a resolution before heading in that direction.

The residents' concern regarding the bump is that they feel it would impede their ability to leave quickly, where they are on a corner, they are worried about oncoming traffic. April stated she would reach out to the residents but wanted to hear from the Conservation Commission and gather all the information first. Rain events are becoming more and more common. The board discussed different options and agreed to have April, Steve, and Joe reach out to meet with the residents first to see if they can come to a resolution and they can come in and discuss with the board if they want if there is no resolution from that meeting.

- Stiles Road: Steve went to look at it today and said it's awful. There is water running down to 3 residents' properties and their properties today are completely flooded. There is a 1-1.5 foot drop off on pavement. Matt stated that the Conservation Commission needs to figure out what to do with this, they need to take this on and figure out what to do with this. Town Counsel feels they do have a bit of leverage as lower Stiles is a public way and this would be considered an illegal discharge of water into a public way, and this could help give us traction to get this rectified. Seth added that the Conservation Commission needs to take this more seriously. At this point, he is ready to take whatever step is necessary as the roadway commissioners of this town because something needs to be done. He suggested getting more guidance from Stephen and seeing what can be done. Steve Mero stated the two residents he spoke with today are worried about their septic systems and all the weight of the water. April stated she spoke with Town Counsel, and he said since the town did not move any of the dirt, and we didn't redirect water, it had nothing to do with any town work, this is not a condition that has happened because of the town; all this liability falls on Mr. Ansari, the developer. April will get a draft letter approved by Town Counsel.

Town Planner:

Planning Board

At their December 4, 2023 meeting, the Planning Board approved a Site Plan for a Summer Star Sanctuary Nature Viewing Barn at 211 Mile Hill Road. We have also received an application for an Accessory Apartment at 395 Cross Street, which will be on the Board's January 8, 2024 agenda.

Zoning Board of Appeals

At their November 27, 2023 meeting, The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) approved the following:

- Request for Finding: 211 Mile Hill Road/Summer Star Sanctuary—modification of a pre-existing non-conforming structure.
- Variance (Modification): 26 Boulder Way/Kenneth Sydow—Lot Reconfiguration/amendment of a Variance granted in 2013. We have also received an application for a Variance for 15 Mill Road, which will be on the Board’s next agenda, which is not yet scheduled.

Grants

- On November 28, I attended the monthly virtual meeting organized by the state’s Federal Funding and Infrastructure Office (FFIO). Among the programs discussed were Building Resilient Infrastructure & Communities (BRIC), Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA), and Climate Pollution Reduction Grants (CPRG).
- On November 29, I was able to verify with MassDOT that if the Town is doing work on a roadway under local jurisdiction, including installing a traffic signal, and it is funded by the Town, there is no MassDOT review or approval required.
- On December 1, we received the executed LAND Grant Contract from the state, which will enable us to move forward with the acquisition of the approximately 30-acre parcel off School Street (Assessors ID# 23-25).
- On December 7, I attended a virtual workshop regarding the MVP program for the Central Massachusetts region, where updates to the program (“MVP 2.0”) were discussed and possible regional collaborations were brainstormed. On December 12, I submitted an Expression of Interest regarding potential grant application topics, including a town-wide inventory and analysis of culverts.

Office/Other

- On December 5, I attended a virtual seminar regarding the effects of Climate Change on senior citizens entitled “Climate Resiliency for an Aging Nation.” This session will inform our ongoing work with the MVP and HMP efforts.
- On December 7, I attended a virtual seminar on Trail Planning and Design.
- On December 8, I attended the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association’s (APA-MA) annual award luncheon in Concord.
- On December 14, I attended the Affordable Housing Committee’s monthly meeting.
 - Reaching out to free resources to help train committee members.

Building Inspector:

- Building is still going on.
- Trailside is about 50% done. They have started building that commercial building.
- ARCO building – 80% is being rented.

Compensation study:

Tony stated that the compensation study says that he’s overpaid and mentioned that historically in the building department, about twenty years ago, the town was paying \$57,000 for a building inspector, and 20 years later you are paying \$60,000 and half the insurance. Nothing was going on back then and he has been here all along. He added that those studies don’t realize that just in peer review he has saved the town over \$200,000 and has found between \$300,00-\$400,000 in

fees that people applying for permits tried to undercut the town on. He does not agree with the compensation study and wanted to voice a couple things to make the board aware.

Discussion with Town Clerk on office structure:

Dawn asked the Board of Selectmen to formally look at the Town Clerks office, staffing structure and hours. Hoping to informally discuss tonight the situation in the Town Clerks office.

**Town Clerk Office Structure – Proposal – On File in the Board of Selectmen’s office*

Every year we have been told to keep budgets level and have tried to do that. She feels in order for the bare minimum to be done in the office, the hours need to be looked at; waited too long.

Part of the problem is actual requirements. In person early voting started at the very end of Sandy Bourassa’s time here and is very limited. Now the requirements are extensive and mail in voting didn’t start until Dawn came and it’s a completely different animal.

- Voter payroll – huge process with getting in touch with these people. If you can’t reach these people you have to wait 2 election cycles.
- Higher Number of In-Person Early Voting Hours–Two Weeks Prior to State Elections, One Week Prior to Primaries. (Early Voting didn’t begin until 2016.)
- Increased Number of Statutory Hours (Elections-related. I am happy to explain and provide examples).
- Increased Number of Petitions and Nominations Submitted for Certification of Signatures.
- Advance Removal, Advance Processing of Ballots; Central Tabulation Facilities. This also puts a strain on elections staffing.
- Regional School Committee Elections (modeling the Regional School District Agreement based on a regional agreement that holds elections in conjunction with State Elections was not the best choice from a voting perspective for either Boylston or Berlin–the two Town Clerks’ Offices are left with the fallout).
- Massive Clean Up of Boylston’s Registered Voters List and Census Information (inaccurate records from as far back as 1996). A four-year process from start to finish.
- Mass Inactivation, Confirmation Card Mailings, Second Census Mailings.
- Dramatically Increased Number of Records Requests. Requires detailed tracking of responses.
- Purging and Organization of ALL Town Hall Records (6,400 cubic feet–floor to ceiling), Implementation of a Database for Archived Records, Structuring of Building/Planning Records by Street Address and Property Type. (Will come in under our \$25,000budget due to the volunteer hours I worked and Bob Bourassa’s building expertise. Could easily have cost the Town in the hundreds of thousands of dollars to contract out.)
- Next Up: Proposal for Super RAO and Structuring of Records Management Program for Town Hall and Eventually Other Off-Site Records Locations (Fire, Police, Highway, Library). I would love to discuss this in detail, and I have provided more information below. Also: Necessity of vault/fire-safe cabinets for improved records protection and preservation.
- Implementation of Online Payments and Fillable Forms. Should absolutely have as an option for residents but adds another layer of work for the Town Clerk.

Dawn continued to explain the Town Clerk Office Structure and proposed the following:

- Increase Town Clerk's salaried hours from 28 to at least 32, with monitoring of actual hours worked. This is the MINIMUM that I estimate I will need to work next year. It's essential to the satisfactory functioning of the Office.
- Look into adjusting the pay rate to be more comparable with other towns.
- Designation of Super RAO. The position should be designated separately from Town Clerk position, though under ideal conditions the Town Clerk should perform the Super RAO duties. The archives need to be maintained and records requests continue to increase.
- Consider Increasing the Assistant Town Clerk Hours from 15 hours per week to 24-26 hours per week, ensuring that the Town Clerk's Office doesn't need to be closed to residents and other visitors due to the Town Clerk's vacations/illnesses. This would also allow the Assistant Town Clerk to "float" to other offices for vacation coverage and specific projects. (This floating ability would fluctuate around elections periods.)
- I would ask that you consider increasing my vacation time from two to three weeks based on the information I provided previously and consider a stipend for the records archives project, perhaps to be drawn from the surplus balance remaining in the archives project account once the project is complete.

Jamie stated there is a lot of information to digest regarding this. He added that it is very hard to do a part time position and not have defined hours and you can't expect someone to be able to come in. Unless the board realizes the extent of the issue, they don't know. More discussion continued about how the office could be structured and Dawn asked the Board for feedback. Jamie stated it needs to be looked at prior to the Town Meeting. Matt Mecum stated it may be hard for town employees who live in town to say they want to spend money because they are also looking at it as a taxpayer, but if you need it, you need it and have to ask. For years and years Boylston has been able to run with town residents or people that were retired or wanting to work part-time, and it worked fine, well, on the surface. On the surface it worked fine, maybe that's a part of the reason we are in some of the situations we are in, but the fact of the matter is that it doesn't necessarily work like that anymore. Because we have grown so much, state laws have changed, elections have changed, and unfortunately, it's not realistic anymore. Dawn added that sourcing volunteers is harder. Discussion continued regarding the increase of the workload due to the growth in town. Matt believes this is a bigger conversation with every office to make sure that our job descriptions are up to date and the hours are correct, as well as compensation, in which we are heading down that road. In the end, it all leads to the kind of service we are providing for the residents. Jamie added that if he wasn't getting paid, no offense, his rear end wouldn't be in the office. That is how they would know there was an issue, because they would be getting complaints left and right from citizens who would come up here and ask why can't I get to see the town clerk? Why are they always closed? Sometimes that's what it takes. Jamie added that Town citizens have to realize that we are only paying for this number of hours and can't expect someone to work extra hours and not get paid. Its good for them to have this discussion now and realize exactly the hours being put in and what's going to be required moving forward. Jamie ended the conversation with asking for time to digest this information and then reconvene in January to discuss and formulate a plan for budgetary reasons. The Board thanked Dawn for her time.

Review and Discussion on Class and Comp Study:

April spoke to the board about the comp study process. She shared it with Finance Committee member David Butler and he has spoken to the rest of the committee about it. The compensation study was done in FY23 and we are currently in FY24. April explained the layout of the document and reviewed the information with the board. April is working off of the information that was given by GovHR, so when it says TA recommendations, those are based off of what GovHR had written in the study; April uploaded the study to Dropbox for the board. Currently we have a 15-step merit plan and April broke out what it would look like to have a 10-step merit plan. April agreed with David Butler in that the way Town Hall is structured and most of our staff not reporting to the Town Administrator office, it may be better to have a more structured 10-step merit plan to move people through the process.

Jamie asked about how Dawns numbers that she provided are different compared to what the GovHR study provided. April explained the numbers GovHR provided regarding Dawns position and explained that in order to bring her up to a comparable wage, they would increase her hourly rate by \$4.50. Jamie expressed concerns since a lot of the Boylston employees are not employed 40 hours. Matt stated that because April is contracted, for this point, he is taking that out. If they add all this up, it adds up to around \$7,000. He finds it hard to believe that we are only \$7,000 out of wack. Jamie stated that he does not trust this study and it is 110% flawed. April stated that this number is just to bring people to the minimum of the range, which is what the recommendation was. April asked the board how they would like her to proceed; go back out and request updated information from municipalities. Matt suggested going to other offices and asking how many hours are you getting paid for, how many hours are you working and how many hours do you need to provide the service that your office is supposed to be providing to the town.

Town Clerk, Dawn Porter mentioned that the study was only 11 out of 20 towns that responded, and she has information for her position from about 300 towns. April stated that the towns need to be comparable. Matt stated it needs to be a two-step process. Jamie asked what each office really thinks they need to operate, because the board is not here every day to know. Treasurer/Collector Cheri Cox stated that she has requested changes within her own office for the past few years and nothing has ever happened with that. April advised the board that someone from this board of selectmen and finance committee spoke with Cheri last year. COLA was brought up and April mentioned that it was just a recommendation; the board has not made a decision or discussed COLA. Cheri asked the board what they would like from each department. Matt stated he would like someone spearheading these conversations. Seth mentioned that historically the finance Committee has always looked at the entire budget, and they looked to see what we could afford, what merits more attention and what doesn't. For years, they were looking at this to give guidance and they would be relying on this heavily. Now that we have this, he thinks there will be more productive conversations about how to move forward. Cheri stated to the board that the town hall has been growing and there is a lot more work, but not more people. More discussion continued with Cheri Cox regarding the comp study and information that has been presented.

April advised the board that this information is only at 50%, but if you brought it to the 60% mark, you would see a lot more people need to get adjusted. Jamie feels the report is a starting point to know what we don't want. Aprils expressed her concerns on looking poorly at the report and information that has already been gathered. Matt doesn't believe it should be thrown out but believes this is only a piece of the puzzle; we need to look at job descriptions, the hours, and all that stuff to see where everyone needs to be. Discussion occurred regarding the process of GovHR

and the job analysis questionnaire. Jamie addressed the employees and stated this report is not even close to a gospel and there's no intention to take away a COLA from anybody, especially now with inflation going through the roof. Discussion continued between the board, Dawn Porter and Cher Cox on positions, compensation, hours, etc. Dawn asked the board to understand that the workload has changed for Town Hall employees due to the growth in town. Jamie responded that they understand and that everyone in town should understand it. They have a lot to digest on this and they will have another discussion shortly. Matt asked April is this project can be handled in the next quarter. April asked how they would like her to handle it; provide numbers for 60%, or 70%. She can go back to these communities and see if they can give us updated information. Matt stated he would like to see the 60% for the next meeting, then ask everyone for their hours worked, hours compensated for, and hours that are needed. After that, start looking at job descriptions. April stated they want to make sure they are retaining talent, attracting talent, and paying people appropriately, but at the same time they are looking at the hours worked and hours needed, she would like to make sure we are looking at efficiency and making sure the kind of programs that are being used are helpful and if there is computer software to do the job faster. More discussion occurred regarding the hours of employees and the hours of the town hall being open. Matt stated there are two steps to get there, let's take some steps to gradually get there or rip the bandied off and say, look, this is what we must do, and you take the heat for a month and move on. Seth stated that FinCom needs to be kept in the loop. April will present more information at the next Board of Selectmen meeting.

Review, Approve and Sign 2024 Business License Renewals:

Matt Mecum made a motion to approve the 2024 business license renewals as presented, Seth Ridinger seconded, voted all in favor.

Review, Approve and Sign 2024 Alcohol License Renewals:

Matt Mecum made a motion to approve the 2024 alcohol licenses as presented, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Vote to approve and sign the 2024 Seasonal Population Increase Estimation Form (ABCC):

Matt Mecum made a motion to approve the 2024 seasonal population increase estimation form, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Vote to approve and sign the Renewal Certification 2024 (ABCC):

Seth Ridinger made a motion to approve the renewal certification 2024, Matt Mecum seconded. Voted all in favor.

Vote to approve the revised vacation policy:

Seth Ridinger made a motion to approve the revised vacation policy, Matt Mecum seconded. Voted all in favor.

Vote to approve changes to Asst. Treasurer/Collector Job Description:

Cheri made some slight changes with the title to the Assistant Treasurer/Collector Job Description, as well as updating some redundancies.

Seth Ridinger made a motion to approve the changes to the Asst. Treasurer/Collector Job Description, Matt Mecum seconded. Voted all in favor.

Vote to appoint Jessica Degliaberti to the Master Plan Implementation Committee: Matt Mecum made a motion to appoint Jessica Degliaberti to the Master Plan Implementation Committee, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Sign the Boylston Police Officers' Union, NEPBA, Local 135 Contract:

Seth Ridinger made a motion to authorize and sign the Boylston Police Officers Union, NEPBA Local 135 contract as presented, Matt Mecum seconded. Voted all in favor.

Selectmen's Miscellaneous: (topics submitted by individual Board members)

Meeting Minutes:

Seth asked about missing meeting minutes and Alison responded that she will work on them and get them in front of the board.

Annual Town Report: Seth asked the board members to email him separately on anything they feel should be added to the report for 2023.

*At 9:11 PM, Matt Mecum made a motion to go into **EXECUTIVE SESSION** (closed to the public):*

Purpose 2: Per MGL c.30A, §21, (2): to discuss strategy with respect to negotiations with nonunion personnel – Police Chief's contract

Seth Ridinger seconded. Not to return to open session. Voted all in favor. Matt: Yes, Seth: Yes, and Jamie: Yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Kennedy, Assistant to the Board of Selectmen

Meeting Materials

Agenda
Town Clerk Documents

On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office