



## Board of Selectmen

Date of Meeting: Monday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023  
Time: 5:30 PM – 8:31 PM  
Members Present: Chair Jamie Underwood, Selectmen Matt Mecum and Seth Ridinger; April Steward, Town Administrator, and Alison Kennedy, Administrative Assistant  
Members not Present: Town Counsel, Stephen Madaus

### **Topics to be discussed:**

- \* *Counsel will be present.*
- \* *Agenda items without a specific time may be taken out of order.*

### **Approval of meeting minutes: 10/23/23**

Minutes were uploaded late – pushed off till November 20<sup>th</sup> meeting for approval.

### **Discussion with the School Committee on SRO position:**

Chair Underwood stated that this has been an ongoing discussion for at least ten years and took a bit of a hiatus. People have asked the Board how they go about this and received one answer today that the School Committee is not the one who would suggest having an SRO, it has to come directly from the Superintendent. Finance Director Nancy Konisky stated that Ms. Costello could not be here tonight due to a family emergency but did just speak with her. She absolutely is requesting an SRO. Jamie advised her that she needs to address it would both Berlin and Boylston Police Chiefs.

Having a formal request brings up two things: are both towns on board for it, and payment, where is the money coming from? Both towns must agree to it. Nancy stated she briefly spoke with the Town Administrator and Police Chief of Berlin today and they said they're comfortable with how their elementary school is run and don't feel they need an SRO there, but they are in favor with having an SRO at Tahanto. The concern is a cost concern regarding training, vehicle, insurance...etc. Nancy suggested setting up some term between the two towns and the school to make it work financially.

Before getting to that point, Matt stated that the vision needs to be discussed as some people believe its Rambo and others believe it's the nicest man/woman on the planet who give hugs and make everything better. Guessing its somewhere in between. We need to get that information out there; what the vision of this position is. While there are plenty of people in favor of it, there are also plenty of people not in favor of it and it's important that we share what that role is really going to be as it may be different than somewhere in Texas or Florida, or wherever else. We need to get feedback on that information.

Chief Annunziata added that the School Resource Officer should reflect the values of both communities. Its educating the general public as to what the position is and is not is going to be crucial. Under the current MOU (memorandum of understanding), which we adopted from a recommendation from the Worcester County District Attorneys Office, a SRO cannot and will not be used for any administrative punishments for the school. They are there to strictly build relationships, community policing, active resources for the staff and

students, educate and deter any criminal activity. A GIH policy of the School Committee that limits the ability for the police to arrest, unless it's a felony, to arrest within the school.

Matt has been consistent with having a public forum to gather feedback. Having the Superintendent and School Committee share their vision of what the SRO is and what they are going to do. Finding a balance so everyone is accepting of it and is comfortable. Holding a joint forum, as both board of selectmen and school committee may answer the same question differently.

Chief Annunziata stated the TA, Nancy and himself reached out to a few other school districts. Both Dudley and Nashoba Regional, the Police Department invoices the school department for the services. For Dudley Regional, it's a 50/50 split. For Nashoba Regional, it's 69% on the school district and the remaining 31% falls on the Police Department. He is unsure if there is anyone on his current roster that would be interested in the position and would most likely have to hire externally. They would have to complete a 12-week training, 5-day SRO school, and then a 5-day leaf school. We would need equipment for it, office space at both schools...etc. He is confident that if they decided to move forward and we were to get the money for July 1<sup>st</sup>, he would not be able to have someone trained and ready to go by the start of the school year, he would be looking at the beginning of the new year.

Matt asked Nancy if this request was strictly for Tahanto or does it include BES as well. Nancy and Chief Annunziata responded that it's a bit unclear. Carol Costello, Superintendent, mentioned three days at Tahanto and maybe two at BES; one position split between the two schools. Discussion continued what the vision is and goals of the SRO. Chief Annunziata stated his vision would be for the SRO to foster relationships and acts as a resource. He added that there is no data to support having an SRO reduces the risk of an active threat; no real way to get that information. Building relationships with staff and students; this would be more along the lines of preempting the threat than stopping it when it happens.

Mary Porter, member of the Berlin Finance Committee, attended the meeting. She added that she spoke with the Chief and Town Administrator this morning and is happy to fill in information if it would help with this dialogue. Jamie updated Mary that they have been told that they are not in favor of an SRO at Berlin Memorial but are in favor at Tahanto. Mary responded that Berlin is not in a position to finance any of this in the upcoming year, and potentially further down the road there are priorities in the police department in Berlin that need to be met. They had a very lean last year with the town departments because the school took so much of the funding. Jamie asked Mary if the Finance Committee would stand up at the next upcoming Town meeting to say they do not recommend an SRO? Mary responded that the Finance Committee has not had the discussion yet, but the indicators are in place. The decision is really in the hands of the district Superintendent and Chief of Police in the town where the schools are located. As a resident in the district, Mary challenged if there are less financially onerous way to get to the goal. Jamie asked if the Superintendent would be willing to say yes to having one in Berlin, one in Boylston and one at Tahanto? Nancy responded that she cannot speak for her. Matt stated he doesn't believe that needs to be answered right now and the public forum will be the place to lay all that out and discuss. Then regroup with the data and figure out where to go from there. Matt suggested that Chief Annunziata and the Superintendent get together and then Finance Committee look at the cost and what effects are going to be. They will also need to understand what the split is going to be as that can get complicated. School Committee Chair, Meagan Grill suggested aiming for January for the public forum. Seth suggested

solidifying the two communities' visions prior to the meeting so they can give more concrete answers at the public forum. Mary encouraged checking in with other places who have an SRO, as she was at a meeting last week in Worcester where they decided to hold it because they found the SRO wasn't useful. Chief Annunziata questioned how they gauged that, as every district's answer is going to be different. Mary suggested taking a hard look at it to see if there are multiple options that could be presented at the public forum. Matt suggested reaching out to the school counselors on what they feel the benefits of this position are. Five years ago, Matt spoke with the previous Police Chief and Superintendent about the SRO position, and they decided to spend the money on mental health resources. Hearing from those mental health resources on how the SRO will help them do their job and serve the kids and community better is an important piece for parents to hear. More discussion/questions continued what the role of the SRO would be, and costs associated with the position. Marching orders have been given and Meagan will work with Carol to figure out a date for the public forum and then we will go from there.

**Vote to approve event request for Boylston Education Foundations Gobble Wobble Event, and waive fees – Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup> – 8AM – 11AM:**

Four detailed officers will be required for the event.

*Matt Mecum made a motion to approve the event request for Boylston Educations Foundations Gobble Wobble Event, and waive fees, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.*

**Tax Classification Hearing:**

David Manzello, Regional Assessor from RRG, from the Assessor's office came in before the board and presented the tax classification information.

*Levy:* The tax levy is the amount of property taxes to be raised. The levy amount is determined by the budget. The total amount of the approved budget less revenues from other sources like motor vehicle excise, municipal fees, and state aid; is the amount to be raised from property taxation. Fiscal year 2024 proposed levy is \$17,680,518.56 up 6.29% from fiscal year 2023 (\$16,633,378.15)

*Levy Ceiling:* The levy ceiling is 2½ percent of the full value of the Town. Based on the Boylston aggregate valuation of \$ 1,280,269,265, the town cannot levy taxes in excess of \$32,006,732

*New Growth Revenue:* Property taxes derived from newly taxable properties like new construction, additions, renovations, subdivisions, and personal property. The Assessors have tabulated new growth revenues of \$644,577

*Levy Limit:* Also referred to as the "maximum allowable levy," this is calculated by adding 2½ percent of the previous year's levy limit plus new growth revenue for the present fiscal year to last year's levy limit. Exceeding the levy limit requires an override of Proposition 2 ½. For Fiscal Year 2024, there are no overrides of Proposition 2 ½. For Fiscal Year 2024 the maximum allowable levy limit is \$18,986,494

*Excess Levy Capacity:* Excess levy capacity is the difference between the actual levy and the levy limit. The proposed excess levy capacity for fiscal year 2024 is \$1,305,975.44.

The Fiscal Year 2024 Levy Limit Calculation  
Fiscal Year 2023 Levy Limit 16,554,890  
Levy Increase Allowed Under Prop. 2 ½ 413,872  
New Growth Revenue 644,577  
Fiscal Year 2024 Overrides 0  
Excluded Debt to Pay Bonds 1,373,155  
Capital Expenditure Exclusions 0  
Fiscal Year 2024 Levy Limit 18,986,494  
Levy Ceiling 32,006,732  
Levy To Be Raised 17,680,519  
Excess Levy Capacity 1,305,975

*Tax Impacts:* Actual property tax impacts will vary from property to property. Note that the FY2024 rate is an estimate only and may change upon Department of Revenue review. Valuations for all property classes including single family homes, multi-family dwellings, and commercial properties will increase for fiscal year 2024, reflecting an aggressive real estate market.

Properties will realize corrective adjustments, or value increases related to additions, renovations and/or data corrections. An extensive database review was performed to attempt to equalize data.

*Board of Assessors Recommendation:* The Board of Assessors recommends that the Select Board adopt a single tax rate for all classes of property in Boylston. A split rate could potentially be a detriment to the current state of commercial and industrial growth in town, a split rate will also affect all the farmers and chapter properties in town.

*Matt Mecum made a motion the Boylston Select Board votes in accordance with M.G.L., Ch 40, Sec 56, as amended, the percentage of local tax levy which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the Fiscal Year 2024 tax rates and set the Residential Factor at 1.0, with a corresponding CIP shift of 1.0, pending approval of the town's annual tax recap by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.*

### **Discussion on regionalizing dispatch:**

Police Chief – Dispatch supervisor gave her notice. She would like to be out at the end of December but stated she will stay a little longer to help with the transition. She had a few concerns that she brought to the Chiefs attention:

- The department has increased but they did not increase dispatch as well.
  - o Posted many time for part time dispatchers: bottom tiered competitive wage compared to other positions
- Increased calls of service:
  - o When someone calls 911 for a medical emergency, they answer, tone out police and fire, while doing this, they need to provide emergency dispatch to the caller, and track multiple items. Its getting overwhelming for them.
- Recently the state 911, checking in on Boylston. We are not EMD'ing adequately.
  - o Stuck in a crossroad. How we are doing now, we can't do it. We are either going to have to go regional or increase staffing in our current dispatch center.

- We need to reflect on what is in the best interests of the community.
  - Regional dispatch: a lot of communities do it. Rutland Regional Communication Center would be the one of interest. \$160,000
  - Part of this would be 0 % for the first 3 years, year 4 is 50% cost to us and year 5 is a 75% cost to us.
  - Regional Dispatch Pros: more people, and if there's a critical event you have multiple people there to help.
  - Cons: While the public can't freely walk into the Boylston Police department and speak to a person anymore, you can speak to a person on a camera. By appointment.
  - Leicester and Dudley offered similar services to Boylston. When they regionalized, residents did not like it and they needed to hire an additional staff to offset that.
  - We need to reflect on this as a community and see what direction we want to go in.
  - Police Chief is in for increasing the staffing to continue.
    - Jamie suggested that if we do increase staffing, we need to have more competitive wages.
    - Part Timers: Number were in range of other part time dispatchers but still on the lower side.

The total dispatch budget is currently \$310,000. \$160,000 for regionalizing/year with a 3% increase yearly. Half of what we currently pay. Matt stated that in theory, they could regionalize, still staff hours so they are not a dark station and still have savings there. Chief Annunziata stated that if they did regionalize, he would fight to keep the four dispatchers they currently have. He would be looking to have a three-year exit plan for the current dispatchers since they are close to retirement. Matt asked what the timeline is, and Chief Flanagan responded that it does require town meeting approval, so best case May to approve it. Chief Annunziata spoke to the Director at Rutland, and he said they could drag it out for a year, or it could go very quickly.

Regarding cost, there are grants that cover the entire transition. The dispatch console that was just purchased would still be used at the current Police Station as we would still need a functioning dispatch for the time being. To keep regional in-house, the Chief would need to outsource EMD; costing \$25,000. It can be covered under annual 911 grants: noncompetitive grant. He would need the 32-hour position increased to 40 hours and would need a 5<sup>th</sup> 40-hour position. It would alleviate some of the dispatchers calling out sick days, and the dispatch supervisor would be able to get more work done. Putting everyone on a 4-2 schedule. Seth asked if not having our dispatch operating at 100% is impacting the accreditation process, and Chief Annunziata responded that everything does. Seth asked Chief Flanagan where he stands on the situation. Chief Flanagan stated that he believes it's more complex than just adding dispatchers. He doesn't believe we will be able to fill the positions as he doesn't believe the pool is there. He would love to keep everyone in house; however, he doesn't think we can. Having two dispatchers work in that tiny area by themselves will be a challenge. The dispatcher supervisor has stated that she is retiring. She has identified safety issues and doesn't feel like she can do her job safely, so adding another dispatcher isn't going to fix that. Matt stated that he feels regionalization is inevitable, it's been brought up quite a bit and the state is actively pushing for regionalization. Chief Annunziata stated one issue will be reflecting on the community values; there are a

lot of stuff the dispatch does for the public walking in that the town is going to struggle with going to an appointment only. The dispatch supervisor stated that if there is a concrete plan, she will stay on longer to help with the transition, but if there are more questions than answers, then 12/31 is her exit plan. Chief Annunziata stated that he knows its not the financial responsible move to try and keep it in house but looking at public safety in total for the town, and what he knows of the community, he believes the right decision is to keep it inhouse. Ultimately, we need to get the finance committee involved. The board can make a decision in a relatively short order. Short term, Chief Annunziata is going to get some officers trained to help out in case she does leave. The plan is to gather all the information and have it ready for the annual town meeting to be voted upon. The Chief can speak to the Dispatch supervisor to see if she will stay on longer for the transition. The emergency medical dispatch process was discussed. There are so many moving pieces to this, Seth asked for Chief Annunziata to lay out 3-4 financial scenarios to help explain the financial impact to the town. April asked the board if the chief should look into subbing out EMD, and the board responded yes; alleviates the current workload and it's already been flagged by state 911. Chief Annunziata stated that his staff appreciated Selectmen Mecum expressing his concerns for them and commenting that the blame is at fault of the town. Chief Annunziata will apply for the grant and start collecting data for the town meeting to see how the town weighs in.

#### **Public communication discussion:**

Matt asked for this to be on the agenda. He has sent out a few ideas previously. The Item has not had much on Boylston lately so that is not helping us get any information out. The schools are working on an internship program and there is a journalism club that we could reach out about. April suggested mail chimp, and a lot of communities do it. Matt suggested taking projects and putting an update of where it stands; basic information of where it's going on. Jamie asked if we would collect emails or have people subscribe and send information out. April stated that Parks and Recreation and COA send out information and we could also use the Lions Club sign. Seth suggested having a couple takeaways from each meeting. He suggested looking into MailChimp and next meeting we can discuss collecting data.

#### **Fiber maintenance discussion:**

Matt stated that we are going to have to contract with somebody; if a tree falls on the wires, Boylston light is going to fix the power and Verizon will fix the cable. They need to be certified lineman to work on it; if fiber breaks, we need someone to fix it. The Light Department does not terminate the fiber. We don't want to go into the winter with no maintenance contract. April asked if we would need a mutual MOU between us and Berlin. Matt added that we are going to connect berlin Police and Fire so they can get tied into Tahanto. Check to see if we can go direct with Phoenix and if so, ask Phoenix for a more formal contract.

#### **Presentation of Top 3 Statement of Qualification Applications received from the 4 Applicants Feasibility Study Committee. Appoint member to negotiate Design Services fees along with Town Administrator:**

April stated that Thursday, The Feasibility Study committee met at 2:00PM and ranked the submittals. Austin Design Cooperative, Inc was first, LLB Architects was second, and Bargmann Hendrie +Archetype, Inc was third. They all came in with about the same quality of work, but capacity, can you get it done within 18 weeks was one thing we had requested information on, and Ausitn Desing said they could. They also had work that was similar in scope and have done a lot of historical renovations.

*Jamie Underwood made a motion to have Selectmen Mecum and the Town Administrator start the negotiations with Austin Design Corporations on the senior center design, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.*

**Vote to approve ARPA funds request of \$20,000 for the Fire Department equipment.**

*Matt Mecum made a motion to approve \$20,000 in ARPA funds for the Fire Department equipment, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.*

**Vote to approve letter to residents on private ways regarding snow removal:**

*Jamie Underwood made a motion to approve the letter to the residents on private ways regarding snow removal, Matt Mecum seconded. Voted all in favor.*

**Review, Approve and Sign Haven CC LLCs Approved ABCC License for Transfer of License from Green Street FLPS, LLC to Haven CC, LLC.**

*Seth Ridinger made a motion to Approve and Sign Haven CC LLCs Approved ABCC License for Transfer of License from Green Street FLPS, LLC to Haven CC, LLC, Matt Mecum seconded. Voted all in favor.*

**Vote to authorize Town Administrator to sign closing documents for Joslin's Lot**

*Seth Ridinger made a motion to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the closing documents for Joslin's Lot, Matt Mecum seconded. Voted all in favor.*

**Highway Superintendents Report:**

- Working heavily on snowplow equipment
- Helping out light department on fabrication of dump truck
- Continuing field maintenance
- Truck state inspections have been done
- Stiles Road – Safety issues – hole getting filled in
- Contract Negotiations: Requesting executive session meeting with the three members of the board to move forward. Meeting will be held on 11/20/23.
- Cremation: burial occurred last Saturday
- Wreaths Across America – December 16<sup>th</sup> – Volunteers can reach out to Highway

**Town Administrators Report:**

1. *Senior Center RFQ:* Thirty-six firms pulled the RFQ and four submitted their statements of qualifications. The Feasibility Study Committee went through the four submissions and ranked them in order, presenting the top 3 to the board for their review. The board will need to appoint a board member to work with the Town Administrator to negotiate with the firm selected to set the fee for service.

2. *ACO Update:* Tuesday, November 14th I will be meeting with CMRPC, Berlin, West Boylston, Lancaster, and Harvard to discuss regionalizing an ACO position. Chief Annunziata will be on the call with me.
3. *Community One Stop for Growth Grant Update:* Paul and I will be receiving feedback on this grant on Tuesday, November 21st.
4. *MIIA Insurance Update:* I attended a Health Benefits Forum last week with MIIA and did not receive good news on the FY25 Health rates. There are many factors driving up our rates, including pharmaceutical costs and inflation, which are out of their control. I was advised to anticipate a 10% - 12% increase in health care costs. The good news is our Property and Casualty rate will be held at a 0% increase for FY25. The actual rates will be made available when they are finalized towards the end of January.

Jamie asked if we could look into somewhere else besides MIIA. April stated we will need to secure \$10,000 to go through that process. Jamie stated he knows a company that will do the cost benefit analysis for free. April stated she spoke with Town Counsel, and we need to go through certain procedures. April stated it is a large increase. We currently have employees who are having a significant medical crisis' and that drives up the price. Another part is that 30% of the population have been qualified for some expensive medication to help with diabetes and also weight management. Another reason for the increase is the contracts with hospitals are working themselves out and they are seeing an industry increase throughout all carriers. April stated she believes if there is not more than a 5% cost savings for employees and the town, you have to stay with the plans you have or go to the state plans. April stated its not all about cost savings and wants to make sure the employees are going to maintain the health coverage that they have. Jamie stated he understands and would like to see what else is out there as its going to be a tough nut to swallow. Matt stated that he thinks its unfortunately gonna be fairly standard across the industry of 10 – 12% increase.

5. *Fire Department Fire Escape:* Bob has been working on the second way of egress at the Fire Station and is anticipating the cost of the project to come in around \$8,000.00. Now that Scott is working with him, he should be starting this project within the next month.

*At 8:31 PM, Matt Mecum made a motion to adjourn. Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.*

**Meeting Materials** - On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office

Agenda

Department Head Reports to the BoS

SRO Job Description and other materials

RFQ – Senior Center

Ranking of RFQ for Senior Center

BEF – Gobble Wobble Event Request

Phoenix Service Agreement

11/23/23 Draft Meeting Minutes

Classification Hearing Packet