



Board of Selectmen

Date of Meeting: Monday, March 10th, 2021
Time: 6:30 PM – 8:05 PM
Members Present: Chair Matt Mecum; Selectmen Jamie Underwood and Seth Ridinger;
April Steward, Town Administrator; and Town Counsel Stephen Madaus

The meeting commenced at 6:30 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Appoint Officer Shepard to Sergeant:

Chief Annunziata stated that here with Officer Shepard is his daughter Mackenzie and wife Tammy. Officer Shepard has been with Boylston for 16 years and law enforcement for 32 years. Chief Annunziata stated that he is one of the most knowledgeable officers he has ever had the pleasure of working with and proved that to many of the officers, himself included and is honored to be recognizing him for this. Town Clerk Dawn Porter swore Officer Shepard in as Sergeant, and his daughter Mackenzie pinned him.

Review/Approve Municipal Employees Step Rate Increase Plan:

Jeff Vander Baan, HR Administrator attended the meeting to discuss the employee step rate increase plan for municipal employees. He stated that the best way to describe it is to explain what we have now. Currently, all jobs are classified, and we have a classification schedule and pay ranges; minimum, mid-range and maximum. If someone is hired typically between the minimum and mid-range, once they are hired, they stay at that rate and adjustments are based on a COLA that the BoS approves every year in July, there are no steps so there is no movement. The steps that they came up with were based on looking at the way the state of Massachusetts Government does it, as well the federal government. We decided on a 15-step program. The steps generally are an average of about 2%. The best way to implement this is for employees to be placed on a step and every year there is a step increase that takes place based on their job performance and a review that is done in the fall. Their wills till be a COLA done in July so there will be 2 increases throughout the year and gives everyone the opportunity to progress which is good for employee moral and prevents the Finance Committee from having to hear those above level requests that take place. Inflation was announced that it was 7.9%, its going up and doesn't look like it's going down anytime soon. We feel that this is probably the right time to introduce this and for our employees to be brought to a pay level that is fair and for employees not to be left behind.

April stated that we started looking at this because of the above service level requests that keep coming in to Finance Committee. The first part was to do an employee evaluation which will happen each fall. They presented this to the Finance Committee, and they stated they are in favor of the step plan as presented however wanted the Board of Selectmen to take a final look at it and let them know if they recommend it or not recommend it for approval.

Jamie asked if we should be doing the evaluations in January so that the COLA and increase can be aligned together so we know exactly what the increase would be for budgets. April stated that

she spoke with Finance Committee and believes that is the direction are going at next year but since this is happening this year, it would be a way of easing in for 6 months instead of 12 months. Jamie suggested starting it this year. Matt asked if 15 years a standard. Jeff responded that its what the state uses. Matt stated that it's important to be consistent with the state. Matt asked if a study needs to occur before we implement this because that could potentially make some significant bumps. Jeff stated that we are quite far behind and found that in recruitment efforts with the Assessors Office and Parks and Recreation. It has come up in exit interviews as a reason people have been leaving; pay being too low. Jeff believes this gets us closer to get us to where we need to be and does not believe it is extravagant. A study will take more time and once that's implemented, that could be down the road and what we are doing know could get us closer to where we truly need to be. Seth stated that overall, it's good to give a level of accountability and guidance; it's been something that has been discussed for years at different levels. Aprils mentioned that a study will help make sure we are doing it correctly and believes that we should be doing this once every five years.

Jamie Underwood made a motion to approve the Municipal Employees Step Rate Increase Plan, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Chief of Police Report to the BoS:

Chief Annunziata reviewed the activity log for the past month.
On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office.

Stop the Bleed Training – Sometime in the near future, we will be hosting a training for employees
Sgt Shepard was promoted
Last night Officer Johnson was involved in a car accident. He was here tonight but will be out of work, doing okay.

Vote to Voluntarily recognize NEPBA

The Police Union is looking to change from their current union to the NEPBA.

Seth Ridinger made a motion that the Board of Selectmen voluntarily recognizes the NEPBA as the new union for our local Police and Dispatch, Jamie Underwood seconded. Voted all in favor.

Discussion on Senior Center and Public Safety Building:

This topic was brought up by the COA at a previous meeting and Matt brought up the potential of combining the Senior Center with a Public Safety Building and it was discussed as putting those items on the ballot as non-binding referendum questions to engage the appetite of the town. Matt believes that we 100% need a senior center as we need to up our senior services and COVID showed us that quickly. He thinks we are getting to the point that we need a public safety building as well. The town is falling behind and its important to keep up with the times. It's important to keep the tax rate low but its also important to be able to provide the services that we are supposed to be providing. Matt would like to explore both but it's also okay to explore them separately as well. Jamie stated that he agrees with the senior center 100%; we are not going to be able to buy a building now, we are going to have to build. Regarding public safety, the buildings are getting to the point where we are going to continue to put a lot of money into them. Do we want to spend

\$200,000 into the Police Station to put in a fire suppression system and within two years, move out of the building, no. Jamie thinks that before we put that on the ballot, we need to find out what we have available for state and federal grants and then we can go better prepared with some actual figures. Seth added that there is a need for a senior center, and we need to be very cognizant on how this affects the taxpayers. Looking into grants is a huge part of that and it might be more lucrative if we combine the public safety building but is unsure. He suggested timing it so that the money that is borrowed comes online just as the highway and library are paid off. Ideally if we were to get grants, and then time it with the payoff of those other loans, ideally, we could make it, so it has as little to no impact on the tax roll. Matt suggested leaving the trash referendum question out and we can talk about that separately. We should push this question to the November election. As it stands right now, there's no contested races on the May election so there won't be as many people at this election compared to the November one. We will get a better snapshot of what the people are thinking, and, in the meantime, we can put together a group/committee to gather that information.

Chief Flanagan added that you are not going to see any grants for fire station and police station but combining a senior center which would be a community space, that's where you get grants. There are a lot of questions to answer before putting this on. Discussion continued on what the needs of the town are.

Discussion on non-binding questions:

Push these questions to the November election. Give us time to do more research and more people will come out to the November election than the May one.

Fire Chiefs Report to the BoS:

Call volume was down a bit in Feb. 61 calls; 2/3 calls a day

Have been doing a lot more mutual aid calls; gets people a lot more experience and diverse settings

COVID:

- Continuing to give out the rapid tests at the station as well as testing.
- Numbers in town have dropped. Testing has decreased.
- Online scheduling system has been set up by Alison Ronn. FD is notified when person is in the parking lot. Makes things a lot more streamlined.

Regional Board of Health Meeting:

- Since COVID numbers are down we have nursing services through the regional grant
 - o April and himself are meeting with Kristin Black next week
 - o Looking to use the nurses for in home visits

Grants:

- Received the \$10,500 grant from the Department of Fire Services for the CBA bottles
 - o Price has doubled since they first put this through so can only get about half of what they originally ordered
- FEMA Grant – has gone through the first round
- Applying for a Volunteer firefighter assistance grant: reimbursable grant

Met with Finance Committee last week to go over the FY2023 budget.

- Explained our need for increase
 - o Fuel
 - o Staffing
 - Seemed supportive of the increased staffing

Articles:

- Transfer out of the Ambulance Receipts Account: Transfer \$6,000 for tires
- Supplement the budget: Number has not been determined yet

Complaints:

- Have received several complaints regarding the blasting going on in town.
 - o Blasting companies have been very good about going out and handling the complaints.
- 93 East Temple Street – FD did a compliance inspection on the property on March 1st
 - o As of today, all but one apartment is occupied
 - o Has been challenging working with the landlord but trying to do everything they can to get the process going
 - Received a complaint from one of the tenants about the conditions

Report of the Highway Superintendent to the BoS:

For the month of Feb, they plowed 6 times and treated the road 19 days; most numerous times a day. Using quite a bit of material this year.

- Keeping up with potholes: nothing has been reported to us regarding damage
- Jim is keeping up with repairs and keeping everything going for us; no outsourcing
- Tree work on Cross Street and Sewall Street
 - o Storm damage on a few roads
- Trash cleanup on roadside
- Hoping to have a list at the next meeting of roads in town that are in need of dire attention. One of the roads this year is Central Street.
 - o Normally likes to focus on the residential stuff but Central Street is a main road in and out of town.
 - o Does not have any numbers for material cost this year
- Submitted to April and article for the ATM.
- Going to submit next year – Salt reduction grant
 - o Affects the reservoir. 50/50 grant

Cemetery Related:

- Have been postponing a couple meetings
 - o Two members have health issues
 - o Nothing is super pending right now
 - o Unsure if the members have pulled papers; may have a vacant spot.

Matt asked if we are in year two or three of our paving contract. Steve stated that we are going into year three. Matt stated it was a really good idea to do it.

April mentioned that the COA was having issues with a dealership and their truck and Steve and Jim Deal stepped in to help them out.

Town Administrators Report to the BOS:

1. **Fitchburg District Court Dangerousness Hearing:** I went to Fitchburg District Court on Wednesday, March 2nd to attend the dangerousness hearing for the driver of the vehicle that struck one of Boylston's patrolmen. The suspect in that case was held without bail.
2. **Epidemiologist Update:** As of March 4th, Boylston had a positivity rate of 1.07% with less than 5 confirmed cases in town. Starting this week, every home in the U.S. will be able to order an additional set of 4 tests from the U.S. Government. Please click on this link to order more free tests. <https://www.covidtests.gov/>
3. **2022 Municipal Cybersecurity Grant Awards Ceremony:** I was invited up to in Haverhill on the 8th, as the town was recognized as one of this year's recipients of the EOTSS Cyber Security Awareness Grants. Lt. Governor Karyn Polito, EOTSS Secretary Curt Wood, and Haverhill Mayor James Fiorentini were present to thank participants for their demonstrated commitment to promoting and improving their 'cyber hygiene'.
4. **Cameras at Town Hall:** There have been a few incidents at town hall that have made me consider installing security cameras at the town hall building for security purposes. Also, the elections division is requiring our ballot box to either be under video surveillance on election day, or to have a person posted at the box for the entirety of the day. I would like to see what it would cost to install a camera at the four entrances to the building, the lobby area, and the main corridor hallway.
5. **Town Administrator Contract:** In Section 9 C of my contract, it is necessary for me to advise the board if I can not complete my bachelor's degree before May 2022. At this time, I have to earn 23 more credits to before I will have earned my bachelor's degree. This is the equivalent to 8 more classes. It has become harder to find the classes I need to take being offered in the evening. I am hopeful that by this time next year I will have been able to take the required courses to receive my degree in Nichols Human Resources Management Program.
6. **Bonuses & Stipends:** Brad Barker from the Library Trustees asked if there was a way that the town could put a free cash article on the warrant for employee bonuses or stipends. I followed up with the Town Accountant on this question and she advised if the town was considering doing this, it would be better to include in the budget as it is a salary line.
 - a. Town Counsel agrees with the Town Accountant
7. **Police Cruiser:** During last night's snowstorm one of our police cruisers was involved in a car accident on Rte. 70. Fortunately, it appears that the officer is going to be fine, however, I cannot say that for the cruiser. I put a claim in to our insurance company for the vehicle.
 - a. MIIA will be doing an appraisal for it tomorrow.
 - b. In our fleet schedule, that vehicle has a replacement cost value put on it. The Insurance should be covering the cost of replacing that vehicle.
8. **Notification of BBRSD School Committee Vacancies:** I am including in your packet a letter received today from the BBRSD District Clerk notifying the board of the open positions for the regional school committee. There will be six seats open this November, three from Berlin and three from Boylston.

Review/Approve Health Rates 70/30 split: Current Boylston Employee rate is 63/37 % split. Looking to bring this to 70/30 split. Finance Committee has reviewed and approved this for both

the health plan and dental. Jamie stated that he is fine with it. Seth stated it will bring us closer to surrounding communities, its still a little bit behind. The right thing to do at this point. April stated that the region is at a 75/25% split and would like to see if get there at some point but this is definitely a step in the right direction.

Jamie Underwood made a motion to approve the health rate as a 70/30 split. Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Review / Approve BOS Meeting Schedule April – August 2022:

Matt stated that he may have a conflict on July 18th and August 15th, but they can leave them alone for now and regroup when they get closer to the dates. Seth stated that he may be out of town right before the July meeting and if they could push it back instead of forward that would be helpful. The Board decided to leave it as it is written and regroup once they get closer to the dates.

Jamie Underwood made a motion to approve the BoS Meeting Schedule from April 11th, 2022 – August 17th, 2022, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Vote to amend the stipend for the four FT Fire Fighters:

Matt stated that we made an error. We voted to give a stipend for \$1,200 to the firefighters for all their help with COVID testing and in error gave them \$1,400. They have two choices, to either amend the money or take it back.

Jamie Underwood made a motion to amend the stipend to \$1,400 to the four full time firefighters through COVID relief funds, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Annual Town Report dedication:

The Board agreed that Matthew Phillips was their top choice.

Jamie Underwood made a motion to dedicate the Town Annual Report to Matthew Phillips, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Approval of meeting minutes: 02.28.2022

Seth Ridinger made a motion to approve the 02/28/2022 meeting minutes, Jamie Underwood seconded. Voted all in favor.

Residents Comments:

Brad Baker from the Library came into the BoS meeting touch base with the request for an increase in pay for all library employees. He stated that he sent an email out to the Board earlier this week and was here to lobby the board. The trustees would like the Boards support on what they are trying to do for their library staff. Brad stated that April and Jeff had made a recommendation to the Finance Committee based on Jeffs findings. In summary the Library Board of Trustees had

requested a 16%+ increase for their employees; about \$34,000 spread across four full time employees and four part time employees. The recommendation that April and Jeff made to the Finance Committee was that might be difficult to swallow. Not economically feasible for the town to do that and the other hesitation was that it may not be fair to the other town employees. Brad stated that Eric Brose did his own research to similar towns and confirmed that we are below what other towns are paying their employees in these positions. Brad continued to discuss the issue of the employees being underpaid and how it affects the library. He asked the BoS for their support as discussions continue and at some point, find the \$34,000 to bring these employees up to a rate of pay, they deserve. Brad thanked the Board for their time.

At 8:05 PM, Jamie Underwood made a motion to adjourn, Seth Ridinger seconded. Voted all in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Mack, Assistant to the Board of Selectmen

Meeting Materials

Agenda	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
Non-binding referendum questions	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
Draft Step Increase w/ 3% COLA	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
BoS Meeting Schedule April-August 2022	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
Chief of Police Activity Report	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
Fire Chiefs Report to the BoS	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
Town Administrator's Report	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
RCA/CPA Report – Year End June 30 th , 2021	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office
Meeting Minutes 02/28/2022	On File in The Board of Selectmen's Office