

Selectmen's minutes of meeting January 11, 2021

Members present: Brian O'Rourke, George Riley, Mark Newman, Joanne Grybosh by remote
Dolores Harasyko, Admin. Asst.

Called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Remote participation information provided for the public.

Reviewed and signed minutes of meetings.

Reviewed and signed purchase orders.

Motion by Mark, second by Brian, passed unanimously to accept the letter of resignation from John Burrows from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Motion by Mark, second by George, passed unanimously to appoint Charles "Chuck" Pease to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Motion by Brian, second by George, passed unanimously to approve and the Common Victualler's license for Bill Taylor DBA Floodgate Farm, 7 New Hartford Road for a farm stand.

Finance Committee Chair Roger Brown in to request that the selectmen consider appointing a special committee to study and make recommendations on alternatives and/or continued participation in the Farmington River School District.

Facts that Roger stated:

Half of the town's budget is for the school, up 6% this year and 7% last year.

The allocation has shifted.

The reality is that Sandisfield struggles to pay for this budget as we do not have the commercial income that Otis does, only residential taxes.

We are limited to a 2 ½ % increase to avoid prop 2 ½.

He attended the School's draft budget meeting last Monday, he felt there was a lack of consideration on the school's part.

The Finance Committee met last Thursday and decided to request that the Selectmen appoint a committee to look into alternatives.

George responded that in the past we've only voted yes or no on the school budget. It would be worthwhile to look into options.

Roger is not recommending that we leave the region, only to look into other alternatives.

Brian asked for a timeframe, Roger responded 60 to 90 days to provide a recommendation.

Discussed committee membership, Roger responded he would like the Town Manager, all 3 school committee members, one finance committee member and up to 5 additional members for no more than 10.

Brian clarified that this discussion is not to withdraw from the region but to explore other options.

George clarified it would not be a subcommittee of the finance committee but a stand alone committee appointed by the Selectboard.

School Committee Jennifer Hibbins reviewed that she has looked into alternatives which included merging with other school districts. There had been prior discussion with Southern Berkshire Regional School District, she doesn't think we will save any money that way. She compared us to the town of Monterey. As the districts get larger we would have less voting power. She is concerned as to the effect of the young students that would be on a bus for over an hour in the morning and again in the afternoon. She feels the time would be better spend on looking for funding, perhaps through marijuana growth facilities, solar or commercial businesses. Brian appreciates her valuable information but would like her info provided to the committee. As far as outside revenue from the town that is not up to the school committee.

Mark is all for looking into options and likes the idea of the committee.

Nina Carr agrees with Jennifer about the time the young kids will be on the bus. She was a former member of the school committee. It is how the state comes up with the funding for rural towns that is the problem. It is a complicated process and formula. Beware it is not a simple problem.

Dolores provided a copy of the original Regional School Agreement. She explained that the discussion of withdrawing from the region has come up several times in the past and has failed. She feels strongly that the route to take is to seek additional funding from the state. She doesn't want to waste time looking into withdrawing from the region which the Town of Otis would also have to approve with a town vote.

Brian reiterated that this is to look into options, not to withdraw from the region.

Motion by Brian, second by Mark, passed unanimously to appoint a District Agreement Review Committee.

Jennifer Hibbins will contact the other school committee members. She would like to be appointed to the committee.

Reviewed employee applications for the part time town custodian position. We received 6 applications. Joanne explained that the town has been without a custodian for months. She has advertised in local papers, reached out to many individuals and services with no luck. She posted the position online and received the 6 applications. She pre-screened more and narrowed it down to these 6. The are in the order of her recommendations.

George would like to narrow it down to 2 interviewed and then hire next week.

Brian asked Joanne to conduct telephone interviews on the top two applicants and make a recommendation to the board by next Tuesday. George asked that she follow up on the references also.

Future agenda items:

Sandisfield Snowmobile Club in to request permission to cross town property.

Discuss post office boxes and possibly set up a cluster mail box at the Town Hall Annex.

Vote to hire a town custodian.

Appoint members to the District Agreement Review Committee.

Reviewed mail.

Reviewed and signed warrants

Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair:

Cindy Deloy would like to discuss the cannabis farm. She would like to know how they can vote on the bylaw. She would also like better internet service.

Brian responded that we are already involved with Charter Communications, they are currently in the pole install process. We are about 12 months out from having better internet.

Regarding the cannabis, we had a community outreach meeting. The next step will be announced soon. As far as her concerns Brian suggested she send them in an email to the selectmen. As far as the bylaw we are currently working with the planning board on a marijuana bylaw. She is concerned that once a special permit is issued it is engraved in stone and cannot be changed.

Brian reviewed the process, community outreach meeting, negotiate and accept the Host Community Agreement, then a Special Permit with a public hearing, licensing from the town followed by licensing from the State.

Barbara Cormier is concerned about a public hearing. Brian confirmed that there will be a public hearing, it will be advertised and posted on the website. It will probably be held by remote so the application will be on the website for all to review ahead of time.

Meeting adjourned at 7:46

Brian O'Rourke

George Riley

Mark Newman