

Town of Sandisfield

Select Board

Minutes for Select Board meeting held on Monday, January 29, 2024 at 6:30PM at the Town Hall, 66 Sandisfield Road, Sandisfield, MA

Members present: Steve Seddon, John Field, Robert Fedell, Jonathan Sylbert

Participants: Douglas Miner, Emelia Fedell, Anina Carr, Michael Morrison, Eric Pachulski, Matt Pachulski, Carl Nett, Mary Turek, Brian O'Rourke, Brigitte Ruthman, Willard Platt, Robert Platt, Barbara Cormier (remote), Alex Bowman (remote)

1. Call to order: Note that the meeting is being recorded

2. Public Hearing – Opting out of offering vote by mail for the Local Election in May 2024

Steve Seddon reads the notice of the public hearing to opt out of offering vote by mail for the Local Election in May 2024 in accordance with the requirements of Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A, Section 11, and the Votes Act.

Town Clerk, Douglas Miner explains that along with the typical Town obligations, Town Clerks are flooded with work during election years for the Secretary of State's Office and Attorney General. Douglas briefly goes over the vote by mail process. He notes that with three elections in addition to the local election, the Town Clerk will be taking on a lot of extra hours.

Choosing to opt out of offering vote by mail for the Local Election in May will not affect absentee voting. Additionally, vote by mail will still be available for the Presidential Primary in March, the State Primary in September and the General Election in November.

Opting out of vote by mail is an annual decision. Should the Town decide they would like the option in 2025, the Select Board will simply choose not to opt out. An option may be to only opt out every four years in coordination with the Presidential election years.

Anina Carr expresses concern about limiting access to a vote for anyone, but especially the seniors in Town. She notes there are many seniors who have difficulty leaving their homes and would not want to deprive them of a vote. Douglas notes that anyone who cannot attend the election at Old Town Hall can always get an absentee ballot instead. Anina questions whether a voter can receive an absentee ballot if they are present in Town, but unable to leave their home. Douglas confirms that if they are unable to physically attend the meeting for whatever reason, they will qualify for an absentee ballot. Anina recommends advertising the availability of absentee ballots. Douglas agrees and will work with the COA on this.

Public Hearing is adjourned.

A motion was made, seconded and so voted to opt out of offering vote by mail for the Local Election in May 2024

Steve Seddon	Aye
John Field	Aye
Robert Fedell	Aye

3. Review & Make Appointments - Volunteer Firefighters, EMTs, & Deputy Fire Chiefs

Steve reports the Select Board failed to appoint the Volunteer Firefighters, EMTs, and Deputy Fire Chiefs. Police Chief and Deputy Fire Chief, Michael Morrison insists the Select Board has never made these appointments, as Sandisfield has always been represented by a “Strong Chief.” Michael claims a “Strong Chief” is a Fire Chief who can make all the Departments appointments instead of the Select Board. The Town Manager and Town Clerk cannot find any evidence the Town voted to allow this appointment process. Steve’s understanding is the Town reappoints a “Strong Chief” every three years, as opposed to a “Weak Chief” who is reappointed annually. However, these definitions have no effect on appointing officials into the Department and it is always the responsibility of the Select Board. Additionally, the Select Board has always opted to reappoint the Fire Chief annually, therefore making them a “Weak Chief.” It’s noted that the Police Chief has always been appointed as a “Strong Chief.”

Deputy Fire Chief, Eric Pachulski has provided a list of all the current Firefighters and EMTs for the Select Board to appoint. Michael notes some members are more active than others. Steve questions Ralph Morrison’s reappointment, as he resigned in 2023. Michael reports Ralph only resigned as the Fire Chief, not as a firefighter/EMT. Steve expresses hesitation towards Ralph’s reappointment. Michael expresses concern that the ambulance will be in jeopardy without Ralph because there is “really only one EMT... that’s active,” Rico Sanchez. He notes that they have three EMTs in the process of getting their final certifications and paperwork in order, but until then he believes the Ambulance cannot run properly without Ralph as the State may revoke their license without enough EMTs.

Robert Fedell requests clarification on the four other EMTs listed if Michael claims only Rico is active. Michael reports, “Zoe’s [Marinelli] probaby on her way out, Sherri’s [Jennison] on a leave of absence, Mike’s [Loglisci] not very active.” Michael confirms that Alec Morrison and Shamus Gerrity will take their final written EMT test in February and their new potential hire, Charles Kuzmech, while being nationally certified as an EMT, Massachusetts requires a MA certification, which he is in the process of acquiring.

Due to the events regarding Ralph Morrison as Fire Chief recently, Steve does not feel confident reappointing him.

A motion was made and seconded to appoint everyone on the list, except for Ralph Morrison. Discussion opens.

Michael reiterates that he feels the decision to not reappoint Ralph puts the Ambulance in jeopardy. Barbara Cormier notes that there are other certified EMTs in Town and Sandisfield has Mutual Aid. Michael states that the Town cannot rely solely on Mutual Aid, as the majority of Town's have a lack of EMTs and are utilizing Mutual Aid at the same time. It's questioned when Mary Bredenfoerder will be back as an EMT, Michael states he has "no idea."

A motion was made, seconded and so voted to appoint everyone on the list, except for Ralph Morrison. [See last page of minutes for list]

Steve Seddon	Aye
John Field	Aye
Robert Fedell	Aye

4. Budget Discussion

Jonathan Sylbert reviews the largest increases in this year's budget: A \$78,000 increase in Highway Salaries, \$18,000 increase in Fire/EMS, \$15,000 of which will be dedicated to training, \$33,000 to accommodate an 8% increase to Insurance, and a \$57,000 increase to the School budget to accommodate a 3.5% increase. However, the School increase is an estimate at this point. The total operating budget is a 5.15% increase.

Carl Nett expresses concern with this increase, as a 5.15% increase will not help take the strain off of the taxpayers. He suggests that should the Select Board and School be unable to find any cost savings, the Town should consider a split tax rate, which will drop the levy on the residential side by about \$200,000. The Select Board can meet with the Board of Assessors to discuss the split tax rate option.

There's a brief discussion about the Animal Control Officer, as the position is currently vacant and with only an \$855.00 stipend, filling the position is unlikely. Robert Fedell notes a neighboring Town offers a \$6,000 stipend for the position. It will need to be determined what the position is worth to Sandisfield, as there are very few animal control calls per year.

Carl notes that the budget can be reduced by a third if the Town stopped paying for positions that are not being performed. Jonathan confirms this is a preliminary budget.

5. Town Manager Updates/Project List

In July the Town put in for reimbursement for damage during rain storms. MEMA concluded that Sandisfield did not qualify for reimbursement. However, MEMA reconsidered and decided to reimburse a few towns, so Sandisfield will now receive

\$20,000. This likely will not cover the entirety of what was spent battling the storms, but is still greatly appreciated.

Jonathan announces that Administrative Assistant, Janey Beardsley has passed her courses and has officially become designated as a Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official. The state recommends every municipality have one certified procurement officer and this year decided to waive the \$2,000 course and \$100 fee to encourage municipalities to get designated.

The dirt road ranking list and data will be published on the website for reference for any future conversations about dirt road prioritization.

6. Select Board Updates

The heat pumps have been installed at Town Hall. It's noted the heat pumps will primarily run off the Town Hall's solar energy. Steve applauds the Green Committee for their dedication to creating a more climate friendly environment while simultaneously saving the Town money.

7. Future Agenda Items

- Review roads to discontinue/abandon

8. Topics Not Anticipated

9. Public Comment

Brian O'Rourke questions the options for repairing Dodd Rd. Jonathan notes Chapter 90 funds are not typically utilized for dirt roads, as the state does not find dirt road repair permanent enough. Should the Town decide to pave Dodd Rd, Chapter 90 would be better received. MassWorks grants can be used for dirt road repair. The importance of a strong narrative when applying for these grants is briefly discussed.

Brigitte requests an update on how the Town plans to address the work done on Dodd Rd that washed away during the heavy rain storm. Mary Turek confirms the Town has been sent a cease-and-desist from the Conservation Commission for this work. It's questioned whether the Town would qualify for a civil suit for the improper work done. This is very unlikely, as the former DPW Superintendent was very involved for the entire process. John Field notes that a reason for the failure was due to residents still driving on the road despite it being closed. Currently, the Town is waiting to receive their bundled NOI from the Conservation Commission before any work can continue. Con Comm will meet in February to review the application.

Mary Turek raises concerns regarding the Library. The public computer is not operational and the IT personnel are unresponsive. Additionally, the Library is in need of new exterior lights. Mary will include an estimate for new lights in her budget.

10. Review and vote to approve minutes of meetings

A motion was made, seconded and so voted to approve the 1/24 meeting minutes

Steve Seddon	Aye
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John Field	Aye
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Robert Fedell	Aye
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11. Review and sign purchase orders, warrants, and mail

12. Adjourn Meeting

Meeting adjourned at 7:46pm

Steve Seddon

John Field

Robert Fedell