

MEETING MINUTES

Town of Heath

SELECT BOARD

School Building, 18 Jacobs Road

March 4, 2020

Called to Order at 6:01 p.m. with Brian DeVriese, Robyn Provost Carlson, Gloria Cronin Fisher and Hilma Sumner, Town Coordinator, in attendance.

Review of Minutes: *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Robyn Provost Carlson, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the February 25, 2020 meeting as amended.*

On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Robyn Provost Carlson, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2020 meeting as amended.

Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DOR/DLS) Meeting: Earlier today, Brian and Ned Wolf, Finance Committee Chair, met with Deb Wagner and Matt Andre, our local Bureau of Accounts Field Representatives, for an informal budget discussion.

One of the topics discussed was the broadband project cost over-runs and possible ways to handle some of the upcoming expenses. One option that is being reviewed by the Town is using a portion of the General Stabilization Account money to help cover some of these upcoming costs, in particular the final “drop” costs (connecting services from the pole to the house). This is being looked at with the understanding that the money used for these costs would be replaced in the General Stabilization Account as soon as possible from broadband income expected over the next couple of years. Deb Wagner stated that the “rule of thumb” for a town’s savings in stabilization accounts should be at five percent of the town’s annual budget; this includes the total of all stabilization accounts. If the Town decided to use a portion of this money for broadband costs, the Town would still be within the five percent goal.

The Town’s OPEB liability was also discussed as it relates to Heath’s move toward joining the Hawlemont District for grades Pre-K through 6. The group discussed possible scenarios for payment of this liability. Ned offered his concern about whether the town could obtain a bond to pay this liability if one was needed. Other payment options will continue to be explored.

The town’s increasing tax rate was discussed with the reminder that the rate needs to stay below \$25. This does not include the previously approved broadband expense as this was approved as debt exclusion by the Town. Deb Wagner offered a few budget planning suggestions as well as offering the services of the DLS to come to Heath and give a budget workshop for the Select Board and Finance Committee. She will be in contact to set this up.

Other items discussed included Free Cash, approximately \$70,000 this year, which is less than previous years. The town is due to receive \$170,000 in state money for reimbursement of Tropical Storm Irene expenses. It was stated that some of that money would be used to pay off the remaining loan for the Irene clean-up and that the balance could help reduce borrowing the \$200,000 from General Stabilization for broadband. During FY2021 and FY2022 there will be CAFII revenue coming in from the broadband project, but that will not begin until all construction is finished. The state representatives also suggested that a commercial tax base was needed.

OPEB: Discussion with Budge Litchfield, Bob Gruen and MTRSD administration was still ongoing in regards to working towards terms of an agreement.

Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Grant: Hilma and Mike Cucchiara are preparing the grant agreement documents. The Treasurer will supply the necessary bank information. The Board asked that the Treasurer be asked where the initial money will come from to purchase materials since this is a reimbursement grant. A purchasing account is being set up with Cummington Supply for purchasing building materials. Kate Peppard will be talking with the Highway Dept. about ordering culverts, gravel, stone and signage through their vendors. They will also be consulted about using labor and equipment. Conservation Commission will be consulted and asked to complete a site visit for the area where the committee would like to put a parking area.

STM Warrant Review: The Board asked that Hilma check the reimbursement policy in regards to requests made after the fiscal year closed. The amount set for the School Building Use Revolving Fund is \$30,000. The Board also wanted the MLPAC asked if the amount for the Broadband Dropline Account can be reduced. The article regarding the establishment of an elected MLP Board will be postponed to the ATM due to timing.

Town Coordinator's Report:

- FCCIP/Hawkins: A follow-up email was sent to Jim Hawkins regarding the request for determination for building a garage at 18 Jacobs Road for fire department vehicles. His response was that it would be considered an accessory building and was allowed.
- Town Facilities Task Force: Researched building insurance information for the task force that would be a breakdown of individual building costs. Received the costs from MIIA who also stated that they did not have the FY2021 rates yet.
- Accountant: Met with Dave Fierro and talked about the various foot clinic accounts and why one account is overdrawn. Developed a strategy to remedy the situation and avoid a similar occurrence in the future. Dave also spoke with the tax collector about reconciling the books balances.
- Town Report: Engaged Liz Canali to do the 2019 Town Report formatting.

Annual Report Dedication: The Board decided to postpone discussion and a decision about the dedication until next week.

Accountant Update: Gloria said she still plans to meet with the accountant to review accounts.

Meeting Policies/Rules of Order: Robyn will organize the policies that she had received from other towns and compare them. The Board will continue this discussion to formulate an updated policy.

Capital Purchase Requests: Hilma will provide Jeff Johnston with capital purchase request forms and advise him to complete a form for any requests by March 17th.

META Grant: Brian said that the revised RFP had been mailed to four local solar companies from FRCOG with the hope of getting participation from local vendors for the feasibility study.

Heath Herald Article: Gloria is writing the article for the April 1st issue and Brian will supply the Green Communities update.

Weatherization Audit: The question was raised as to when to expect the weatherization audit report from ECI. Hilma will follow up with an email.

Mail:

- Town Meeting Concerns: Email from Cathy Tallen expressed concerns about group assemblies such as the town election and town meeting if the coronavirus becomes a high-risk concern in this area. Hilma will respond to her suggestions of alternative ways of meeting and will also forward her email to the Board of Health.
- Chapter 90 Award: The town received the Chapter 90 award letter from Mass DOT. For FY 2020 the amount of bond authorization is \$208,463.00.
- FRCOG Workshop: Gloria said she would attend the workshop on March 12th about finding and keeping volunteers in municipal services.
- Alyssa Larose sent an email suggesting another joint meeting with the Select Board and Energy Advisory Committee. The Board agreed and Hilma will establish a day with Alyssa.
- William Gran has requested clarification on the use of Green Community Funds for solar. Brian said he will make a written response to Bill's query.
- Betsy Kovacs emailed with questions about the town nurse's appointment and extent of authority. The Board's response is that the nurse is appointed by them upon recommendation from the Board of Health. Although the nurse has latitude to make purchases as she finds necessary, the Board authorizes both the purchases and her time sheets when she signs the biweekly warrants.
- FCSWMD: An email was received from Jan Ameen stating that the Department of Labor Standards had denied the appeal of a \$48/hour prevailing wage for transfer station hauling. Under the direction of the District's Executive Committee, Jan will be making an appeal to Superior Court.
- Bill and Jean Gran sent a letter stating that it was difficult to hear the Board's conversation during meetings and asked that microphones be used. The Board said that they would make every effort to speak louder and to please let them know if they were unable to hear. The Board summarized points from town counsel's response that stated there is no OML violation if there was no intent and that members of the public may attend meetings but may not speak or otherwise disrupt the meeting.

Other Items of Note:

- Susan Gruen asked how much of the Special Projects budget had been spent to which the Board replied that none of it had been used to date. If it is not spent by June 30th, the Board said that it could be carried over for next year.
- Robyn reported that she had met a couple living in Heath who stated that they were extremely pleased with the winter road maintenance in town for the pretreatment, plowing and clean-up after a storm. The man has said he used to work on a road crew in another town.

Documents Approved and Signed: Letters of appreciation for Jeff Johnston, Highway Superintendent and the Parks and Recreation Committee for successful grant applications and awards.

There being no further business to come before the Board: *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and seconded by Brian DeVriese, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:07 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

Hilma A. Sumner
Town Coordinator