

MEETING MINUTES

Town of Heath
SELECT BOARD
Via Conference Call
May 12, 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.

Other Attendees: See attendance sheet.

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 May 5, 2020 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 May 6, 2020 as submitted.

Town Facilities Task Force Soft Report: Sue Lively of the Task Force was present and provided updates of their work which entailed identifying the needs for the school building, getting report information as accurate as possible and responding to a letter sent by Bob Viarengo and Bill Gran with multiple questions. Accurate insurance numbers still need to be obtained. An outline of viable options for the Fire Department and Emergency Operations Center is being developed. It was noted that the Green Communities Grant program would have a role in providing energy savings to buildings.

Robyn asked that the Task Force send along the price estimates they had obtained for various building repair projects and she would supplement that with quotes she had gotten last fall. The Task Force also went through each item listed in the Potomac Report. Jim Cerone and Tim Lively have developed a spreadsheet with long-range planning for building maintenance. It was mentioned that there are a variety of possible sources for funding including the CDBG monies, MVP grants for solar installation and Green Communities grant funds. The letter sent to the Task Force listed 12 questions and the Board asked that the Task Force prepare a written response to the questions.

It was requested that the Task Force wrap up their work by the ATM even if there are unfinished items. The Board would also like the Task Force to provide an update to the March 9, 2020 Soft Report and meet with the Board in two to three weeks.

Council on Aging: Gloria report that she had researched the Executive Office of Elder Affairs website and the MGL that addressed COA duties and found that they usually closely with senior centers and administer the annual formula grant. She has spoken to Theresa Peters who said she had resigned several years ago. Gloria had also spoken to Jean LaMothe who was uncertain about continuing. The MGL c. 40, s. 8b states the purpose is to support elders in the community. The amount of the formula grant is based on population. It was agreed that the Board needs to develop a mission statement and outline of duties for COA members. Hilma will check the records to see if anything exists. It was noted that senior centers will be one of the last public places to reopen due to the population's higher vulnerability.

Annual Town Election Plans: Brian and Hilma will discuss preparations and space organization on Wednesday.

Annual & Special Town Meetings Plans: Brian said he has an electronic floor plan of the school building and is going to be working on a diagram for spacing of seating that allows for the six-foot social distancing.

COVID-19 Municipal Items:

Meeting Platform: Based on information from Brian's son who works with internet services in the eastern part of the state, Zoom was considered the most feasible option to suit the Select Board's needs. *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Robyn Provost Carlson, the Select Board unanimously voted to subscribe to Zoom internet meeting service to be used for future meetings.* Hilma will set up the account.

Municipal Vulnerability Program Grant: Hilma reported correspondence with Kimberly MacPhee and Megan Rhodes of FRCOG about applying for the initial grant that will enable the town to have membership in the program. Megan will be the contact person to assist in the application. Hilma stated that she is reviewing what is required in the application. Part of what is required is letters of support from relevant town committees as well as area groups. In the application Heath will request additional funds to enable the town to update the Hazardous Mitigation Plan which expired in January 2020.

WiFi Hotspot: Brian announced that Westfield Gas & Electric will be sending technicians on Thursday morning to install the equipment and activate the hotspot at 18 Jacobs Road.

Town Coordinator's Report:

- Town Report: All documents in to Liz Canali for formatting. Draft received and being proofread by Gloria and Hilma.
- Loose Dogs: Thursday, May 7, two large Rottweilers belonging to a neighboring home were running loose around the center, including joining an outside Planning Board meeting and coming up the town hall steps. Contacted ACO who came and spoke to homeowner. Given until May 20 to provide immunizations and restraint notice was issued. Monday, May 11, dogs seen loose on Main St again and notice sent to ACO.
- ACO Expense Budget: Sheriff's Dept. said that they pay almost all expenses so the town could zero out that account for FY21. The only type of expenses that the town would have to pay for is if there was need to purchase a cage for a dangerous dog or if a dog needed rabies testing. Most other towns charge expenses like this to their revolving fund. The account balance currently is \$1,972.
- Transfer Station Permits: FY 2021 permits are in and Charlene is ready to sell them. People are asking already. *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Robyn Provost Carlson, the Select Board unanimously voted to keep the same cost of \$15 for a permit and \$1.50 per bag sticker.*
- FY 2021 Budget: Conversation with Ned Wolf regarding insurance costs, drop line costs. There was also discussion as to why town building dropline costs would not be included with the private-resident funding source and monthly service fees would exist since the town will be the company owner. This matter needs further clarification.
- MLPAC and Finance Committee mailing: Art Schwenger sent an email proposing that the two letters to residents be sent together with expenses for the mailing to be paid for through the COVID-19 reimbursable account. The explanation is that the information in both letters is necessary and time sensitive but neither committee is able to hold public information meetings due to the coronavirus group-assembly restrictions. The MLPAC letter, according to member Jan Carr, will contain history of the project and a request to send contact information to them. The Select Board agreed to this request.

Mail:

- MIIA, M. Garrold re: FY2021 insurance

- N. Wolf re: MTRSD overspent account
- FRCOG re: MVP application
- R & L Sampson re: The Branch School. Hilma will send an email telling them they may keep furniture and equipment in the room.
- J. Gougeon re: Fire Dept. move
- Tom Lively re: emergency shelter move. Brian will send a response.
- C. Tallen re: move to 18 Jacobs Rd
- R. Viarengo re: Community Hall & TFTF report
- BDV re: mtg video conference options
- BDV re: wifi hotspot statement of 5/5/20
- E. Holan re: clarification about center wifi hotspot
- BDV & R. Gruen re: placement of new hotspot
- FCSWMD re: update of services
- MIIA re: memo of COVID-19 & discrimination
- B. Kovacs re: BOH face covering enforcement policy
- M. Thurber re: MTRSD Superintendent search update
- T. Schott re: resignation. *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Robyn Provost Carlson, the Select Board unanimously voted to accept Tracy Schott's resignation from the Community Hall Committee with regrets.*
- MTRS re: preschool reimbursement
- P. Walker re: reimbursement for internal expenses
- P. Porter, SBUC re: insurance premium questions
- N. Wolf re: invitation to meet on May 14
- N. Wolf re: FY21 budget items
- N. Wolf re: draft Tax Levy Worksheet
- N. Wolf re: budget update
- M. Thurber re: Supt. Finalist meetings
- BDV re: to Fire Chief
- MassDOT re: CH. 90 payment—1 pg.
- BDV re: documents for ERP Supplement—7 pg.

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 9:00 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

Hilma A. Sumner
Town Coordinator

Attachment to Select Board May 5, 2020 Minutes

Statement from Select Board Chair at the 5/5/2020 BOS meeting regarding decision on the location of the temporary "Hot Spot".

This evening the Select Board has responsibility for making a decision about the location of a temporary, state funded hotspot to serve the citizens and students of our town and that best protects their health and safety during the Covid-19 emergency.

The Select Board has responsibility for all municipal property. The location and installation or upgrade of internet capability on municipal property requires a majority vote of a quorum of the Board. We were prepared to vote on this matter at our meeting on April 28 but because there were members of the Broadband Committee and the School Committee who wished to address the Board about it and who could not attend that meeting we agreed to delay the vote until this evening.

We intend to make this decision on the basis of the most accurate information we have been able to gather from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Authority, from Rich Carnall at Westfield Gas and Electric, from School officials, and members of the School Committee and the Broadband Committee. We will consider what we deem are good reasons for choosing one of the two viable locations in the town of Heath. Good reasons are those that serve the interests and protect the health and safety of our citizens and children.

In making this decision, we do not intend to entertain or be swayed by insults, baseless accusations or attacks on the motives, competency or character of any committee members or town personnel. We have had enough of these things. They are hurtful and destructive. There is no place for them in civil discourse. People disagree. That is normal and we accept it. People can become upset and disappointed, even angry when things don't go their way. That is human. But it doesn't mean we have to allow ourselves or others to use these feelings as an excuse to hurt each other or disrupt our work on behalf of the whole town.

Here is some background on the decision before us.

First, as you know, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Governor Baker recently continued his stay at home orders and extended school closure through the end of this school year.

Subsequently, the Baker-Polito Administration announced a plan to expand access to high-speed internet for underserved cities and towns that do not have a completed last-mile broadband network. In the announcement of this plan it was stated, and I quote, *"These WIFI hotspots will provide communities with temporary 250 megabit per second hotspots allowing increased broadband access to residents, families and students impacted by Covid-19. The program will be offered free of monthly charge to eligible communities until September 1, 2020. Citizens who use these hotspots must follow social distancing protocols and [there must be] clear signs with Department of Public Health guidance."*

The Town of Heath was listed among the eligible towns and the announcement stated that communities with independently established hotspots are still eligible to receive a hotspot as a part of this program. This is good news for us. And it means we have a choice. We can either upgrade the external WiFi in the center of town or keep that external WiFi in the center and add a hotspot in a second location. In other words, it is possible for our town to have external access to WiFi in two locations.

Lastly, the announcement named Westfield Gas and Electric as the internet service provider responsible for launching the hot spots in eligible communities on a rolling basis over the next several weeks.

Within a few days of the announcement to provide underserved cities and towns with a temporary, free hotspot, we received word of one new announcement. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education or DESE, declared to Massachusetts Public School the directive to initiate new learning for all students via remote access. This is a change from previous guidance from DESE. Up until the time of this new directive, the focus had been on the review of previously taught material rather than on the introduction of new learning.

In a communication dated May 1, 2020, MTRHS Principal Marisa Mendosa indicated that the district is working on a proposal for a new remote learning plan for the final 5 weeks of school which will be available by the end of week of May 11. Meanwhile, all students will continue to have access to their assignments either via the internet or by receiving written materials from their school.

For those of you who do not know, Heath students at Mohawk and Hawlemont access lessons from their schools either by downloading them on a portable laptop if they have internet access or by receiving a packet from the school of written assignments and materials. The introduction of new learning via these methods introduces a new level of challenge for students.

All Mohawk and Hawlemont students have school issued laptops. But not all students in Heath have access to the internet at home. Each week those who have access, download their new material on to their laptops so they can complete their assignments. A 250-megabit hotspot will make a big difference in the speed with which students can access their lessons. This could be helpful both to students with home internet and those who rely on external Wifi. Currently most homes that have internet might operate with 1.5 to 3 megabits. The external access in the center of town has 5 megabits. A 250-megabit hot spot is not only a big boost for students, it will also be helpful to many townspeople who are working at home during the pandemic.

We have been in contact with Richard Carnall of Westfield Gas and Electric about where and when the hotspot can be installed. The two possibilities are at Sawyer Hall and at 18 Jacobs Road, the former school. Neither place will cost the town anything and there is no need for the hotspot to be near the Broadband equipment hut located at the town center. It does require an MBI line which Rich has verified is available at either Sawyer Hall or the former school. While installation of equipment can begin sooner at Sawyer Hall, the completion of the build out at either location will take two to three weeks from tomorrow morning when we give them our decision.

The job of the Select Board this evening is to make an informed and well-reasoned decision about the most advantageous location of the temporary, free hotspot for the town as a whole and in particular for our students who need safe access to remote learning in order to complete the requirements of their education while schools are closed.

It should be clearly understood by all that in no way does the decision we are making have any bearing on the location of town offices now or in the future either at the town center or anywhere else. In no way does this decision have any relevance to anyone's personal preference for the Center over the former school building or the former school building over Heath Center. It is simply a matter of how best and most safely to increase broadband access for as many of our residents, families and students as possible while the community is impacted by Covid-19.

We are prepared to hear from members of the School Committee, the Broadband Committee and the Board of Health any new information or considerations that they believe are relevant and helpful to the Board in making this decision. In the interests of time there will be no public comment. When you are

invited to speak, I ask that you address your comments to the Board. The board may ask for clarification, but otherwise we will receive what you have to say without comment or debate. Following your comments, the Board may have a discussion of the issues that will allow for some back and forth, but only among the Board. Following this, we will take a vote.

Brian De Vriese