

MEETING MINUTES

Town of Heath
SELECT BOARD
Virtual Meeting
March 23, 2021

Called to Order at 6:00 p.m. with Robyn Provost-Carlson, Gloria Cronin Fisher, Brian De Vriese and Hilma Sumner, Town Coordinator, in attendance.

Other Attendees: See attendance sheet.

Public Comment: None.

Review Minutes: *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Brian De Vriese, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the second draft minutes of March 16, 2021 as amended.*

Building Maintenance:

Salt Shed: Brian reported that there had been no response from the truss engineering company. Robyn stated that she will contact Leader Home Center and ask them to have their truss company look at the documents and give an estimate.

Community Hall doors and Sawyer Hall doors: Locksmith John Lively suggested that Sawyer Hall be installed with a removable center mullion that each door would lock into separately. Using that method instead of replacing the present method with the same, would allow the door next to the post office to remain locked during typical use. Door hardware would cost an estimated \$2,500.

Robyn will contact Carson Ovitt about replacing the Community Hall doors and hardware since he had given a quote last year for that work.

18 Jacobs Road: Repair work on the Ansul system has been finished.

Budget Hearing:

MTRSD Budgets: With Finance Committee members Ned Wolf, Ken Gilbert, Alice Wozniak, Janis Carr, Will Emmet, and School Committee members Budge Litchfield and Barbara Rode.

Heath's minimum required contribution was reduced for FY22 which has resulted in a reduction in the town's assessment for the operating budget. It was explained that both the MTRSD budget sub-committee and the full School Committee passed the final budget unanimously.

The Board reviewed the tuition agreement between MTRSD and Hawlemont for the 2021—2022 school year for Heath students. *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Brian De Vriese, the Select Board unanimously voted to endorse the tuition agreement between MTRSD and Hawlemont for the 2021—2022 school year on behalf of Heath students.*

Heath-Hawlemont Regionalization: Committee member Robert Gruen and guest Ken Rocke joined the meeting for this discussion.

It was requested that there be room allowed on the ATM warrant for possible articles related to regionalization. Ken Rocke commented that all towns in the school district will have to vote on Heath withdrawing, in part, from the district and the Hawlemont towns of Charlemont and Hawley will both need to vote to form a new district with Heath. Much time and effort will be needed to get information out to voters ahead of time.

A brief discussion ensued concerning the need for further discussion on Heath's educational goals and what is hoped to be gained in regionalization with Hawlemont. This discussion would include

goals for the quality of education. The committee members hope to enlist the services of Sarah Carlton, a retired DESE employee. She has analysis tools enabling her to dig up numbers and trends in education and will hopefully be able to provide valuable information to aid in the analysis.

The Regionalization Committee members agreed to continue the discussion at next week's meeting and Ken Rocke agreed to participate.

FY22 Salary & COLA: The Finance Committee presented salary amounts related to a variety of COLA percentages. The total salary amount for FY21 is \$457,003. The following amounts would each be a respective addition to this amount based on what percentage of COLA was chosen.

\$4,570	1% COLA
\$6,856	1.5% COLA
\$9,140	2% COLA
\$11,426	2.5% COLA
\$13,711	3% COLA

Both FRCOG and State salary COLA rates are 2.5%. The federal rate is 1.3% and the Franklin Regional Retirement System is 3%. For FY21 the town gave a 2% increase which included the adjustment for the increase in minimum wage. Hilma will prepare an updated salary spreadsheet showing the various possible increases for individual salaries.

FRCOG Wage and Salary Survey: The Board and Finance Committee held a general discussion reviewing the FRCOG Survey. It was agreed that FinCom members will send notes of any flagged salaries to Hilma for compilation and possible discussion at a future meeting.

Other Budgetary Concerns: Ned stated that the FinCom had not discussed it yet as a group but his recommendation was to appropriate funds to add to the Tax Taking Revolving Account so that the tax taking process can be followed through on properties where taxes were delinquent.

COVID-19 Concerns: Hilma will make reservations for a tent rental and the public address system. After the 2020 ATM Gloria had gotten feedback from a couple of people that it was difficult to hear. The Board requested that more speakers be set up in different locations for better hearing.

Hilma reported that the State legislature had extended early mail-in voting to include municipal elections held before June 30, 2021.

Requests for Use of 18 Jacobs Road: The Board reviewed two requests for use of the former school property. One was from Jonathan Diamond for a spring theatre workshop and the second was a request from Mary Sumner to hold a small family gathering. Brian commented that the past use of the theatre group has shown safety measures had been followed. Robyn stated that requests such as these need to be sent earlier so that all Board members have time to read and review the requests.

The Board discussed the need to view overall building use at what would be both safe and fair and equitable to everyone at this point in time. The decision was made to postpone decisions about the use requests until next week following an overall discussion of public building use. It was agreed to review state guidelines for the present reopening phase.

Multi-year Mowing Contract: Highway Superintendent Jeff Johnston requested approval from the Board to issue mowing bids for a three-year contract award. It was discussed that this would allow more continuity for the work and Jeff would only need to solicit bids every three years. *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Brian De Vriese, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve soliciting bids for a three-year contract for town property mowing.*

WiValley Application for Pole Placement: No word has been received yet from town counsel. The Board agreed to wait another week before discussing a course of action.

Green Communities Update: Energia began installing the insulation in Community Hall on Monday. Brian reported that at the last Energy Advisory Committee meeting the engineer's report for evaluation of energy use and savings for Community Hall was reviewed. A quote for design services had been received from the engineer. Brian sent the quote to Alyssa LaRose with a request for information about how the town can get it approved by DOER.

The state legislature climate bill had finally been passed. This was the legislation that the Solar Store was waiting for in order to finish their solar feasibility study for the town.

Sawyer Hall Sign Repair: No development.

Animal Inspector: Hilma reported about the research of qualifications and duties of the position. She also stated that John McDonough has agreed to be appointed on a temporary basis until the end of April. There were two separate dog bite incidents last week in town and the dogs need to be quarantined. *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Brian De Vriese, the Select Board unanimously voted to appoint John McDonough as temporary Animal Inspector through April 30, 2021.*

Town Coordinator's Report:

- **Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance Grant:** Worked with the Highway Superintendent who provided necessary information to write an application for this grant. The grant is awarded by the Dept. of Ecological Restoration with a look to replacing what is now deemed as undersized culverts because of changes in weather patterns and increased torrential rains. If Heath is awarded a grant it would provide funding for the preliminary work of field research, design, permitting and construction bid support to replace the culvert on Burrington Road going over the Avery Brook Tributary. The amount of funding requested was \$140,000.
- **Northeast IT:** Participated in the remote 'kick-off' meeting of town IT equipment upgrade work with Heath's primary technicians, Shawn Weaver and Doug Sudnick. The purpose was a last go-over of the upgrade plans for each department and scheduling of a technician to be onsite to do the actual work. If everything goes according to plan, the technician will be working at Sawyer Hall on Thursday.
- **Northeast IT & CH Internet:** In speaking with the technicians, a discussion was held about wifi to the Community Hall. The proposal that NEIT provided last fall of running a secure system of wifi from Sawyer Hall to CH is work that can be covered under the second part of the CCC IT grant funding that the town was awarded. That cost was approximately \$5,000 but, again, would be paid from the grant. The other option of providing internet to that building would be a separate subscription fee. That would cost the town \$90 per month (\$1,080 per year) plus the installation fees. Hilma's recommendation is to choose the NEIT wifi installation and a cold drop for CH. This will be a much more economical approach for the municipal budget. WG&E will be consulted regarding options and the best method.

Sheila Litchfield had sent an email informing the Board about a proposed meeting with Joe Parda of Westfield Gas and Electric to discuss the town internet services with MLB members and Northeast IT technicians. Hilma will let Sheila know who to include in the invitation.

- Animal Inspector: Qualifications and Duties as outlined at the MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources:
Qualifications: “Reasonably experienced in the care and handling of domestic livestock animals,” dogs, cats and wildlife that may expose domestic animals. Understand local ordinances which may form part of their duties.
Duties: Primary duty is rabies control in the domestic animal population which may include testing, quarantine or destruction of animal. Other duties include barn inspections, animal population census of the town, observe animal housing, food, water and animal health. They check ear tag numbers.

Hilma will consult with FRCOG and possibly other towns to see about cooperative services, especially since the state is now requiring a series of trainings for Animal Inspectors. It was noted that, with the increase in duties, there may be a need for an increase in stipend for FY22.

- Annual Town Report: Continue to submit office and board/committee reports to Liz Canali.
- MIIA Application: With assistance from NEIT, completed and submitted a Cyber Liability Insurance Program application. In her return email Hilma asked if this meant the town needed to purchase a new, separate insurance policy and, if so, what would the cost be.

New Mail:

- L. Thwing re: update for pole hearing
- FCRDHRA re: annual report on activity of Housing Rehab Revolving Fund
- D. Kowacki re: proposed legislature & possible impact on retirement budget
- L. Johnson-Fuller re: request to establish food pantry— *On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Brian De Vriese, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the establishment of a food pantry that would be located at 18 Jacobs Rd. and be available when the internet hub was open.*
- S. Gruen re: Community Hall window repair—The Board referred this item to be brought first to the Energy Advisory Committee and the Building Facilities Committee.
- BoH re: letter sent to Sen. Hinds and Rep. Mark expressing appreciation for the COVID-19 vaccine in Franklin County
- Hawlemont News March 19, 2021
- D. Travers re: Building Facilities Committee Interim Report

Next Meeting:

6:15 Regionalization discussion and planning
Town salary & COLA review
Status of building use & immediate requests for use

On a motion by Gloria Cronin Fisher and a second by Brian De Vriese, the Select Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Hilma A. Sumner
Town Coordinator