

MEETING MINUTES
Town of Heath
SELECT BOARD
Jacobs Road Municipal Center
Tuesday, February 13, 2024

Called to Order at 4:00 p.m. With Robyn Provost-Carlson, Susan Lively, Elissa Viarengo and Hilma Sumner, Town Coordinator.

Others in Attendance: See attendance sheet.

The meeting was recorded.

Review Agenda: Added: Signing warrant for primary election, town nurse job description, annual town report.

Budget Planning Discussion: Joint discussion with Finance Committee members Tom Lively, Bob McGahan, Will Emmet and Ned Wolf, and Town Accountant Dave Fierro.

The new worksheet developed by the accountant was reviewed. Although this worksheet contains account numbers and percentage differences, this information may not be included in the final budget proposal that is included in the Annual Town Meeting warrant.

The accountant advised that caution be used in setting amounts for the various lines, especially when considering any amount cuts. The message to departments ought to be that planning expenses for the upcoming year be realistic based on current spending and costs.

When the Finance Committee meets, they will be looking at the amount for cost-of-living adjustments (COLA). Social Security adjustment will be 3.2 percent for the year while federal employees are set for a 5.2 percent increase. Hilma will email information gathered from neighboring towns.

The accountant stated that, when budgeting for the maintenance and utility accounts for the town buildings, the amounts should reflect the total expenses anticipated for the year. That amount will then be offset by any anticipated income such as what the town receives from any long-term leases. Expenses for all buildings will be reviewed to get more realistic amount levels for the accounts.

The various special project accounts were reviewed. These funds are to be spent within the approved year and, if not spent during that particular year, the money gets reported as part of the amount that becomes Free Cash.

Review Minutes: *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the minutes of January 23, 2024, as amended.*

On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the minutes of January 26, 2024, as presented.

Flag Policy: After review of the drafted policy the Board acknowledged that the Town needs to have a policy instituted before it may be needed. *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by*

Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to adopt the “Display of Flags, Signs and Banners on Municipal Flagpoles and Properties” policy.

Community Hall and Sawyer Hall Buildings: Mold remediation work is continuing to progress in both the buildings. A brief report was given about the recent break-in at Jacobs Road Municipal Center. Entrance was gained through forcing open a window. It is estimated that between \$150-\$200 in cash was taken and the tax collector’s safe was forced open. The surveillance camera got a brief clip of an individual in front of the building.

Community Hall Fundraising: Committee members Bob Gruen and Jan Carr attended the meeting to present an update on the committee’s work. They asked if the deadline for fundraising could be extended until December 31st. After consideration, the Board stated that the November 1st deadline would stand in hopes to show the urgency of the project, show dedication to the Mass Cultural Council and so the matching certification could be accomplished during 2024.

The committee is also drafting a second letter to be mailed out to a list of property owners giving more details about the Community Hall and its history. Also, they would like to make a weatherproof poster of a window that would be displayed outside of the building and colored in as funds were raised. This was approved by the Select Board.

MTRSD Sustainability Study, Phase II: Jake Eberwein, from BERK 12, and Project Manager for the study joined the meeting to present an overview of the work that they will be conducting. Also present were Budge Litchfield, School Committee Representative, and Elizabeth Finn, Heath member of the study’s steering committee.

The charge is to support an ongoing study and analysis of the operating and organizational structures of the two regional school districts (Hawlemont and MTRSD). Identified problems are defined as: 1) declining enrollment; 2) rising operational costs; and, 3) relatively flat state aid.

It was explained that the approach will be to study, plan, engage, act, and sustain, and to provide a well-documented narrative. The school districts have asked that BERK 12 bring a subset of possibilities at the end of their study.

It is anticipated that this study will take approximately 18 months with communication being a key factor in its completeness. There will be an update published once a month that will be available through several modalities. Mr. Eberwein stated that he is willing to come again to speak with the Select Board of any other town group, if that would be helpful.

There will be a large survey made available to residents in all the district towns, probably in May, that they are hoping for a high rate of response. They also will do a survey to families who have chosen to “choice-out” from the district schools.

Hilltown Youth Performing Arts (HYPA): The Board reviewed the research that Robyn had compiled. She noted that, per two realtors she had spoken with, there had not been much change in commercial pricing for rental space over the past several years. It was noted that in more populous areas such as Greenfield, there is more space available.

It was agreed that Hilma would send an email to HYPA stating that the Board had thoroughly looked at costs to maintain the facility, looked at appropriate per-square-foot lease costs, and

spoken to agents about real estate markets. There was also a comparison of the space usage using the building block rates that private individuals would pay.

The Board also stated that they have a fiscal responsibility to the Town taxpayers. They continue to believe that an annual lease amount of \$30,000 is a fair number for use of the amount of property that is included: three exclusive rooms, and frequent use of the grounds, atrium, gymnasium, stage, and cafeteria. The Board also discussed other possible options such as reducing the exclusive use to two rooms but without further conversation with HYPAs, there could be no final resolution.

Roadside Mower Repair: No action taken. It will be addressed on February 27th at the Highway Department budget hearing.

Town Nurse Job Description: The latest revision will be sent out to Board members for their review and the item will be put on a future meeting agenda for finalization.

Annual Town Report: It was decided that Sue and Elissa would collaborate on drafting the Select Board's 2023 annual report. A list will be sent out of the recipients of report dedications so that a decision may be made for the 2023 dedication.

Mail:

- EDV re: emails reporting on HYPAs usage
- Current rates for building rentals
- FinCom re: recommendation for salt shed location
- B. Johnson re: thanks to road crew
- D. Clark re: recordings of meetings
- S. Stanton re: introduction to 2D8T Committee
- HAS re: meeting notes of sustainability study introduction
- J. Lederman re: Sen. Markey Regional Director introduction
- A. Gobi re: Rural Check-in notes of 1/24/24
- RPC re: email to Highway Supt. Regarding FY25 budget
- STAM re: 2024 legislative priorities
- J. Gran re: thank you email
- FCSWMD re: January reports
- A. Gobi re: rural recap 2/7/24
- Senator P. Mark re: Beacon Hill in the Berkshire Hills

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 27th, 6:00 p.m. Joint meeting with Finance Committee for Police, Fire, and Highway Departments budgeting hearings.

8:15 p.m. *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.*

Respectfully submitted,

Hilma A. Sumner
Town Coordinator