

TOWN OF WENHAM  
Board of Selectmen  
Meeting of April 7, 2020  
Town Hall, 138 Main Street

Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30 A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk delivered to all Board members, a meeting of the Board of Selectmen (BOS) was held on Tuesday April 7, 2020 at 6:30 pm virtually on Zoom.us.

The Town of Wenham has a three-member Board of Selectmen elected for three-year terms with one seat up for election each year. Catherine Harrison (2020); John Clemenzi (2021); Jack Wilhelm (2022)

The Board of Selectmen serve as the chief executive body of the Town. The board's duties include in part appointing the Town Administrator and other board/committee members, developing goals and policies, preparing the town report, the annual budget, and presenting the warrant for Town Meeting.

The Board typically meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 pm in Town Hall. The BOS meetings are posted on the Town calendar. All meetings are open to the public and may be viewed on local cable channels HWCAM.org or You Tube HWCAM.

*Please be advised that this open meeting is being broadcast live via Zoom and recorded for playback on-line, video on-demand viewing at hwcam.org. The listings of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours before said meeting, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed. Items may be taken out of order and at times that differ from those listed below. Other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. All participants wishing to address the Board of Selectmen must indicate so in the Zoom meeting chat.*

In response to the Covid19 Virus pandemic, the Massachusetts Governor closed all non-essential businesses and issued stay at home advisory. To comply with the Governor's orders that there be no gatherings, this meeting took place virtually.

**Call to Order** - With a quorum present, Mr. Wilhelm called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.

Selectmen present: Jack Wilhelm, Chair; John Clemenzi, Vice Chair; Catherine Harrison, Clerk

Also present: Anthony Ansaldi, Town Administrator; Jackie Bresnahan, Director of Administrative Services; Catherine Tinsley, Recording Secretary; Town Counsel, Attorney Lauren Goldberg; Public Health Nurse, Marybeth Ting; Board of Health Chair, Dr. Ting; Library Director, Kim Butler; Fire Chief Stephen Kavanagh and Deputy Chief Jeff Baxter; Police Chief Thomas Perkins and Captain Kevin DiNapoli; Land Use Coordinator, Margaret Hoffman; Town Clerk, Dianne Bucco

Mr. Wilhelm gave an opening statement: "We wish to thank all of our town departments for helping during this crisis, especially our first responders and Fire Department. And thanks for all our citizen's for observing the social distancing instructions the Governor has announced; this is very important.

We, the BOS, will meet every week to discuss the most current guidelines and what actions we need to consider taking.

Next week we expect to meet (virtually) with our counterparts in Hamilton (BOS) to discuss potential dates for our town meetings, the town elections as well as the staffing for our jointly funded departments. And also discuss what communications we receive from the HW school district leadership as to their plans for the continuation of the remainder school year and their cost reduction efforts, since they represent more than 50% of the town's budget we are anxious to hear from them, which to date, we have not.

Lastly, we do not know when we can schedule our town elections and annual town meeting absent instructions from the state. For tonight the BOS will reluctantly pass over the previous scheduled presentation of Great Blue Research on our town survey. This presentation will take considerable time, as it should, and is well worth reviewing when our current crisis is over. I reviewed a few days ago and was very, very impressed. This will probably take an hour to one hour and a half. This was on the agenda first but the crisis really takes precedence."

### **New Business**

- Discussion of Resident Survey Results from Great Blue Research, Inc.

This agenda item was deferred to a future meeting.

- COVID-19 Discussion

- Update from the Board of Health & Public Health Nurse

Ms. Ting gave an updated on the new guidance from the Board of Health (BOH), State / Federal Government and Department of Public Health.

With the expected surge in COVID19 infections in the coming weeks, Ms. Ting stressed that residents need to continue to do their part and stay home unless they absolutely need to go out, and then people to practice social distancing guidelines of 6-foot distance, wear a face covering, and wash hands.

Ms. Ting reported that there have been no new COVID19 infections in Wenham the past week but cautioned that this is most likely due to limited testing. Wenham has had 5 confirmed cases of COVID19 infections and all 5 people (thankfully) have recovered.

The town's web page has been updated with current information, notifications, and links regarding the COVID19 virus and will be updated twice weekly. Ms. Roebuck and Ms. Bresnahan were recognized for their efforts to get this information on line for residents.

- Extension of no parking regulations

Chief Perkins was present and requested additional parking bans for Conrad Circle and Pleasant Street. Chief Perkins spoke on this request and explained that with closure of the parking areas of the Rail Trail and Pleasant Pond, people are now parking along the side of Pleasant Street and Conrad Circle to access these closed areas. The Police Department reported a number of calls from residents in these areas. The Police Department will post temporary "no parking" signs on Pleasant Street and Conrad Circle.

*Vote: The BOS voted unanimously by roll call vote, that based on the recommendation of the Police Chief, for additional temporary no parking signs to be posted in the areas of Conrad Circle and Pleasant Street.*

- Discussion of cost savings initiatives for the remainder of Fiscal 2020

- Memo to BOS re Town Administrator Report, from A. Ansaldi, April 7, 2020

Ms. Ansaldi circulated a comprehensive report from town departments regarding the current state of each department and any impact to the department over the past few weeks due to the COVID19 protocols.

Mr. Wilhelm opined on each department's report:

- Assessors – This report described typical work for the assessors and did not specifically address how the department was working during the COVID19 crises or recommended reductions from Tom Tanous, Chair of the Assessors.
- Fire Department – Although it was understood this department is very busy, this report was minimal and needed to include more details of the stress on the department, types of calls, emergency preparations. An update from the chief weekly may be valuable to the town.
- Finance Department - This report was well done
- Department of Public Works – This report was well done.
- Town clerk – This report was well done.
- Council on Aging – Mr. Wilhelm questioned the need to make weekly calls to senior residents.
- Library – This was an outstanding report with complete information and details.

#### 4. Review of the proposed Fiscal 2021 expenses in light of the Covid19 pandemic

Mr. Wilhelm summarized that the few residents he has talked to are interested in knowing what the town is doing to reduce expenses. Mr. Wilhelm mentioned that real estate taxes are due May 1 and there could be a financial issue with possibly 10-15% of tax payments delayed and the BOS should be prepared to reduce expenses /services.

Mr. Clemenzi noted the importance that staff log in and track they are doing to figure out where the work load is or is not.

Ms. Harrison opined that the Assessors report was sufficient and that as a government entity an essential service, and if there are occasions that staff is not as busy could they adjust their hours or assist in another area to avoid layoffs. Ms. Harrison added if there is a financial shortfall, there should be enough information to make rational decisions at that time, and have a longer-term strategic the regular town hall staff is very lean, and when this crisis is over, the town needs to avoid staff shortages and trouble filling critical positions. Ms. Harrison reiterated that some of that work staff is doing is mandated and a municipality is not a business, and the town needs to have a strategic, as well as financial, long term plan. Ms. Harrison did not agree that is should be a priority at this time to gather data for the purpose of reducing services or staff for a short time, given the possible long-term impacts to the town.

Mr. Clemenzi noted the town is lightly staffed and data would help put staff where they could best be used.

Mr. Wilhelm noted that the BOS has not made recommendations to town meeting regarding the FY 21 overrides.

Mr. Wilhelm requested the Finance Committee's recommendations on these articles. Mr. Ansaldi stated that this information had been provided for a previous meeting where the agenda item was postponed. He will resend the information.

Mr. Wilhelm denied public comments during this discussion.

Mr. Ansaldi said he spoke with the Interim Superintendent of the HWRSD who did not know at this time if schools would return to session this year, but said all staff and transportation services are still paid at this time in the event the schools do open, all services would be in place.

School Committee Michele Bailey was present and was asked to give update. Ms. Bailey confirmed currently all contracts are being paid at this time. The FY21 budget has not been evaluated as expenses for that school year are anticipated not to change. The School Committee is working with Representative Brad Hill regarding state funding and there is discussion to hold a round table discussion with the BOS of Hamilton and Wenham.

*Approved 04.21.2020*

In closing, Ms. Bailey noted lessons continue every day for teachers and all students.

Ms. Harrison has specific question regarding the legislation that has been passed and signed to help municipalities regarding elections and town meetings past June 30 and deficit spending. Attorney Goldberg summarized that at this time, elections still must be held by June 30.

The goal of the legislation was to provide immediate relief for municipalities; Attorney Goldberg anticipated additional timelines would be addressed with the ongoing state of emergency. Attorney Goldberg noted that under existing law, the BOS must give 20-day notice to post an election, therefore, the Board must decide by June 10 at the latest.

Attorney Goldberg summarized the scenarios if an override passes/fails at Town meeting and or elections; the details of these votes will be provided to the BOS in writing.

Ms. Harrison responded that she has not heard from any residents questioning if the town was making financial adjustments, and requested to amend the motion to add the language “to deploy resources to react to situations as they arrive and provide analysis of cuts and /or reallocation of staff” citing she was not in favor of just making cuts. She also noted the motion needs to be specific to include union and non-union personnel. Mr. Wilhelm did not accept the amendment. Mr. Clemenzi made no comment.

*Vote: the BOS voted 2-1-0 to charge the Town Administrator with coming up with an evaluation of proposed expense reductions for departments in town, that are not essential, (to be determined) for BOS to evaluate at subsequent meetings.*

*Ms. Harrison voted in the negative and offered an amendment to provide analysis of cuts or reallocations; the amendment was not accepted.*

#### 5. Annual Town Meeting/Town Election Timeline

The Selectmen will meet jointly (Monday) with the Hamilton BOS to discuss town meeting and town election.

The town clerk has requested to send absentee ballots “sooner rather than later”. Ms. Bucco said she recently received 54 new requests for absentee ballots and needs to time prepare for high mailing volume in the event all ballots are mailed.

Ms. Harrison opined the town has had no communications to the residents regarding the overrides or budget and believed it was premature to send ballots before providing residents with information.

#### C. Other matters, as may not have been reasonably anticipated by the Chair (Discussion Only)

- Adjournment - *The BOS voted unanimously by roll call vote to adjourn at 8:23 pm.*

Respectfully Submitted By

Catherine Tinsley

4.11.2020