

**TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2019
Selectmen's Meeting Room, Lawrence Memorial Hall**



Present: Nicholas O'Connor, George D. Archible, Gail Gramarossa, Brenda Q. Aldrich, Ed Boscher

Call to Order: Chairman O'Connor called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

2) Sign Documents:

- a) Warrant #1941 was signed for \$561,337.36.
- b) Routine documents
- c) Approval of Minutes: Ms. Aldrich moved the Board accept the minutes of February 19, 2019. Motion seconded by Mr. Archible. Motion passes 4 – yes, 1 – abstain (Boscher). Ms. Aldrich moved the Board accept the minutes of February 25, 2019. Motion seconded by Mr. Archible. Motion passes 5 – 0. Mr. Boscher moved the Board accept the minutes of March 11, 2019. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 3 – yes, 2 – abstain (Aldrich, Archible).

3) Additions to the Agenda:

- Fill-In Meals on Wheels Driver: Per the recommendation of Jessica Langlois, Executive Director of the Belchertown Council on Aging, Mr. Boscher moved to appoint Rose Byrnes as a Fill-In Meals on Wheels driver position, effective immediately pending the outcome of CORI check. Motion seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Motion passes 5 – 0.
- Accept Maintenance – Buildings and Grounds Resignation: Ms. Aldrich presented the details. Nick Luduc has submitted his resignation effective April 5, 2019. A letter will be sent to Mr. Luduc acknowledging his resignation and thanking him for his service to the Town.

4) Appearances Before the Board:

- 7:03 p.m. Senator Eric Lesser: Senator Lesser came in to check in about budget meetings and to hear what is going on in the town. He thanked the Board for having him.

The Board and Finance Committee are finishing up with budgets with the school committee for next fiscal year. The Town continues to struggle to make a balanced budget. It will be another year of significant cuts on both the town side and the school side in order to accommodate a level service budget. Mr. O'Connor feels there has been significant progress with how the town does its budgeting having successfully but painfully weaning off using money from our stabilization fund. We still need to use free cash to fund some of our operations. He fears the town also needs to wean off using that as well. He further explained how the town has been using free cash on the operating side of things and the stabilization fund

for one time things such as repairs/emergencies. It has been painful and led to some serious cuts over the years. We are at the point or just past the point where we are cutting very significant programs. He fears next year will be more challenging. Our expenses at level service grew by almost 4%, revenues grew by 2.5% and the increase on the allocation on the cherry sheet was .003%. We are not going to be able to grow our way out of it. What comes back on the cherry sheet is not significant for this community. He further explained that 93% of our revenue is generated through taxation. It is going to be unsustainable and already kind of is. Stormwater is another example as it is an unfunded mandate that we now have to pick up out of our budgets roughly to find a \$180,000 a year for increased street sweeping, and things like that to keep Long Island Sound clean.

Mr. Archible mentioned Chapter 90 funds. Our roads and bridges are falling apart. There are not enough Chapter 90 funds for us to maintain safe roads. He is also on the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) representing 14 towns for federal and state highway funds and projects are being cut because they are short five million dollars. It looks like Longmeadow or Granby projects are going to be cut.

Mr. O'Connor added that this is the 4th time he has voted to increase the price of trash bags – this is where the town is at with trying to generate revenue. Cuts in town have been significant and with new mandates coming in he doesn't know what we are going to do.

Mr. Boscher commented that unfunded mandates are a big issue. Chapter 70 had been impacted over the years. He was previously on the finance committee and now being on the Board of Selectmen he has seen the budget process from every angle. At some point something needs to change whether it's how the government calculates the different aides to the town. We are essentially a bedroom-farm community and not an affluent community. With the cherry sheets we are every year constantly working with the school department to figure out how we can make all their requests happen while the state is lowering their contribution level. It is really hard every year to make the budget work. He asked for some extra thought into how the calculations are made and what can be done for Belchertown by putting it in a category that is more realistic.

Mr. O'Connor commented that one of the things they hear all the time is if there is not enough revenue do an override but they hear all the time about how much taxes we pay in Belchertown and it is so expensive. We are not necessarily paying more in taxes but more of our taxes are driving our revenue which is really the issue. An override just hits the same people harder.

Senator Lesser questioned if the town has estimates on what Christopher Heights and the rest of the state school building will generate once that is complete. We have an idea with Christopher Heights but can't say with the rest of the area because it will depend on the building that occurs. Senator Lesser commented that even the best case scenario would not generate nearly enough to what is actually

needed. Mr. Boscher commented right around the tax levy – 93% of it comes from the residents. Senator Lesser questioned again if the town had any idea what would be generated when the state school grounds are fully developed. Mr. O'Connor commented that this is a 20 year plan that has tried and failed many, many times. The development at the state school grounds now is the best we've seen it.

Ms. Aldrich added that the taxes we are going to be adding for stormwater it's just another added stress for the residents. It's one more tax being added on for them to have to pay. We have the marijuana shops that are supposed to open but we can't rely on that for revenue as we don't know if they will be a success or not. It did well in Northampton but not in Greenfield. The State really needs to step forward and help out. Senator Lesser asked if we had any Airbnb's in town because the state did just put in place the new local options for them. Mr. O'Connor attended a library focus group to see what the library can do to help the community. An owner of an Airbnb on the town common attended and told the group one of the things she struggles with is that people check in and want to walk around the common but there is really nothing to walk around. The Airbnb thing would really happen if the town had the money to develop the trails and the recreation area near the Patrick Center/Chestnut Hill Community School.

Ms. Gramarossa indicated this is her first time going through the budget process. There were painful moments in the budget process. We have had to delay in moving capital improvement projects along. When the budget is really tight and we have to make difficult decisions about the operations of the town, trying to protect staffing and protect level service we are often looking at delaying the capital projects.

Senator Lesser questioned if there was any update on the splash pads. He questioned if the money that he obtained for them had been received. Mr. O'Connor commented that there is a meeting coming up in the next couple of weeks as part of that. We have a firm working with us to draw out that whole area including the Patrick Center and will be meeting with them in the next couple of weeks to look at conceptual drawings. There is an article on the annual town meeting warrant to do with funding. Mr. Brougham confirmed for Senator Lesser that the town has received the funding for the splash park from the state. There is a conceptual design. The recreation director and a committee are moving forward on a Park Grant application for upwards of a million and a half dollars. It would be part of the Splash Park but also part of the Patrick Center.

Senator Lesser commented that he really likes working with the Town of Belchertown. He acknowledged the passing of Mr. Barnett and sent his condolences to his family.

He went on to say that he views all the issues that were mentioned as inter-related. We can't be asking the same people to be stepping up and carry more and more of

the burden. We need to grow the economy. We need to grow the town. There are a lot of ways to do that. There is the literal growth (the 60 new houses a year); there are ways of building valuations, diversifying the economy, diversifying the types of revenue streams. He is fully on board with all of it. He has a bill for remote working and feels it would be a massive benefit to Belchertown. Rail service is a big part of that with a movement with the Pioneer Valley North/South pilot program from Greenfield to New York City. The East/West rail studying is also happening. There are amazing initiatives happening in town such as "The Nest" that are citizen run around opioid awareness and substance abusers as well as creating recreation facilities where the Patrick Center was. The surrounding areas are all facing similar challenges as the populations are aging, growth rates are slowing so property rates are not keeping pace which puts pressure on the system to raise the revenue elsewhere and where it manifests itself is hitting the middle class people with increased fees. This year they are working on the foundation budget rewrite of the formula calculations. The formula for school aide was written in 1993 and a lot has changed since then. A committee was formed four years ago to look at the foundation budget. They found four key areas where the state was chronically under funding local schools. The foundation budget was not taking into account the full cost of educating students. There is also the cost of health care costs for employees and again the formula has never been updated to cover the cost of inflation. Special education funding has also been under funded. English language learners and some of the costs around EL learners have been underfunded as well as around districts with high rates of poverty. He feels that for Belchertown the health care issue and the special education will be a major piece to update. He thinks it will do a lot to help with the budget pressures. Ms. Gramarossa questioned if it gets passed how quickly do the budget implications take affect? The Governor's proposal is to phase it in over seven years which is not ideal which is not ideal as it's a long time. He believes there is one proposal to phase it in immediately which is not realistic. There is another bill filed by Representative Tucker from Salem which phases it in over five years. It will depend on the budget forecast as to which phase will happen. He also feels there needs to be a conversation about revenue and tax policy in the state because we have a tax system that is very unfair to the middle class people as they are paying more and more of the share of their income in taxes while the wealthier are paying less. It has been a very lop-sided, unfair system and puts the burden on the middle class people. Our tax system is not caught up with where the economy is. A lot of the wealth being generated in capital gains, investment income is not taxed the same way labor is. He is a supporter of the fair share amendment and there is a proposal to bring that amendment back which would be a billion dollars a year in additional revenue just for education, transportation would also be part of it addressing the chapter 90 issues.

Mr. Brougham, the town administrator, commented that our transfer station runs on an enterprise fund. There is an issue with solid waste in Massachusetts across the board. There are no new landfills opening, there are two remaining operating landfills and the price of tipping has gone through the roof. The recycle markets

are struggling with many large recycling districts dumping their recycle materials in landfill space. The foreign recycle markets have dried up and with no recycle markets in this state we are running into a \$30,000 deficit with what should have been a budget that was responsible just because of the initial tipping fees. This is a state wide problem. Most of solid waste is now going out of state. Senator Lesser commented that it is a very complex issues that has to do with trade issues with China as China stopped taking waste and recycle material from the United States which has created a major shortage that has driven the cost up. They are working on the problem trying to build that capacity out. They are trying to get some aide to cities and towns.

The town administrator also revisited the former Belchertown state school grounds. He doesn't think \$200,000 is out of the question and it could be considerably more determined by who eventually locates their business there. Christopher Heights is up and running. There are several other interested businesses that are looking to go there but it is a process. Carriage Drive is near completion and hopefully by June it will be done. It has made its way all the way out to Jackson Street. We are struggling with additional demo work that needs to be done and it is his understanding that our master developer would like to have \$1.5 million additional demo money this year from Housing and Economic Development. There is currently \$500,000 in the budget. It would be a great help if there is something that Senator Lesser could do to get us more money. The \$1.5 million makes a much bigger impression as to what gets demolished and what doesn't. The buildings that are left are relatively inexpensive to demolish and could make a big impression. We have a bout a \$ 1.5 million structural deficit in our budget and every year we are playing a shell game. We are looking to grow our revenue off of the Belchertown State School site. We have a pretty brisk solar industry going on in town with a chance for a couple of hundred thousand in tax pilot agreements. We have one retail cannabis store with a host agreement that will be applying for a special permit with another that would like to open here soon as well as a cultivator. All of which will generate new revenue but not \$1.5 million a year to fully fund our budget.

Michael Knapp, School Committee Chairman, thanked Senator Lesser for the STEM lab funding. Also thanked him for co-sponsoring the Promise Act which is the foundation budget. Anything in our school district involving special education is super important. Our transportation budget is about \$2 million a year but we are not getting specific help for that. These kinds of increments can make a huge difference. On the Chapter 70 aid vs local sources to pay for the schools our population peaked in about 2011. Minimum aid at \$50 or \$100 per student is amazing usually we are at \$20 - \$30 per student that drives some difficult financial decisions for our schools. He also mentioned the bill about school start times as it addresses a real health concern.

The Board thanked Senator Lesser for coming in to listen to our concerns.

- 8:15 p.m. Liquor License Transfer Hearing – F&J Tan Family Food LLC (Wong Garden) to WU FU, LLC (WU FU): Ms. Gramarossa presented the details to the Board and opened the public hearing. Attorney Bohnet spoke on behalf of his clients (Ms. Yeng and Mr. Wang). He has been in the restaurant business for a very long time. Attorney Bohnet gave the history of the new owners. The restaurant and seating will stay the same. The new owners are anxious to get the liquor license transfer which will allow them to get the restaurant back up to full speed. Ms. Gramarossa questioned if the transfer involved any major change of staff. She was told it would be pretty much the same staff in as much as the current staff stays. She mentioned if there is any change in staff it is highly recommended that they get TIPS trained so they are compliant with all laws regarding alcohol.

With no questions, Ms. Gramarossa moved the Board approve the liquor license transfer to Yan Wei Wu of Wu Fu, LLC d/b/a WU FU. Motion seconded by Mr. Archible. Motion passes 5 – 0.

Mr. Archible moved to close the hearing. Motion seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Motion passes 5 – 0. Vote re-taken to approve the transfer following the close of the hearing. Mr. Archible moved the Board approve the liquor license transfer as previously stated. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 5 – 0.

5) Discussion/Action Items:

- a. Amend/Clarify 3/25/19 Vote of Member to Board of Registrars: Mr. O'Connor presented the details to the Board in that they had voted to appoint three members to the Board of Registrars and the need to clarify the vote to re-appoint only one member to the Board of Registrars. Mr. O'Connor moved to re-appoint Mary Catherine Knight as a member to the Board of Registrars, term to expire March 31, 2022. Motion seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Motion passes 5 – 0.
- b. Appointment of One Member to Board of Registrars: Mr. O'Connor presented the details to the Board. Per the recommendation of the Democratic Town Committee, Mr. O'Connor moved to appoint Carla H. Dell'Olio to the Board of Registrars. Motion seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Motion passes 5 – 0.
- c. Appointment of Senior Center Social Services/Outreach Coordinator: Mr. Boscher presented the details to the Board. Per the recommendation of Jessica Langlois, Executive Director of the Belchertown Council on Aging, Mr. Boscher moved to appoint Laurene Kendall to the position of Social Services/Outreach Coordinator, effective immediately. Motion seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Motion passes 5 – 0.
- d. Accept Skate Park Committee Member Resignation: Ms. Aldrich presented the details to the Board. Elizabeth Adams has submitted her letter of resignation after having worked many years on the skate park committee. Her resignation is effective immediately. A letter will be sent to Ms. Adams acknowledging her resignation and thanking her for her service to the Town.
- e. Trash Bag Fee Increase: Mr. Archible presented the details to the Board. The Board received a request from the Director of Public Works to increase the cost of

the transfer station trash bags. Mr. Archible asked Mr. Williams to explain his reasons for the increase.

Mr. Williams reminded the Board that the transfer station operates on an enterprise fund. There are two different processes going on with one being recyclables and the other solid waste. The users of the facility subscribe to both services. Over the years he has tried to maintain the fees for the annual pass to cover the budget the trash bag fees. The bags are pay as you go while the access fee gets you in to do your recycling needs and access to solid waste disposal methods. The bags cover the cost of the disposal. When bag fees are increased there is incentive to recycle more. This year there was a larger deficit than normal and after making cuts elsewhere he has no choice but to increase the bag fees. Massachusetts has not opened any new landfills and the two that are opened are getting ready to close so all solid waste is being hauled out of the state. Depending on what happens another increase could happen next year but he's hoping that things stabilize.

Mr. Archible moved to increase the bag fees from \$20 to \$23 for large bags and from \$13 to \$15 for small bags. Motion seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Mr. Boscher questioned how many years it's been since there was an increase in the fees for trash bags. He was told it has been three years. He then asked if this was catching us up or if fees would be increased again next year. He was told that it will depend on the markets and it is possible that there could be an increase again next year. He asked for confirmation that all of the fees go to the cost of removing the trash from town. He was told that is correct. Motion to raise the prices passes 5 – 0.

- f. Review/Endorse OPEB Policy: Mr. O'Connor presented the details. This policy is a recommendation made by the Finance Committee for the Board's review. OPEB – Other Post Employment Benefit and the town's liability for paying this is over \$40 million as of June 30, 2018. We started funding OPEB in fiscal year 2017 and so far have put in about \$20,000. The town is in good if not better shape than many other communities in Massachusetts who haven't begun this remediation work yet. The town needs to be consistently funding something to OPEB. After looking at the numbers the Finance Committee voted unanimously on the following guidelines – to plan for long-term funding of OPEB Trust account to address the unfunded actuarial accrued liability, a minimum of \$100,000 will be funded annually to the OPEB Trust from the following:
- At least 10% of the certified free cash will be placed into the OPEB account
 - Up to 100% of the meals tax
 - Up to 100% of the rental monies received from the solar array fields

Mr. O'Connor feels this makes sense especially around the meals tax and the solar pilots. We should be contributing to this account every year. This policy would go into effect in fiscal year 2021, Mr. O'Connor moved the Board accept the recommendation of the finance committee and enact this policy beginning fiscal year 2021. Motion seconded by Mr. Archible. Motion passes 5 – 0.

- g. Review/Endorse Free Cash Policy: Mr. O'Connor presented the details. This is another policy recommended by the Finance Committee which they unanimously

approved. The policy sets the guidelines for using free cash that has been certified. He explained that at the end of a fiscal year there may be money left in accounts that didn't get utilized and it gets returned back to the town. There is also accommodation for meals tax and other things where we under estimated the revenue that would come to the town. The guidelines after the free cash is certified would be as follows:

- At least 30% of the certified free cash will be used to fund necessary capital improvements as determined based on capital budget prioritization;
- At least 30% of the certified free cash will be placed in the stabilization fund;
- At least 10% of the certified free cash will be placed into the OPEB account;
- No more than 30% of the certified free cash will be used for one-time expense (including capital items) or the operating budget.

Mr. O'Connor moved the Board accept the recommendation of the finance committee as it relates to the free cash policy. Motion seconded by Mr. Archible. Mr. Boscher commented it is a step in the right direction but does have a concern regarding some of the department put backs on the town side. He would like to have language in the guidelines that say department put backs get taken off the top of the free cash so that it goes back to those departments. There would be two "buckets" – department turn backs and then everything else. Mr. O'Connor is not opposed to it but wants time to think about how the mechanics of it would work. Ms. Gramarossa commented that the finance committee would need to be told of the change so that they could vote on it as it is not part of their recommended guidelines. Mr. Brougham questioned where the money got plugged back in for the departments – is it on top of the level service budget, is it a slush fund. Mr. O'Connor feels that it needs to be talked about in greater detail. Mr. O'Connor recommended this guideline go back to the finance committee and he will ask the chairman of the committee to let the Board of Selectmen know when it will be on their agenda.

Ms. Gramarossa voiced a concern that if there is some absolute, unexpected emergency if these policies could not be complied with if there would be conversation about it and a recommendation with votes by the finance committee and the board of selectmen with an escape clause to use the money as the town needed. Mr. Brougham commented that when these guidelines were first talked about that was his concern. He was told they were guidelines and not a hard and fast policy.

- h. Review Special Permit/Variance Application – Craig Authier/AHH Inc., Lot 1, Crestview Drive: Mr. O'Connor indicated this is just a heads-up for the Board as it makes its way to the Planning Board. With no comments the Board remanded this application back to the Planning Board for their review.
- i. Review Special Permit/Non-Conforming Use & Variance Application – Maureen Desabrais & Zenaida Ortega, 536 Federal Street: Ms. Gramarossa recused herself from any discussion regarding this item as she has professional contacts with the

two individuals who are part of this application. With no comments the Board remanded this application back to the Planning Board for their review.

- j. Executive Session, MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21, Subsections 2, 3 and 6: Ms. Gramarossa moved the Board enter executive session at the conclusion of their regular session pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21, Subsections 2, 3 and 6 and not to reconvene in open meeting. Motion seconded by Mr. Archible. Roll call vote: O'Connor – yes, Archible – yes, Gramarossa – yes, Aldrich – yes, Boscher - yes.

6) Town Administrator's Report:

The town warrant is coming along and will be ready for the Selectmen to review at the April 22nd meeting. We are working with town counsel to get everything ready in legal form for the warrant.

There was talk a few months ago about redesigning the town website and last Wednesday we had a meeting with our consultant sharing ideas and going over the basic framework for the upgrade so that will be moving forward very soon.

- 7) Review of Weekly Mail:** Reviewed, no discussion held.

8) Individual Board Members' Reports:

Mr. Archible: Attended the MPO meeting last week. It was a very heated meeting which is the first time that's happened in the nine years he's attended those meetings. They are \$5 million short on a couple of projects. Our project here in town is all set because of the work that Steve Williams has done. We should be going out to bid in August of this year. The MPO will either have to stop a project in Granby or Longmeadow. We are very fortunate that our project is a go.

Ms. Gramarossa: She was a part of the meeting with the department heads and the consultant for the upgrade to our town website. She is impressed with the consultant that we are working with and all of the great ideas that the department heads have. There was some talk about social media as well so the different departments are thinking about what will work for them. There was a lot of talk about making our website as user friendly and clear as possible.

She and Ms. Aldrich volunteered at the annual spring library book sale. A huge thank you to all the volunteers who make it happen.

Mr. Boscher: He visited the library last week. Peg Louraine moderated an event at the library regarding the Belchertown vision for the next five or so years. There were a lot of great ideas from the residents. A big group of people is looking for more centralized communications as to what events are going on in town.

Ms. Aldrich: Sat in on the honor court for the boy scouts. It was amazing. The two young men did wonderful community project. One project was to redo the signs for

the cemeteries and the soccer board. It was a wonderful event. Both boys were born and raised here in Belchertown

On Friday she attended the Child Advocacy Center breakfast with our police department. It's difficult going to it but shows all the wonderful things that the Belchertown Police Officer's do with child abuse, sexual abuse and human trafficking which is on the radar now even in our area.

Mr. O'Connor: He mentioned the video that he saw with members of our police department. The video was called A County That's Moving Forward which is about the opioid crisis. It is a very good video to watch.

He was able to attend one of the library sessions that Mr. Boscher mentioned earlier. He agreed with his comments about the centralized communications so was happy to hear about the progress towards an updated town website.

9) **Questions from the Press:** Wyatt Aloisio from *The Sentinel* introduced himself to the Board. He is the new editor replacing Aimee Henderson.

10) **Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Gary L. Brougham, Town Administrator

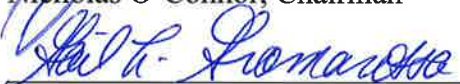
Board approved/endorsed: May 28, 2019

Board of Selectmen - Town of Belchertown

Endorsed by a majority:



Nicholas O'Connor, Chairman




Gail Gramarossa



Ed Boscher

George D. Archible



Brenda Q. Aldrich