

**TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, AUGUST 26, 2019
Selectmen's Meeting Room, Lawrence Memorial Hall**



Present: Ed Boscher, Gail Gramarossa, Jen D. Turner, Nicholas O'Connor
Absent: Brenda Q. Aldrich

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

2) Sign Documents:

- a) Warrant #2009 was signed for \$621,837.20.
- b) Routine documents
- c) Approval of Minutes: Ms. Turner moved the Board accept the minutes of August 12, 2019. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 4 – 0. Ms. Turner moved the Board accept the minutes of August 17, 2019. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 4 – 0.

3) Additions to the Agenda:

- Accept Retirement – Department of Public Works: After 28 years of service to the Town, Edward Burton submitted his letter of retirement. His last day of work was August 22, 2019. The Board wished him luck on his retirement.

4) Appearances Before the Board:

- 7:03 p.m. Pole Hearing #2020-1, Maple Street and State Street: Ms. Turner read the public hearing notice. Mr. Boscher moved the Board continue the hearing until the second meeting of September which is September 23rd at 7:05 p.m. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. The reason for the continuance is to address the abutters concerns. Motion passes 4 – 0. Mr. O'Connor moved to close the public hearing. Motion seconded by Ms. Gramarossa. Motion passes 4 – 0.
- 7:10 p.m. Ray Janke, Veterans' Agent: Mr. Janke, Veterans' Agent came before the Board to discuss his upcoming retirement. It's been an honor for him to serve the veterans and their families in Belchertown and has really enjoyed working with the veterans. His goal is to assist in finding a suitable replacement hopefully as good as or better than he's been. The person needs to be compassionate, respectful, part of the community, be able to connect with the veteran and their family members. He presented the Board with material that all veterans' agents are trained to do. He believes that we will receive a lot of applicants and suggested utilizing the Veterans Service Advisory Board and to appoint people as the Board sees fit to be part of the search committee. The committee should come up with three recommendations for the Board of Selectmen to interview for the position. The Belchertown veteran population based on the 2010 census was well over 1,900 with a recalculation 2012 – 2016 with 1,253 as some die, some move on and some don't respond to the paperwork

that is sent to them that shows they are still in town. The veterans make up about 8 – 10% of the population in town.

He also wanted the Board to know that with his work, the VA, and other agencies they bring in monthly close to \$ 400,000 which includes VA compensation, DIC, widow's pension, and war pensions. It's important because it makes it affordable for them to live in Belchertown as retirees.

Mr. Boscher questioned what Mr. Janke thought people would be surprised to know about his job? He responded advocating for people that normally wouldn't know where to turn to get answers or resolve a problem. It could be writing letters to drug manufacturers to allow them to recalculate the prescription cost; finding the finger prints of a lost loved one that deceased while in active duty because they needed that finger print to remember; figuring out how to get immigration papers that go back so far in time but are important to prove that they are actually a US citizen; advocating for the widows who no longer have the veteran in their home and making sure they are getting benefits that they deserve. It also includes helping with simple things. How do they get VA healthcare, or a disability claim was submitted but denied how does it get re-opened. The list went on with the many different things he does. The big thing is being accessible and not saying "I can't".

Mr. Boscher questioned if they would have to bring in somebody new and they would have to learn from the ground up or if it would be someone who is already doing the job. Mr. Janke thinks that both types of applications will be received. He had no training when he got the job – he had been a teacher. He is a disabled veteran and had some connection with the veteran community so he understood the VA process from a personal point of view. It took three years of learning, realizing he needed to network and developing a community from where he could learn things. He visited other veterans' agents and took away their best practices and applied it to what he was doing. It needs to be the right person with the right temperament, good attitude and willing to work at it.

Ms. Gramarossa thanked him for taking the time to meet with her when she was first elected to the Board. She questioned how we should advertise for his position so we get the best possible applicants. Mr. Janke reported that a lot of veterans' agents want to move to different communities so once the job description is set he can post it with the MVSOA which is his agency – there are approximately 300 veteran agents that he works with will get that email from that agency. It is a community of people trained for this position. Then we would go through weeding out process. We can also apply on Indeed and again many of those would need to be weeded out because they have no experience. The MMA website is another place to advertise. Information can be sent to Westover Airforce Base or Barnes as that is a reserve community and a lot of people that work there were on active duty or activated under Title 10. The criteria are really simple – honorable discharge, active duty, and willing to serve the veteran community. Mr. Janke

asked the Board to not consider being a part of a district. The veterans in our town would not be getting the service that they are used to as they would now have to share a veterans' agent and possibly an assistant with many towns. Ms. Gramarossa was in agreement to not go with a district. We are fortunate to have our own agent for our veterans in town. Mr. Janke has been able to get 75% reimbursement for our veterans since he started working here. He is meeting the certification of the warrants and the expenditures to take care of the veterans in town. He recommends looking at that if we are hiring a current veterans' agent from another town.

Mr. O'Connor appreciates that Mr. Janke is involved in many of the happenings in town. He's there for the Fair parade, Memorial Day, Veterans' Day and that will be hard to get someone that is so involved.

Mr. Brougham asked for confirmation that 75% is the maximum reimbursement for veterans. It was confirmed that 75% is the maximum. Mr. Janke has been able to get that since he started working as the veterans' agent even though he came in to a big mess in that department.

Mr. Boscher thanked him for his many years of caring for the veterans. He hopes we are successful in his successor. He questioned if the VSAB wants to be in the search process. Mr. Janke feels three members would be a good number for the search committee, a selectman liaison. Mr. O'Connor doesn't know if a board of selectman member should be on the search committee as the Board will interview the finalists. Mr. Janke questioned if there should be a spot for a community person on the search committee. Mr. O'Connor felt it would be remiss to not include Mr. Archible as one of the individuals on the search committee. Ms. Gramarossa questioned if there was a spouse of a veteran on the VSAB and thought maybe a spouse should be included in the search committee.

Mr. Brougham commented that the office will advertise for letters of interest for the search committee.

Ms. Gramarossa moved to accept Ray Janke, Veterans' Service Agent, letter of retirement effective October 17, 2019. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 4 - 0.

Mr. Janke informed the Board that the week after he retires there is a free training by the State in Leominster. If the town hires a new person (one without any veterans' agent knowledge) they should attend this training.

- 5) **Discussion/Action Items:**
- a. Discuss BWC Scarboro Brook LLC, Gulf Road: Mr. Boscher reported this item was posted in error and there will be no discussion.
 - b. Appointment of Part-Time Dispatchers: Per the recommendation of Chief Pronovost, Mr. Boscher moved to appoint Alexander Smidy, Mariya Primakov,

and Joshua Orrell to the position of Part-Time Dispatchers, effective August 30, 2019. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 4 – 0.

- c. Ongoing Discussion – Goals and Objectives: Mr. Boscher reported this was a follow-up to the Board's Saturday meeting. He asked the Board to identify a couple of priorities moving forward.

Ms. Gramarossa will be meeting with the senior center staff this week regarding age friendly / dementia friendly community. The Mass Department of Public Health has released some grant funds under a stream they call Healthy Aging. This will allow communities to look at senior focused projects – looking at such things as transportation, housing and other issues and concerns of seniors. There is a deadline of mid-September (18th) to submit an inquiry of ideas which says the town is interested. The actual grant proposal isn't due for another month or so. As this is time sensitive it should be pushed to the front of priorities. She also mentioned meeting weekly and what the time frame for making that happen is. The website is another priority.

Ms. Turner also feels the weekly meeting should be a priority.

Mr. O'Connor reported that he feels a lot of things they discussed focus around the website and that should be a priority. Technology is what he works on for his day job so he will talk to the IT Director so he's not doing work on the website that the Board may want done differently.

He feels HR components are also a priority and those involve job descriptions, succession planning with senior leaders, boards and committees to include attracting or re-appointing of members, recreation planning – capital projects.

The work that the town has started with the State regarding traffic concerns on Allen Street is also a priority.

Mr. Boscher reported the Board isn't done prioritizing everything. He also commented that the town administrator can't do it all on his own. Mr. O'Connor interrupted stating that weekly meetings will help. Mr. Boscher feels the Board needs to be committed to being engaged. He is excited to tackle a lot of the projects. One person on the Board can take the lead on a particular project to report back to the Board. Reviewing the emergency preparedness plan for the town, reviewing job descriptions need to be looked at even though they are not part of the "public facing" but are good for the town.

Mr. Boscher moved the Board change the meeting schedule to every Monday except for months that have five Monday, also during the months of July and August they Board will go to a summer schedule, and only meet twice a month with the new meeting schedule beginning October 7, 2019 at 7:30 p.m. Motion seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 4 – 0.

Mr. Boscher commented that all Board members feel the town's website needs to be updated. The new server is in. Mr. O'Connor feels that this is absolutely a priority. He will take the lead in working with Kevin Hannon on how to proceed. Mr. Brougham reported that in April town department heads and employees met with a consultant to look at a new website. We are about ten weeks away from launching the new website. Mr. O'Connor feels it deserves a larger conversation with the IT Department because this is not simply updating the website it's the complete functionality and marketability.

Mr. Boscher moved the Mr. O'Connor, given his professional background, take the lead on the website and that he bring the Board up to date before any significant processes are put into place so the Board can weigh in on any changes. Motion seconded by Ms. Turner. Ms. Turner offered to help with the website from a marketing branding prospective. Ms. Gramarossa recommended that once the website is ready to launch the Board pick a few people who can play on it for a while and give feedback to the Board. Mr. Boscher called for a vote. Motion passes 4 – 0.

Mr. Boscher recommended that Ms. Gramarossa look to see what is recommended for the Healthy Aging grant. She will be able to report back to the Board at the Selectmen's meeting of September 9th.

The emergency disaster program should also be looked at again. Mr. Boscher would like to work closely on it with the town administrator. It is functional currently but should be looked at now to see what has changed since it was last looked at. The Board was in agreement that Mr. Boscher works with the town administrator on the program. Mr. Brougham reminded the Board that Chief Bock is the town's emergency preparedness coordinator. Ultimately Chief Bock and his administrative assistant update the plan periodically.

- d. Review / Discuss Citizen's Petition – Cordner Road: Mr. Boscher reported that there was a submission to the Town Clerk about a week ago requesting a special town meeting to see if the town will vote to accept Cordner Road as an accepted town road from Route 181 to Sabin Street. Mr. Brougham presented the details to the Board. It is an unimproved road that connects Mill Valley Road and Sabin Street. On the west end there are seven or eight homes and at that end the road was improved; however, from that point up to Sabin Street there is some gravel on the surface but it has not been maintained. Its wheel tracks and vegetation. There are no official records indicating if it's ever been accepted as a town road. The petitioner who bought acreage on Sabin Street. She has also bought the old Atkins Storage on Mill Valley Road and is now asking that we improve the road surface so that customers heading to her orchard to pick their own apples can use Cordner Road instead of going to Cold Spring Road where they will have to pass UMass Orchards. There has been much discussion amongst many different departments and no one has been able to locate any official records showing that Cordner Road was an accepted town road. There has been reluctance to make any improvements which would be very expensive. The petitioner was frustrated that the town wasn't

doing anything so she submitted the petition with over 200 signatures. There were 70 signatures that could not be certified so she will have to obtain additional signatures.

Mr. Brougham questions how town meeting could mandate to the town to accept this road when there are no necessary documents that would be involved in the acceptance of a road. He further detailed what would need to be done to have this accepted as a town road. Town meeting doesn't have the authority per town counsel to make the town accept this road. If the town were to hold a special town meeting the vote would be a non-binding vote or the moderator could rule it out of order.

6) Town Administrator's Report:

- He and Judy Metcalf will be going to Worcester tomorrow to meet with DEP, the attorney general's office, DHCD to further try and identify funding for ongoing infrastructure problems at Sportshaven.
- The Fair Committee recently upgraded their shed. Pictures were posted at the back of the Selectmen's meeting room. The pictures showed the old shed and the new shed. Also listed were all the donors who made it happen.

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

8) Individual Board Members' Reports:

Ms. Gramarossa:

- The SOAAR event will be held on Saturday, September 7th from 12 to 7:00 p.m. on the town common. There will be music and food and information regarding drug addiction. There is also a 5k race earlier in the day.
- Certified local government initiative involving the historic commission and the historic district by-law commission is being pursued. This will give them a leg up in applying for State grants.
- MMA Selectmen's Association will be holding a meeting on Saturday, October 5th at UMass. She is going to try to attend this meeting.

Mr. O'Connor:

- He will send the final edits for the social media policy to the town administrator's office tomorrow. He wants to get that to town counsel as soon as possible to review that material.
- He is going to try and coordinate with the Charter Spectrum public event where their government representative is coming out. It is an event to address citizen's concerns such as why they are the only cable company available to the town.

Ms. Turner:

- She is ready for school to start on Wednesday.
- The last food truck event happened in August and was well attended. The recreation department had an outdoor movie following the event.
- She went to a Planning Board meeting.

Mr. Boscher:

- He has been busy trying to formulate thoughts since the goals and objectives meeting.
- Wished everyone a happy end of summer.
- School starts on Wednesday.
- Enjoy the Labor Day Weekend!

9) **Questions from the Press:** Lew Louraine from *BCTV* reported on the Lawrence Memorial Hall auditorium updates. They should all be completed by the middle of September. He is hoping to have an open house once everything is completed.

10) **Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Gary L. Brougham, Town Administrator


Board approved/endorsed: 9/9/19

Board of Selectmen - Town of Belchertown

Endorsed by a majority:



Ed Boscher, Chairman



Gail Gramarossa

Nicholas O'Connor

(Absent)

Brenda Q. Aldrich



Jen D. Turner