

**TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MINUTES**  
**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2019**  
**Selectmen's Meeting Room, Lawrence Memorial Hall**



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

**Call to Order:** Chairman Boscher called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ongoing Discussion – Goals and Objectives: Mr. Boscher reminded everyone that this meeting was a follow-up to a previous meeting where the Board also met on a Saturday to discuss a lot of different ideas. They were able to talk about things that they felt were important as elected officials in town. As they ran out of time at the last meeting today is to further hash out some of these ideas.

The town website has been placed as a higher priority as it was viewed as being able to be tackled fairly quickly and easily. It will help to improve the communication between the town and the residents.

Mr. O'Connor commented that the website stuff is more than the website functionally. There are other things tied in with it such as community engagement, inventory of public spaces, shared calendar which will all land on the website so it was more than the structure of the site itself. The Board should look at items in terms of time – is it something that can be done in six months, one year, two years.

Ms. Gramarossa shared some updates regarding the senior aging community cluster of things. There is more information about the money that is available from the Department of Public Health for the Healthy Aging fund. She is looking to work on a regional application with multiple communities. She will discuss this more at the Board of Selectmen meeting on Monday evening. There is a deadline of September 18<sup>th</sup> for the initial phase I.

She also spoke with members of the community and the idea of a volunteer fair seems to be of interest to a people – both members serving on boards / commissions and other non-profit groups. It would let residents know what was available in town to volunteer for.

She also received feedback from residents that they would welcome the idea of opening up the nominations for volunteer and citizen of the year to a broader process where individuals could more formally nominate a person. There would be a group that makes those decisions in time for the annual town meeting. Mr. O'Connor commented this should go into the “bucket” of town meeting because it's changing how town meeting functions and maybe it would make sense to have a volunteer fair around that same time. Ms. Turner feels that's too far away to wait to have a volunteer fair. Ms. Aldrich commented maybe we do one sooner but also make it in the future an ongoing part of town meeting. Ms. Turner is happy to work on the volunteer fair. Ms. Gramarossa is happy to help with it as well. Ms. Aldrich questioned when it would be a good time to do it before town

meeting. Ms. Turner wishes it could be done fair weekend. She commented the next big event in town is the Winter Light Night event in November. Board members felt that wasn't a bad idea as it gives some sort of presence. The Winter Light Night event is volunteer driven event so it's a good example of volunteering. Mr. Boscher confirmed that Ms. Aldrich, Ms. Gramarossa, and Ms. Turner would be in charge on the volunteer fair. They will come up with plans and bring them back to the Board for approval.

In strengthening the town meeting experience a bunch of elements could be tied together. Mr. Boscher and Mr. O'Connor will work together on this item. They will sketch out plans and bring them back to the Board for approval. Mr. O'Connor commented that one of the things that keeps being brought up – is the moderator responsible for explaining to everyone at town meeting how it works. There should maybe be an intro letting everyone know what is happening. He feels there is a lot of misunderstanding about how town meeting works and what is being done that night. He further commented that he hears all the time not understanding how the warrant articles tie to the motions. He thinks audio / visual prompting may help. He also feels splitting it into two nights would be beneficial.

Mr. O'Connor went back to the volunteer fair and how we cycle through volunteers. Currently we automatically re-appoint individuals to committees when their terms are up if they want to stay on. We only post for vacancies and not when terms end. There are committees where individuals want to get engaged and can't because they are blocked by these re-appointments. If more people want to get engaged we need to find a way to let them and not have them blocked by tradition.

Mr. Boscher commented that he and Mr. O'Connor can come back to the Board with some processes before the end of the year for the town meeting experience. Ms. Gramarossa commented she can come up with a draft of a timeline around a nomination form for town meeting awards.

Mr. Boscher reported that one of the more critical issues from his perspective is the succession plan for upper management. It will take place over several years but he feels the Board should outline a process of what succession planning looks like. Ms. Turner will work with him on forming baseline succession processes. They will have several drafts to bring before the Board and hopefully prior to town meeting there will be a process going forward. Mr. Brougham commented that he has the dates for six employees who will be retiring out to 2023.

Mr. Boscher reminded Board members that he had volunteered to take a closer look at the emergency preparedness plan. He and the town administrator have spoken about it on several occasions but nothing to report today.

Ms. Turner spoke about economic development for the town. Tied in with that is the inventory of available town spaces and how they are being used. The work the Cultural Council is involved with, the new non-profit – the Belchertown Cultural Alliance and the group of individuals that are involved in it. They should be hearing “soonish” about the grant that they submitted. They are meeting tomorrow

with a woman from Easthampton that did a lot of work in that town. They had a grant funded position for the municipality that is now fully funded through the town and the group wants to learn more about that. This kind of work is her "baby" that she has been working on for a couple of years. She is happy to have anyone involved in it. Mr. O'Connor mentioned that they had spoken about getting the town planner more engaged and having a larger role in this. The town planner / planning board should be the go to person for economic development.

Mr. Boscher questioned the town administrator and his views on the planning board and the EDIC and whether they should be working together regarding economic development or should they continue to be separated. The town administrator commented that the EDIC was appointed specifically to be an independent board. It has a lot of statutory authority that the planning board does not have. He thinks that the two entities work well together when there is an opportunity. Mr. O'Connor feels that we haven't really focused on business outside of the former Belchertown State School and we need to start going out and attracting business to us outside of the state school property. This is where the town planner needs to get more engaged. Ms. Gramarossa questioned if this is where we need to set up an economic advisory group or a group of people who are interested in getting into town. Ms. Turner reported that they had looked into starting a Chamber of Commerce in town but that Belchertown belongs to two already although neither is really doing anything for Belchertown. Ms. Gramarossa will do an on-line survey of businesses in town to see what might have been helpful to them when starting up their business.

Ware and Palmer both have an economic developer coordinator. Mr. Brougham feels if there was a central outlet for economic development it would streamline the process.

Ms. Aldrich will reach out to businesses about doing something the Saturday after black Friday which is shop local. She will see what they can do as a group in town so they reach out to residents reminding them to shop in town. The Winter Night Light event is on that day also.

Ms. Gramarossa suggested looking at the idea of trying to bring a warrant article to town meeting in May about whether or not Board of Selectmen is changed name wise. Maybe the public hearing should be held to start the process to get feedback from the community. The public hearing could be held in October at one of the Board of Selectmen's meetings.

As there was some confusion regarding the Board's new meeting schedule, Mr. Boscher moved the Board meet every Monday night, not meeting on the Tuesday following a Monday holiday. Mr. O'Connor seconded by motion. Motion passes 5 - 0. The Board confirmed that they will not meet on the 5<sup>th</sup> Monday of the month.

Mr. Boscher asked if any Board members wanted to work with Ms. Gramarossa on the name change of the Board. Ms. Turner commented that she wondered if the public hearing could be tied in with a volunteer fair. The how of holding a public

hearing in this manner were listed out by Ms. Gramarossa. Mr. Boscher asked that Ms. Gramarossa and Ms. Turner work together on recommendations on a process and get back to the Board with them. Ms. Aldrich has concerns about doing it this way. She feels it should be part of a regular Selectmen's meeting. Mr. Brougham commented that it should be part of a regular meeting, it will have to be advertised 14 days prior to the hearing. It can be fit into a regular meeting sooner rather than later, allow 15 – 20 minutes for the hearing and continue it – do not close the hearing that night and give the public 30 days to submit written comments. This allows people who couldn't make the hearing time to have their comments heard. At the end of the written comment period pick up the discussion again at a Selectmen's meeting and decide the next step. Members were in agreement with Mr. Brougham's comments. He and Mr. Boscher will decide on a date for the public hearing.

Mr. Boscher asked for comments regarding the finance board and their role in the budget process and what the Board wants to see moving forward. Ms. Aldrich wants the finance committee to know that the meetings they come to when department heads present their budgets are the Selectmen's meetings and not the finance committee's meetings. Mr. O'Connor reiterated that the finance committee is an advisory committee; they are not an elected committee and don't really have any statutory power. It is not really up to the finance committee to decide if the chief of police needs a lieutenant. The finance committee should say this is the money the town has to work with but they don't have a say as to where the money is going. Ms. Aldrich was in agreement with his comments. Mr. O'Connor feels the Board of Selectmen meets with the department heads and then the Board works with the finance committee on the number based on revenue. Mr. Boscher thinks that the finance committee should be able to ask questions even down to the line item if that's what they feel. Mr. O'Connor and Ms. Aldrich agree that they should be able to question things but we want their input and not their permission.

The town administrator was asked to give his input regarding the board of selectmen and the finance committee roles on the budget process. Mr. Brougham gave an overview of his work history and the many different committees/boards that he's worked with. Over time he has seen the finance committee take a greater role in the decision making. In preparing for tonight's meeting he had documents one of which was prepared by former Selectmen, Linda Barron. Her notes clearly state the finance committee has two purposes; one to serve as an advisory body to the town meeting regarding fiscal matters and the other is administer the reserve fund. Mr. Boscher was asked for his comments regarding the finance committee as he had served on it. He has always felt they were advisory and believes that the Selectmen should still listen to their comments. As the liaison to the finance committee he will speak with them so they have an understanding of how this Board is feeling. He will let the Board know what the finance committee says. He does think there should be joint meetings between the two boards but those meetings need to be kept on track. There was also talk about the different between open meetings where people can attend but the Board does not have to take comments from the public versus a public hearing where comments are taken.

Mr. Boscher asked for Mr. O'Connor's comments regarding recreation components. There is the Chestnut Hill Recreation Complex and that grant has been applied for. We should hear around December if we got it. Getting the tennis courts down is another component whether or not we get the grant is important. He also feels the disk golf course is a priority as funds have already been allocated to it. There will need to be some fund raising to complete the disk golf course and that will be discussed at the next Recreation Committee meeting. It is not a huge funding gap but manpower. Basketball season is coming up. The Belchertown basketball brand has become very active.

The Citizen Police Academy is coming up!

The Personnel Board was another committee that this Board wanted to learn more about. That Board has had some recent business to attend to. There was general discussion about this Board and the fact that they are down several members.

Mr. O'Connor questioned former Selectmen Archible's position on the MPO and Chapter 90 funding. He was told that he is no longer able to serve on the MPO as he is not an elected municipal official. Mr. O'Connor commented that with a nomination in the spring the town may want to nominate a new individual who then has to go through an election process to get on that Board. Mr. Boscher will follow up with Steve Williams, Director of Public Works and Mr. Brougham. Mr. Brougham commented that this position is voted on by the transportation implementation panel and accept applications when a seat is vacated.

Mr. O'Connor also commented that they have not yet talked about is the public works stuff such as truck exclusions, climate change and trees. The social issues haven't really been brought up. Emotional and physical abuse were briefly brought up as well as opioid abuse and the aging community.

Ms. Aldrich commented that she hears everyday how many cannabis businesses are we going to allow in town. Mr. O'Connor commented that if he remembered correctly the number of cannabis retailers in town is supposed to align directly with the liquor licenses. Mr. Brougham confirmed that there are three full liquor licenses in town but there are also the wine and malt licenses and there are eight or nine of those. It was Mr. O'Connor's intent to tie the cannabis license amounts back to the full liquor licenses and that should be clarified. Ms. Gramarossa commented on how other communities allow cannabis licenses in their towns. She also continues to hear that having a retail cannabis store around the town common is not an appropriate place for it. It is a Planning Board by-law and they will have to be the ones to review it. Mr. O'Connor reminded everyone that so far there have only been two retail cannabis plans and they still do not have their State license to operate. Mr. O'Connor has some concerns with zoning and that is the 500 ft. from a school. There is a liquor store and a bar around the town common but people are questioning a retail cannabis store being there. Mr. Boscher questioned Mr. Brougham as to what they would need to do to make changes. He was told it would be a by-law change so a public hearing would need to be scheduled, the planning board would need to be involved and figure out what the Board actually hopes to accomplish. There are three proposed cannabis stores within a mile of

each other and he's not sure how the market will support that. Mr. O'Connor reminded the members that as of right now we will have to comply with the existing by-law. To make any changes it will need to go before town meeting. Mr. Boscher asked the town administrator to start the process of talking with the planning board. Some of the items to be discussed will be limiting the number of cannabis stores, keeping them out of the historic district, keeping them away from the town common and increasing the distance from schools/pre-schools.

The tree concern was mentioned. Mr. Brougham reported that the dollar amount to take care of all the trees needing to come down is rapidly approaching one million dollars.

He, Steve Williams and Kevin Williams (superintendent of the water district) were able to secure a grant for rain water harvesting and the feasibility study to replace the water tower in the center of town. The next round is going to open soon and these grants are purposely intended to address things that are happening due to climate change and global warming. They have been lobbying hard to have money included in that round of grant funding for these tree problems. The director of public works has been trying to address it through DCR but they have no funding available and are unaware of the problem. Not every tree needs to come down at the same time but a more concentrated effort to take those down that are the most dangerous is needed. It is a big problem. There is \$85,000 in the DPW budget for trees and between that budget and what we were able to partner with National Grid on as they have done a tremendous amount of hazard tree removal since the October 2011 storm. National Grid has cut hundreds of trees in town trying to keep their infrastructure safe. The dpw tree budget is no longer effective even with the assistance from National Grid. DPW has talked about a bucket truck which would cost about \$150,000 with two additional people to operate it, annual certifications on the booms and operational costs. Mr. Boscher questioned dipping into the stabilization fund especially for trees that pose a hazard. Ms. Aldrich believes we need to do something to remove the trees that are a hazard but also help to protect the trees that we do have. Mr. Brougham reported that tree work is an ineligible use of Chapter 90 money. He has been trying to talk to our legislator's telling them we need help. As there is surplus money in the State revenue it would be good if they would do a supplement to Chapter 90 money allowing it to be used for this problem.

Truck exclusions was another topic the Board had initially discussed. Mr. Brougham explained that it's a process for the town and massDOT to work jointly on. Typically, a complete assessment needs to be done, housing density, speed monitoring – average speeding, maximum speed, minimum speed. Once that information is obtained massDOT is petitioned. He doesn't believe there is a problem with trucks on Michael Sears Road. Mr. O'Connor also commented that he doesn't believe it's an issue. Street complaints should first be dealt with by the chief of police and the director of public works.

Mr. O'Connor reminded everyone that today is the SOAAR 5K and festival event. The festival starts at noon with bands all day and runs until 7:00 p.m. There will be all kinds of events. Ms. Gramarossa will be at the dunk tank.

Mr. Boscher summarized the meeting:

- He and Ms. Turner will work on the succession planning process to bring back to the Board.
- Ms. Gramarossa is waiting to apply for the grant with a deadline of September 18, 2019. She has to have a letter of intent that needs to be submitted so she is hoping to have conversations with the council on aging and speak with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission who is hoping to do an application regionally. Her goal is to have Belchertown listed as a participating community for the Mass Department of Public Health Healthy Aging Fund. Mr. Boscher called for a vote as this is time sensitive. Ms. Gramarossa moved the Board express their support for Belchertown to be part of a regional application in collaboration with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission due September 18, 2019. Motion seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Motion passes 5 – 0.
- Ms. Gramarossa will also come back to the Board with thoughts on strengthening the volunteer of the year process.
- All recreation stuff – Mr. Boscher questioned if the demolition of the tennis courts needs to wait to be done. Mr. O'Connor thinks it would be wise to wait to see what happens with the grant before taking them down.
- At a future meeting the Board will see about putting a name forward for the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Mr. Boscher, Mr. Brougham and Steve Williams will discuss putting a name forward when the time comes.
- Mr. O'Connor and Mr. Boscher will work on the town meeting experience. Once they have some ideas they will bring it back to the Board for their input.
- Mr. Boscher and Mr. Brougham will work together to get the name change process on a Board of Selectmen meeting in the very near future. Ms. Aldrich, Ms. Gramarossa and Ms. Turner will work on the process of getting it on a town meeting warrant in May of 2020.
- The central outlet for economic development is the biggest project. Ms. Turner will spearhead a map of what it will look like. She will bring it back before the Board for their input.
- Volunteer Fair – Ms. Turner, Ms. Aldrich and Ms. Gramarossa will work on this. Ms. Turner wants to hold it before the end of the year.
- Small Business Saturday – Ms. Aldrich will reach out to other small businesses in town to put something together. Ms. Turner will work with her on this.
- Cannabis discussions will be on the regular Board of Selectmen agenda.
- Finance Committee – Mr. Boscher will reach out to them and begin discussions. He will report back to the Board as to how they will approach the budget season. Mr. O'Connor asked him to get a sense of their reorganization and if they are adding a fifth member and the condition of the committee overall.
- Ms. Gramarossa questioned when they would be doing Town wide emergency plan tabletop exercise. Mr. Boscher needs to have further discussions with Fire Chief Bock and Mr. Brougham. He thinks it will happen after the first of the year.

Mr. Brougham mentioned there would be another opportunity with the volunteer fair to put something up when the Art Walk happens in town. Ms. Turner commented that the Art Walk is very close to town meeting and wants to do something in 2019 but that we could still advertise for it during that event.

**Questions from the Press:** Lew Louraine from *BCTV* questioned if the Volunteer Fair would need to have a posted meeting as three selectmen will be working on it. It was confirmed that they would.

Bctv offered their services as a resource they just asked they be given notice. Currently the Chairman of the Board goes over the town meeting warrants on bctv and bctv runs that many times prior to the meeting. Bctv also has a show regarding town talk and that is an option for getting information out to the public.

Ms. Aldrich thanked bctv for all they do for the town.

**Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.


Minutes submitted by Gary L. Brougham, Town Administrator

Board approved/endorsed: 9/23/19


Board of Selectmen - Town of Belchertown

Endorsed by a majority:

  
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Ed Boscher, Chairman

  
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Gail Gramarossa

  
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Nicholas O'Connor

  
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Brenda Q. Aldrich

  
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Jen D. Turner