

**TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2019
Selectmen's Meeting Room, Lawrence Memorial Hall**



Present: Ed Boscher, Gail Gramarossa, Brenda Q. Aldrich, Jen D. Turner

Absent: Nicholas O'Connor

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 #2011 was signed for \$791,083.20.
- b) Routine documents
- c) Approval of Minutes: Ms. Gramarossa moved the Board accept the minutes of August 26, 2019. Motion seconded by Ms. Turner. Motion passes 3 – yes, 1 – abstain (Aldrich).

3) Additions to the Agenda: None.

4) Appearances Before the Board: None.

5) Discussion/Action Items:

- a. Review ZBA Variance Application – Mercier, 18 Prescott Hill: Ms. Gramarossa is struck by the magnitude of the change in the requested set back from the existing set back is to what is proposed. The ZBA will hear this request later this month in a public hearing. She is concerned about public safety and in particular public safety vehicles getting in or out. It is a very big change that they are asking for.

Mr. Boscher reported that it was his understanding the Planning Board had denied the original application for the reasons stated. He looked at proposed property on satellite imagery and it does not make a lot of sense.

Ms. Aldrich wants to support the planning board's vote on the application.

Ms. Aldrich moved the Board have the town administrator send a letter to the ZBA stating the Board recommends the ZBA look at the Planning Board's recommendation and that the Board of Selectmen supports their decision. Motion seconded by Ms. Turner. Motion passes 4 – 0.

- b. Appointment of Election Workers: Per the recommendation of Colleen Toohill-Berte, Town Clerk, Mr. Boscher moved to re-appoint the election workers as follows: Precinct Coordinator – Clair Partridge; Precinct Wardens – Bernette Daly, Gale Miron, Carol Walker, and Erica Morrison-Brazitis; Precinct Clerks – Donna Butler, Brian O'Leary, Christine Babineau and Ann Finley all with terms expiring August 31, 2020. Motion seconded by Ms. Gramarossa. Motion passes 4 – 0.
- c. Review Spending Evaluation: Mr. Boscher provided an overview of the spending evaluation that was submitted last February. He asked the town administrator to take a closer look at it.

The town administrator explained that at a finance committee meeting the chairman of the board of assessors addressed the board of selectmen members that

were in attendance and the finance committee. He spoke in general terms of the spending that is going on in town and how it could potentially affect the tax rate or our ability to raise sufficient revenue going forward. A spending evaluation was offered to support his thoughts and allegations.

- At one point the chairman of the assessor's commented that the town is doing a compensation study every two years for no other reason than to keep pushing the upper limits of salaries – mostly non-bargaining unit employees. He further suggested we use the same consultant and criticized some of the comparison communities and felt that the town's salaries are totally out of line.
- He commented that the town had too many vehicles with 110 on a log sheet he acquired from the assessor's office which was not accurate. Eight of those vehicles had been surplus within weeks prior to that meeting by the Board of Selectmen. Many of the vehicles on the list are not actual vehicles but utility trailers, landscaper tractors, a patch box, flashing arrow signs – basically everything that requires a registration in the State at the DPW, fire department, EMS, police department. His suggesting we had 110 vehicles and purchasing them when we don't need them is factually incorrect.
- There was also the suggestion that the town should not be sending any vehicles outside of our public works department as we have two mechanics. It was also suggested that there are plenty of ways to save money which the town administrator did not accept with the intention that it was offered. He confirmed there are two mechanics at the highway garage and we do have approximately 110 vehicles that are registered and probably that many more vehicles that don't require registrations such as lawnmowers and rollers. There are times when some of our bigger vehicles are in the shop and another town vehicle may need some minor repair so it does get sent out for repair just so it's not held up waiting for the vehicle that's in the shop to be done. It's not always possible to take a vehicle in on short notice. Our new vehicles such as a dump truck has three computer systems on it and we can't always trouble shoot them so they have to go to a shop that can take care of it.
- We were criticized about the compensation study being done every two years which is not accurate. It's been done twice since the town administrator has been working for the town. Once in about 2000 and the last one in 2012. He did confirm that it was done by the same consultant both times. Eleven comparison communities were selected in the 2012 study and the Board of Selectmen at that time took the highest and lowest out of the report and went with the average. The intent was to make sure we were equitably paying our employees. The 2012 study found that the director of public works position was nearly \$20,000 under funded. That position was upgraded to the recommended range and implemented over a period of time. The report that was offered at that meeting used five other communities as comparisons with one being the Town of Granby. It is nearly one-third the size of our town, they don't have the road miles we do or the infrastructure. They don't have a lot of full time employees. Of the comparison communities used in that report Belchertown had the second lowest tax rate.

- Mr. Brougham concluded he did not agree with the report as it was submitted. He would be happy to go over it in greater detail if needed.

Mr. Boscher thanked Mr. Brougham for going over the report. It is important to address the tax payers concerns that the town is spending appropriately. He did agree that we want to be able to attract good workers to fill positions.

Ms. Aldrich commented that we need to be competitive when we are looking at filling positions when employees retire. Ms. Gramarossa commented that some of the key positions are growing in complexity and we need to be able to fill those positions with good employees. She encouraged people to attend budget meetings if they are interested in learning what goes on.

Ms. Aldrich was appalled to see that they wanted to see the veterans' agent eliminated. Mr. Brougham commented that the salary for that position did increase substantially but was done over a period of time but it was originally a part time position that is now full time. Animal control has also increased their hours. The comparisons were done only on budget sheets and not taking into consider strategic decisions the time made.

- d. Executive Session – Pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21, Subsection 3: Ms. Aldrich moved the Board enter executive session at the conclusion of their regular session pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21, Subsections 3 and not to reconvene in open meeting. Motion seconded by Ms. Gramarossa. Roll call vote: Boscher – yes, Gramarossa – yes, Turner – yes, Aldrich – yes.
- e. Miscellaneous Matters: Mr. Boscher commented there is significant interest in the veterans' agent position. We should determine which path the town should go down – he knows that Mr. Janke wants the position to stay as it is but the board should also review being part of a district. They can review this at the board's next meeting.

6) Town Administrator's Report:

- This Sunday the Annual Belchertown Fair tents will be going up around noon time. if anyone has time to spare and would like to help with that task it would be greatly appreciated.
- On Monday, September 16th he and Judy Metcalf will be back in housing court regarding Sportshaven. They will be updating Judge Fields on the progress that's been made and what still needs to happen.
- Attended the 2nd goals and objectives strategy. He wanted the board to know how much he appreciates these meetings. It puts the town on track with tackling core issues that have been pushed to the side.

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

8) Individual Board Members' Reports:

Ms. Aldrich:

- Also is pleased the board has had the goals and objectives meetings.
- A few weeks ago she attended an event with Mary Olberding (Hampshire County Registrar of Deeds) had her 2nd Annual Women's Equality Breakfast. She went with her daughter and granddaughter. She spoke with Congressman Jim McGovern and Senator Lesser and it was interesting to hear what they had to say

about what the town does. She thanked Mary Olberding as she is really a driving force in Belchertown.

Ms. Gramarossa:

- She thanked the SOAAR group and Honest Beginnings for a great event on Saturday. She did get dunked in the dunk tank a few times!
- The Solarize Mass program is moving ahead. They interviewed the three finalists. Northeast Solar is the contractor who they chose. The Meet the Installer meeting will be on September 26th from 7:00 – 9:00 pm at town hall in the auditorium. It is a public open meeting for anyone who wants to know if they qualify and get all questions answered.
- Update on Healthy Aging Fund with Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. They are looking to do a regional application with multiple communities. The initial application is due on September 18th.
- Fair weekend is coming up. She is a judge in the exhibit hall and encouraged people to participate.

Ms. Turner: There is a skate park event on September 15th at 11:00 am. It is a skate park jam. It sounds cool and everyone should go.

Mr. Boscher:

- The board had another several hour session on Saturday morning. The board has decided to move forward with several initiatives simultaneously. They are tackling a volunteer fair, central economic outlet that will be mapped out, improving town meeting experience, looking at succession planning. He thanked the board and the town administrator for all the work that is being done.

9) **Questions from the Press:** None.

10) **Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.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:



Ed Boscher, Chairman



Gail Gramarossa

(Absent)

Nicholas O'Connor



Brenda Q. Aldrich



Jen B. Turner