

**MINUTES  
SELECTMEN'S MEETING  
FEBRUARY 11, 2013**

Chairman Belanger called the meeting to order at 6:38pm. Members present were Douglas Belanger, Sandra Wilson, Thomas Buckley, Dianna Provencher and Matthew Dennison. Also present was Town Administrator Robert Reed.

**Blizzard of 2013**

Mr. Belanger noted that we will need to formalize recent communications declaring a State of Emergency in the Town, as the Governor declared for the entire State of Massachusetts, due to the blizzard that enveloped the area with more than 2' of snowfall beginning February 8<sup>th</sup> into February 9<sup>th</sup> 2013.

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to ratify action taken by the Chairman in making an Emergency Declaration in the Town of Leicester effective at 12:00PM on Friday, February 8, 2013.  
Mr. Dennison seconded. UNANIMOUS

Mr. Buckley asked if reimbursement for storm related costs is made on a first come/first served basis. Mr. Belanger stated no. Mass Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) will process documents that we must complete and provide backup information, which will be available to all communities within the Commonwealth.

**Correspondence**

1. List of members for reappointment to Health Insurance Advisory Committee. Ms. LeChasseur noted that all representatives have agreed to serve another year, except for the Highway union rep, on which we are waiting to hear who will take the position this year. Mr. Belanger made note that the ex-officio reps should be changed to reflect new school superintendent, and that he should also be listed in this category.

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to appoint list of HIAC members as amended.  
Mr. Buckley seconded. UNANIMOUS

Mr. Reed noted that our health insurance consultant, EBS Foran, has put our health insurance out to bid, with a February 8<sup>th</sup> deadline for receipt. They will review the proposals and make recommendation to the Committee at an upcoming meeting, which will be held quarterly per recent Agreement. He is hoping for some relief relative to this budget appropriation. Mr. Belanger noted that the Town's pursuit of tiered-system incentives has helped us keep costs down. Mr. Buckley felt that, with many insurance coverage, co-pays can feel like penalties in some instances.

2. Notice from MBTA Advisory Board of upcoming meeting on February 19<sup>th</sup> in Boston with regards to Governor's proposed changes and a new General Manager. Ms. Provencher stated that she is planning on attending. Mr. Dennison expressed his concern with bailouts that have been made to MBTA and is not interested in continuing to pay increased taxes toward poorly managed State agencies. He feels a letter should be sent from the Town indicating just that. The Board agreed.

**FY'14 Budget discussions**

Veterans' Agent – Michael "Tim" Hickey was present and noted that veterans' claims have increased. He may need more funding added to his budget. MGL Chapter 115 was established by the State and we must have a Vets Agent on staff, part or full time depending on our population. His work is driven by the needs of our veterans or their families. He has managed to put some veterans back to work through his affiliation with Worcester's Workforce Development Central offices. Benefits are pro-rated depending on when resident veterans come on to our books, proof is required for coverage and we are required to fulfill our obligations to our veterans.

Mr. Reed noted that we will be prepared to add funds to this budget at the spring special town meeting. However, he wants the Board to know that there may be a request for a Reserve Fund Transfer if need be; he will let Advisory Board know as well.

Planning Board – Chairman Jason Grimshaw was present along with Town Planner Michelle Buck. Ms. Buck noted a 1½-year old request from her to combine clerks from ZBA and Planning into one position, which would help their office by having less paperwork to process each payroll week, and it just makes sense. The Personnel Board approved this back in April 2012. Combining the positions will help when it comes time to replace the current clerk, who happens to work for both boards; in the future this would become one position performing both job duties, much as what was done a few years back with Conservation and Board of Health clerks. The change would add about \$412 to the total cost of payroll.

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to approving merger of ZBA and Planning Board clerks, effective this date with a Grade 5/Step 6 ranking. Ms. Wilson seconded. UNANIMOUS

Mr. Buckley would like to see a listing of those employees who fall under the Personnel Board. Mr. Belanger asked Mr. Reed to invite the Personnel Board members to one of our upcoming meetings. Mr. Reed replied that he had already done so, but has not heard back from either one of them.

Other “necessities” or ancillary items that would make her department whole, Ms. Buck noted:

- Return to full-time Planner
- Increase consulting line item to realistic amount
- Replace 8-yr old laptop with basic software including Microsoft Office and PowerPoint

Ms. Buck noted that their consulting line item has been robbed over the years, with not enough budgeted anyway to make much difference; this year they will be contributing toward GIS implementation with Assessors Office. For instance, their site development guidelines are out of date, which consulting line should pay for.

She noted that having only a part-time Town Planner leaves her to put out fires, as limited office hours do not allow for any pro-active measures. She feels they could better serve the public as well, were they to be open more hours.

Mr. Grimshaw added that the Planning Board cannot do as much because their Planner is not here, and we are seen as being inefficient.

Mr. Reed noted that in our move to a regional Town Planner with Spencer he hoped that would have insulated the Planning Office from any further cuts. He did want to say that the Planning Board has been very cooperative in these discussions and inner workings.

Ms. Wilson saw an estimated increased cost of 45% to return to a full-time Planner. She asked if Spencer is also looking for a full-time Planner. Ms. Buck said that the administrator out there would like to do so, but that may be difficult with other pending issues they have to deal with.

#### **Personnel Action – Secretary to Police Chief**

Mr. Reed noted memo from Personnel Board dated June 2011 requesting support of their recommendation to move Secretary to Police Chief job description from Grade 7 to a Grade 9/Step 1. This is a major concern for the Chief, that this position be upgraded due to the added workload and additional responsibilities that have been implemented.

Mr. Dennison noted that he was a member of the Personnel Board at the time of this review and the job description had totally changed. Mr. Belanger read aloud the eight items listed, but not limited to, additional responsibilities. Mr. Dennison noted that the Police Chief's role has expanded with staffing shortfalls; the secretary has stepped up to help out as well.

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to approve Grade 9/Step 1 for Chief of Police Secretary on compensation scale, effective this date. Mr. Dennison seconded. UNANIMOUS

Mr. Belanger felt we need to review all other positions as well.

**Other Agenda items:**

Noting that we are without LCAC recording or broadcasting this meeting tonight, Mr. Belanger asked if we wanted to wait on discussion of DOR Report review and Override discussions. The Board agreed to wait on these important matters so that the public may be better informed.

**Police Dept – replacement of officer**

Mr. Belanger read aloud an email to Mr. Reed from Police Chief dated 1/30/13 indicating his need to wait on replacement of retiring police officer due to budget constraints.

First of all, Mr. Dennison asked that we be provided with years of departmental expense layout, which would be more helpful as we have these conversations. It is difficult to make decisions without the history of each line item budget.

Discussion on costs to replace full-time officers or reinstate part-time officers, all that come with benefits and training costs with limited to no savings available this year. There needs to be broader discussions on possibility of going for a Proposition 2½ Override and what that might entail for Leicester, as there are several ways we can look at this. We have managed the last few years with last minute agreements between the Town and School operations, but not without much dissention among departments and ranks. Moral is awful. We have mortgaged our future. We are fortunate to have such cooperative employees, but the imbalance is unfair and frustrating.

Ms. Wilson asked if we have moved forward on preparations for regional dispatching proposal, as our public forum is coming up on February 27<sup>th</sup>. We meet two nights before that but there has been no further discussion that she is aware of. Perhaps we might think of doing a dry run on what our presentation will be. Mr. Belanger will work with the Administrator in this regard.

**FY'14 Budget discussions (continued)**

Budgets under Selectmen's Office – Mr. Reed noted level funded budgets, none are realistic as far as needs go, however. These accounts are often in need of supplemental appropriation at spring STM:

- Legal Budget – pending claims along with personnel issues and town counsel advisories drive this cost
- Street Lights – rates increase yearly although we are contracted for usage costs, which was good pricing at the time. He continues to work with solar proposals to attempt to lower our electricity costs.
- Information Technology (IT) – this works much like our Capital Plan; many upgrades are needed that continue to get put off. We are limping along on 8yr old computer equipment for staff with second-hand financial server that needs replacement and our main service that should also be upgraded.
- Insurance – we have managed well with dividends and rewards program but our claims drive this account. So far this year claims have been limited.
- Selectmen – his salary could be cut depending on what the Board wants to do with his position. Vacant clerk's position has allowed us to absorb salary increases to date.

Mr. Buckley noted that the concern of many department heads is that we apparently have no control at town meeting to get a recommended budget passed. Mr. Reed noted the Police Chief's ultimate frustration when he is willing to give up dispatching operations in hopes of saving his police force. But, in reality, special interest groups can stack town meeting and vote to change budgets as they see fit, which we have experienced of late.

Mr. Dennison reported that the School Committee is meeting on February 12<sup>th</sup> to discuss School budget, and to appoint a liaison to the DOR Report review group, and their Chairman reports a line item budget will be provided.

**Town Administrator's Report/New Business**

- Recent legislation by the State regarding maintenance or repairs to local dams is available, which he will review to see if this new legislation might be of any help to Leicester.
- Met recently with Hampshire Power representatives and he is still under discussion with Broadway Electric toward power purchase agreements for Town electricity usage. Both companies he has worked with in the past, is comfortable with each, and they are established and reliable resources. Our current Agreement for electricity usage expires December 2014. He will work to see if we can get out from under that contract should we be able to purchase electricity at lower pricing.

**Annual Town Meeting**

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to open Warrants for Annual Town Meeting 5/7/13.  
Mr. Dennison seconded. UNANIMOUS

The Board discussed when article requests should be due, with March 6<sup>th</sup> as a start date to allow review at our March 11<sup>th</sup> meeting prior to Mr. Reed's vacation shortly thereafter. A closing date can be determined at that point.

**Board Reports/New Business****Selectman Belanger:**

- Kudos to Highway workers and superintendent on a job well done; non-stop falling snow and equipment breakdowns didn't stop them. He thanked all who worked, especially Highway staff.

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to send letter of appreciation to Highway Supt for a job well done.  
Mr. Dennison seconded. UNANIMOUS

- Public forum on regional dispatching is scheduled for February 27<sup>th</sup>. He does hope to draft a rough format to work from. He asked that the Town Hall be set up as with town meetings. We will need to provide set up for visual PowerPoint by Worcester officials. We should post a Selectmen's meeting for that evening. Mr. Buckley suggested a 6:00pm Selectmen's meeting, as the public forum was scheduled for 6:30pm.

Mr. Belanger hopes to present with a positive approach. For instance, the proposed dispatching center is merely 2.8 miles from the Leicester police station. We have heard that the Police Chief is between a rock and a hard place. The Chief's attempt to save his department by regionalizing dispatch services shows how desperate we are. Unfortunately, the Chief realized that he cannot count on those funds being kept within his budget, which speaks to the very poor moral among employees. We could encounter another situation where the town meeting is stacked by the School Department and the Chief may lose what he made these proposed changes for; to keep his police officers in place.

Mr. Belanger wondered if the Board would support the setting of policy as guideline to help those in the future, as we cannot dictate to another sitting Board what we may do here during our tenure. Mr. Dennison felt language such as "departmental savings will be used to restore services to that department" or the like. Members felt it was something to think about but it would have to pertain to all departments.

Mr. Buckley did not want to commit to regional dispatching now. The Police Chief will give a presentation at the public forum. He asked if we could obtain information as to how dispatching works now, with related costs, and how he proposes this will work so we can make a comparison.

Ms. Wilson asked if we would do a dry run before 2/27. She herself forwarded 12 questions in this regard. It could help our cause to be as prepared as possible in our efforts. Ms. Provencher noted that the two issues that need to be addressed as she sees it is where the prisoners will be held and when the police station will be open to the public. Mr. Belanger felt those were the top two, but he

wanted all to realize that even without regional dispatching, the Chief will not be able to remain open 24/7 any further. They will have to set limited hours because the workload needs to be completed in timely manner. Ms. Provencher also wondered what our yearly costs will be; there were originally ten communities considering regionalizing with Worcester, now there are two of us. Mr. Belanger felt the other towns must have gone elsewhere by now, but we couldn't. He felt everything should be on the table, including the possibility of civilian jailers and civilian clerks to help with administrative tasks.

Selectman Wilson:

- Noted the preparation by three deputy fire chiefs enabled staff to handle all calls during 24-hr storm period with Fire and EMS departments staffed and responding to calls all night long. She asked that they be included in the letter of appreciation. Mr. Dennison noted also that our Emergency Management Director (EMD) and Police Department performed during extraordinary conditions. He felt all public safety did a great job and they should all receive a letter. The Board agreed.
- Snowmobiles cannot use Hillcrest Country Club properly any longer. Any snowmobile club must be registered and know what trails are for their use. Local regulations have not been met by our local group.

Selectman Buckley:

- Echoed storm kudos for staffers and volunteers alike. He commended the efforts of our new EMD Matt Thompson.
- February 14<sup>th</sup> at the Senior Center will provide 'coffee and...' refreshments at 9am.

Selectman Provencher:

- Noted the ever increasing gas prices, knowing we have no control over it.

Selectman Dennison:

- Asked if EMD can put training information on our website. Ms. Wilson noted that the Director uses Facebook, which we could endorse if it is made to be a public page.
- Cautioned motorists driving around with the number of blind spots due to snowdrifts.
- Hearts for Heat dance will be held February 15<sup>th</sup> at Leicester Country Club.

Selectmen Belanger:

- Was able to assist local resident who had lost power to her home; she had just been released from hospital and had oxygen tanks that could not function. His contacts with Ngrid allowed for speedy resolution.

MOTION: Ms. Provencher moved to adjourn.  
Mr. Buckley seconded. UNANIMOUS

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan LeChasseur,  
Administrative Assistant