

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JULY, 17 2023 AT 6:00PM
LEICESTER TOWN HALL, LEICESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01524**

Chair Rick Antanavica, Vice Chair Dianna Provencher, Second Vice Chair Allen Phillips, Selectman John Bujak, Selectman Kevin Menard, Town Administrator David Genereux, and Grants Manager, Samantha Chatterton were in attendance.

ATTENDANCE:

Chair Rick Antanavica	Present
Vice Chair Allen Phillips	Present
Second Vice Chair Dianna Provencher	Present
Kevin Menard	Present
John Bujak	Present

Meeting was called to order 6:10 PM. Mr. Antanavica recited a prayer.

1. SCHEDULED ITEMS

6:00 pm Discuss joint appointment to the School Committee - Candidates to be interviewed in order of applications received.

Mr. Genereux gave a brief overview of the process regarding the appointment of the candidates and the role of the School Committee, Select Board joint votes and where elections for the roles come into play.

Mr. Phillips clarified it is a Select Board appointment and they would work together to discuss with the school department.

Mr. Genereux stated it was a Select Board appointment.

Mr. Bujak asked if it was not allowable for a special town election for the role.

Mr. Genereux read Mass General Law on the vacancy of two or more members and the process involved with filling the vacancies.

a. Ashlyn Coyle (Candidate for appointment)

Ms. Coyle stated she wants to make sure each child's voice is heard and the transparency of town boards continue, and she wants to see the school system prosper. She stated she has been volunteering in municipal government for over four years and she has the heart and passion to continue serving her town.

Ms. Provencher asked what she would do to help the committee.

Ms. Coyle said she would work with the existing committee and be a team player.

Mr. Phillips asked what her biggest asset to the committee was.

Ms. Coyle stated passion and thinking outside the box to with others.

Mr. Phillips asked what she thought was the biggest issue for the school department.

Ms. Coyle stated she thought it came down to money.

Mr. Phillips asked what education or work experience she had related to the school department.

She said she possessed a Bachelor's degree in applied science.

Mr. Antanavica asked how she would help the situation of the school and prevent staff from leaving.

She replied that grants, the vocational program would generate needed finances and stability and she would try her hardest to right the ship and a positive attitude will help the town move forward and work together.

Dr. Kustigian stated the school committee doesn't hire teachers, but they aspire to hire the most qualified candidates at the lowest cost and the school committee vets the candidates.

Mr. Phillips stated they should be asking the same questions to each candidate.

b. Laura Cummins Candidate for appointment)

Ms. Cummins stated she truly believes in Dr. Kustigian's plan and his vocational programs and they would benefit the staff and the town. She would like to assist in those efforts in any way she can.

Ms. Provencher asked what she would do differently to help the committee.

Ms. Cummins stated she has 11 years teaching experience in two districts as a teacher and that experience would help her move Leicester in the right direction.

Mr. Phillips asked what her biggest asset to the committee was.

Ms. Cummins stated she teaches high school math and that would help in Leicester.

Mr. Phillips asked what the biggest issue for the school department was.

Ms. Cummins stated the budget and Dr Kustigian's plan could greatly assist in the financial crisis.

Mr. Phillips asked about degrees and experience that made her a good fit.

Ms. Cummins covered her educational background in math including a master's degree in education and experience in the educational field as a teacher.

Mr. Phillips asked about how to bridge the divide within town and prevent the misinformation spreading.

Ms. Cummins stated the boards have made progress in coming together and being a united front would help immensely. She stated social media is an outlet to get the facts out and you couldn't stop the misinformation.

Mr. Bujak asked what her thoughts are on better educating people in public forums particularly when it comes to math and numbers.

Ms. Cummins stated she does that in the classroom, and she praised Ms. Auger and Mr. Kustigian in being transparent and open.

Mr. Phillips asked Ms. Coyle to return so he could ask her how to bridge the gap.

Ms. Coyle stated the school committee could work with the Town Administrator to set up a joint website to relay news to the public about the schools.

Mr. Phillips asked how to prevent people from twisting words and misinterpreting the facts.

Ms. Coyle stated you can't control social media and it was very difficult to do that in Leicester and said the town needed to keep trying to move forward.

Mr. Phillips reiterated the unfortunateness of the situation of twisting words.

c. David Mero (Candidate for appointment)

Mr. Mero stated he thought it was important for the committee to have continuity, budgeting experience, set educational goals and policies, curriculum approval, assistance with buildings, land and equipment, contract negotiations. He stated he is a bulldog who has served the towns for many years and he wanted to help the kids.

Ms. Provencher asked what he would bring differently to the school committee to open new ideas and new channels.

Mr. Mero stated he had done that in the last year with many ideas and wouldn't do anything half-heartedly.

Mr. Phillips asked what his greatest assets for the school committee are.

Mr. Mero said education, experience and willingness to do anything it takes for the school department.

Mr. Phillips asked what he thought was the greatest issue of the school committee was.

Mr. Mero stated getting trust of the entire town was difficult, but he had recommendations and stated after the meeting, post the minutes so people could see what was approved and not approved which would equate to more transparency.

Mr. Phillips asked about his education and experience.

Mr. Mero stated he attended Clark University, Trinity College and University in accounting and finance, business management, municipal accounting and taxes.

Mr. Phillips asked how to bridge the gap in the town and lessen the division.

Mr. Mero said he would eliminate Facebook, but it would be difficult as people didn't attend meetings and claim they didn't know about decisions being made. He said they needed to do a better job to attract people out of their homes to vote. He stated he thought it was great they had three candidates for school committee.

Ms. Provencher asked for recommendations from the school committee after the questions and who they thought would be the best candidate.

Ms. McCance stated she'd like to follow process with the Select Board appointment as they were the deciding factor.

Mr. Phillips asked for input from the remainder of the Select Board.

Ms. Provencher stated she was happy with the candidates and none of the answers were right or wrong and said she would have been happy with a recommendation from the school committee.

Mr. Bujak said all three candidates were good candidates. He stated the process was awkward and he would like a recommendation from the school committee.

Mr. Menard stated he would like a recommendation from the school committee as well and he would want to know who they would work with the best and be in their best interest.

Mr. Paul McCarthy stated he is a former school committee member and chair and inquired is the board allow the School Committee to go outside and discuss without them being on the spot.

Mr. Genereux and Mr. Phillips stated it would be an open meeting violation.

Ms. Donna McCance stated she has been on the school committee for four years and has worked with Ms. Cummins and has been impressed by her work and input.

Mr. Phillips made a motion to appoint Laura Cummins to the school committee for the term to end at the next town election in June of 2024. Seconded by Mr. Bujak. (5-0-0) Motion passes.

Mr. Antanavica stated he was taking the agenda items out or order.

3. RESIGNATIONS & APPOINTMENTS

a. Alternate WRTA member - Heather-Lyn Haley

Mr. Genereux turned it over to Doug Belanger. Mr. Belanger stated he would like to appoint an alternate to WRTA as Ms. Haley was qualified and her term ended June 30th. Mr. Phillips stated he would like to postpone since Ms. Haley was not there to attend so the board could ask questions to the candidate. Mr. Bujak asked if not appointing at the meeting would cause a negative effect and Ms. Belanger stated it would not.

b. Conservation Commission – Ashlyn Coyle

Mr. Genereux stated conservation did not have enough members to make quorum. Ms. Coyle stated she had previously been on conservation, and she liked learning new things about the environment. She said the existing board is very easy to work with. **Mr. Phillips made a motion to appoint. Seconded by Mr. Menard. (5-0-0) Motion passes.**

Ms. Jan Parke spoke about the vitality of the conservation committee, and she is glad Ms. Coyle is willing to step up and help.

c. Board and Committee Reappointments (see list in packet)

Mr. Genereux read the names of the reappointments. **Mr. Phillips made the motion to reappoint. Seconded by Mr. Bujak. (5-0-0) Motion passes.**

4. REPORTS

a. Town Buildings Report

Mr. Genereux stated he received three bids for the hand-rail projects and pads for handicap accessibility projects and ADA bathroom construction projects were running smoothly and appear to be on progress. He stated the fire alarm system is complete. He stated the planning board was working on some of the projects of the Colonials to be sold and overall things were progressing well. Furniture and trash were scheduled to be moved out of some of the buildings. He stated appliances have arrived for the dormitories.

Mr. Bujak inquired about the return of microwaves and the reimbursement process for capital items and suggested installing a white vinyl fence to be aesthetically pleasing on the grounds of Becker with the capital funds if there was leftover funds in the budget.

Mr. Genereux stated the items were returned and the credit was pending.

Mr. Phillips stated he agreed with Mr. Bujak on installing a better-quality fence if the budget allows.

Mr. Bujak asked if they were within the budget for the appliances.

Mr. Genereux stated there was electrical and plumbing work to be completed and they would utilize the full \$150,000 on capital.

Mr. Genereux discussed ramps, tree work removal and work that had been done over the past month. He stated the night security guard had been moved to the staff house with the dormitory housing progress. Memorial School was offered to the Housing Authority for senior housing but they opted to pass on the opportunity given the uncertainty of competitive grants for acquisition. He stated MEMA expressed interest in the property for temporary usage.

Mr. Phillips stated he would like Mr. Genereux to clarify who reached out to him from MEMA as it wasn't him.

Mr. Genereux stated he was contacted by Richard LaTour from the Civil Defense Agency and they set the appointment to look at the buildings to discuss what their proposal is. He stated Memorial School would likely be put out to RFP in mid-September. He stated state police were looking at the former idle school for a training facility and a rate would be set for the utilization of the building. Mr. Phillips explained the training process for the cadets and covered the stations of typical trainings. He stated the specs were complete for the police canopy.

Mr. Bujak inquired about the sinkhole on the turf field and said bricks were pulling away with all the rain and asked if someone could inspect the damage before football season.

Mr. Genereux stated he would work with the school department to correct the problem.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

a. ARPA Committee Update

Ms. Cheryl Cooney explained the committee has completed the scoring and 66 applications totaling \$982,000 in total had been received and they would be voting at follow-up meetings.

Mr. Phillips asked if there were duplicates in the business category.

Ms. Cooney confirmed three businesses did send duplicate applications in.

Mr. Phillips asked about the high numbers of non-profits.

Ms. Colby stated not all were actually non-profits, there was entities such a little leagues and sports organizations that applied.

Ms. Cooney stated they may need to reduce amounts if they can take less money to complete a project.

Mr. Bujak asked when the disbursement would likely take place.

Ms. Colby stated she would like to have everything to the Select Board by August for review and they would appreciate feedback from them so the group is striving for September.

Mr. Phillips thanked the committee and commended their work.

Ms. Colby thanked Mr. Antanavica for the invite to the event at the dormitories and the opportunity for those who need help those in need within the community.

4. REPORTS

b. Town Administrator's Report

Mr. Genereux stated bids were in for the Auburn St. Bridge. He covered citizen issues and measures to obtain a temporary license, conservation issues, recurring yard sale and a senior bussing issue, ARPA distribution to public safety personnel, billing issues with energy providers and the progress in Schedule Z and attempting to get all town buildings on the energy aggregate. He covered HR topics, interviews, and conversations regarding a 111F claim and campus coverage, police contract negotiations and working with the school department and DESE for children who may be entering into the school from the dormitory housing program. He stated a meeting was scheduled to set up a regional dispatch center, tree removal on private property to protect emergency responders.

Mr. Bujak spoke about a fence that was voted on the property surrounding the fire department building.

Mr. Genereux clarified money would only be appropriated at town meeting.

Mr. Bujak asked about the budget meeting the following night since he hadn't received any numbers.

Mr. Antanavica stated he would ask the finance director of the schools to get numbers to view salaries.

Mr. Bujak asked about the town budget numbers.

Mr. Genereux stated they are primarily focused on the school department given the town depleted their reserve funds and he foresees a problem in year 2 and 3 if the vocational program does not generate revenues as hoped.

Mr. Bujak stated he was familiar with the problem, and they would have to work together to be aware of the problem and they needed to examine both the town and school sides.

Mr. Genereux stated grants funded the general budget of the schools as the town couldn't keep them afloat.

Mr. Bujak stated they would have to examine school choice numbers to ensure the vocational programs were being successful and generating revenue.

Mr. Antanavica agreed and stated the joint meeting would decide the frequency of the meetings moving forward.

Mr. Bob Mercer asked about the hiring freeze that was previously discussed.

Mr. Antanavica clarified some of the positions would not be filled and some would and they would discuss it the next night at the joint budget meeting.

c. Select Board Reports

Ms. Provencher stated she attended the transitional housing meeting and senior center events.

Mr. Bujak stated the flowers were planted around the town common and thanked the Garden Club, Everlast Nursery, Leicester High School soccer team for sponsoring the flowers.

Mr. Menard stated he toured Barrett for the housing program, and he was impressed with the work and progress that had been done thus far and he believes it will be a successful program.

Mr. Antanavica stated he had a meeting with the state police, and he attended the open house at Barrett Hall, and he too was impressed with the progress.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Ms. Parke asked if she missed the bids on the bridge street and Mr. Genereux stated they were being voted on tonight.

Mr. Bill Robert stated he was on the committee that reviewed the Barrett building identifying heating and air conditioning issues and suggested a closer look be taken at the buildings. Mr. Robert asked where the town was at on road paving and Mr. Genereux replied that the pavers should continue their work in late July.

Mr. Phillips asked Mr. Genereux to provide Mr. Robert a list of roads deemed priority roads.

Mr. Bujak inquired about Chapter 90 funds and Mr. Genereux clarified the timeframe of the new allocation with pre-qualified vendors.

Mr. Bujak asked for a list of lesser priority roads and high priority roads to get a better picture of the financial picture and the priorities in town.

Mr. Monteverde expressed concern with policy implemented by the EMS director, as members have been reprimanded for showing up for critical calls and the punishment for attempting to help. He asked the board as policy makers, to become involved in the progress and talk to the EMS director about re-evaluating that policy so employees aren't disciplined for attempting to help in critical situations.

Mr. Phillips stated the fire chief should vet the policy and the board should extend policy review through the appropriate channels.

Mr. Bujak asked for clarification on the policy.

Mr. Antanavica stated they could not keep talking about the issue as it wasn't on the agenda, and they have to move it to another meeting.

6. CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS

a. Concerts on the Common

Mr. Phillips reminded the public of the concerts on the common over the summer.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

b. Donation Acceptance – Paul McNamara \$3,000 for park benches

Mr. Genereux stated the McNamara family used the courts on Towtaid for many years and the family wanted to help so they offered to donate \$3,000 to donate two benches in memory of Stella and Leftie McNamara. The benches have already been installed and parks and rec are waiting on plaques.

Mr. Phillips made a motion to accept the donation. Seconded by Ms. Provencher. (5-0-0) Motion passes.

Mr. Phillips thanked the family but stated he would like to follow process moving forward and accept donations before any work is done.

c. Auburn Street Bridge award

Mr. Genereux discussed the returned bids, pricing differences and the reference checks that were ongoing. He discussed the vetting process and stated thus far, Kenefick Corporation was found to be the lowest bidder.

Ms. Parke stated she was speaking on behalf of Common Ground Land Trust and the organization had concerns of contamination of land abutting on the bridge. She stated drainage off of Auburn Street and Route 9 was a concern and paving, sloping and the stream could then be contaminated. Mr. Genereux stated just the bridge was being repaired and street work was not part of the project. He asked Ms. Parke to come to the town administrator's office to go over the bids and documents.

Ms. Provencher made a motion to have Mr. Genereux sign contract with lowest, responsive and responsible bidder. Seconded by Mr. Menard. (5-0-0) Motion passes.

d. Borger Outside Railings bid award.

Mr. Genereux stated they received three bidders, the lowest bidder was K and G Remodeling Inc.

Mr. Phillips made a made to motion to award the contract to the lowest, responsive and responsible bidder. Seconded by Ms. Provencher. (5-0-0) Motion passes.

e. Vote to accept Deed in Lieu of Foreclosure; 39-A5 & 39-A5.2 (TM Article)

Mr. Genereux stated the properties would still have to go to town meeting but if the board choose to accept the properties they could be voted on in October.

Ms. Provencher made a motion to accept both properties. Seconded by Mr. Menard.

Mr. Bujak asked why the owner didn't just sell because it seems to be a valuable lot.

Mr. Genereux stated the land was likely not developable as most of it was land locked and the owners didn't want to go through the foreclosure process.

Mr. Phillips inquired about the value to the town.

Mr. Genereux stated they were saving money by not having to go through the foreclosure process.

Ms. Provencher made a motion to accept the parcels.

Mr. Phillips asked to check the status of the property in terms of contamination.

Ms. Provencher made a motion.

Mr. Phillips asked for the motion to be withdrawn and Ms. Provencher withdrew the motion until the contamination report came back.

f. ARPA funding for First Responders

Passed over.

g. FY 2024 Budget/Fall Town Meeting Discussion

Previously discussed during open meeting. Passed over agenda item.

h. FBAC Discussion

Mr. Antanavica stated there wasn't much being done with the committee given the progress and asked Mr. Bujak's thoughts on disbanding.

Mr. Bujak stated he wasn't in favor of disbanding the board as work needed to be done with May, Swan, Knight and Borger and several other properties and projects. He stated much work needed to be done and he didn't want to lose sight of the process and progress.

Mr. Phillips stated he thought it was time to disband the committee, as the previous work wasn't done by the committee, if anything the group slowed down the process as the bulk of the work was done by the town administrator's office, the building inspector's office and the Select Board should work on the remaining properties as they have the statutory authority.

Mr. Menard stated he had very little knowledge of the committee.

Ms. Provencher stated the committee did a great job in their work and since the work to be done is smaller, it should come back to the Select Board. She stated the goal of the committee was originally to ensure the kids returned to school.

Mr. Bujak stated FBAC is not something the Select Board should be focused on given the budgetary issues and the lack of economic development and the committee was already invested and familiar with the remaining properties and it would be a waste of time to the Select Board.

Mr. Phillips stated the board needed to be more involved in the process since they would be voting on it.

Mr. Bujak stated only one floor of one of the buildings was occupied and the work was far from complete.

Mr. Phillips stated the Select Board is no longer receiving reports and they have little knowledge of what FBAC is discussing. He said he was not belittling the work that was done in the past but stated he didn't think that moving forward the committee would be beneficial.

Mr. Phillips made a motion to disband the FBAC committee. Seconded by Ms. Provencher.

Mr. Antanavica expressed his positive experience on the committee but stated the work that needed to be done moving forward didn't require the committee's input and they could bring the committee back in the future if the needs change.

Mr. Bujak stated work was being done currently by the committee and lack of planning is what got the town in many poor situations.

Mr. Antanavica stated most of the work was being done though the town administrator's office.

Mr. Menard stated he didn't have the history of the committee but asked about the slow down of the progress and how it relates to FBAC.

Mr. Phillips clarified there was a difference of opinion on the properties. He stated the committee was doing their due diligence but ultimately it slowed the process down as the properties were sold a year after the fact.

Mr. Bujak clarified some of the FBAC prior discussions on the properties and reiterated there have been many benefits to having the committee.

**Mr. Antanavica entertained the motion on the floor to disband FBAC. (3-1-1, Mr. Bujak opposed/Mr. Menard abstain)
Motion passes.**

8. MINUTES

a. May 31, 2023

Mr. Phillips made the motion to approve. Seconded by Ms. Provencher. (5-0-0) Motion passes.

2.EXECUTIVE SESSION

- d. To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition, or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or to discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(1) – Select Board member.
- e. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(2) – Assistant Town Administrator, DIS Personnel
- f. To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(3) – Cape Cod Builders
- g. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(2) – ARPA funding for first responders – Police, Fire, EMS and other personnel.

Mr. Phillips made the motion to enter into executive session at 9:01 PM and stated they would be concluding the meeting after executive session. Seconded by Ms. Provencher.

Roll call (5-0-0) Motion passes.

ADJOURN