



**Town of West Newbury
Select Board Meeting
January 29, 2024 @ 7:00pm
381 Main Street, Town Office Building
www.wnewbury.org
Meeting Minutes**

Open Session: Chairwoman Reed opened the session at 7:00pm.

Participation at the Meeting:

- Rick Parker, Wendy Reed, Chris Wile- Select Board
- Angus Jennings- Town Manager
- Jim Blatchford- Town Clerk
- Rob Phillips- Finance Committee representative
- Doug Mead, Wendy Willis- Park and Rec Commissioners
- Elisa Grammer- Historical Commission representative
- Paul Niman- Park and Rec applicant
- Casey Fallon- Park and Rec applicant

Announcements:

- This meeting is being broadcast on local cable TV and recorded for rebroadcast on the local cable channels and on the internet. Meeting also accessible by remote participation; instructions below.
- Nomination papers available for local office- contact the Town Clerk's Office!
- Call for volunteers! FY24 positions on Boards/Commissions/Committees. See www.wnewbury.org/volunteer
- Reminder to subscribe for emailed Town agendas/news/announcements at www.wnewbury.org/subscribe

Regular Business:

- A. Public Comment. Limited to 2 minutes per resident on any topic. Please note that the Board will not discuss or take action at this meeting.
No comment was made at this time.**

B. Consent agenda - Request to approve the following:

- a. Request to Designate Kayla Provencher as Animal Control Officer**
See Exhibit Ba, p. 3-4. Wile asked if there was any information to review with regard to Provencher's performance, but Jennings explained that the approval was more of a formality as requested annually by the state. The Intermunicipal Agreement with Newburyport, and the review that would accompany it, would not be up until 2025.
- b. Request for authorization to submit Department of Fire Services FY24 Senior SAFE grant application**
See Exhibit Bb, p. 5-7. Wile wondered what the money was to be used for and who would be administering the grant. Reed asked Jennings if the Town Offices would be the administrator of the grant and affiliated paperwork, and he replied that the Finance Department would be able to capably handle the administrative work. Reed and Wile debated the merits of delaying authorization to find out more about the grant and its management. Jennings felt that the documentation submitted by Public Safety personnel was just as adequate as it had been in the past for Select Board sign off. Parker wondered if a standardized grant-approval request procedure should be implemented, though suggested it might create more bureaucracy. Jennings said that if there were any issues in a contract issued as part of a grant, the Town Manager's Office would make sure to address those before getting final sign-off.
- c. Select Board meeting minutes: January 8, 2024**
See Exhibit Bc, p. 8-10.
Reed motioned to approve all items on the Consent Agenda. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).

C. Town Manager Updates

- a. Pending submittal to MassWorks re Middle Street Bridge grant; financing update**
See Exhibit Ca, p. 11-30. Jennings said that the Town had to submit materials to the State by 1/31, which had been done. The activities in question made it possible to accept a million-dollar grant for the Bridge project awarded to West Newbury. Jennings had made a major push to crystallize a financing strategy, with overtures made to Newburyport to establish a new Intermunicipal Agreement with regard to the Bridge. Jennings also spoke on a communication received from the Commonwealth's Federal Infrastructure Office, set up to help municipalities navigate federal funding. Parker had dug into a bridge funding formula program to bring federal monies to the project.
- b. Telecom RFP; update; potential to seek funds for wiring updates/installation and replacements**
See Exhibit Cb, p. 31-36. The RFP had been issued and a site-walk conducted. Jennings provided a heads-up from Jake Soucy (IT management) recommended replacing phone and IT cables in Public Safety, Town Offices, and the GAR Library, though this expense would not be covered in what was allotted for the project. Jennings said conversations had been ongoing in the potential of bringing expert assistance to pinpoint how much cable would be needed, where it would be, etc. This information would be included in an addendum to the original RFP, with the deadline for proposals extended a month. Soucy suggested that at Town Offices all cables would be routed to the basement, with potential for cybersecurity grant money helping to defray costs.
- c. Page School Conditions Assessment, draft study**
Steady work was continuing on the Assessment.
- d. MMA Annual Conference update on information received**

Jennings said he received presentation materials from the Conference he would share with the Board.

- e. **Outgoing communication re Mullen property**
See Exhibit Ce, p. 37-38. Reed emphasized that the Town was not undertaking any active discussions or activities on the Mullen property at this time. A citizen petition had come in asking for the land to be employed for a specific purpose.
- f. **Updated Highway Union CBA executed**
Jennings wanted to make the public aware that the CBA was now in place after fall revisions and the West Newbury DPW restructuring.
- g. **Updates on other ongoing/active projects/initiatives**
See Exhibit Cg, p. 39-40. The Town received a “clean bill of health” from a workplace safety audit recently conducted.

Item F was taken out of order at this time.

D. Department Updates/Discussion

- a. **Whittier Election Results, Town Clerk**
See Exhibit Da, p. 41-42. Blatchford offered up statistics and a brief recap of the Whittier Tech election in January. He lauded the high turnout (1000+ voters versus 200-300 voters in a typical local election). Wile reminded the group of an upcoming Whittier-sponsored meeting as they plan their next steps after their failed attempt at the ballot box to get a new school building funded. Wile suggested that redoing the Regional Agreement should be a priority to allow for easier modification of it, and Reed suggested boosting enrollment should be considered too. Parker stated he would attend the meeting via Zoom, and Wile planned to attend in person.
- b. **Receipt of Citizen Petition article, Town Clerk**
See Exhibit Db, p. 43-46. Blatchford said he received a Petition regarding the Mullen property. Another petition Blatchford said, which would lower the minimum voting age at local Town Meeting/elections with state approval, was expected to come across his desk in the coming days. He said that a Citizen Petition required 10 certified voter signatures to be considered at Annual Town Meeting.
- c. **Town Planner’s Report (Not on Agenda)**
See Exhibit Dc, p. 47-48. Jennings said that maintenance issues at Drake’s landing had caused flooding and other problems, and the Planner and other Town agents had been involved in investigating the issue.

E. Board/Commission/Committee Updates/Discussion (and Select Board liaison updates):

- a. **Historical Commission presentation of completed Phase 3 Historic Property Survey**
See Exhibit Ea, p. 49-58. Elisa Grammer recapped the Survey results and subsequent report which was published in three phases over the last four years. The Survey encompasses cemeteries, homes, outbuildings, and a bridge. She relayed that as the project has gone along properties listed in the Survey have already been modified or destroyed. The Survey offers recommendation to the property owners to pursue historical designation should they so choose. The document recommends three potential (and one existing) historic districts (Manufacturer’s Row, Training Field, Maple Street, and Way to the River). Jennings asked the Commission if they had spoken with the Historic District Commission with regard to restoring the Training Field’s foliage to more manageable and “authentic” dimensions- a concern of both Commissions and the West Newbury Garden Club. Discussions had been ongoing about how best to pursue the trimming/removal of the plants (Town labor, volunteers, plans for the removed bushes, etc.)

Item Fb was taken out of order at this time.

- b. **Finalized Water Distribution System Study received January 22, 2024**
See Exhibit Eb, p. 59-115. Reed asked Jennings if the changes he wanted had been included, and it was deemed they had. The next step would be for the Board of Water Commissioners to approve it prior to public circulation. The Finance Committee and Select Board also viewed the final report. Jennings recapped some of the provisions that had been set out clearly at the start of the process, but had not been taken into account by Tata and Howard. Namely, Jennings found that the report did not include analysis of capital needs, one of the main things that the Town would like to know.
- c. **CPA funding and eligibility applications submitted to CPC as of January 26, 2024**
See Exhibit Ec, p. 116-126. Two of the applications received were sponsored by the Select Board: a feasibility study for a pickleball court, and Saw Mill Brook trail design and planning. The Historical Commission submitted another application- this one for historic cemetery cleanup. Jennings stated that with regard to the pickleball study, eventually stakeholders would need to be brought in to help determine the final location.
- d. **PSRD Regional Agreement (Not on Agenda)**
See Exhibit Ed, p. 129-131. Jennings mentioned that Wile would be attending a PRSD RA meeting, but said that he did not want to get too deep into conversation on it since it was not formally on the Agenda.

F. Action Items

- a. **Joint meeting with Parks & Recreation Commission to consider applications for appointment to fill vacant Commissioner position until the next Town election (applicants Casey Fallon and Paul Niman)**
See Exhibit Fa, p. 132-134. The Commission obtained a quorum and their meeting was declared open. The chosen applicant, explained Reed, would serve the balance of the outgoing Commissioner’s term before being eligible to run for the seat during the local election in May if they so chose. Opening the proceedings, Wendy Willis thanked Fallon for throwing his hat in the ring and asked what caused him to apply. He spoke to his interest in helping “West Newbury recreation”. Parker asked if Fallon intended to run for the open position in May, and he said he would. Then, Willis noted Niman’s advocacy for pickleball, and wondered what he could bring to the table. He spoke to his experience with youth sports

and adult activities, and his work with CoA. He also touched on his robust experience in local and state government fields, and in grant writing. Niman stated he wanted more activities to benefit a broader cross-section of people. Reed asked the Park and Recreation Commission to make the Motion on the appointment. **Mead motioned to appoint Fallon to the vacancy. Under the appointment rules, the Select Board joined with the Commission in voting as a body. The motion was properly seconded. The motion passed (4 Yes, Wile No, 0 Abstain).** After the vote, Parker spoke to Niman encouraging him to apply for other positions, and requested permission to call him to discuss this.

Item D was taken up at this time.

- b. Request for approval of proposed 2024 Summer Recreation program budget and staffing structure**
See Exhibit Fb, p. 135-138. The Board looked over the final version of the documents and asked questions. Wile queried first, clarifying the tuition for the program was \$160/wk. for 6 weeks. Jennings said that a pre-registration period for West Newbury residents only was being thought about for the future. No Assistant Director had yet to be hired, but the salary range the Board was to vote on this evening would be covered either way. **Wile motioned to approve the staffing and the budget. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**

Item Eb was taken up at this time.

- c. Request for authorization to submit Ash Street Road Management Plan to NHESP**
See Exhibit Fc, p. 139-145. Jennings brought up the map of byway in question including markups of signage and the Board looked it over. Reed stated that Conservation Agent Greene wanted generic warnings of animal crossings to be put in place to caution motorists. **Reed motioned to authorize submittal of the Plan with amendments by Greene. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**
- d. Request to withdraw Notice of intent re Whetstone Trail**
See Exhibit Fd, p. 146. **Wile motioned to withdraw the Notice of Intent without prejudice. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**
- e. Request to consider forming an Advisory Council re Right to Farm Bylaw**
See Exhibit Fe, p. 147-152. The Select Board received a draft charter, and Reed suggested that the Board vote to appoint the residents who created the charter to be a steering committee (which would then work to get the Bylaw before Town Meeting voters). Reed said that an Agriculture Committee would build community between residents and agriculturalists, which lead to discussion on the value of forming an informal committee to promote pro-agriculture activities (i.e. supporting relevant legislation, establishing a farmer's market, etc.) An informal Committee would avoid some of the bureaucratic requirements of a formal one. Jennings suggested that any persons on the Committee should be made aware of resources and present legislation/regulations/ongoing initiatives in West Newbury.
- f. Request for endorsement of the (Small Town Administrators of MA) STAM legislative priorities**
See Exhibit Ff, p. 153. Jennings provided background on STAM and a document containing legislative priorities from the caucus which Jennings could support with the Select Board's approval. Jennings touched on each of the bullet points and provided background as he was able, explaining their direct relevance to West Newbury if there was (such as advocating for changing the Commonwealth's school funding formulas). The Board and Manager also looked into the Office of Rural Affairs recently created by the Governor since support for this Office was included among the priorities. **Wile motioned to authorize Jennings to sign the legislative priorities letter. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain).**
- g. Authorization to sign ECCF letter of support re NOAA grant**
See Exhibit Fg, p. 154-157. The Essex County Community Foundation requested support in receiving an NOAA grant which would focus on climate change resiliency planning, but the Board felt they were not prepared enough to make a formal sign-off, but did fully support the mission of the grant.

G. General Discussion Items

- a. Potential participation in Commercial Building Pilot program**
See Exhibit Ga, p. 158-168. Parker explained that the program would develop a set of standardized methodologies in bringing buildings to carbon-neutral status through selection of 15 buildings across Massachusetts. Parker felt West Newbury would be a good candidate in his mind for this pilot program as the community attempts to go carbon free, with the community selecting municipally-owned structures to transition to carbon neutrality over a certain timeframe with assistance from an appropriate contractor or entity. Reed wondered if any applicants had been accepted yet, but Parker said he was not sure. Reed wanted to determine if it was worth the amount of work involved given the small number of Towns and Cities to be accepted to the pilot program. Parker responded by saying that the Energy and Sustainability Committee would be able to get most of the work done without Town administrative help. Reed asked if the Town was selected, who would develop a carbon neutrality plan and carry out the transition during Phase 2 of the program. Parker said a chosen contractor by the Energy and Sustainability Committee would do that work. The Board discussed the idea at length. Jennings felt that the buildings being targeted by program were not around in West Newbury (strip malls, multifamily buildings, etc.) Parker opted to return to the matter on February 6th's Board meeting after seeing how many communities had been selected to date.
- b. Designate representative and schedule Town Manager and Town Accountant personnel evaluations**
See Exhibit Gb, p. 169-176. Jennings expressed his preference for the pre-existing evaluation forms. and suggested a pre-Town Meeting evaluation date for himself and Jenny Walsh, the Accountant. March was determined to be a good option.

H. Correspondence, including:

- a. Deed acceptance for Sawmill Brook property**

See Exhibit Ha, p. 177-181.

b. Attorney General approval received for zoning bylaw amendments

See Exhibit Hb, p. 182-186. Blatchford alerted the Board that the State had approved two amendments adopted by Special Town Meeting in Fall '23, and that he had provided updates to impacted Town departments.

c. MIIA 0% rate change (property/casualty/workers comp insurance) FY25

See Exhibit Hc, p. 187. The Town was rewarded for low usage of property/casualty/worker's comp. payouts by seeing no rate change for Fiscal Year 2025.

I. Future Agenda Items / Meeting follow-up assignments

There were no future Items. The group confirmed the upcoming Board (and Finance Committee) meeting dates. These are Feb 15th, Feb 20th, Feb. 26th, March 13th, March 20th, and March 27th.

Reed motioned to adjourn the Session. The motion was properly seconded. The motion unanimously passed. (3 Yes, 0 No, 0 Abstain). The Session adjourned at 9:34pm.

To access a video recording of the meeting, use the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfnbM-pfwlg>

