



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 24, 2022, 10:00 a.m.

Belmont Mill, Tioga Meeting Room

Chairman Ruth Mooney called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Also present were Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude Patten, Jr., TA Jeanne Beaudin, Assistant TA Alicia Jipson, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Kevin Sturgeon, Sharon Ciampi, Ron Mitchell, TC/TC Cynthia Deroy, Al Nix. Present via Zoom was Irma Robinson, Finance Director Katherine Davis and General Assistance Director Donna Cilley.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Minutes

Selectman Claude Patten, Jr., moved the minutes of the meeting held on January 10, 2022 as written; seconded by Selectman Jon Pike. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Hearing

Chairman Ruth Mooney opened the Public Hearing in accordance with RSA 41:8-c at 10:00 am to take public comment on a petition to change the size of the Board of Selectmen from three to five. Sharon Ciampi the petitioner spoke first at the podium. Mrs. Ciampi indicated that over the last 2 years she has had people make comments and suggestions of increasing the BOS from 3 to 5 members. She sees how hard the BOS works and the increase would help lighten the load, bring new ideas and new perspectives. With town growth, and the demographics changing that there should be more board members across the board to assist. Selectman Mooney commented that they both serve on the Budget Committee, and we even had to cancel a meeting due to lack of a quorum. Northfield, she believes just filled their 3rd position and have a hard time keeping their positions filled. Mrs. Ciampi added that she feels that a lot of people would say why would people sign up and run against someone who is doing a good job. So maybe if there was 5 there might be more people interested. It is hard to get people involved. Selectman Mooney added that this weekend Sharon posted on social media about this meeting and only 2 people showed up and that attendance is regardless if it is night or day meeting. Selectman Mooney added that due to the post she spent all weekend answering questions. Mrs. Ciampi responded that she brought this to the Board's attention because she has been asked to bring it forward. Adding that the dialogue is there it gives us the ability to say we need help here and there and will bring us together. I think it should be on the ballot and allow those to decide. Selectman Mooney added that having 5 is an added expense to the budget as well. David Libby of 25 Lamprey Road spoke asking the Board when will this be decided on. TA Beaudin indicated that it will be going on the ballot in March 2022 and then if approved the candidates would run in 2023 in which you will be voting to elect 2 members. 1 for 3 years and 1 member for 1 year. Libby indicated at that time if someone were to petition against it then it could get reversed. TA Beaudin responded, yes it could be. Mr. Libby indicated that he was for this petition only because I think it would bring more

diversity. We seem to have more people moving into the area and it seems that having more board members is a good idea. I think more transparency is the best policy. I think more people's perspectives is good. Kevin Sturgeon 110 Depot Street asked why wouldn't you welcome more help if we voted for 5 members? Mr. Sturgeon indicated he had done the research years ago on this topic and believes it is a good option. When he did his research in other towns, one town said they moved to 5 because they were not getting enough work done. In Belmont there is a lot of volunteerism and people would be willing to participate. Town Moderator Al Nix commented that years ago we had the Government Study Committee recommend 5 vs 3 but it was voted down. We walked this path already, but maybe things have changed. Irma Robinson asked how much would it cost us to have 2 more people. TA Beaudin commented that the budget is currently at \$16,000 then add \$11,000 for a total in \$28,000 for stipends. Then if the meetings were at night we would have to factor in overtime pay for employees who have to attend night meetings 2x a month sometimes more, and it would be an increase on demand on the town employees. Mrs. Robinson asked if anyone has spoken to a town that has transitioned from 3 to 5 BOS members. TA Beaudin responded that we have polled the number of communities who have 5 Selectmen but did not reach out individually to get their perspectives. Mrs. Robinson responded that she assumes it will be hard in the beginning. TA Beaudin responded that she expects it would be very similar to onboarding to a new Selectmen. It is a learning experience for them and to teach and train them. It's a learning curve for staff to get to know them all. Selectman Mooney commented that the other thing that we need to take into consideration is we have staff retirement and new employees who are still learning, that could add a little bit of hardship to the new employees due to retirements. I do not know if we will have to add another person in that office to accommodate the needs of the Selectmen. Donna Cilley commented that her major concern for this is the timing of all of this with Jeanne's historical knowledge leaving, having a new Finance Director, and a new Town Planner, this is a lot to put on staff. Things have changed, laws are different, structure is different than those positions may afford them that they may already have. Again, if it is not broken don't fix it, the timing is off on this. Kevin spoke of volunteerism and that is great, but if you look at the other committees we are typically scraping to fill vacancies, we do not have applicants knocking down the doors to apply. If someone wants to run then you need to put your name out there and do the democratic process and get your name out there, and get the support of the people Donna Cilley also wanted noted in the record that she is appearing on personal time and not speaking during work hours as people seem to want to capitalize on misrepresenting the facts. TA Beaudin clarified in regards to Mr. Libby's question when he spoke to what would happen if the following year if a petition would come forward to bring it back to a 3-member board, what would basically happen is if that were approved you would then the following year all the currently serving BOS would be done and you would be electing 1 for 1 year, 1 for 2 years and 1 for 3 years. Mrs. Ciampi responded that what Donna said seems to prove the point. The BOS and Jeanne have the knowledge and experience and the town for the most part runs pretty smoothly. We all get to the age of retirement. New people have to come in at some point, because it can't stay the same forever. Selectman Mooney made the comment that her first 3 years were learning years under a great support system, adding that if this gets reversed we could be in a bad spot with 3 totally new BOS Members with no experience. Selectman Mooney commented look at Northfield they have been down to 1 member for a long time and just filled the position. Selectman Pike commented there is a myth about this job, you're in charge of absolutely nothing that people seem to think, but overall, we have a good Board that has worked well for a long time. Mr. Sturgeon asked the Board why they like being a selectman. Selectman Pike responded that he puts in 12 to 15 hours a week on average throughout the whole year. The public can come to us with ideas. We never turn anyone away. People can come to meetings at any time. Selectman Mooney added that we used to have night time meetings but no one would show and we would spend a lot of money paying employees to attend these meeting. We had someone request a later meeting and we had it later and that person never showed. We moved it to the day because it accommodated our schedules and was a cost savings to the town. If

someone wanted to participate in a meeting we would be more than willing to accommodate them. If someone wants to be a Selectman there is a lot involved and they really need to be present and involved. Selectman Pike added that he had 16 years on the Planning Board before he became a Selectman. Sonny will have almost 30 years serving, we have spent years knowing the Town and the residents before serving as Selectmen.

Cynthia Deroy TC/TC indicated that last year the Library decided they wanted 5 trustees. This year we have 3 positions, and we have only 1 person who signed up. It's all fine and dandy to say you want 5, but you have to start on a committee, you have to be knowledgeable, you have to have experience. You are asking for a top seat in the town, but you need to have some experience and have had some time on the boards. I do not see the people signing up. We are always scrambling to fill seats and get people to sign up. Yes, we do have a lot of new residents, but a lot of them have family's and do not have the time and do not know Belmont enough to fill a seat.

Selectman Mooney closed the Public Hearing at 10:38 am. This will be continued to be discussed at the Deliberative session on Saturday, February 5th at 10:00 am in the High School Cafeteria.

Discussion relative to Petition Articles- TA Beaudin noted that Moderator Al Nix was present to discuss the petition articles and the deliberative session. Al Nix Town Moderator noted he will conduct the meeting as we have in the past. The only thing is where we position the petitions in the discussions. He suggested that we put the petitions up front as you may have a lot people who want to address those particular articles, that way we can get all that work done first then move along on the standard stuff. TA Beaudin asked if Roberts Rules would allow the moderator to suggest to those present to move those articles forward for discussion purposes only. Mr. Nix responded sure we could move them forward for discussion first with a motion.

Ta Beaudin read off the petition warrant articles that will be on the warrant.

Selectman Mooney asked TC/TC Deroy if she had any idea on what the cost may be to go from electronic to hand counting. TC/TC Deroy responded that TA Beaudin has asked her to do a study on it. Everyone coming in is at overtime. Counting in the hand writes usually takes us till 9:00 pm just to count and add to the machine. The cost would be astronomical and you would not have your results in the same day. I think just for 3 hours it would cost \$2,500. The error with the machine last year was due to the absentee ballots being folded the wrong way. The machine is maintained each year. We test the machine, we mark the ballots, we test ballots and we are always correct, and it kicks back the bad ballots. The machine is sealed before each election. The state is looking at newer updated machines, I cannot even image the cost to do this, and the accuracy I feel will be very wrong. TA Beaudin reached out to the Supervisors of the Checklist and she voiced that same sentiment. It is a painful process, and we had to get lots of volunteers. Selectman Mooney added that she feels like a lot of these petitions are setting us back in time. Al Nix commented that we should be going forward with technology not back. We are 100% accurate in counting our votes in this town and have always been. When we have errors, we reach out to the company and they come and fix. One of the things the machine will do when ballots are jammed it will say ballot jammed ballot not counted or ballot jam and counted. The political environment there is a lot of individuals who want to pick, and they want to see each ballot go in and make sure they all go in. We have covid again and we had a hard time manning the tables as it is. TC/TC Deroy commented that she did check with LHS who services our machines. They gave the first machines in 1996 than in 2005 we changed to the new machines, and we are unclear if the state payed for it, but next time around we will be responsible for paying for it that's why we have been setting aside money.

Selectman Mooney indicated that this petition does not seem to include the school so they will have to have a separate date and we are still responsible for counting their ballots. It will take days to hand count all of these.

Sharon Ciampi asked if AI would be willing to write the explanation of how the machine works. Al Nix responded that in the past he got a similar question and they talked about the integrity of voting. And I got inundated with hate mail, on what was a private conversation. I am willing to explain if someone asks the question at the deliberative session. Selectman Mooney pointed out that the petition to eliminate the Facility Use Capital Reserve account would set us back. TA Beaudin responded that unfortunately the process of getting rid of that will remove those funds already set aside for that use was already voted on and intended for and revert back to the general fund. Selectman Pike commented that we have seen the issue at Town Hall with covid and not having the room, these petitions are not well thought out. These will cost more and more money not save the town money. Ron Mitchell added that it is our responsibility to enlighten the voters on the 5th the reason why these are not good petitions.

Sharon Ciampi commented that most of the petitions that you are talking about have her signature, stating that it was a 15-minute conversation with 1 gentleman who had 5 pieces of paper shoved in our face. It was like having a used car salesman in your face. He was unclear and fast talking and piling one piece of paper onto one another I feel horrible because I signed something that I was not fully informed of, and I wish I could take back my signatures.

TA Beaudin commented that Budget Committee Chairman Ron Mitchell had indicated that he wanted the department heads at the deliberative session. Typically, we do not have department heads at the deliberative session speak up on their individual budgets. Ron Mitchell replied that when we held Budget Meetings one dept head did not know info that I had thought he should have known. We hire the dept heads to run the departments. We are asking these people to risk their lives to keep the people safe. We have departments working on holidays and they are constantly disrespected. There is a lot of strain on the departments and if there is someone there to grip I want a dept head to explain. Selectman Mooney responded that the deliberative session is not the time to voice gripes it is to get through the budget. Ron Mitchell commented that he thinks this is a place where we can enlighten the people so that these petition articles don't come around again. Selectman Pike added that we can have the dept heads there to answer those questions. TA Beaudin responded that those are bond articles and really the BOS and her office to deal with. Craig can speak to the technical side of it, clarifying that they can be there to answer questions if they are asked but will not be going through their budgets or speaking to their budgets.

Warrant Signatures- TA Beaudin commented that the warrants are available for signature and will be posted on Friday and we will post it through all necessary means. Cynthia's office will be open till 5:00 pm on Friday for signing up for offices.

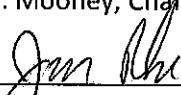
Other New Business

Street Lights- TA Beaudin commented that Craig had inquired about LED street lighting with Eversource, TA Beaudin had followed up and received the current proposal from Affinity. Currently the incentive programs are not available due to legislature eliminating them. They gave us 2 proposals to switching over to all LED and supplied us with the cost savings. DPW Craig Clairmont commented that this all came about due to the accident that happened on Main Street. The new lights increase the

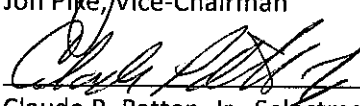
number of lumens which light up the crosswalk more, and it saves us on electricity costs. TA Beaudin will inquire about he 2 proposals and report back at the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 11:28 a.m.

Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman



Jon Pike, Vice-Chairman



Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman