

Selectboard and Finance Committee Joint Meeting and Selectboard Regular Meeting  
Monday, September 19, 2022

1. CALL TO ORDER SELECTBOARD AND FINANCE COMMITTEE JOINT MEETING

Chairman Bannon opened the meeting via Zoom at 5:30pm.

Selectboard roll call: Ed Abrahams, “aye,” Steve Bannon, “aye,” Leigh Davis, “aye,” Eric Gabriel, “aye,” Garfield Reed, “aye.”

Finance Committee roll call - Milena Cerna, “aye,” Richard Geiler, “aye,” Anne O’Dwyer, “aye,” Philip Orenstein, “aye.”

Additional attendees: Town Manager Mark Pruhenski

- a. FY 2024 Budget Policy – P. Orenstein presented proposed changes to the Budget and Finance Policy noting it is the result of multiple Finance Committee meetings, discussions and revisions/drafts. He stated the goal is to have sufficient information/data up front for the budget process and budget binder to support decision-making - and he noted that updates to the policy reflect recent trends in Town revenue/expenses.
  - i. S. Bannon asked for Selectboard general comments – E. Abrahams stated in the current process the budget is reviewed with Town staff input/decisions and the Selectboard reviews it to confirm it makes sense. He expressed hesitation to add new, unnecessary restrictions and specifics – but for required change in dates every year. L. Davis stated the current budget process works well with M. Pruhenski working closely with the Finance Department. S. Bannon stated the suggested materials to be added to the budget book can be reviewed by the Finance Committee separately before the budget is formally reviewed – he expressed concerns about including extensive detail that likely would not be used and may slow down the review process.
  - ii. Free cash – P. Orenstein referred to the state prepared financial manual from 2020 that provides free cash/reserve percentages and suggested these are useful benchmarks for the decision-making process. He noted the Town is doing well on this and the percentages are objectives. A. O’Dwyer added free cash was discussed at the end of the last budget process - it was deemed an important topic and should be highlighted in the policy. E. Gabriel stated the Community Impact fee should be a separate line item from free cash – P. Orenstein added free cash should be discussed earlier in the budget process to inform decisions about funds used for reserves, reducing taxes or other expenses. L. Davis stated it is an important discussion, but specific percentages are too restrictive as each budget/year is unique. S. Bannon stated concerns about having this discussion without finance input/staffing. He also stated while the free cash discussion came up at the end of budget review, it is built into the budget and the funds are used wisely. He also stated for the Community Impact fee, whether it is part of free cash or separate depends on which authority is listened to. He suggested removing the free cash percentages and making it more general. P. Orenstein agreed, though stated the percentages can be a useful guide.
  - iii. Community Preservation Act funds – It was clarified it is made explicit that Community Preservation is not part of the Town budget nor does the vote on it at Town Meeting impact the Town budget. P. Orenstein stated it is a tax surcharge so is useful to include in budget discussion and calculating tax bills. S. Bannon stated Town CPA participation is a much larger issue than just one budget. A. O’Dwyer asked if CPC funding was included in the annual tax rate calculation – M. Pruhenski stated he would check. E. Gabriel stated residents consider CPA part of their tax bill and it should be discussed in the future. S. Bannon suggested coming back to this when there is more information.
  - iv. Next steps – It was discussed whether to have the current general policy or a new, more

detailed policy in place for the new Town Accountant/Financial Services Coordinator. It was stated that before making policy changes, open questions requiring additional information and finance expertise/input - and Town staff time/effort required for reports should be addressed. It was also raised that the suggested revised policy provides the new Finance Coordinator something to work with. P. Orenstein asked to move forward – making free cash bullets more general, removing the CPA reference and including the reports pending discussion with the new Finance Coordinator. He stated this is a roadmap for the budget process and binder contents – and can be revised. S. Bannon noted a policy will likely be followed and that considering it to be flexible can create uncertainties. M. Cerna stated timing for hiring is a consideration and a policy should be finalized prior to budget process. It was clarified that the Finance Coordinator's role is to assist with/develop the budget and the interview process for the position is just starting.

L. Davis made a motion to continue with the current policy as it stands and discuss the work of the Finance Committee when the Finance Coordinator is hired/settled in; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked if any discussion – A. O'Dwyer asked about making minor/typo/reference changes - S. Bannon replied those could be made without a vote. It was discussed that the free cash/reserves revision is acceptable, but must be rewritten, so cannot be voted on now – but it was clarified that the motion is to postpone discussion/revision decisions until the Finance Coordinator is hired. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, "aye," S. Bannon, "aye," L. Davis, "aye," E. Gabriel, "no," G. Reed, "no." Motion passed: 3-2.

v. S. Bannon noted the Finance Committee can accept this motion, do nothing or make a new motion.

P. Orenstein made a motion to revise the policy portion to include Selectboard changes – making the free cash reserves portion more general and deleting references/changes to CPA – but retaining changes to the budget preparation process/binder table of contents; A. O'Dwyer seconded. P. Orenstein asked if any discussion – A. O'Dwyer stated the Finance Committee should provide a revised version that adds affordable housing, changes dates and includes the free cash revisions as agreed upon. P. Orenstein agreed with this approach.

P. Orenstein withdrew his motion and A. O'Dwyer withdrew her second.

A. O'Dwyer made a motion to continue the discussion at an upcoming Finance Committee meeting and come back to the Selectboard at a later date; M. Cerna seconded. P. Orenstein asked if any discussion – P. Orenstein stated he/the Finance Committee is not comfortable approving the current version of the policy. Roll call vote: M. Cerna, "aye," R. Geiler, "aye," A. O'Dwyer, "aye," P. Orenstein, "aye." All in favor: 4-0.

2. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME – there was none

S. Bannon stated there are 10 panelists and 22 attendees at the meeting.

3. ADJOURNMENT – A. O'Dwyer made a motion for the Finance Committee to adjourn; P. Orenstein seconded. M. Cerna, "aye," R. Geiler, "aye," A. O'Dwyer, "aye," P. Orenstein, "aye."

## 2. SELECTBOARD'S ANNOUNCEMENTS/STATEMENTS

- a. E. Abrahams asked to start discussions as a board about housing - as it is one of the Selectboard's priorities. He noted he has made suggestions as has the Planning Board and both Bill Cooke and James Garzon have submitted ideas. He suggested adding it to an agenda soon and when staff is available to do research. S. Bannon stated it is important to understand what each board is doing on this topic and agreed it should be discussed.
- b. L. Davis stated the Housing Subcommittee is developing a housing action plan with input from residents, Town staff and other partners – and the intention is to bring it to the appropriate boards. She added there is a Subcommittee meeting on Tuesday at 1:00pm

## 3. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

- a. Housatonic Water Works – M. Pruhenski stated he is working with Town Counsel on a public statement regarding HWW which will be shared shortly and he continues to explore temporary relief measures and associated funding.
- b. M. Pruhenski added a request for the Selectboard to move to a hybrid meeting format for the next meeting, noting it has worked well for the Parks Commission. S. Bannon asked those on the Selectboard who are comfortable to join him at Town Hall for the October meeting.

## 4. LICENSES AND PERMITS – There were none

## 5. PUBLIC HEARINGS

- a. (Continued from July 11) Special permit application from the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, c/o Betsy Andrus, Executive Director, for new construction in the Village Center Overlay District; work includes replacing the existing visitor booth at approximately 362 Main Street, Great Barrington, with a new larger building in the same location, and a parking waiver. Application is filed in accordance with Sections 9.2, 6.9, and 10.4 of the Zoning Bylaw.
    - i. S. Bannon stated there is a request from the applicant to continue the public hearing.
- L. Davis made a motion to approve a continuance of the public hearing as requested to November 21, 2022 at 6:00pm; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

## 6. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Renewal of the Town's Electrical Aggregation Program – Mark Cappadona and Denise Allard, Colonial Power Group attended – M. Cappadona presented stating Great Barrington is in a three-year program with NextEra Energy Services that ends November 2022. He stated energy costs have increased significantly and likely will continue to rise. the Town has signed a contract with a new supplier providing a rate of .22203 – and National Grid rates are expected to be higher.
  - i. S. Bannon clarified these rates are being set because they are expected to be lower than National Grid's – but residents can opt out of these rates at any time. M. Cappadona confirmed and added we are providing a choice – residents can opt in or opt out with no penalties.
  - ii. E. Abrahams clarified the expectation is this is the least expensive green energy with rates lower than National Grid's. M. Cappadona agreed and stated we are awaiting National Grid's new rates and it will be sent to M. Pruhenski. E. Abrahams noted there is an option for one or two years – M. Cappadona replied suggesting one year in case prices decrease.

- iii. L. Davis asked about the impact on citizens – new vs old rate. M. Cappadona replied the

supply portion of electric bills will double and will hit the December bill. S. Bannon added this will happen whether electing to aggregate or not – and adding we are keeping rates as low as we can.

- iv. D. Allard stated a postcard will be sent in mid-October to participating customers to let them know the new rate, to opt out and contact information for questions. Anyone else can opt in once National Grid's rates are confirmed.

- b. Request from Bernice Washington et al., c/o Courtney Lane, to waive remaining obligations and to release the lien from a 1988 Housing Rehabilitation Program lien on 28 Rosseter Street.

- i. The Selectboard discussed this is straightforward - and liens have been released in the past.

L. Davis made a motion that the Selectboard vote to release the \$13,250 lien on 28 Rosseter Street since the goal of the original grant was met; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

- c. Review and comment to the Building Inspector, per Sec. 9.3.11 of the Zoning Bylaw, regarding notification from SBA Communications to make upgrades to the existing wireless telecommunications facility at 425 Stockbridge Road.

- i. Elizabeth Jamieson, SBA Communications, stated this is for a T-Mobile antenna upgrade – six antennas will be swapped out and three new ones added with new mounts added to the existing platform and tower. She noted there will not be any extension of the tower or the antennas nor any exterior changes.

- ii. E. Abrahams clarified they are required to ask the Selectboard which can approve or do nothing since none of the six criteria have been violated.

L. Davis made a motion to provide no recommendation to the Building Inspector; E. Abrahams seconded. S. Bannon asked if any discussion – there was none. Roll call vote: E. Abrahams, “aye,” S. Bannon, “aye,” L. Davis, “aye,” E. Gabriel, “aye,” G. Reed, “aye.” All in favor: 5-0.

7. CITIZEN SPEAK TIME – there was none

8. SELECTBOARD'S TIME

- a. E. Gabriel announced the Housatonic Improvement Committee meeting Wednesday night at 6:30pm and encouraged attendance at the October 1 Housatonic Party in the Park.

9. MEDIA TIME – there was none

10. ADJOURNMENT - Chairman Bannon adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 7:19pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacy Ostrow, Recording Clerk