

**Minutes of the
BOXFORD SELECT BOARD
HYBRID VIA ZOOM
Monday, January 22, 2024
Draft**

Present: Chuck Costello, Peter Perkins, Margaret Chow-Menzer, Judi Stickney

Absent: Barbara Jessel

Others Present: Town Administrator Matthew Coogan, Police Chief Riter, Teegan Dolan, Meagan Sousa, Vazz Eng, Chris Olbrot, Jessica Grigg, Brian Middleton-Cox, Sue Shillue and Minutes Recorder Donna Grieco.

6:30 PM Call to Order

Select Board Clerk Chow-Menzer called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

6:35 PM Announcements

Real Estate Tax Exemption – Select Board member Perkins announced that the period for filing Real Estate Tax Exemptions for residents who are eligible for property tax relief is currently ongoing.

Some of the programs available include:

- Legally Blind
- Disabled Veterans
- Seniors 65+ years with low to moderate income
- CPA Surcharge Exemption

Anyone interested in applying for an exemption should contact the Assessor's Office 978-887-6692. Monday – Thursday, 8:00am - 4:30pm.

Applications will be accepted until April 1, 2024, for the current tax year.

Town of Boxford is Hiring – Select Board member Stickney announced that the Town of Boxford is hiring for the following positions:

- Administrative Assistant - Inspectional Services and Zoning Board of Appeals
- Full Time Dispatcher – Communications
- Program, Outreach, and Activities Assistant - Council on Aging

For more detailed information about these positions, please visit:

www.boxfordma.gov/employmentopportunities. Please send your cover letter, resume and completed Application for Employment to Leanne Mihalchik (lmihalchik@boxfordma.gov).

Real Estate Taxes Due 2/1- Select Board member Costello announced that real estate tax bills for the 3rd quarter of FY 2024 are due on Thursday, February 1st. Payments to "Town of Boxford" may be made in a timely manner by several convenient methods:

- Mail to P.O. Box 601, Medford, MA 02155 (must include bill payment coupon) in envelope provided with bill.

- Mail to Town Hall at 7A Spofford Rd., Boxford, MA 01921
- Pay online at www.town.boxford.ma.us. (Select "\$ Online Payments")
- Pay in person at Town Hall 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM, Monday – Thursday.
- Deposit in secure Tax Payment Dropbox located to right of front door entrance to Town Hall—available 24 hours.

Questions should be directed to 978-887-3674 or treasurerandtaxcollector@town.boxford.ma.us.

6:40 PM National Grid Pole Petition Public Hearing

Upon a motion by Select Board member Costello, Select Board Clerk Chow-Menzer opened the public hearing on a petition by National Grid Company (North Andover), Petition Plan No. 30867067, dated October 10, 2023, seeking permission to replace pole #2339 on Hillside Road with two new poles, 2339 and 2339-50. National Grid will install 2 JO poles and remove 1 JO pole on Hillside Road beginning at a point approximately 410 feet West-Northwest of the centerline of the intersection of Stagecoach Road and continuing approximately 20 feet in a South- Southwest direction. Telco will remove existing pole 2339. National Grid is also seeking permission to lay and maintain underground laterals, cables, and wires in the above or intersecting public ways to make connections with such poles and buildings as each of said petitioners may desire for distributing purposes. This petition is requested because utility lines have accumulated on poles that are far apart, causing the lines to hang too low. With this plan, the utility lines will be raised to an appropriate above ground height. The Board of Health approved this plan at their meeting of 12/13/24 since there were no concerns of being within 100 ft. of a nearby well.

On a **MOTION** made by **Costello**, second by **Perkins**, the Select Board **VOTED** unanimously to approve National Grid Petition# 30867067 to replace pole#2339 with two new poles, 2339 and 2339-50 and to conduct associated work.

Select Board member Costello moved to close the public hearing.

6:50 PM Appointments

The following were before the Select Board seeking reappointment or appointment:

Regional ACO/ Animal Inspector, Meagan Sousa (reappointment)

Regional Assistant ACO/ Animal Inspector, Teagan Dolan

Regional Backup ACO/ Animal Inspector, Brad Dicenzo.

Chief Riter appeared and gave an overview of how Boxford's Animal Control program operates: Meagan Sousa is an Animal Control Officer and an Animal Inspector. Teagan Dolan is an Asst. ACO and an AI. Brad Dicenzo is an Animal Inspector only, but also serves as a backup ACO. Chief Riter was asked about department policy concerning deer which may be critically injured due to a car accident, more specifically if they are euthanized. The answer was that for a critical injury such as in that case, yes. The department does not however, regularly put down animals. There has been no change to department policy in that regard.

Recently, there was a sick deer with an injured leg and Chief Riter explained that this type of situation would require a call to the Environmental Police.

On a **MOTION** made by **Perkins**, second by **Stickney**, the Select Board VOTED unanimously by roll call vote to appoint Teagan Dolan as Assistant Animal Control Officer with term ending 6/30/25.

On a **MOTION** made by **Stickney**, second by **Costello**, the Select Board VOTED unanimously by roll call vote to appoint Meagan Sousa, Teagan Dolan and Brad Diconzo to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Division of Animal Health, as Boxford's Animal Inspectors, in accordance with the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter xx, §15 and 16 with terms ending April 30, 2025.

7:00 PM One-Day Liquor License Application

Jessica Grigg of BTA/ BOLT appeared to request a one-day (1/25/24) liquor license on municipal property located at 10 Elm Street for the *Winter Speaker Series*. The completed application and fees were submitted along with all supporting documentation and have been approved by Police Chief Riter.

On a **MOTION** made by **Stickney**, second by **Perkins**, the Select Board **VOTED** unanimously to approve BTA/BOLT's one-day liquor license application for 1/25/24 at 10 Elm Street.

7:10 PM Meeting with Boxford Athletic Association and Boxford Little League

A discussion on a partnership between DPW and Little League regarding shared field maintenance was held. Tom Stevens, a member of the Recreation Committee and Mike McKenzie, President of Boxford Little League appeared to discuss what they have planned in terms of coordinating with the DPW to get Koster Field ready for the Little League season, its upkeep, and installation of potential new features. They are seeking the Board's "permission to aid" the DPW with field maintenance, With this approval, volunteers will assist in mowing the grass when necessary and plan on adding amenities such as batting cages, dugouts, and a score board. Safety enhancements will also be added. These additions will bring the field up to Little League Standards. Chris Olbrot said the department is fine with this collaboration and said that there is even a mower that they can use. The Town Administrator suggested that they put the agreement in writing so that everyone is aware of what the expectations are, as well as the fact that there will be no budget impact. All Select Board members were in favor of such an arrangement and Select Board member Costello stated that as long as the DPW Superintendent/Town Engineer is in favor, it's fine with him. It was also noted that the Little League raised \$16K last year. This year they are currently at \$17K out of their goal of \$25K, which is deemed necessary to complete the above-mentioned enhancements. When completed, the field will be a Williamsport Official Ball Field suitable for hosting tournament games. Morse Field was also discussed in terms of being utilized currently only for Girls Softball. In order to truly bring Morse Field up to Little League standards, an investment of more than \$650K would be necessary

because it's a blank canvas at this point. The funding required for that field is going to be much more substantial. They will apply for Community Preservation Funds in November since they should know the definitive costs by summer. This would require a warrant at Town Meeting the following May. Construction on Morse Field should be completed by Spring of 2026. Finally, it was noted that whatever tenant rents/leases 188 Washington Street, they will be told that the Little League will have access to that parking lot during games and practices.

7:40 PM Report of the Town Administrator

Common Victualler License, Boxford House of Pizza, 256 Georgetown Road.

On a **MOTION** made by **Costello**, second by **Perkins**, the Select Board VOTED unanimously to grant Victualler License 24-10 to Boxford House of Pizza, 256 Georgetown Road.

Common Victualler License, Far Corner Golf Course, Inc., 5 Barker Road.

On a **MOTION** made by **Costello**, second by **Stickney**, the Select Board VOTED unanimously to grant Victualler License 24-01 to Far Corner Golf Course, Inc., 5 Barker Road.

Capital Improvement Program FY25 – FY29 Update

Operating Budget FY25 Update

The Town Administrator reported that he is scheduled to present Boxford's FY'25 Operating Budget as well as the Capital Improvement Program for the five-year period FY'25- FY'29 at the next select board meeting on February 12th. He will also present a list of items for appropriation at Town Meeting including between \$1 and \$1.4 million worth of free cash projects. He reported that the budget is in good shape and that the Town would definitely be within the 2 ½ % increase guidelines. All departments have their figures in except the School Department. Regarding MASCO, they are at a 4.6% increase as a starting point.

Waste Stream Task Force Update

They will meet next week and are looking to negotiate directly with a new contractor, new to us, but not new to the area. The Town will be taking full advantage of the exemption from requiring this to go out to bid and will secure the best pricing possible.

ARBA Committee Update

The next meeting of the ARBA Committee will be on February 13th. Attending will be a local commercial real estate agent that is volunteering his/her time to do an appraisal of both buildings 188 Washington and 4 Middleton Road. It appears that although residents really like the idea of a restaurant or some sort of food establishment going into 188 Washington, it's going to be a real challenge since Topsfield has been working on something similar for the last few years and has yet to receive a bid on their property.

The ARBA Committee is still working through this since it is what the Town wants, and doing their due diligence to figure out what it would take to make this happen and finding an entity willing to make that investment and what exactly that investment will be.

MA Municipal Association Conference

The Town Administrator, Select Board Clerk Chow-Menzer, Select Board member Stickney, Asst. Town Administrator Sweeney, and Leanne Mihalchik attended the Mass Municipal Association Conference last Friday and sat in on sessions on Cybersecurity, Grievances, Economic Outlook, DEI and Trash. The Governor committed to a 3% increase in government aid to fully fund state education by matching funds. The Healey Administration is also filing the Municipal Empowerment Act which includes things like increasing the thresholds for procurement from \$50,000 to \$400,000, which would be very helpful so that Towns don't have to go to a full bidding process, and a prohibition on double poles with National Grid, which is not a big issue in Boxford. They also discussed local options for increases to meals and lodging taxes, which again doesn't really affect Boxford, but also to enable any local excise tax to go above and beyond the state excise tax rate. This might be a local option for us as we do collect excise taxes. First, however, the State is going to have to create legislation which will allow towns to add additional income.

7:55 PM Consideration of Change in Employee Health Insurance

It has been ten years since Boxford reviewed their employee health insurance and since costs are on the rise, the Town is looking at various options. A presentation of municipal health insurance options was delivered by Sue Shillue, of Cook & Co. She summarized the meetings held with the Insurance Advisory Committee and reviewed costs for various plans from which the Town of Boxford could select. Deductibles, co-pays, and other pertinent health insurance costs were discussed. In order to engage in the process to change employee health insurance benefits, the Select Board would need to invoke M.G.L. c. 32B §21 through 23. If changes for the next fiscal year beginning July 1st, are to take effect, subscribers will be notified 60 days in advance, and open enrollment will take place in May. There will also be a Health Fair held in April.

On a **MOTION** made by **Costello**, second by **Perkins**, the Select Board VOTED unanimously that the Town of Boxford elect to engage in the process to change health benefits under M.G.L. c.32B, §21 through 23.

8:25 PM Routines

None

Select Board member Costello provided a recap of the latest Elementary Regional School Planning Committee meeting. The committee is looking at moving from a Tri-Town Union Superintendent model to a Regional School model. They intend to draft an agreement before Town Meeting and there will be a public awareness meeting to discuss the pros and cons of such an agreement.

Select Board members Costello and Stickney attended a Saturday morning meeting of the Merrimack Valley Planning Association. The Town's 5-year Housing Production Plan was discussed. There was a large audience in attendance, but not everything was on the agenda discussed since with all of the questions asked, time ran out. They will heavily advertise the next meeting which will be held soon depending on Merrimack Valley's schedule.

8:35 PM Executive Session

On a **MOTION** made by **Chow-Menzer**, second by **Stickney**, the Select Board VOTED unanimously by roll call vote to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy relative to preparation for negotiations with the Public Employee Commission (PEC), and declared that an Executive Session is necessary since an open public discussion may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating, bargaining or litigating position of the Select Board, and upon completion of the Executive Session to return to open session and immediately adjourn without conducting any further business.

Next Meeting – February 12, 2024

Respectfully submitted,
Donna M Grieco
Minutes Recorder

Documents either distributed to the Select Board before the meeting in a packet or at the meeting:

Agenda
New Call to Order
Announcement: Real Estate Tax Exemption
Announcement: Boxford is Hiring
Announcement: Real Estate Taxes Due 2/1/24
Notice of Public Hearing: Hillside Road Poles
Liquor License Application and Supporting Documentation: BTA/ BOLT One-day license on municipal property at 10 Elm Street
Common Victuallers License Application & Supporting Documentation: Boxford House of Pizza
Common Victuallers License Supporting & Supporting Documentation: Far Corner Golf Club