

Town of Wendell
Selectboard Meeting Minutes
February 21, 2024, 7 p.m.
Hybrid Meeting: Selectboard Offices and by Zoom

Present:

Chair Laurie DiDonato, Vice Chair Gillian Budine, Member Paul Doud

Also Present: Glenn Johnson-Mussad, Town Coordinator; Cynthia Bolling, Selectboard Clerk; members of the public and press.

I. Roll Call/Call to Order

With all members present, the meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. Town Coordinator Glenn Johnson-Mussad was expected to join the meeting at a later time.

II. Announcements

There were no announcements.

III. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

IV. Selectboard Updates and Comments

There were no Selectboard updates or comments.

V. Selectboard Meeting and Warrant Schedule Review

The meeting and warrant schedules are on alternating weeks through March.

VI. Consent Agenda

- A. Approve minutes of February 7, 2024, Selectboard meeting
- B. Approve Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans' Services District Inter-Municipal Agreement as presented

Discussion

The Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans' Services District has requested a three-year approval from the state. The state issued a two-year approval, from July 22, 2023, through July 2024.

- The services are for veterans within the town.
- Greenfield pays 56% of the budget, with the remaining 44% assessed to other towns.
- Wendell currently budgets \$2,271 for veterans' services.

Laurie DiDonato moved to approve the consent agenda. Gillian Budine seconded. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

To ensure that there's enough money in Wendell's budget to cover this service, Glenn is asked to check and see what amount Wendell is expected to pay.

VII. Noncitizen Voting Legislation Request. Laurie

Wendell's Selectboard is sending a letter to state Senator Jo Comerford and Representative Aaron Saunders about a June 26, 2023, Town Meeting vote that is in favor of allowing noncitizens to vote in Town meetings and elections and serve on elected boards and committees.

- The letter requests that Sen. Comerford and Rep. Saunders petition the legislature to allow such legislation.

The Selectboard members will sign the letter as written.

VIII. FY 25 Cost-of-living Adjustment (COLA). Laurie.

The Selectboard considered the recommendation the Finance Committee (FinCom) submitted in an email to apply a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) "to all wages and salaries equal to a three-year rolling average of the northeastern urban CPI, which is 4.5% for fiscal year 2025."

- The FinCom wants a decision before March 31.

Discussion

If the Selectboard votes to approve the FinCom's recommendation, when Glenn joins tonight's meeting Laurie will check to see if he knows of any reason not to approve this.

Gillian made a motion in favor of the FinCom's recommendation to approve the 4.5% COLA for all wages and salaries for fiscal year 2025. Paul Doud seconded. No discussion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Glenn joined the meeting at this point and Laurie reviewed the decisions it had made until then.

IX. Inspection Program. Glenn

Glenn reported on the status of the search for a building inspector, in anticipation of Building Inspector Phil Delorey's withdrawal from the position at the end of April.

- Paul and Phil worked on the building inspector job description, with a contribution from Personnel Director Carolyn Manley.
- The job description was published yesterday on the Town's website, bulletin board, and email list.
- While a veteran building inspector has shown interest in preparing his son for the position through an apprentice-style program, no formal applications have been received.
- A closing deadline wasn't included in the posting.

Discussion

- If this job search isn't fruitful, the Selectboard still has the option of using the inspection service offered by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG).
- The FRCOG service already has the FinCom's approval, which was obtained before the Selectboard decided to conduct a search for an individual.
- Phil did say he can continue to fill the building inspector position past April 30 if necessary.

X. FinCom Budget Requests. Glenn

Glenn and the Selectboard considered the best way to coordinate the budget items that the FinCom sent them to update for the next fiscal year.

Discussion

- The Selectboard's budget items include Selectboard salaries, Selectboard clerk, shared clerk, Selectboard expenses, veterans' memorial, memorial upgrade, mediation account, bulk mailings, Town report, and Recreation Committee. Glenn has many more budget items to review.
- Gillian noted the bulk mailings budget was doubled last year, but it probably won't be enough to cover current expenditures.
 - a. Glenn pointed out that this is the first year that printing and mailing are being done by the same company.
- The Town Coordinator's salary will be affected by the following issues:
 - a. Glenn and Carolyn will be splitting the duties of the Finance Coordinator position and will work on a salary proposal that accounts for the additional duties.
 - b. When compared with the salaries of administrators in surrounding towns, Wendell's Town Coordinator makes the lowest.
 - c. Glenn aims to propose a salary for the Town Coordinator that is low, but not the lowest, when compared to surrounding towns, plus the COLA and hopefully bring it to the next meeting.
- Glenn will answer questions and give feedback to a designated Selectboard member about possible changes for the new position of Selectboard Clerk.

Glenn will bring those budget items he's responsible for to the next Selectboard meeting for review if they will change; he'll forward the others directly to the FinCom.

XI. Town Coordinator Report. Glenn

Voting Equipment

- The state provides the equipment in the Town Clerk's office related to voting, including a very high-end printer and monitor.
- Instead of removing the equipment for recycling when they came, the state's workers offered it to Wendell to keep or recycle.
- If there are no objections, Glenn would like to keep the equipment and use the monitor to help him with multitasking.

Town Hall Rentals

Town Hall rentals are increasing in the wake of the pandemic.

Workflow

With questions about the budget coming in, the pace of the Town Coordinator's work is increasing significantly.

New Posting Process for Meetings

- In anticipation of the website becoming the official posting place for meetings, Glenn sent Town Clerk Anna Wetherby a draft of the Selectboard a week in advance as she requested.
 - a. Anna approved the draft over the weekend and Glenn was able to post it by Wednesday.

Town Coordinator Assistant Update

- The new assistant, Su Hoyle, is excellent at knowledge management and is beginning to be a lot of help with Microsoft 365 and One Drive.
- Now that Su has attended website training, Glenn anticipates offloading some of his website tasks to her.
- Glenn will meet with Su this weekend to review other tasks.

- Glenn asked if next year’s budget could handle Su working more than 8 hours a month if she’s available.
 - a. Since Su and Highway Clerk Joy Gorzocoski share the same budget line, the answer will depend on how much Joy is working.
 - b. Joy has been helping out a lot with the utilities bill schedule.

XII. Annual Reports. Glenn

Glenn sent Wendell’s 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports to Highland Press some time ago, but they haven’t responded for a long time.

Discussion

- Glenn did ask Highland to recommend another printer if they’re too busy to print the reports.
- In a previous meeting Glenn noted that Anna needs annual reports that are printed on archival paper.
 - a. Gillian noted a lot of towns use the sheriff’s department to print their annual reports.
 - b. Glenn will investigate whether the reports printed by the sheriff’s department will meet Anna’s requirements.
- The Selectboard chair is responsible for writing and circulating a draft of the Selectboard’s annual report.

XIII. Town Coordinator Accounting Course Request. Glenn

Glenn asked the Selectboard to approve his enrollment in a one-week Fundamentals of Municipal Accounting online course given by Greenfield Community College (GCC) to support people in public works.

- Orientation takes place March 18 and the course ends on March 22.
- Course requirements must be completed by April 5. Those who complete the course will get a Certificate of Completion.

Discussion

- Gillian was concerned about how much of Glenn’s time it would take but Glenn felt he could make it work.
- Glenn suggested that if it took a lot of extra hours, he could be paid from the funds in the special projects line that were left over from the website project, so he could add some hours that week and do both.

Laurie made a motion to approve Glenn taking the Fundamentals of Municipal Accounting course, with the funds being paid out of the Town Coordinator account. It is understood that Glenn will tell the Selectboard whether it needs to take funds from the special projects line to cover the extra hours he might have to work. Paul seconded. 2. No discussion.

The motion passed unanimously.

XIV. Battery Storage. Glenn

With support from the Planning Committee, Sen. Comerford and Rep. Saunders submitted a letter asking for a review of Borrego/New Leaf Energy’s proposal to build a lithium-ion battery storage facility in a forested, environmentally sensitive area of Wendell.

(According to past minutes, the Massachusetts Attorney General’s office struck down the zoning bylaw Wendell originally wrote, which denies a permit for the project.)

- The review request didn’t meet certain technical standards and was declined.
- Sen. Comerford and Rep. Saunders followed up with fail-safe review request, but it didn’t follow certain protocols, including a minimum of 10 signatures and was also denied.
 - a. They are encouraging Wendell to submit a fail-safe review request that follows the proper protocols.

- b. Sen. Comerford and Rep. Saunders are also encouraging Wendell to let the letter show that its protest comes from a desire to have a voice in the process rather than from a rigid, Not in My Backyard (NIMBY) attitude.
- c. Glenn has asked Sen. Comerford and Rep. Saunders for a copy of their fail-safe request so he'll have a better idea of what the proper protocols are for its submission.
- They also suggest that Wendell request assistance from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA).
 - a. The EEA can get the AG's office to request that the organization that proposes building the battery storage facility be made to pay for the Town's response (most small towns like Wendell can't afford the legal fees involved in fighting big corporations).

Discussion

- In a previous meeting, the Selectboard asked Town Counsel David Doneski whether he thought the bylaw that the No Assault & Batteries in Wendell group (NAB) put together would pass muster with the AG's office.
- Attorney Doneski replied today, concluding that the AG isn't likely to accept it because:
 - a. The bylaw comes off as a zoning ordinance.
 - b. Attorney Doneski also thinks that it's too restrictive and would therefore be as unsuccessful as the bylaw Wendall passed previously.

Next Steps

- Glenn will draft another fail-safe review request with Laurie's help when he gets a copy of the first one.
- He will pass on Attorney Doneski's response to the NAB group.
- Laurie noted that she would like to see NAB's bylaw go through the Planning Board before it's put on a warrant for a Special Town Meeting.
- This issue should appear on a future Selectboard agenda. A Planning Board representative might be invited to attend and comment.

XV. Special Town Meeting. Laurie

Since the Selectboard has decided not to put the NAB bylaw as written on a warrant, it won't call for an STM now, but might for the end of March, depending on what happens with a new bylaw.

XVI. Items Not Anticipated

Mice

- There is an infestation of mice in the Town Office building. Town Custodian Eric Shufelt says the regular methods are no longer working, so Glenn is recommending that Wendell get a professional pest remediation company to help.
 - a. Paul will ask Library Director Miriam Warner how the library's professional treatment went. He'll also call Dan and Nina Keller—who previously offered to help with pest remediation in Town offices—and find out what help they might be able to offer.
 - b. There are insects in the Town Hall kitchen that have created a problem.
 - c. The line under town offices, general expenses, has \$7,000.

Incident Command System Training

- The Selectboard will meet with Glenn at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow to look at the online PowerPoint presentation for emergency responders.
- They agreed that if the session went too long, people could just leave.

- Glenn will try to find the link and send it to the Selectboard tonight.

XVII. Adjournment

Gillian made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:24 p.m. Paul seconded. No discussion. The motion passed unanimously.

Documents

Selectboard Meeting Minutes, Feb. 7, 2024

FinCom COLA and Inspector Recommendations, Feb. 8, 2024

Home Rule Petition Cover Letter Feb. 21, 2024

Selectboard Posting and Agenda, Feb. 21, 2024

Fundamentals of Municipal Accounting, Feb. 14, 2024