

TOWN OF LEE
SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Tuesday March 21, 2024 @ 10:30AM
LMHS • 300 Greylock Street • Room A-106

Minutes

Members Present: Bob Jones, Gordon Bailey

Members Absent: Sean Regnier

Others Present: Admin Brittain

Chairman Jones called the meeting to order at 10:41AM.

Introductions to Mr. Tom Salinetti's 8th grade civics classes
(period 10:40am-11:37am and period 11:30am-12:18pm)

Chairman Jones began by explaining the duties of the Select Board. He stated that there is a total of three members on the Select Board that serve a three-year term. Each year, one Selectman is on the ballot for Town Election to either serve another three-year term, or be replaced with a new Selectman. He also explained that the Select Board members used be to called the "Town Fathers", and they are at the "top of the food chain" in terms of town government. Chairman Jones explained that the school has its own type of government. He stated that the Select Board is in communication with the school and goes over the budget with them annually, but the school is its own entity.

Chairman Jones concluded introductions by explaining that Lee holds its Annual Town Meeting on the first Thursday of May each year. He added that the New England Town Meeting has been known as the "purest form of democracy on the face of the Earth."

Discussion of letters sent to the Select Board

Chairman Jones stated that the Board has received several letters from students of the Civics Class and they are happy to address some of these letters today.

They began by addressing the letter written by Libby, Olivia, and Cassie regarding students having access to hygiene products. In the letter, the students present a case that hygiene products should be accessible to all students, such as school lunch and breakfast programs are. Chairman Jones stated that there would be expenditures involved in this project, which goes beyond the Select Board. Mr. Bailey suggested that donations could be made by local businesses, such as Big Y or local dentist offices. Mr. Bailey added that there are some things to consider, such as if there should be different products offered for each gender, and sensitivity to the fact that some cultures follow different hygiene routines. Mr. Bailey also suggested that the students get on the agenda for an upcoming Select Board meeting and announce that they are looking for donations from local businesses. The meeting will be aired on CTSB and may help reach more people. Admin Brittain mentioned that each student received a copy of the FY22 Annual Town Report today and there is a page in it that lists contact phone numbers for offices in Town Hall.

Admin Brittain then went over budget details with the students. He shared that in FY22, it cost \$26 million to run the Town of Lee and the school alone cost over \$10 million of that. He showed the students where to find a copy of the Town Warrant in the Annual Town Report and explained

where to find the cost of each department. The students agreed that a project such as the hygiene products would likely fall under Health and Human Services.

Admin Brittain explained that the students could make a request to the Health and Human Services department, and they may add it to the proposed budget for the following year. It would then go to the Finance Committee for approval, be added to the Town Warrant, and need to be voted for by the voting residents of the Town of Lee. He stated that they can start spending the money at the beginning of the fiscal year (July 1st) and that the budgeting process begins in October of each year.

Admin Brittain stated that the Town gets the money for the approved budget from the State, grant money, revenue from meal/hotel taxes, excise tax, fees for certain permits/certificates/licenses, ambulance rides, etc. Whatever is leftover comes from taxes, based on the value of your home in Lee. He stated that the average home is taxed about \$4000 a year.

Chairman Jones brought up the possibility of the new Public Safety Building that will be voted on in May. Altogether, this project will cost a little over \$36 million; a lot of money, but it is a golden opportunity and will last the town for decades. If approved, this new building will cost the average household an additional \$360 a year in taxes. He stated that the project received overwhelming support at the Special Town Meeting this past fall with over 80% approval. It will now be on the ballot for the upcoming election and require a majority vote.

The next letters the Board discussed were from Aaron and Shayna who expressed the need for a community center in Lee. Mr. Bailey stated that this type of project requires money and land. He stated that they have done research to find land that the Town already owns. There was a proposal to put it on Stockbridge Road, but that got denied at Town Meeting.

Mr. Bailey stated that a community center will need to be in a central location with sidewalks available to get there. He stated that once they find the land to build the community center, they'll need to figure out how it will be funded – maybe state/federal grants, local businesses, etc. It all comes back to the taxpayer dollars. Admin Brittain showed the students page 81 of the Town Report, article 11 of the warrant requested \$12.5 million for the community center. He explained that if it was approved, taxes would go way up. Massachusetts has the proposition that taxes cannot be raised more than 2.5% without first getting permission from the citizens. The community center needed 2/3 vote at Town Meeting, and it would then go to referendum (town wide vote), however it did not pass at the FY22 Town Meeting.

Admin Brittain stated that federal elections usually get more voters than town elections, but he asked if voting for the President was more important than what is going on in your own town.

The next letter the Board discussed was from Ian regarding a big box store. Mr. Bailey stated that there is a subcommittee for this sort of thing called the Community Development Commission (CDC). The CDC is in charge of reaching out and trying to get businesses to come to our town. In order to bring in a big box store, you need land is that zoned properly, and zoning goes back to the Planning Board. He stated that a big box store would require a property that is properly zoned by the Town's bylaws. Admin Brittain then showed the students how the Town of Lee is divided up into different zones.

The next letter the Board responded to was from Andrew regarding a 4-day school week and better lunches. Chairman Jones explained that the Select Board has no authority over how the school is run, and it is the Commonwealth's Department of Education that sets the rules for the

number of hours students have to be taught. The Board suggested Andrew reach out to the State with that concern. As for better lunches, Mr. Bailey suggested Andrew reach out to a school nutritionist to discuss lunch offerings. Unfortunately, the Board has no control over school lunches, but the students could work with the School Committee on this issue.

During the 2nd period, the Board also discussed a letter from a student named Tristan that was sent to the Planning Board. Tristan wrote about how his family is trying to sell a small portion of their side lot to their neighbor to help with financial hardships. Zoning bylaws require a building lot to be on .5 acres, however, meaning his family would require a special permit. Tristan stated that his family lived on West Pine Street. Mr. Bailey stated that that is a CR: Conservation Residential Zone – which is the strictest zone. He explained that it is a very old area of the Town, and most of those lots were created before 1972, which is when the zoning bylaws were created. Mr. Bailey stated that something like this has been done before, so it is not something that is impossible; our culture and way of living has change since 1972.

Admin Brittain stated that the first step to changing the zoning bylaws would be through the Planning Board. They would hold a public hearing and notify all abutters of the hearing via a newspaper legal notice. It would then get brought to Town Meeting where every registered voter that was present would vote and 2/3 vote would let it pass. It would then go to the Massachusetts Attorney General, and she would need to prove it's not conflicting with any state laws. She would send it back to the Town, it would be posted for 20 days, and then would become a law.

Admin Brittain concluded with each class by showing the students how to access the Town's website.

Mr. Salinetti asked the Select Board members what they believe is the most important job of a Selectman. Chairman Jones stated that it was to try and glean what direction the Board should take to represent the residents of the Town. Mr. Bailey stated that it is to listen to the Townspeople on how they want the Town to be.

The Board members thanked Mr. Salinetti and his classes for the opportunity to speak with them today.

Mr. Bailey made a motion to temporarily adjourn the meeting at 12:20pm and reconvene at 1:00pm in the Town Administrator's office to discuss an emergency situation that could not be anticipated, which Chairman Jones seconded and was approved, 2-0.

Chairman Jones called the meeting to order at 1:04pm.

Members Present: Bob Jones, Gordon Bailey

Members Absent: Sean Regnier

Others Present: Admin Brittain, Sergeant Stephanie Burdick (Lee Police Department), Lenny Tisdale (DPW Superintendent), Patricia Begrowicz (Onyx Specialty Papers, Inc. Owner/President) and John Healy (Onyx Specialty Papers, Inc. Director of Operations).

Admin Brittain began by stating that MassDOT informed him today that the Town will be receiving orders to shut down the Willow Street Bridge. He stated that the last inspection of the bridge was in 2021 and it did not come back as in critical condition, so this is very out of the blue. Another inspection was done in 2023 but the Town has not received the results of that inspection yet. MassDOT has no temporary bridges available, but they can provide signage and barricades for the closure. Admin Brittain stated that everything else will be on the Town's dime,

but it is likely this will be put on the State's bridge projects. He stated that they are able to use about \$500,000 in bridge capital of Chapter 90 right away; any more funds will need to go to Town Meeting.

Ms. Begrowicz and Mr. Healy explained that Onyx Specialty Papers needs the bridge on Willow Street to operate their business. They stated that the ideal situation would be to have the bridge be turned into one-lane only with weight restrictions. This would, however, create about 14 trips a day as opposed to the usual 5-7 trips.

Mr. Bailey stated that this bridge was on the State's radar when he was last on the Select Board in 2012 for repairs or shutdown. Mr. Tisdale stated that they did make repairs to it at that time, and took the sidewalk out. Mr. Bailey stated that he has an MPO meeting on Monday – it's too late to get on that agenda, but he will reach out to BRPC and see what they know. He also added that LB Corp and Maxymillian may have temporary bridges available to use.

Mr. Tisdale stated that LB Corp is available right away to make adjustments for an alternate route using Pine and Willow Street. The Town has an emergency contract with LB Corp and the Town can notify homeowners of temporary trucks on the alternate route. The Board agreed that they should use the emergency contract with LB Corp. Mr. Tisdale stated that this work would take a few streets off the upcoming paving list.

Mr. Tisdale stated that adjusting the intersection of Pine and Willow will cost \$110,000. LB Corp is waiting for the asphalt plants to open, but they can use gravel for now. Mr. Healy stated that Onyx will have to run half loads which will double Onyx's transport costs. Ms. Begrowicz stated that if MassDOT would allow use of the bridge for one more week, it would help them plan better.

The Board asked about the rail siding against the papermill, but Mr. Healy explained it hasn't been used in 30-40 years and would probably need to be completely rebuilt on Onyx's dime. Ms. Begrowicz added that suppliers won't load railcars anymore, so it is not a cost-effective option anymore.

Admin Brittain stated that he would get a letter drawn up to hand deliver to residents of Pine and Willow streets. Mr. Tisdale stated that he would call LB Corp and give them the go-ahead to begin work on the alternate route. Mr. Bailey suggested Mr. Tisdale do a deep-dive of all bridges in Lee to be prepared for any future work.

Appoint Daniel Blaisdell as an alternate member of the Zoning Board of Appeals

Mr. Bailey made a motion to appoint Daniel Blaisdell as an alternate member of the Zoning Board of Appeals which Chairman Jones seconded and was approved, 2-0.

Mr. Bailey made a motion to adjourn at 1:54pm which Chairman Jones seconded and was approved, 2-0.

Submitted by:



Sabrina Touhey
Exec Asst TA/BOS

Approved on: 04/02/2024