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MINUTES
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2005
REGULAR SESSION
SELECTMEN'S MEETING ROOM, TOWN HALL

Call to Order

A regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order in open session at 6:30 PM in the Selectmen's Meeting Room of Town Hall. All members were present. Town Administrator Tom Younger and Assistant Town Administrator Jeff Conti were also present.

Questions from Town Residents

Resident Lee Adams of Trapelo Road asked about snow removal. His driveway comes right next to a "bump-out" in front of his home. In order to clear the bump-out, the plow must push the snow between the bump-out and his driveway, creating an unsafe situation where he is practically in the drive lane when plowing his driveway, as well as creating an unsafe situation for pedestrians. He contends that the design of the bump-out is inherently flawed for this reason.

Mr. Younger will look into this and report back to the Board.

Action by Appointment

The Board moved: to enter into executive session to discuss a grievance and litigation.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

The Board of Selectmen returned to open session.

The Board agreed that Chairman Solomon would contact Superintendent Holland to be sure that the schools coordinate with the police to ensure that the school bus incident of Friday, in which children had to walk home from a stuck bus in the snow unsupervised, never happens again.

Proclamation re: MWRA Commonwealth Sewer Rate Relief Fund

The proclamation requests the State Legislature to continue to fund the Sewer Fund at an appropriate level.

The Board moved: to approve the proclamation.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0). The Board signed the proclamation.

Public Works Director Peter Castanino appeared before the Board. The Board asked about difficulties in plowing the sidewalks generally. Mr. Castanino stated that his department has three sidewalk plows and it mainly plows around schools, train stations and heavily trafficked pedestrian routes. One problem is that the Town's sidewalks are narrow so only certain equipment can be used. Sometimes there is no place for the snow to go because there are snow piles on either edge of the sidewalk. We also cause damage to public and private property because we have no margin for error and the crews often cannot see where the boundary is. The Department gets a lot of complaints about sidewalk plowing.

The Board discussed the pros and cons of plowing sidewalks, and whether there are some locations where, if a good job plowing the sidewalk can't be done, perhaps plowing should not be done. Mr. Castanino stated he continues to look for ways to do a better job with the sidewalks.

Discussion of Special Hearing - Sign

Optometrist Dr. Linda Bennett is moving her practice to the Reardon Funeral Home building on Belmont Street. She wants to erect a sign on the property.

The Board moved: to approve the sign as submitted.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

Action by Consent

- A. *Approval of BOS Minutes (10/31/05; 11/07/05)*
- B. *Approval of Quitclaim Deed - 315 Brighton Street*

The Board noted that the Belmont Media Center contract has not been finalized and so that item has been removed from the agenda.

The Chair of the Housing Trust, Roger Colton, and Town Clerk Delores Keefe appeared before the Board. Mr. Colton explained that the land is being transferred from the Town to Habitat for Humanity Boston. Two years ago, Town Meeting voted to transfer two unused town properties for affordable housing. One was B Street where there are now four homes, the other was this property. There will be a single-family home that will be affordable housing built by Habitat for Humanity and the people who will live there. He expects a groundbreaking in March or April when the ground thaws out, and he hopes there will be a family living there by Thanksgiving 2006.

Selectman Firenze noted he remains concerned about where the Town is going with respect to affordable housing, but will vote to approve this to respect the will of Town Meeting.

The Board moved: to approve the 10/31/05 and 11/07/05 Selectmen's meeting minutes and the quitclaim deed.

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

Mr. Colton updated the Board on the status of the B street property and the McLean project.

Renewal of Alcoholic Beverage Licenses

The Board noted that Andros Diner failed to submit their renewal application for the second time in three years despite being notified. If they wish to renew they will have to apply for a new license.

Chairman Solomon listed the eight licenses being renewed. Mr. Younger stated some have not turned in their server certificates but renewals can be approved nonetheless and handed over once these certificates have been presented.

The Board moved: to approve the renewals of the following licenses, subject to the Town Administrator's restriction regarding the certificates;

Asai Restaurant
Belmont Country Club
Brothers Pizza
Kashish Restaurant
Ling Garden
Little Lotus
Shangri-La
Stonehearth Pizza

The motion was carried unanimously (3-0).

Action by Appointment

Update on Purecoat North

Selectman Brownsberger recalled that the town is following up aggressively on any environmental violations while at the same time trying to assist Purecoat North (PN) in developing the property in ways that will benefit the Town. The Town Administrator did some research into programs that might assist PN. Since then, the Health Department has moved forward with actions to abate the odor nuisance. PN has recently suggested holding a meeting on redevelopment without Purecoat

Committee Chairman Sachs because he is pursuing the environmental issue. Selectman Brownsberger said he did not feel this would be appropriate since this is an appropriate issue for the Committee and its Chair. The Board concurred that it supports Mr. Sachs' actions and his role with the Committee.

Town Administrator's Report

Mr. Younger reported that the Waverley Fire Station sale is closed and the Town has received a check for \$600,000 plus the taxes. Chairman Solomon noted that the developer is making a contribution towards the Waverley Trail kiosks, which are being designed and built at no cost to the Town. The kiosk in front of the former fire station has been endowed by the developer.

Mr. Younger reported that MassHighway's project review committee has approved the Trapelo Road plan. The next step is to get the project on the Metropolitan Planning Organization's TIP for funding. The Board discussed how to move forward. Mr. Conti noted that our State Representative may be able to be of assistance.

Mr. Younger reported that the Archdiocese has said it will get back to him within the next two weeks regarding the future of the Senior Center at the Our Lady of Mercy Parish Hall. Also, he is still finalizing the timing on the Woodfall Road agreement with the Country Club.

Mr. Conti reported that he have received 110 RSVP's for the employee holiday party. As the result of the increased attendance over last year, he anticipates a higher cost in the vicinity of \$1,000. The Board confirmed its decision to fund this and Board members expressed their plans to attend the function if possible.

Mr. Younger reported that the Central Fire Station RFP will be finalized shortly. Also, our new Planning Director, Jay Szklut, has started.

Discussion of Health Care Insurance Committee Report

Health Care Insurance Committee members appeared before the Board.

Committee Chair Phil Curtis gave a presentation of the Committee's Report on controlling the Town's health insurance costs. Mr. Curtis began by introducing the members of the Committee.

The Committee began its investigation in April and formulated its recommendations in November. One of the most important points considered is the extent to which increases in health insurance costs are going to consume more and more of the Town's incremental revenues up to 5 out of every 6 dollars in 2009, leaving very little for anything else the Town wants to do. This is a problem for every

municipality. The Committee noted that state laws and mandates limit our ability to consider all possible methods to address the issue.

In 2005, the Town is paying \$7.8 million in health insurance premiums for employees and retirees. The Town pays 90% of the premium for employees on the Harvard Pilgrim HMO option and 80% on the PPO. Belmont is among the very highest paying municipalities in terms of the percentage of premiums paid.

Some options that the Committee looked at were: Increasing the percentage of premiums paid by employees and retirees; Change the plan design to increase co-pays and deductibles or use a narrower network; Decrease utilization by working to keep employees healthier; Decrease administrative costs by considering self-insurance options.

The Committee is recommending changing the benefit plan design; making the contribution percentage for the HMO and the PPO the same; and reducing that percentage paid by the Town to 80%. All of those changes would have to be bargained with the unions. In the longer term, the Committee recommends increasing the Town's health care management resources; exploring self-insurance and competitive bidding, joint purchasing with other towns; explore medical management and wellness programs, reviewing Medicare Part D implications, and promoting legislation that improves the cost environment.

There was discussion of people switching from the PPO to the HMO if the rates are equalized and that this will result in higher rates for the HMO. The Committee noted that this would be the case but that there would be a year's lag before the increase would take effect. However, in the long run the Town would still save money.

Changes that the Committee does not recommend are: treating retirees differently from active employees; and a cap on benefits.

By changing the plan to increase co-pays, the Town could save \$620,000. The Board discussed with the Committee its concerns that this could disproportionately hurt retirees who might be presumed to use more care and so pay more co-pays. Together with the other two short-term recommendations, the Town could save \$1.9 million. Long term, a self-funded insurance plan could save the Town 8 to 15%.

There was discussion of options for co-operative purchasing with other towns. Joining the West Suburban Health Coalition probably would not save the Town money because there would be a front-loaded surcharge to the Town for joining. MIIA is another option with some 90 towns currently members.

There was discussion of wellness programs and how much money they might save the Town in the long term, especially if the Town moves to a self-funded system.

There was discussion of how to approach collective bargaining and talks with the unions on these recommendations. It was noted that most of the Town's union contracts expire July 1, 2007.

The Board agreed that the following actions should be taken: 1) Human Resources Director Diane Jenkins will organize a meeting of the union presidents, and the Health Care Insurance Committee will give their presentation to that group to familiarize the union heads with the options the Town is considering.

2) Mr. Younger will obtain legal advice from counsel regarding the extent to which the Committee's recommendations will need to be bargained with the unions.

3) Mr. Younger and Ms. Jenkins will come before the Board again about March 1 with strategy recommendations for negotiation.

The Board thanked the members of the Committee for their hard work.

Other

The meeting was adjourned at 11:13 PM.

Thomas G. Younger
Town Administrator