

TOWN OF EGREMONT, MASSACHUSETTS
MEETING OF THE SELECT BOARD
MINUTES

Date: January 18, 2022
Time: 10:00am
Place: Via Zoom Meeting
Egremont

Present via zoom were Selectboard Chairman George McGurn, Vice-Chair Lucinda Fenn-Vermeulen, Board member Mary Brazie.

Others present via zoom: Michael Lebowitz, Rolfe Tessem, Eileen Vining, Caleb Stone, Harald Scheid, Sue Funk, Sue Turner, Alice Tortoriello, Ronnie Sacco, Leslie Alfin, Chuck Ogden, James Psalia, Mary McGurn, Nan Coleman, Adam Kronenberg, Kate Santog, Emily Eyre, James DiPisa, Dave Seligman, Steve Cohen, Peg McDonough, Marj Wexler, Jared Kelly, Jessica Nordoff, Suzanne Taylor.

The meeting was audio and video recorded.

MINUTES:

The minutes of the January 4 meeting were accepted with minor edits.

SCHEDULED ISSUES:

Egremont's School Committee member James DiPisa, being new the Committee, said he was impressed with the School Committee and Administrator. He noted its been a hard time for public education. Currently the schools Unions are bargaining. There is active COVID testing being done at the schools. The Board would like a School Committee update bi-monthly.

Caleb Stone, Southern Berkshire Ambulance Service, spoke with the Board about the request for \$23,447 as Egremont's share of the purchase of a new ambulance to be taken from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding. Another ambulance has been leased purchase using current funding. Pay increased were implemented for ambulance personnel within the current budget. As well, the departments technology was upgraded. Currently there are 15 people enrolled in the EMT training being conducted by the department, which includes one Egremont person. There will be no FY 23 request for an annual assessment. The Board voted unanimously to approve the request for \$23,447 from ARPA funds for the purchase of a new ambulance.

NEW BUSINESS:

Board of Health Chairman Chuck Ogden asked that the Board pass over his request to consider the Town joins the Southern Berkshire Health Collaborative. It turns out that because the town is already a member of the Berkshire Health Alliance and both are funded through the same grant the town cannot join both organizations and the Alliance includes everything we need.

Peg McDonough said the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is being covered in grant discussions.

The Board recognized Conservation Commission member Alexis Fakelman for achieving certification through the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions. The press release will be distributed to all local media.

Board of Health Chairman asked several questions surrounding the use of zoom for meetings and the legalities of not allowing someone to speak, removing people from meetings, requiring people to identify themselves in calling in, ending a meeting if hacked, police support for threatening people. Zoom basically follows the open meeting. People can be removed, muted, blocked and meetings can be abruptly ended if need be.

The Board began a discussion around public communications from Egremont officials and a possible policy limiting the use of social media. The Town has a social media policy as a part of the personnel policy which will be reviewed. The discussion was ended to go into public hearing and did not resume.

At 11:00am the Tax Classification hearing was called to order. Harald Scheid, Consulting Assessor from Regional Resource Group, presented data regarding the town's values and the percentage of residential vs commercial properties, levy limit and excess levy (report attached). The recommendation was made to continue with a single tax rate as 95% of the taxable property in Egremont is residential. There is a significant increase in values supported by sales data over the last few years and a small increase in the town's budget leading to a decrease in the tax rate from \$9.35 to \$7.96. The average tax bill will see a modest increase of about 1.7%. The Board expressed its interest in adopting the residential exemption which shifts the value burden to the larger valued properties. Mr. Scheid said he would have this data to the Board by mid-February. It was noted that the Department of Revenue approved the Town's values after expressing concern that the values should have increased incrementally not all in one year and that the Town should be looking at similar factors in surrounding Towns. The Board voted unanimously to approve a single tax rate for the Fiscal Year 2022. The next step is to submit the Tax Recapitulation Sheet to get tax rate approval. Hearing closed at 11:23am.

Marj Wexler, speaking for the Green Committee, asked for the Board's approval to release information to the public regarding the proposed amended bottle bill which will increase the return rate to \$.10 from \$.05 and add other plastic and glass bottles to the return list. The Board approved the request and gave its support to the Green Committee's informing of citizens.

OLD BUSINESS:

The discussion surrounding the buy recycled policy was deferred to the next meeting.

Vice-Chairman Vermuelen and Selectboard member Brazie agreed that the draft policy Chairman McGurn presented for the use of legal counsel was not what was discussed. There should be no requirement to get approval from the Selectboard first as that would delay the work of town boards, and there should be a requirement that requests to legal counsel be made in writing via email.

Vice-Chairman Vermeulen presented the Board with protocols for the Dog Park setting up a registration process for all users, replacing signage and making signage clearer and simpler, periodic Go-Fund-Me campaigns, and peer oversight. A group of users have stepped forward and agree to take on the oversight of the Dog Park. Concerns of the Board revolved around public education, enforcement, liability, and monitoring. All agreed the goal is to have a safe, fun venue for dogs and dog owners. The Board will revisit at its next meeting.

GRANTS:

. The Planning Board, Housing Committee, Buildings and Grounds and Conservation Commission are interested in applying for grants within the Community One Stop for Growth program. A group formed from each of those departments will meet in order to put together details to submit to the Board at the next meeting.

Planning Board Chairman Jared Kelly recommended that the Town contract with Innes & Associates working with Tighe & Bond for the updates to both the Master Plan and the Open Space Recreation Plans. The Planning Board and Conservation Commission jointly put an RFP to which they received 3 proposals. All agreed that the Innes/Tighe & Bond proposal was the best fit. The contract will be for \$60,000, using the two \$30,000 grants received. The Board voted unanimously to contract with Innes & Associates and Tighe & Bond.

COVID-19:

The vote to purchase test kits through Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) was rescinded as BRPC is no longer doing a regional purchase. Peg McDonough reported that on state contract a minimum order can be placed at \$19 per kit for a total of \$37,500 but there are supply chain issues. The Board agreed not to move forward as the Federal and State Governments are now giving a limited number to residents free and insurance is required to reimburse for the costs of kits.

FOLLOW UPS/UPDATES:

Finance Committee Chair Laura Allen reported that she has reached out to Mount Washington Finance Committee member Chris Blum to give him data on the last 5 years of the Fire Department budget and calls.

At 12:38 the Board voted unanimously to go into executive session as allowed by MGL Chapter 30A, Section 21, Paragraph 2 for strategy with respect to Collective Bargaining. The Board will not return to open session.

Mary Brazie,
Office Administrator

minutes.22/jan18

The recording of the minutes is on record at the Town Hall for 90 days. Anyone who wishes to may obtain a copy or listen to the recording at Town Hall. Attachments are on file at Town Hall.