

TOWN OF EGREMONT, MASSACHUSETTS
MEETING OF THE SELECTBOARD
MINUTES

Date: September 19, 2023
Time: 9:30 AM
Place: Via Zoom Meeting & Town Hall
Egremont

Present at the meeting in person were Selectboard Chairman George McGurn, Vice-Chair Lucinda Fenn-Vermeulen, Board member Mary Brazie, David Katzenstein, Grant Administrator Peg McDonough and for parts of the meeting Craig Barnum, Bob Noonan and Board of Health Director Juliette Haas. Present via zoom were Mary McGurn, Eileen Vining, Marj Wexler, Jeff Nathan, Dan Blitzer, and Doug Mishkin.

The meeting was audio and video recorded.

The Board spoke with Craig Barnum regarding his interest in serving on the Housing Trust Board. Craig is involved in workforce housing projects in Berkshire County. He said that housing trusts work well and that it enables towns to develop housing protectively and in line with Town's culture. He supports adding and re-dignifying existing properties. If state and federal regulations are followed, housing development can become very expensive. Re-doing existing units can be quick and inexpensive. He feels tapping into private funding is important and said that many local non-profits are tapped out. He felt he had no conflicts and he will continue his work elsewhere while doing what he can to help Egremont. He feels the Trust should keep it small and keep the moving forward but not with reaching 10% as the end goal. Egremont should stay nimble and flexible. He feels the town needs both rental and ownership housing.

The Board also spoke with Bob Noonan about his interest in serving on the Housing Trust Board. Bob's experience lies in obtaining funding and overseeing financing for large real estate projects and recognizes that Egremont's projects would be of a smaller scale. When asked he said he was aware of the increased population and changing demographics, not only in Egremont, but nearby Great Barrington where many businesses are unable to get help. He also noted a need for assisted living for our elderly. He wants to assist to bring to the table an answer to the screaming demand for affordable housing and to help assure that the needs of Egremont are met. He is happy the Town is starting from scratch and can set objections and build a program.

MINUTES:

The Board approved, with minor edits, the minutes of the July 25, September 4 and September 12 meetings.

SCHEDULED ISSUES:

Mary McGurn, Chair of the Bylaw Review Committee presented a report and update to the Board on the Committee's completion of its review. Proposed changes will be presented for either a fall 2024 Special Town Meeting or the May Annual Town Meeting. The Select Board supported the idea of continuing to consolidate bylaws into categories as was partially done in 2019. A comparison of the current format to proposed will be completed by the Committee, for a better understanding of the changes.

CITIZENS TIME:

Juliette Haas explained that the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) is reviewing guidelines for Municipal Aggregations. The Town has an aggregation agreement with Colonial Power that expires in January of 2025. Juliette would like the Board to sign a letter urging the DPU to not take local control away from Town's on aggregations so that our residents can continue to reap the benefits of the program. Her draft is a bullet point version of Colonial Power's more detailed letter to the DPU expressing concern over the new guidelines being considered. The deadline for comments is October 6. Chairman McGurn is concerned as Colonial Power has been bought by a very large conglomerate. Vice-Chairman Vermeulen noted she has asked Senator Mark to review the proposed guidelines. Selectboard member Brazie noted that the role of the DPU is to attempt to keep utilities honest and to protect consumers. The Board agreed to consider at its next meeting, before the comment deadline.

NEW BUSINESS:

The Board discussed the work load and frustrations involved with the quarterly newsletter and determined that no changes need to be made at this time.

The Board set a date of November 7 at 5:30pm for the annual all-boards meeting to kick off the budget process.

The Board voted unanimously to appoint Transportation Administrator Melanie Vicneiri to the Egremont Emergency Management Team.

Board of Health Director Juliette Haas asked the Board to approve signing onto a class action suit regarding PFAS in public water supplies. There was some question as to whether Egremont met the criteria to sign on to the lawsuit and as to who would be the one to take on the task of any reporting requirements for the lawsuit. The Board voted 2 in favor with Chairman McGurn abstaining, to authorize Juliette to file a claim.

The Board asked Treasurer Sue Funk to obtain borrowing data for 10 year, 15 year and 20 year terms for the \$969,372 balance for the bond to pay the engineering costs for Phase 1 of the Mount Washington Road reconstruction project. To date the town has borrowing short-term for this project. The Board would like an update on phase 2 scheduling and costs.

OLD BUSINESS:

The Board voted unanimously to appoint Mary Brazie, Lucinda Vermeulen, Richard Stanley, Craig Barnum and Robert Noonan to the Egremont Municipal Housing Trust Board. Web Administrator Mary McGurn will set up a dedicated web page on the town's site for the Housing Trust Board.

The resurfacing of Route 71/Egremont Plain Road by MassDOT will take place next spring. This is just a resurfacing project with no reconstruction, bike lanes, etc. MassDOT is fully funding the project and has full oversight.

The search for legal counsel knowledgeable of municipal employment and labor law continues.

The Finance Committee still has not submitted its research on an appropriate fire services fee to assess to the Town of Mount Washington.

The Board expects the Regional School District Planning Board (RSDPB) to vote on September 26 to recommend a merger and to adopt a draft district agreement and notification to be sent to the towns on September 27, starting the clock for the required Special Town Meetings within 30 days. Egremont is

not able to use Mount Everett High School on October 23, the requested date by the RSDPB for these meetings, as Sheffield has already reserved the auditorium and the high school cafeteria. The parking capacity cannot accommodate both towns. The Board discuss having Egremont's meeting on October 21 at the school.

The Library Trustees have asked that the blacktopping of the Library parking lot be placed on the October Special Town Meeting warrant. The Board agreed to do so.

The issues surrounding the reading garden at the Egremont Library have been resolved and plans are being made for the garden.

GRANTS:

The deadline for the Massachusetts Office on Disabilities (MOD) grant has passed without the town filing for a grant.

Grant Administrator Peg McDonough reported that the invite for the current round of Community Compact grants has been received. The categories are best practices, IT, regionalization and Fiber. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) self-evaluations on town properties could be updated through a Community Compact grant so that the Town can apply during the next round of MOD grants. Accessibility issues on town properties was raised through the Municipal Vulnerability Plan, Comprehensive Plan and Open Space & Recreation Plan processes. The compact grants have no deadline but are taken on a rolling basis.

At the next Board meeting Grant Administrator Peg McDonough will talk to the Board about an IT grant to digitize town records.

Egremont has participated in 4 Community Development Block Grants for housing rehabilitation. Two rounds as lead community (FY 21 & FY 22/23) and two rounds as a regional participant (FY19 & FY21). The breakdown below shows the number of homes rehabbed through those 4 grants in each of the communities that participated during that span.

Egremont: 29 homes

Great Barrington: 22 homes

Sandisfield: 29 homes

Monterey: 14 homes

The current wait list has 28 Egremont homes, which will all receive notification when it's time to apply to the FY22/23 program.

The Council on Aging has been notified of a new \$25,000 supplement transportation grant. More details will be given to the Board at its next meeting. At this time we don't know if there will be another round of the Taxi/Limousine Grant program.

SELECTMEN'S ITEMS:

Vice-Chairman Vermeulen asked if the article renaming the Egremont Selectmen to Egremont Selectboard could be on the October Special Town Meeting warrant. It was noted that the Town Clerk had been asked to research this and hasn't reported back to the Board yet.

Meeting adjourned at 12:09 pm.

Mary Brazie,

Office Administrator

minutes.24/sept19

*The recording of the minutes is posted on the Town's web page at www.egremont-ma.gov for 90 days.
Any attachments noted are on file at Town Hall.*