

**SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
VIRTUAL MEETING
MONDAY, MARCH 29, 2021
APPROVED**

SB Members Virtually Present: Alison S. Manugian, Chair; Joshua A. Degen, Vice Chair; Rebecca H. Pine, Clerk; John R. Giger, Member; John F. Reilly, Member

Also Virtually Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant; Melisa Doig, HR Director; Michael Hartnett, Tax Collector/Treasurer; Hannah Moller, Assistant Tax Collector/Treasurer; Megan Foster, Principal Assistant Assessor; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant; Bud Robertson; Marlena Gilbert

Ms. Manugian called the meeting to order at 7:05pm and reviewed the agenda.

Announcements

Ms. Pine said there was still time to pull papers for elected offices. She said that folks had until Friday to pull papers and Tuesday to turn them in.

Mr. Haddad said that a tree fell on the Center in West Groton this morning due to the high winds. He said that the Insurance Company would be out tomorrow morning and the roof contractor was already lined up to make temporary repairs to the holes in the roof.

Mr. Haddad read a statement into the record on behalf of the Town Clerk regarding the ballot question that would be on the May 25, 2021 ballot pertaining to the arguments for and against the ballot question. This informative pamphlet would be mailed to the residents prior to the election.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that they were seeing an uptick in COVID cases. He said they remained at yellow status this past week. He said that he urged the residents to be diligent in adhering to the protocols. He said that they would keep Town Hall closed to the public and by appointment only until things trended down. Mr. Haddad said that the Governor was allowing meetings to happen in public if they followed 50% capacity guidelines but recommended that they keep meetings via Zoom for now. The Board agreed with meetings remaining on Zoom.

LIQUOR LICENSE PUBLIC HEARING – IXTAPA CANTINA

Mr. Haddad read the public hearing notice into the record. Mr. Haddad said that he approved, last summer, a temporary expansion of the liquor license to allow for outdoor seating at Ixtapa due to COVID, as allowed by the Governors order and added that this was to make permanent what they had in place currently now.

Ms. Pine moved to open the public hearing to consider altering the premises on the all-alcohol on-premise liquor license for Ixtapa Cantina. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Degen-aye; Pine-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye; Manugian-aye

Attorney Nicholas Felici said that their request was to permanently add 6-7 tables with 28 chairs for outside dining. He said there would be no structural changes being made but adding this would allow them some extra seating during the spring and summer months. Ms. Manugian said that it appeared as though Planning Board approval was needed. Mr. Haddad said that they obtained Planning Board approval last summer. Ms. Pine asked how many tables they were looking for. Attorney Felici said that 7 tables with 28 seats would be ideal. Mr. Giger said he wasn't sure the Town wanted to see this indefinitely.

Abutter, Mr. David Martin said he lived at 74 Shelters Road. He said that when the restaurant expanded last year, the music outside became excessive which made his backyard and back deck unusable. He said he was not in favor of this unless they would make changes to this in a residential neighborhood. Mr. Haddad said that the Board could make a condition that said no outdoor music. Attorney Felici said that if this was a concern, no notice had been given but could certainly address it. He said that this was a family style restaurant and not a bar but could appreciate concern if music was echoing across the pond. He said that they could address the volume of the music. Mr. Martin said that he did not file a complaint last year adding he wanted to support local business. Mr. Degen asked if the applicant would forego the music in order to obtain outdoor seating.

Mr. Giger said that they were on a slippery slope with outside music. He said that they would get his vote if they didn't have music outside. Attorney Felici said his client's intention was not to add additional music outside. Mr. Brambila said he would not put the additional speaker outside and only play music inside.

Ms. Pine made a motion to close the public hearing. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. Roll Call: Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye

Mr. Degen moved to grant an alteration to the all alcohol on premise liquor license through December 31, 2021 for the license at Ixtapa with the condition that no outdoor speakers with music from the indoors be allowed. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion. Roll Call: Degen-aye; Manugian-aye; Pine-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye

T.R.E.A.D PROGRAM PRESENTATION

Ms. Moller said she was going to be speaking about 3 different sections of Mass General Law; one that had been voted on at Town Meeting and 2 others to consider. She said that TREAD stood for Tax Relief for Elderly and Disabled persons. She said it was voted on and approved at the Spring 2016 Town Meeting but never implemented. Ms. Moller reviewed the criteria required to qualify. Mr. Haddad said that this was a Board appointed committee. Ms. Moller explained Chapter 60, Section F which was the Municipal Veterans Assistance Fund which would need to be voted on by July 1st of a given Fiscal Year in order to be implemented. Ms. Moller said that Chapter 59, Section 5N was a reduction of property tax obligation for veterans in exchange for volunteer services. She said that this would draw from their current overlay. Ms. Manugian asked if people could utilize multiple programs. Ms. Moller said that she thought that they could. Ms. Pine said that the Commissioners of Trust Funds were familiar with evaluating someone's need adding that this would require that the Veterans Agent would need to qualify people for this fund. There was a question if because they were not fully utilizing veterans funds they already had, why adopt additional programs for the same usage.

Mr. Haddad said that they adopted the TREAD program 5 years ago and did not implement it. He said that they wanted to provide the residents with this program. He said he would like to advertise the 3 vacant positions and fill this committee. He said he would like to see the Board adopt Chapter 59, Section 5N to expand the senior work off program to include Veteran's.

Mr. Degen moved to appoint the committee as requested by the Town Manager as stipulated by the 2016 Spring Town Meeting vote. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Mr. Degen further added to his motion that they advertise for 3 members at large to serve with the Chair of the Board of Assessors and the Tax Collector Treasurer on this Committee. Roll Call: Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Degen-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye

Mr. Haddad said that the second motion was to adopt Chapter 59, Section 5N.

Mr. Degen made a motion to adopt Chapter 59, Section 5N. Mr. Reilly seconded the motion.

Ms. Manugian asked if they could bring it back to look into it a little bit further. Mr. Degen withdrew his motion.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

2. Mr. Haddad said he had provided the Board with the latest draft of the warrant and a memo of outstanding positions.

Article 5 – Operating Budget – Mr. Haddad said that the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve the budget as presented. The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 6 – Mr. Haddad said he broke out the dump truck into 2 separate capital items as was discussed at their last meeting. Mr. Haddad explained the breakdown. The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 7 – Middle School Track – Mr. Giger remained as deferred until Town Meeting.

Article 10 – Whitney Pond Well #3 Engineering – Mr. Haddad said that the amount being requested was \$300K. Mr. Degen was in favor.

Article 14 – Ms. Manugian supported CPC Proposal C. Mr. Giger and Mr. Degen continued to defer on CPC Proposal J.

Article 19 – Mr. Haddad said he didn't have anything he wanted to bring forward for line-item transfers at this time. He said he may withdraw this article but would keep it for now.

Article 20 – Mr. Haddad said that there was a current deficit of \$78K in snow and ice at this time. He said that he would probably be withdrawing this item and use the money appropriated in the budget.

Article 21 – Mr. Haddad said that they were looking for \$122K. The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 22 - \$210K – The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 23 - \$35K – The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 24 - \$10K – The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 25 – Mr. Haddad said that there were 4 prior years bills totaling approximately \$800. The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 26 - \$239 to offset shortfalls. The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 27 –Fire details - \$1,861.04. The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 28 – Final year for paying off Surrenden Farm - The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 29 – Assessors Quinquennial Certification – Ms. Pine said that it seemed to her that they were constantly approving money for certification and appraisals. The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 30 – The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 31 – The Board unanimously supported this.

Article 32 - The Board unanimously supported this.

Mr. Haddad said that he sent out an email this afternoon to update them on the golf carts. He said that the Capital Plan called for the leasing of 25 gas powered carts this summer. Mr. Haddad said that for the past week, he, Shawn Campbell, Tom Delaney, Kevin Kelly had been working on developing a plan and costs to make this happen.

Mr. Haddad said that there were two issues that they needed to take into consideration when making this final decision. He said that the first was that they needed to replace the carts this summer adding the current carts were over 9 years old and were overdue for replacement. He said that this purchase had been in the Capital Plan for the last five years. He said that the second consideration was that he did not have a budget to convert to electric carts, so if they decided to pursue that option, they would need to come up with a funding source. Mr. Haddad noted the following:

- The Light Department would provide the labor and materials to bring the necessary electricity to the Country Club to install an electric cart station. They would need to hire an electrician to bring the power from the light poles to the electric cart station. They would need to construct a “bird box” type facility to house the electric charging ports. Based on an estimate from their maintenance department, he said they believed this entire construction/electricity would run between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

- Mr. Haddad said that they had also been advised that the carts would need to remain on the charging ports for the winter months. He said he was not comfortable leaving the carts exposed to the elements all winter (adding the current carts were stored at the pavilion over the winter to protect them from the elements). He said that they would want to do the same thing with electric carts, so they would need to run electricity to the pavilion and move the charging stations there. Mr. Haddad said that they anticipated this cost to be between \$5,000 and \$10,000. The total cost to get this done will be between \$15,000 and \$25,000.

Mr. Haddad said that as stated, he did not have a budget for this, so they would need either a reserve fund transfer or an article added to the Warrant to transfer the necessary funds from Free Cash. Mr. Haddad said that this was potentially a temporary solution. Mr. Haddad said that the Light Commission met last week to discuss this issue and were considering the idea of the Groton Electric co-op purchasing the electric golf carts and leasing them back to the Town. He said that they were also considering the idea of the Groton Electric co-op building a shelter (primarily for the carts) but for other things as well and leasing that back to the town with a \$1 buyout at the end. He said that they would need to study this in more detail to determine the viability adding this could be a long-term solution, but obviously would not be ready for this summer.

Mr. Haddad said he was still recommending that they follow through with the original capital budget and replace the Carts as originally called for in the Capital Plan and then take the next year to plan to build a permanent structure for electric carts with the Light Department's potential assistance. Mr. Haddad said he understood the fact that they were a Green Community and was proud of that but that this couldn't be pulled together for this summer.

Mr. Robertson said that they all agreed going green was the right answer but the extra costs at this time when they weren't filling positions, etc. was a concern. He said that the Country Club was under extreme criticism to make their budget and wasn't sure this should be done right now. Mr. Haddad said he didn't think Green Communities was a possibility this year due to the short deadline they would have and the list of projects they had already planned for. Mr. Robertson said that the Finance Committee voted unanimously to defer for right now adding there were still too many questions. Mr. Robertson said that the existing carts were terrible and needed to be replaced.

Ms. Pine said she wanted to thank GELD for offering a great program. She said she saw this as the way to go and saw this as a short-term issue. She asked if there was a program for a short-term lease to cover them for the summer. Mr. Degen said there was a need to replace the carts now adding that was not the question. He said that in the spirit of going green and for leaving less of a carbon footprint, the time to go green was now. He said that the \$25K expense was short term and could maybe be offset somewhat by raising golf cart fees. Ms. Manugian said she couldn't support an outright purchase of gas golf carts. She wished there was a way to defer this or make the money more available. Ms. Pine said she wasn't sure a proposal to buy gas carts at Town Meeting would pass and thought they should buy the electric ones. Mr. Reilly asked what they would raise the cart fees on, the old ones. He said the cost of the electric ones were low in his estimation. Ms. Manugian said she was not in favor of gas carts or for approving money for temporary electric charging stations. She said that they either had to figure it out how to make it work without spending more money or tell people they had to walk. Mr. Robertson said that they had to have carts. He said that there were seniors who couldn't walk an entire course and needed to have carts available. Mr. Giger said he was in favor of going electric and thought they should find the \$25K. Ms. Pine said she was in favor of finding the money or for also finding temporary carts. Mr. Haddad said he could ask the Finance Committee for a \$25K reserve fund transfer and work with GELD on the infrastructure. Mr. Haddad said he didn't want to see them build anymore buildings right now. He said if GELD was willing to build the building and lease it back, that was the choice. Mr. Degen suggested that they speak to the Green Communities representative on Wednesday about whether this could be included. The Board deferred until they had more information.

3. Mr. Haddad provided the Board with an update on their upcoming schedule.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. Manugian said that an email was sent from one member to two others which raised concerns of an OML violation. She said that in the past they had self-reported, alerted the Attorney General, read the email into the record and waited for the AG to respond and suggested that be the course of action this time. Ms. Manugian read the email in question into the record. (see attached)

Mr. Haddad asked the Board to vote that they acknowledge the OML violation and accept the remedy as proposed by the Chair.

Mr. Degen made that motion. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Degen-abstain; Giger-aye; Pine-aye; Manugian-aye; Reilly-aye

MINUTES

Mr. Degen moved to approve the meeting minutes of March 22, 2021 as presented. Ms. Pine seconded the motion. Roll Call: Degen-aye; Pine-aye; Giger-aye; Reilly-aye; Manugian-aye

Mr. Manugian adjourned the meeting at 8:46pm.

Approved: _____
Rebecca H. Pine, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted:
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 4/12/2021