

## SUNDERLAND SELECTBOARD MINUTES

Place: Sunderland Town Offices, 12 School Street

June 26, 2023

Attending: N. Waring, C. Drake-Tremblay (remote), D. Murphy, G. Kravitz

Others: Senator Jo Comerford, B. Bennett (BOH Chair), J. Corwin, C. Bennett

Meeting presented Hybrid and In-person with portions recorded by FCAT

Meeting called to order at 6:30PM

### MINUTES

Mr. Murphy motion to accept MINUTES of 06/12 /2023, Ms. Drake-Tremblay second, vote 3-0.

### BUSINESS

- Senator Comerford gave an update of her activities. She began by thanking the Board and the Town Administrator for their support and service. Internet disconnection experienced during Sen. Comerford's session; the meeting continued while technology issues were explored, FCAT continued to show on Local Channel and record. Sen Comerford said she is currently Senate Chair of Joint Committee for Higher Ed and Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Agriculture, 21st Rural Farm Commission. She represents 25 cities and towns in Franklin, Hampshire and Worcester counties. She has worked on the Local Aid bill for \$1.27 Billion, \$15 Million Public Health Bill, working on possible Chapter 90 definitions to distribute for the amount of road miles, not population. Rural School Aid Pilot payment bill with Rep. Blais and Ch 70 Rural School Bill for formula adjustment. She also talked about review of water distribution of the Quabbin which isn't including Western Mass or compensation. Mr. Waring expressed much needed attention to the Quabbin water distribution and remembers when neighboring towns no longer existed due to the changes years ago. Energy resource support from the state is welcomed and Sen. Comerford noted that Sunderland is a model with solar. Mr. Waring encourages the state to work with towns to make those types of projects are streamlined and easier to implement for communities and residents as well as prioritize manufacturing of green products in MA. Gov. Healey & Lt. Gov Driscoll announced MA Senator Anne Gobi as Director of Rural Affairs and looks forward to working with her. Sen. Comerford led tour with Sen. Lydia Edwards tour of rural vs. urban area needs with the housing delegation for housing grants in western mass. Low-income housing assistance is in the budget. State is also pursuing the Rt. 2 Rail Project which is progressing for the northern tier corridor in addition to the North/South and Berkshire to Boston lines as well as to Springfield. Mr. Murphy expressed the need for state guidance on ADUs and septic allowing the change in number of bedrooms in an existing home for diverting that bedroom space to an ADU without having to go through an expensive full upgrade. Sen. Comerford stated the Title 8 tax credit was tripled and is now in conference, which would benefit many since approximately 30% in MA are on septic. Mr. Waring also brought up grants re: threshold of funds to pay for grant writers, etc. Would appreciate some state support from RCOGs, the state, or direct state aid, allowing grant funds to be applied for grant writers. Or, rural development with grant writers on staff, noting that grant writers are quite costly for small towns limiting competitiveness. Matching funds are problematic since small towns need to provide up to 25-30% of funds for the assistance without return for several years which makes budgeting difficult. The FRCOG did receive state funding for grant writers to assist local communities, which have been discussed with the town by Executive Director Linda Dunlavy. Mr. Waring recognizes this regionally and encourages more of that support to towns. Town Grant Workshop series being offered allows for rural town visibility. Sen. Comerford enthusiastically offered to work with Sunderland to request an "earmark" for grant writing funding, however, other options need to be recognized by the state. Mr. Waring noted the workshops are great, however, many interested in attending are volunteers in smaller communities which makes attendance difficult. He also stated that larger communities have paid staff to attend workshops, etc., as part of their duties during business hours. He encouraged offering after-hours or weekend options for those who cannot attend otherwise. Town will review priorities for earmarks with Town Administrator for further dialogue with Sen. Comerford. Mr. Waring recognized the efforts of Sen. Comerford in her service to Western Mass. Ms. Houle, Town Clerk,

sent in message to Sen. Comerford stating she appreciates the work helping small towns fund the extra cost of new responsibilities on town clerks of the Votes Act and to help to facilitate the huge volume that comes with elections now and looks forward to seeing Sen. Comerford on Wednesday for Town Clerks Day on the hill. Sen. Comerford will be on the hill Wednesday and looks forward to seeing Wendy and all the Town Clerks. Voting expansion needs to continue to be reviewed and agrees we need to do better.

- **SICK BANK POLICY** – Mr. Kravitz noted that recently the Personnel Committee recommended the Sick Bank Policy be amended to allow new employees to take advantage of it. We still want to limit our potential liability by limiting the number of hours. Mr. Kravitz amended the policy under “*Management, § 5 stating total sick, leave in the bank may accumulate year-to-year but shall not exceed 600 hours from year-to-year. Qualified employees who have not donated to the bank may do so regardless of the existing number of hours in the bank. If this causes the bank to exceed 600 hours on July 1<sup>st</sup> of the following year, the bank will be reduced to 600 hours.*” There was discussion of clarification of number of hours any employee may use during a fiscal year. Ms. Drake-Tremblay explained that on Pg 2, §5 of document addresses that issue: once the balance reduces to 40 hours, employees can donate time again in that year. The policy states the sick bank balance has to drop to 40 hours before employees can donate again. Ms. Drake-Tremblay asked if the bank balance can be raised before donations can be added, rather than deplete down to 40 hours. Mr. Kravitz noted that we can allow donations at any time once the minimum has been achieved. Mr. Waring would support raising the threshold for the minimum. Timeframe for replenishing bank before end of fiscal year was discussed. Mr. Murphy motion to accept the new Sick Leave Bank policy with an increase of the base threshold to 160 hours from the original 40 hours, Ms. Drake-Tremblay second, vote 3-0.

#### SELECTBOARD UPDATES

- Mr. Waring enjoyed PARTICIPATING IN THE DEERFIELD 350<sup>TH</sup> PARADE, attending with Ms. Drake-Tremblay, both riding on the float with the Deerfield Selectboard, which was fun. He thanked Deerfield for inviting them. Mr. Murphy had nothing to report. Ms. Drake-Tremblay attended a SCEMS Board of Oversight meeting, noting they will be meeting every two weeks due to matters required since the Director is leaving. They will be reviewing job descriptions, etc., before advertising before posting the job opening.

#### TOWN ADMINISTRATOR UPDATES

- Capital Project for Mini-Splits at SES Library was approved at \$11,000, school’s updated quote is \$4,000 more but vendor said they can also apply for a reimbursement for up to \$9,000. The stipulation would be requiring all funds paid first, then be reimbursed. If the Board wishes to take this option, Mr. Kravitz recommends ARPA funds be used for the difference. Any rebate received would go into the General Fund as Free Cash. Mr. Waring motion to appropriate \$4,000 from ARPA funds to SES Library Capital Project for Mini-Splits, Mr. Murphy second, vote 3-0.
- School is asking for both the Library A/C project and oil tank project, who should sign contracts. Typically the Town Administrator signs as Procurement Officer and because it is a town building. This allows for contract oversight but school noted they would accept full responsibility as well as requested. Mr. Kravitz will provide oversight and present contracts for signature to the Selectboard between the school and contractor. No vote needed.
- **ACCOUNTING SERVICES CONTRACT** – RFP had two responses. One proposal was disqualified as their plan of service was outside the scope of request and not relevant to accounting services. They gave an hourly rate, not an annual rate, also interest in moving clients to the cloud as noted on their website and not accounting services. All of this was worthy in disqualifying this vendor. The second respondent was Aponte and Aponte who have been providing the town with interim accounting services. Requesting vote from the Board to award Accounting Service Contract to Aponte and Aponte for 7/1/2023-6/30/2024. Their services to date have been working well with the town and has received positive feedback from staff. Mr. Murphy motion to award ACCOUNTING SERVICE CONTRACT TO APONTE AND APONTE effective 7/1/23-6/30/24, Ms. Drake-Tremblay second, vote 3-0.

- ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE CHANGE – Current software company is asking to sign a one-year license with them even though we will not need the service for full year. We have minimized users, etc. but the cost will still be about \$12,000. With the old accounting software, new Accounting Service and new accounting software, we will still be within budget appropriated for this fiscal year. We still need to maintain the old software for year end close-out, etc. and will simultaneously be using the new software for FY24 activities.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

- CALL-FIREFIGHTER SPECIAL LEGISLATION as authorized by town meeting to accept this.  
Correspondence has been prepared to send to the House asking for Special Legislation for one of our Call Firefighters to remain on staff beyond the age of 65. The Board will sign letter and send.
- Next Selectboard meeting is scheduled for July 10, 2023.
- Town Offices Closed Tues. July 4<sup>th</sup> – Independence Day Observance.

ADJOURNMENT: Mr. Murphy motion to adjourn, Ms. Drake-Tremblay second, vote 3-0 at 7:39PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Geoff Kravitz,  
Town Administrator

