MINUTES OF THE SANDWICH BOARD OF SELECTMEN JANUARY 9, 2020
Town Hall, 130 Main Street, Sandwich, MA 02563
7:00 p.m.

Board of Selectmen Members Present: Dave Sampson, Michael Miller, Robert George, Shane Hoctor, Charles Holden
Others Present: Town Manager George Dunham, Assistant Town Manager Heather Harper, Carl Johansen, B. Holcombe, A. Adler, J. Dodson-Edgars, M. Sullivan, J. Coogan, D. Darling

Mr. Sampson opened the meeting at 7:00 PM

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Mr. Miller moved to approve the minutes of November 21, 2019. Seconded. Approved unanimously.

PUBLIC FORUM

B. Holcombe spoke about being distressed about paying the taxes. They seem to increase, but he doesn’t see what he is getting for what he pays.

A. Adler stated her taxes are high and there don’t seem to be any services for what she is paying – no discounted beach pass, no discounts for senior citizens, no fire hydrants in Holly Ridge area, and there is an additional tax for water.

J. Dodson-Edgars would like to see a specific breakdown on her tax bill as to where specifically the money is going. She owns a home in Oregon and they do that. She is retired and is missing her cash flow. She states she receives no help with her taxes and no tax credits for seniors and veterans, although New Mexico has them. She is at the meeting to support tax relief because she wants to be able to stay in Town.

C. Johansen thanked the Board for his celebration at the last meeting. He also wanted to make one correction on what he heard a prior speaker state. Any veteran living in Sandwich with a disability received $500 off the tax bill. Apply through the Veteran’s office in Hyannis.
M. Sullivan is the president of his newcomers' and neighborhood club, and their interest has been the senior center. He states that the seniors are the most important segment of the tax base. They don’t receive anything but pay a large proportion of the taxes.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

1. Finance Committee meets January 14. On January 15 there is a public forum on the Wing School disposition. Next Selectmen’s meeting is January 30, at which the FY ’21 budget presentation will be made.
2. The DPW has announced some drainage work in Forestdale – Country Estates. There is a news alert on the DPW website with additional information. The draft short term signal plan has been completed with any changes due in the next two weeks. There is an ongoing study of pedestrian crossings on Cotuit and Quaker Meetinghouse Rds.
3. S. Jensen and the consultant met with the Historic District Committee to discuss the conceptual plans for the boardwalk reconstruction. Some concerns were expressed about the size and rail changes. They have begun reaching out to the State relative to some of the permits.
4. There has been a bid of $220,000 received for the needed work at Sandwich Hollows. G. Dunham hopes to have a contract within six weeks. The work will result in a prolonged closure of the clubhouse.
5. The Town applied for a $56,000 IT grant, but was awarded only $20,000. This will be enough to digitize the records at Town Hall, which has started.

CORRESPONDENCE/STATEMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr. Hoctor asked about the status of the Section 111 study. Mr. Dunham said the draft is not completed; it is expected in March. Mr. George thanked people for coming to speak at Public Forum. Mr. Hoctor announced that the Eagle Scouts will be attending the January 30 budget meeting.

STAFF MEETING

7:15 PM Public Hearing – This is a hearing to discuss Eversource’s request to install three utility poles at 34 Quaker Meetinghouse Rd. for the skate park and the multipurpose courts projects. Mr. Sampson read the hearing notice. **Mr. Miller moved to open the public hearing, seconded and voted unanimously to open the hearing.** The proposal is for three new poles, which will include coverage for the Oak Crest Cove property plus others (see the map in the Agenda packet). The company will not be taking any poles down, and abutters have been notified. Mr. Holden asked whether this work will facilitate the crossings in that location. Mr. Dunham said yes. There was no further discussion from the public or the Board. **Mr. Miller moved to close the public hearing, seconded, approved unanimously.** Mr. Miller moved to accept the request for three poles at the locations stated, seconded, approved unanimously.
Wilson Gravesite – Mr. Jim Coogan talked about his proposal to erect a new historical marker at the Wilson gravesite. There is already a sign marking the site, which he does not want to remove, however he thinks there should be more information available about Mr. Wilson’s life and contributions. A recent newspaper article raised awareness, and there has been a response from people who would like to donate the money for the project. Because the gravesite is on Town property, he wanted to be sure he was following protocol. He would like to erect a new sign with the Grand Army of the Republic symbol and text about Mr. Wilson’s life. Additionally, he would like to develop a historical flyer with additional information about Mr. Wilson and also Sandwich’s contribution to the Civil War; these handouts would be placed in a weather proof box. Mr. Coogan has contacted the Visitor Service Board and has been told that Board could fund the sign and the pamphlet; he will show the pamphlet to the Selectmen when it is finished. He has no intention of touching the Eagle Scout sign, although thinks it should be repainted and the gravestone cleaned. Mr. Miller moved to accept the concept plans and to designate Mr. Dunham to supervise and approve the copy of the materials, seconded, approved unanimously.

Tax Exemption Proposal – Mr. David Darling came to talk about town taxes and fees. After providing some information about his economic and planning background, he presented a potential article he would like to see on the warrant for the next Town Meeting. The article is designed to give tax relief for residents 65 years and older who have been residents in Town for at least five years. His proposal is to give a tax exemption of $1,000 or 20% of the mean home value based on the most recent assessment, whichever is greater. Mr. Dunham had consulted with both Ed Childs and John Giorgio. There is a flyer in the Agenda Packet that describes the State rules for exemptions. The information in the flyer talks about income and equity limits, which are not part of Mr. Darling’s proposal. He said there is a process within State guidelines for Town Meeting to approve some adjustments, but otherwise large adjustments would need to be approved as a special act of the Legislature. Mr. Sampson talked about how complex this would be if approved, as it would affect revenue amounts. Currently, the Town budgets $500,000 for those meeting current exemption guidelines; not being able to anticipate who would be applying makes planning very difficult. Mr. Darling suggested that only people who have a sense that they would need the exemption would apply, but that would mean that the Town would have to budget assuming everyone who met the age and residency requirements would apply. Mr. Dunham and Mr. Childs will discuss the issue and get back to the Selectmen with legal options.

Mr. Dunham was asked to explain how the tax bills work. He explained that the first two quarterly bills of the year are based on the prior year’s taxes. Impact of any changes approved by Town Meeting, such as a project being paid for the first time, would appear in the final two bills of the year, which is why bills might seem to increase. There are detailed explanations on the Town website. This process is mandated and supervised by the State. The State requires a full evaluation to be done every 5 years and this is happening this fiscal year. The current average tax bill is $6,220 and will be about $6,223 next year.
OLD BUSINESS

FY ’21 Budget – Progress has been made this week with multiple meetings. There are eight or nine department heads who would like an increase in their budget. Right now, the overall increase is at about 3%. Opportunities have been created with the consolidation of Rte 6A. The net for the capital budget is $961,000. Ambulance Fund transfers of $250,000 have been recommended. The school budget has been sent to the School Committee for consideration. They will hold a few meetings before sending recommendations to the Selectmen.

Rte. 6A – Mr. Dunham reported that the cost estimates for the Rte. 6A project are higher than anticipated. This is a bare bones proposal with very little room to save money. Things that have been considered include reducing the scope of the parking, identified more work that could be done in-house, and eliminating the basement well. Mr. Dunham has consulted with the Town departments and verified estimates with department heads; some parts could be broken out. The estimate is a base bid with the possibility of deducting alternates; hard figures are needed for Town meeting. Contributing factors to this situation include higher public project costs, increase in the prevailing wage, and workload of contractors. Additionally, more attention needs to be paid to the HVAC system and electrical wiring.

Mr. Dunham presented several ways of addressing the increased estimate: using free cash, decreasing the capital plan amount, using the tax title sale of $230,000 plus other estimate collections in tax title ($205,000), savings from health insurance change, expected refund balance from the Cape Health Group, and funds from the sale of the Forestdale fire station. These would all need to be authorized by Town Meeting. This plan will maintain the excess levy reserve and will not require issuing debt. If the action plan is ready by end of January and the construction bid by early March, a special Town Meeting could be held by March 23. The warrant would need to be posted before the bid numbers come in; alterations to articles can be made in the official motions. Other issues that could be added to the meeting include the recommendation for the Wing School, approval of the capital budget, etc. Mr. Sampson called the proposed actions planning for the worst and being proactive. The Selectmen agreed that Mr. Dunham should go forward with the action plan.

Other Old Business – None.

NEW BUSINESS

Seasonal Population for ACBB – The projected number for seasonal population is 35,000. Mr. Hoctor moved that this number be forwarded to the ABCC, seconded, approved unanimously.

LCP Steering Committee – the Planning Board has requested that the Selectmen authorize a structure for a Local Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. The work to update the LCP will take an estimated 1 1/2 to 2 years. The recommendation is that the Steering Committee be comprised of nine members: two from Planning Board, one from the Housing Authority, one each from the Conservation and Historical Commission, and the remainder from the community at large. The Planning Board will accept inquiries and reviewing letters of interest. Mr. Holden moved to accept the formation of the Steering Committee as proposed, seconded, and approved unanimously.
Warrants – They have been signed. No concerns.

PUBLIC FORUM

None.

CLOSING REMARKS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Hoctor moved that the meeting be adjourned, seconded, approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:33 PM. Happy New Year to all.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Coggeshall

Supporting Documents:

1. Pole Hearing – Quaker Meetinghouse Road
2. Eversource Petition for 3 new poles on Quaker Meetinghouse Road (28 pages)
3. Memo from Jim Coogan re: Improvements to Joseph Wilson grave site
4. Email from David Darling re: Property Tax Relief for Sandwich Seniors/homeowners
5. Standard Information Provided to All Sandwich Taxpayers re: tax exemption
6. DLS Taxpayer’s Guide to Local Property Tax Exemptions (6 pages)
7. Email from Ed Childs re: Senior Exemptions (3 pages)
8. Proposed Timeline for FY21 Budget
9. Projected General Fund Revenues and Expenses FY21
10. Town Offices Study – Preliminary Project Budget
11. 2020 Seasonal Population Increase Estimate Form
12. Letter from Robert E. King re: formation of a Local Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee