

Town of Princeton, Mass. – Oct. 2, 2017 – 7:30 PM

Board of Selectmen – Regular Meeting

Present: Chair Jon Fudeman, Richard Bisk, Edith Morgan w/ TA Nina Nazarian absent.

7:30 PM The chairman opened the meeting and board voted all in favor to approve minutes for September 18 and 21 with minor edits from Richy.

Selectmen voted all in favor to appoint new administrative assistant for the Building Dept., Ginger Toll, effective Oct. 3. From Oct. 3 to the end of the month, she will be in training, then will be working the full hours when Linda Albrecht retires at end of month.

Group noted progress of Charter Cable franchise. A “Statement of Reasons” letter had been sent, signed by the T.A., to the Mass. DTC secretary on Sept. 27. It served as the Issuing Authority's written public statement reporting the license grant and the reasons for it pursuant to 207 CMR 3.04(5), as authorized by the Board of Selectmen.

Edith reported on progress of Facilities Steering Cmte. which has received responses from several architect/design firms who responded to an RFQ. They will be interviewed on Oct. 10 at 5:30 PM at the Annex. The firm chosen will determine needs and priorities for four town buildings.

7:40 PM Selectmen turned to the agenda item on Small Bridge Repair Program and voted all in favor to authorize the T.A. to sign the contract with MassDOT for \$500,000 for the Route 31 bridge project.

7:42 PM Responding to an inquiry from Beth Mellor, who asked if the BOS is moving forward with formation of a standing Facilities Advisory Committee. The P.C. Management Cmte. is now defunct but its members could transition into an F.A.C. similar to the Roads Advisory Committee to assist with monitoring facilities and triaging maintenance needs both short and long term. Edith noted that current focus is on other four buildings with the recent RFQ activity; plus, T.P. School needs to be monitored. She added that the building inspector should be involved as to buildings’ critical needs. Group discussed formation of a punch list, from the building inspector or maybe one already exists, from the Facilities Study Cmte. or Phil Connors. Jon stated that BOS needs to safeguard the assets of the town—a community needs to invest in its assets.

7:50 PM Amanda Culhane, in for The Landmark, asked about the notice of non-compliance from DEP on the well under Mechanics Hall. Richy has communicated with Townline Garage owner Dick Stuart who said he has communicated with well-pump contractor Bob Culley about doing the work. Any work at the site should be done before the ground freezes. DEP is recommending that wellhead controls be located above ground and the controls at the Townline building—not in a condemned building where they are not accessible. Richy has investigated history of the garage and well and was told that the shared well may be linked to Charlie or Clayton Hubbard but no details on legal status were forthcoming. DEP had set a deadline (for Oct. 5) for a response by the town. This is a response outlining action, not a deadline for action, and town may request an extension.

8 PM Selectmen voted all in favor to authorize the T.A. to request an extension of up to six months for a response to DEP’s Notice of Non-compliance dated Sept. 5, 2017, for a water-well violation at Mechanics Hall.

8:05 PM Jon continued a conversation about what he feels is a need for a Town Financial Plan—for operations, crunching numbers on financial needs--that includes looking for savings. He

distributed a list of motions for the board to vote on and recited the “Long Range Financial Plan Motion” as follows: It tasks the Selectboard~to prepare a long range financial plan in conjunction with the town administrator, the advisory committee and interested residents. It is expected that the preparation of a long range financial plan is an organic process and from time to time progress may be limited to other pressing matters. Therefore, no deadline is set for completion. It is further expected that this plan will address matters such as revenue and expense projections, anticipated capital expenditures, sustainability, and debt levels. It is further expected that the~Selectboard~will consider long range financial plan guidelines and recommendations available from various sources as well as plans prepared by other towns.~

Jon stressed importance of three elements working together to insure fiscal health: budget development; capital plan and financial plan. These must work together in lockstep and cannot be implemented individually. He pointed out that communities locally and globally have created financial plans and Princeton lacks one. He also noted that he could not find a financial model similar to Princeton as every community is so different, but he has shared plans from other towns in the state to illustrate what a financial plan looks like.

Edith wanted to know what a financial plan for Princeton would look like, and what it would accomplish. She noted some revenue sources such as grant funding cannot be predicted while figures from tax revenue can be anticipated.

Jon noted a list of pending capital expenditures totaling almost \$15 million, including bridge and culvert upgrades; facilities improvements (Bagg Hall) and fire department/public safety requests; doing something with P.C. and a possible Community Center. He suggested that when debt service for the windmills ends in 2025, the drop in PMLD charges to homeowners could be taken up by higher taxes for the town, for a zero-sum gain to residents’ bills. He also noted that Princeton’s DPW and Police budgets are the highest per capita among 24 similar-sized towns in the area, and that the reasons for this could be analyzed.

Edith pointed out that PMLD may have other ideas about redirecting or re-applying revenues.

Richy recalled that at the last meeting, the BOS tasked Jon—who agreed--to craft a financial plan model for Princeton to discuss at this meeting. He insisted that all three selectmen needed to be onboard with a financial plan and an outline would help with that. Edith said group must focus on current pressing needs such as facilities upgrades and road maintenance and crafting another plan may be an obstacle, while Jon sees (a financial plan) as support for these projects.

Jon said he will send models from other towns. He viewed his own model as potentially reflecting his personal opinions, and was reluctant to subject it to open-meeting regulations. He then offered to craft a model for Princeton and distribute it publicly as a private citizen, not as a selectman.

8:40 PM Group discussed Capital Improvements Plan using Collins Center. Jon pointed to the fact that many financial experts live in town who would be willing to contribute volunteer time towards a capital plan. He didn’t think an outside contractor was necessary to craft the initial plan, which, moving forward, has to be updated annually anyway, using internal resources. The Collins Center is being funded by a \$20,000 grant from Community Compact with a local contribution of \$1,600, but some other project may be more useful, such as an operational review. Group agreed and wants to find out if focus of grant can be switched into a different study be the Collins Center.

Edith pointed out that the view of municipal finance by Jon as a CPA may not match her view-or others--as a business owner, or meet the actual needs of the town.

Richy wants to support Jon's (internally-done) capital plan concept but voiced two specific concerns: is it possible for Collins Center to switch to a different study using this grant; and, does the town really have a group of expert volunteers willing to do a capital plan?

9:05 PM Selectmen voted all in favor to have Jon and Nina look into the possibility of Community Compact grant funding being applied to another purpose such as an operational review.

Jon then recited the "Budget Motion" from his list, which stated that the~Selectboard~shall prepare the fiscal year 2018 budget in conjunction with the town administrator, the advisory committee and department heads. It is expected that in preparing the budget the~Selectboard~will consider at their discretion concepts and techniques such as zero based budgeting, benchmarking, best practices, town needs, comparisons with similar towns, long term sustainability, current and expected debt service and anticipated capital and future needs such as road repairs, facilities improvements and post-employment benefits. It is further expected that in light of expected capital expenditures that the~Selectboard~in preparing the budget will consider areas for possible cost reductions.

9:10 PM Selectmen voted all in favor to approve the Budget Motion as stated.

The Town Democratic party has put forth resident Philip G. O'Brien as a nominee for the final registrar opening; the term to expire 3/31/19. Phil does meet the MGL requirements for the position. The board then voted all in favor to appoint Phil O'Brien for Democratic Town Committee.

Christopher Conway serves on the Facilities Steering Committee and has done work for one of the vendors who bid on a project, but he has completed the state disclosure form. The Board voted all in favor to accept the disclosure of an appearance of a conflict of interest as completed by Chris Conway.

9:17 PM A resident who is financially unable to pay an ambulance bill requested an abatement in a letter to BOS explaining the situation. Board members voted all in favor to authorize abatement of \$1,543.75 for ambulance run number 17-38939.

Richy attended the anniversary celebration of the Central Mass. Rail Trail at the West Boylston trailhead on Thomas Street, reporting that the Wachusett Greenways ongoing success with the expanding pathway and interpretive programs very impressive.

During Public Comment, Phil Gransewicz recommended that for major study projects, the town avoid depending on volunteers when Community Compact grants can fund the use of professional firms.

9:30 PM Selectmen voted all in favor to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted, Marie Auger, admin. assist.

BOS Referenced Documents: Resume from Ginger Toll; DEP notice on well violation; List of architect/design firms; List of motions from Jon F.; Request from DTC chair Phoebe Moore to appoint Phil O'Brien to Registrar of Voters in town. DEP's Notice of Non-compliance; Disclosure from Chris Conway; an inquiry from Beth Mellor; request for ambulance abatement.