

**Minutes of Regular Meeting
Select Board
Tuesday, March 24, 2020
Remote Online Meeting (Zoom ID 350-005-2756)
Called to Order at 7:00 p.m.**

Remotely participating were Board members Laurie Bent, Harvey Boshart, and Christopher Houston, Chair. Also present were Assistant Town Manager/Human Resources Director Lisa Yanakakis and Recording Secretary Kara Fleming.

Mr. Houston called the remote meeting to order and read the following:

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order concerning imposition on strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, meetings in the Town of Weston will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. We will strive to provide access to such meetings via a link to call in, or other similar option. In the event we are unable to accommodate the same, despite best efforts, we will post recorded sessions of the meeting as soon as possible following the same. No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings.

Item 1 – Resident Comments

Ms. Bent asked if there were a way to establish a neighbor helping neighbor type of program to assist residents who may be struggling with food or finances, etc. during the stay at home advisory amidst the public health emergency. Ms. Fleming said the Emergency Reserve Corps has been called up by the Board of Health and it is working with the Council on Aging and she could discuss Ms. Bent's idea further with her after the meeting.

Item 3 - Potential COVID-19 Related Items

- a) Authorize filing of a Governor's Bill postponing the date of the Annual Town Election, and providing support for a bill of general application for such purposes; authorize Town Manager, Chair or other Member to sign letter
- b) Postpone the date of the Annual Town Election in accord with general terms of proposed special legislation and provide for notice to the public by such means as are calculated to reach eligible voters
- c) Discuss paring down of meeting agendas, remote meetings, and similar efforts meant to encourage social distancing; address closing of municipal buildings to the public, including encouraging emailing
- d) Approve revised "notice of remote participation" for inclusion on meeting notices and disclaimer for beginning of meetings
- e) In conjunction with the Board of Health, close playgrounds
- f) Identify members of the Board of Health and Board of Selectmen who are authorized to work with Town Manager to make emergency decisions

This item was taken out of order to accommodate Town Counsel's participation at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Gaumond informed the Board that regular COVID-19 updates are posted to the Town's website at Weston.org/Covid19. The updates include positive virus case counts, town services and program updates, information on preventing the spread of the virus, and links to town and state resources for food, mental health, and financial assistance.

Mr. Houston noted that items c through e, listed above, had been discussed at the previous meeting or had already been addressed by the Emergency Management Team, such as closing the playgrounds and municipal buildings. With regard to item c, Mr. Gaumont said the spirit of the guidance is for public bodies to consider the constraints already placed on municipal staff and operations and to hold off on moving forward with some projects or work to the extent possible. Ms. Yanakakis said she has been speaking with staff who have expressed interest in continuing business as usual to the best of their ability and she has been working with Information Systems Department to help make this happen with better remote working capabilities. She also informed the Board that the Town purchased additional Zoom licenses and has developed a schedule to accommodate the public bodies that wish to continue their work. Regarding item d, Mr. Gaumont said the Board does have to officially approve the revised notice of remote participation.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved to approve the revised notice of remote participation. 2nd by Ms. Bent.
Roll call vote: Mr. Boshart, Ms. Bent and Mr. Houston voted in the affirmative. **Approved unanimously**

Relating to item e, Mr. Houston expressed surprise that despite the multitude of explicit signage and messaging that group activities are prohibited on recreational fields and courts, he found many group practices and games occurring on these fields. Mr. Gaumont said the Governor's state of emergency allows for municipalities to issue warnings and fines of up to \$300. Ms. Bent expressed concern that residents should be educated initially rather than penalized with fines. The Board discussed the issue and weighed education over fining. A member of the School Committee, who discussed this topic at his committee meeting the previous evening, and the Emergency Management Director and Fire Chief David Soar also participated in this discussion. Chief Soar had discussed the issue with Police Chief Goulding and relayed that conversation. The Board decided that Chief Goulding's suggestion to issue warnings initially would be a sufficient deterrent at this time, as the education and signage piece has been happening.

Specifically related to item e, Mr. Gaumont informed the Board it would be prudent to have an official vote of the Board to close the playgrounds on record. Town Counsel provided the language for the motion.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved that in order to facilitate social distancing as part of the local effort to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19, and based upon information provided by the CDC and the DPH, that there is a risk that transmission can occur even when a person is not symptomatic, and that the virus can be active on hard surfaces for extended periods of time, the Board of Selectmen [and the Board of Health] close all public playgrounds, including standalone playgrounds as well as playgrounds within parks, until at least April 6, 2020, or the Board of Selectmen votes to extend the same in the best interests of the public health and safety. 2nd by Ms. Bent.
Roll call vote: Ms. Bent, Mr. Boshart and Mr. Houston voted in the affirmative. **Approved unanimously**

The Board briefly discussed item f with consideration as to the necessity since the Emergency Management Team is in place and Mr. Boshart had been attending a few of the meetings. Mr. Gaumont said the provision is for true emergencies where time is of the essence and the Select Board would need to be consulted.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved to authorized himself to work with the Town Manager to make emergency decisions where convening the Board is not feasible or timely; and further, the Town Manager is authorized to contact another Board member if Mr. Houston cannot be contacted. 2nd by Ms. Bent
Roll call vote: Ms. Bent, Mr. Boshart and Mr. Houston voted in the affirmative. **Approved unanimously**

With Town Counsel, Lauren Goldberg, joining the meeting, Mr. Houston asked for an update on Town Elections and Town Meeting. Ms. Goldberg informed the Board that three bills were passed this week, which involved delaying elections for the State House and Senate and municipalities. The bill for municipal elections expands the qualifications to vote absentee by including COVID-19 as a reason, which in effect creates early voting by mail to encourage more voter participation. Under this new legislation, the election can be delayed until June 30th. Ms. Goldberg continued to explain that the Town has additional flexibility on when to hold Town Meeting because it has not yet posted the warrant. Mr. Houston said given the amount of flexibility the Town has for holding the election and Town Meeting, he is inclined to hold off on approving the warrant and ballot until a later time. Mr. Boshart suggested calling the events for the last Saturday of June for the election and the following Monday for Town Meeting, which would allow the time needed to hear from the Finance Committee and to gain more clarity on the public health emergency. The Board continued to discuss the timing and options available; however, with so much uncertainty and the foreshadowing of events that could be facing the state in the next few months, the Board decided rather to signal a tentative date for the election and Town Meeting to help guide the work that needs to occur in the preparation of the proceedings, as well as to allow for continued flexibility for the town.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved to signal to the residents of Weston that the events scheduled for May 9th and 11th are not going to be held, as originally planned, but possibly Saturday, May 30th for the Annual Town Election and Tuesday, June 2nd for Annual Town Meeting. 2nd by Mr. Boshart.

Roll call vote: Mr. Boshart, Ms. Bent and Mr. Houston voted in the affirmative. **Approved unanimously**

Item 2 - Annual Town Meeting Related Items

- a) Adopt Annual Town Meeting Warrant
- b) Approve Recommended Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget
- c) Approve Select Board Report for Warrant & Budget Book
- d) Approve Ballot Questions for the Annual Town Election

Mr. Houston said that none of the above items need to be discussed tonight but did open the meeting to public questions and feedback.

Ms. Lisa Reitano, chair of the Finance Committee, raised concern over some of the articles included in the consent agenda on the draft warrant. She asked for the OPEB appropriation, the Operating Capital items, and the southside and other drainage projects to be withdrawn from the consent agenda to allow discussion at Town Meeting, and also to allow the Finance Committee to review these articles further, particularly in light of the coming economic impacts due to the national health emergency. She explained that her committee has only discussed OPEB, so far, given the disruption to their meeting schedule over the past couple of weeks. Mr. Houston asked Ms. Reitano for her committee to discuss its concerns with the other three items and to come back to the Board with refined recommendations since there is more time before Town Meeting is held. He added that he has a general idea of some objections her committee has with the Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget based on offline conversations he has had with her. He asked if her committee could provide a specific list of concerns and the specific cuts in services it would like to see so the Board can discuss and appropriately address them. The Board continued this discussion with Ms. Reitano, Mr. Bharath Venkataraman, and Mr. John Sallay, two other members of the Finance Committee, and reiterated its request for the Finance Committee to provide specificity in its current recommendations for the fiscal 2021 operating budget and include longer-term decision guidance that focuses on both sides of an economic environment.

Consent Agenda

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved the consent agenda as follows:

Approve a request from the Weston Public Library to accept a gift of \$8,000 from the Natalie and Theodore Jones Charitable Trust to be applied to the Library General Purposes Fund.

2nd by Mr. Boshart.

Roll call vote: Ms. Bent, Mr. Boshart and Mr. Houston voted in the affirmative. **Approved unanimously**

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved to adjourn the meeting. 2nd by Ms. Bent.

Roll call vote: Mr. Boshart, Ms. Bent and Mr. Houston voted in the affirmative

Meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Laurie A. Bent
Clerk

Note: A copy of all documents, explanatory material, and exhibits presented to and used by the Select Board as part of this meeting are attached to the approved minutes.