

Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for Tuesday, January 26, 2021
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83012497485>

5:45 p.m. Informal Meeting with Citizens: No Activity.

6:00 p.m. Call to Order:

A meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chairman Maurice Handel. In addition to the Select Board, Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager, Dave Davison, ATM/Finance, and Katie King ATM/Operations were in attendance. Recording Secretary Mary Hunt joined the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Handel announced this open meeting is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020 due to the current state of emergency from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. He noted all public gatherings have been suspended as advised and directed by the Commonwealth. And, as such, suspending the requirement of the open meeting law to have all meetings in a public, accessible, physical location while encouraging and allowing members of all public bodies to participate remotely. Mr. Handel stated the meeting will not include public comment and that the Needham Select Board and all attendees are convening by Zoom, as posted on the Town's website identifying how the public may join. He said all supporting documents used at this meeting are available on the Town's website www.needhamma.gov.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that this meeting be continued to the Select Board's next scheduled meeting on Tuesday, February 9, 2021, if a technical problem develops that makes it impossible for the Select Board to conduct the meeting in this format.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

6:01 p.m. Close Public Hearing: Change of Control of RCN TELECOM SERVICES OF MA, LLC.

Mr. Handel said the purpose of this public hearing is to close the January 12th public hearing which was held to consider and receive public input regarding the FCC Form 394 transfer request received by the Town on December 2, 2020. Form 394 seeks the Select Board's approval for a change of control of the Cable Television Franchisee, RCN Telecom Services of MA, LLC, from Radiate Holdings, LP to Stonepeak Associates, IV LLC. The public hearing was held open until January 19th to receive responses to questions from Radiate/RCN/Stonepeak and to receive any input from the public. He noted receipt of answers from Radiate/RCN/Stonepeak to questions made by the Town, and that there were no public comments. Mr. Handel said the Select Board will meet again on February 23, 2021 to render its decision.

6:02 p.m. Town Manager:
Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager spoke with the Board regarding three items:

1. Budget Presentation

Ms. Fitzpatrick presented the proposed annual balanced budget for FY2022. She commented the budget is titled “Uncertainty in the Now Normal.” She spoke of racial equity and continuing efforts to address uncertainties due to the pandemic, as well as the Town’s priorities guiding development of the budget. A PowerPoint presentation was viewed where Ms. Fitzpatrick referred to “Overall General Fund Balance Summary,” noting revenue is up 4.9% over FY2021. She commented the only category with increased revenue is estimated property taxes, all other categories are expecting a reduction at this point of the budget cycle. She noted a major reason for the balanced budget in such a difficult period is because major spending categories (i.e. municipal departments, public schools, and town wide expenses) are all below the historical revenue estimated targets. Ms. Fitzpatrick commented COVID-19 expenses are to be funded by Federal & State Grants and Town Reserves. Discussion ensued on Budget Drivers: Enrollment, Employee Benefits, and Staffing, as well as Balanced Budget Highlights, Enterprise Funds, and items Beyond the Operating Budget. She asked the Select Board to approve the proposed budget.

Mr. Bulian commented on decreased school enrollment. He asked about vacancies in the downtown and the effect on commercial property taxes. He also asked about Needham’s share of Chapter 70 funding. Mr. Davison commented on Chapter 70 funds, noting a greater share is anticipated due to full day kindergarten. He said it is unknown at this time whether the Commonwealth will hold communities harmless, relative to the changes in school enrollment this past year. He said many districts are making the case to use figures from the prior year, given the unique nature of enrollment for this year. Mr. Davison commented construction in Needham remains strong, residential property continues to appreciate, and people continue to purchase homes in town. He said core commercial value areas (i.e. Needham Crossing) are going well due to NBC Universal and TripAdvisor. Mr. Davison anticipates no material change in the share of commercial tax levy in FY2022.

Mr. Borrelli commented on Needham’s sustainable budget. He said he supports building maintenance and is optimistic on state aid. He asked about health department expenses, as well as school expenses and warrant articles. Mr. Borrelli asked consideration to be given for a fund to help restaurants recoup some of their losses. Ms. Fitzpatrick commented on Health and Human Services expenses and funds necessary for setting up vaccination clinics. Ms. Fitzpatrick commented on the School Department budget, which excludes running a hybrid school, changes in busing, and a fully remote academy, noting all of those expenses have been moved to a warrant article. Ms. Fitzpatrick said more thought could be given to reimbursing restaurants for their expenses.

Mr. Matthews said the proposed budget has been carefully crafted at a complex and challenging time. He thanked Ms. Fitzpatrick.

Ms. Cooley said she is grateful the level of concern for the budget is less than a year ago but remains cautious.

Mr. Handel said the budget “reflects the bones” of a well-managed town and maintains a good quality of life for its residents. He thanked Ms. Fitzpatrick and Mr. Davison for their work.

**Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to recommend approval of the Town Manager’s Proposed Annual Budget for FY2022.
Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.**

6:46 p.m. Appointments and Consent Agenda:
Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to approve the Appointments and Consent Agenda as presented.

Appointments:

1. **Property Tax Assistance Committee** Jonathan Robbins (term expires 6/30/2024)
2. **Taxation Aid Committee** Jonathan Robbins (term expires 6/30/2022)

Consent Agenda:

1. **Approve Open Session minutes of November 10, 2020, and January 12, 2021 and Executive Session minutes of December 22, 2020.**
2. **Accept the following donation made to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Maintenance Donation Fund: \$100 from Sherry Joyce.**
3. **Accept a \$133.97 donation made to the Needham Health Division’s Gift of Warmth program from the First Baptist Church in Needham.**
4. **Accept a \$100 donation made to the Needham Health Division’s Domestic Violence Action Committee from Ann MacFate, a Needham resident.**
5. **Accept a \$300 donation made to the Needham Health Division’s Traveling Meals Program from Amy Sherman, a Canton resident.**

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

2. **Temporary Vaccination Location in Needham Crossing**

Ms. Fitzpatrick recommended the Select Board support a temporary emergency dispensing site in Needham Crossing. She noted Needham will receive approximately 100 doses of the COVID vaccine per week, which is significantly lower than anticipated. She noted Needham has the infrastructure and is poised to distribute the vaccine once more becomes available.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to ask the Board of Health to determine whether a temporary emergency dispensing site for COVID-19 vaccine at a location in Needham Crossing is an urgent local public health need to prevent the spread of the virus and to support Governor Baker’s declaration of a State of Emergency.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

3. Town Manager's Report

Katie King, ATM/Operations reported on the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, saying 30 applications have been received overall, with 16 approved and enrolled in the program. She said of the 16 enrolled households, the apartments house 34 Needham residents, nine of whom are children and 6 units being occupied by residents 55 or older. She said 62% of the households are white, 19% are black, one household self identifies as Asian, and one as Latino. Ms. King commented on bedroom type, noting the average rent paid is just under \$2,000/month, with the average assistance provided being \$962/month for 3 months. The total expenditure for the town is \$46,188.

Ms. Fitzpatrick commented on the Ridge Hill Demolition Project, noting the project team has identified ways to bring costs lower. She said more will be known when the Town Meeting Warrant is to be closed.

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported three Needham police officers retired this week. She recognized and thanked David Eldridge, Carl Harmon, and Tom McNiff for their service.

Ms. Fitzpatrick reported on a new initiative targeting youth to think about the need to wear a facemask to protect their family, friends, and neighbors. A short video was viewed. She said 2,000 masks with the Needham logo are being distributed this week, asking people to post on social media who they are wearing the mask for to the hashtag #needhammaskchallenge.

7:00 p.m.

Board Discussion:

1. Committee Reports - Needham Unite Against Racism (NUARI)

Ms. Cooley reported 60 people attended (by Zoom) NUARI's public hearing last night to gather feedback on its vision, guiding principles, and practices. Additional public comment may be made on the NUARI website or by email. Ms. Cooley said, in general, the vision was well received. She said after the public hearing the committee discussed an article on white fragility, agreeing more discussion is necessary on terms such as white fragility, white supremacy, and white privilege, noting the terms must be well defined so people understand the context in which they fit. She commented on racial stamina. Ms. Cooley discussed the committee schedule and what can be accomplished leading up to Town Meeting in the spring. She noted the importance of getting through the basic pillars, before setting the work plan for year two. Ms. Cooley thanked the attendees and looks forward to having a vision statement to bring to the Select Board at its February 9, 2021 meeting.

Mr. Borrelli said Ms. Cooley's summary of the meeting was excellent. He said comments were received both supportive of what the committee is doing, as well as some comments of hesitation. Mr. Borrelli said his hesitation regards how to use

some terms and labels, which could be offensive. He said sometimes the labeling, in certain contexts (i.e. from the Town or its leadership), can have an unintended effect. Mr. Borrelli said it is important to be careful moving forward to get the correct language, without the finger pointing or debate. He concluded the goal is to move forward, not to debate terminology and what it means to some people and what it means to other people. He concluded it is important to keep in mind some labeling could have a detrimental effect.

Mr. Matthews said the work is not easy, but necessary in order to bring as much of the community along in the process. He agreed with Mr. Borrelli, also saying the goal is to include a lot of voices that haven't been able to get to the table" in the past. He said there is a real window of opportunity to make progress on the issue. Mr. Matthews said he is hopeful a vision statement can be approved and adopted by the Select Board.

2. Committee Reports - Other

Mr. Matthews commented on the Massachusetts Municipal Conference held this past weekend, noting several programs focused on race equity and inclusion in public policy. He commented on a new police reform bill, saying it will need additional work. Mr. Matthews said one program focused on the workplace in the COVID era, noting the workplace changes over the last year have created an endemic condition, of varying degrees, of people under stress, anxiety, and depression. Mr. Matthews said people must remain patient and persistent for a few more months.

Ms. Cooley said people are making choices, working from home, working 24 hours a day because everything is now remote. She said it is not fair to say to Town Hall that people are not working. She said everyone is trying to balance things from wherever they are located, acknowledging tax dollars are at work even though people cannot see or get into Town Hall. Ms. Cooley concluded people are still able to get personal business done.

Mr. Borrelli said people are much more isolated and not interacting with colleagues while working from home. He said the situation adds to the level of stress, thanking Mr. Matthews for bringing up the topic.

7:10 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board meeting on Tuesday, January 26, 2021.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

A list of all documents used at this Select Board meeting is available at:

<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID=>