

Town of Colrain
Select Board/MLP Board Meeting
Colrain Highway Garage
9 Jacksonville Road
4:30 PM

**MINUTES OF SELECT BOARD
February 27, 2024**

Present: Benjamin Eastman, Chair; W. Thomas Griffin; Emily Thurber

Others Present: Betty Ringwood, Deb Menard, Doug MacLeay, Michael Shuipis, Finance Committee Members; Marjorie Smith, Administrative Assistant; Kevin Fox, Town Administrator

Chair, Benjamin Eastman called the meeting to order at 4:32pm.

Appointments:

Brennan Tierney – 8th Grade Civics Teacher -MTRSD – Video Recording of Brief Overview of the Role of the Town Administrator and Select Board

Brennan Tierney did not attend the meeting.

Unanticipated:

John Chivers – Shattuckville Cross Rd

John Chivers requested to speak to the Board regarding discontinuing the portion of Shattuckville Cross Rd/Old Town Rd that is no longer being maintained by the town. Kevin Fox explained that it would take town meeting action to officially discontinue the road. He further explained that this would need Town Counsel opinion first and there are some neighbor-to-neighbor disputes going on as well. Ben will research the issue as well and will discuss it at the next meeting. Discussion on possible financial aspects to the property owners should the road be discontinued.

New Business:

Request to be Appointed to Colrain Council on Aging - Susan Slowinski

MOVED: Thom Griffin moved to appoint Susan Slowinski to the Colrain Council on Aging. Emily Thurber seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Approve Continuing as Member of the Upper Pioneer Valley Veteran’s Services District for the Period 7/1/2024-7/30/2026 FY’s 2025 and 2026)

Thom Griffin as the representative to the Upper Pioneer Valley Veteran’s Services District spoke with the Assistant Director and explained that if a veteran needs services or help to file claims they can go to the District. Further MA General Law states every town in MA must have veteran services outreach.

MOVED: Thom Griffin moved to approve to continue as members of the Upper Pioneer Valley Veteran’s Services District for the Period 7/1/2024-7/30/2026.

Emily Thurber seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Town Administrator Updates:

Jacksonville Rd

Kevin Fox sent an email to the engineering firm, BSC Group, for a status update after receiving approval with conditions from the Department of Fish and Wildlife. The engineers are working on completing the drawings and cost estimates with estimated completion of 3/29/2024. The Army Corp of Engineers applications has been submitted and review can take 30-90 days. If Kevin hasn't received any information by 3/27, he will reach out to the State Congressman. The Conservation Commission meets on 3/5/2024 and BSC expects the hearing to go well with no delays. The anticipated bid date is 5/28/2024 and anticipated construction date is 7/15/2024.

Appointments:

Meeting with Colrain Finance Committee RE: FY2025 Preliminary Town Budget Discussion

Ben Eastman, Chair, opened the meeting with the finance committee at 4:58pm.

Michael Shuipis explained that the Finance Committee has received all the draft budgets and met with each department over the last several weeks. Once they are consolidated into one report, the committee will make their recommendations. He pointed out some items on the budgets that were somewhat out of the ordinary, most of which relate to higher wages or new positions.

1. Library – The Library Director proposed a new part-time position of Assistant Library Director. This would eliminate one of the assistant librarian positions. The Director is also requesting raises for all the positions, except for theirs, which would be a total of a 15% wage increase.
2. Town Clerk – requesting a 33% increase in salary, which would include working five more hours per week. The Finance Committee discussed with her that the position is not an hourly position, she was elected knowing the position was salaried. Also requesting \$5,500 for equipment and software for a ballot counter.
3. Town Administrator – pay-out of \$11,000-\$12,000 for unused accrued vacation time. The Ad-Hoc Seach Committee also recommended a \$15,000 capital request for reconfiguring the offices so the Town Administrator would have a private office.
4. Highway Department – requesting to keep contracted services of \$50,000 in the budget and keep the unfilled laborer position in budget. Also requesting \$45,000 for sidewalk snow removal equipment, with other attachments, and \$12,000 for a trailer to haul the equipment.
5. Board of Health – requesting a new line item for code violation enforcement of \$10,000
6. Police Department – the unfilled full-time position that has been in the budget is being used to fund the hours being worked by the Chief and part-time officers outside their normal schedule. Michael recommended the Board meet with the Police Chief to discuss the full-time position. The Chief is also requesting wage increases to the officers above the COLA, as well as adding a part-time position of Administrative Clerk (2-3 hours/week) to help with paperwork and other clerical duties. The Board asked Kevin to set up a joint meeting with the Finance Committee and the Police Chief.

Other items proposed to be on the annual town meeting warrant: MTRSD Regional Agreement and Woodlands Partnership of Northwest Massachusetts. Discussion on health insurance costs related to the budget and accounting for three unfilled positions: town administrator, full-time police officer, and highway laborer.

MOVED: Betty Ringwood moved to dissolve the Finance Committee meeting 5:28pm.

Deb Menard seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Executive Session:

MOVED: At 5:30 pm, Ben Eastman moved to enter into Executive Session pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(6): To consider the purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real property if the chair declares that an open session meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body. TG seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Benjamin Eastman	<u>Aye</u>
W. Thomas Griffin	<u>Aye</u>
Emily Thurber	<u>Aye</u>

Approved unanimously.

Returned to open session at 5:37 pm.

Unanticipated:

Approve Select Board Meeting Minutes – (2/13/2024 and 2/13/2024 Executive Session)

MOVED: Emily Thurber moved to approve the minutes of the Select Board for 2/13/2024 and the Select Board of the Executive Session of 2/13/2024.

Thom Griffin seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Howard Phelps

Thom Griffin thanked Howard Phelps for taking out nomination papers and running for Select Board. He commented he has all the signatures and has turned them into the Town Clerk.

Town Clerk Update

Anna Lavarreda updated the Board that the Presidential Primaries are coming up on 3/5/2024. The polls will be open from 7:00am – 8:00pm. Early in-person voting hours are posted on the website. They are always looking for more poll workers and election clerks as well. Discussion on party affiliation and which ballots to use.

Residents are turning in the street listings and registering for dog licenses.

Anna also presented her FY2025 budget requests for an electric ballot counter and increase in salary, which includes her working more hours.

Appointments:

Jake Eberwein – Presentation RE: MTRSD Phase II Sustainability Study

Sheryl Stanton, MTRSD Superintendent, thanked the community for advocating for rural districts. She explained that the District is entering into Phase II which is getting at what the communities are looking for and providing the best education possible.

Jake Eberwein, BERK12, introduced himself as the project lead on the Phase II Sustainability Study. He and his team will review all the past studies and expand on Phase I and look deeper into enrollment, finance, buildings, and educational quality. The group has launched a website, www.2districts8towns.org, and encourages all to visit it often for updates. Jake summarized current and future enrollment trends, State Aid and the budget, total town assessments, and town financial variables. The aims of the group are to analyze data from Phase I, project enrollment and finances for the future, generate viable alternatives and solutions for the district and engage with the community. There is a Steering Committee in place and meet once a month, as well as communicate with the towns monthly. Different Advisory Teams will be created to focus on certain aspects of the study: Education, Finance, Community Engagement.

Jake explained that the team is looking for initial feedback in the form of a survey: challenges, positives, non-negotiables, questions for team, advice for team. The team produces monthly updates, which are posted on their website.

Alice Wozniak- Director of Assessing – Request to Discuss Contract

Alice Wozniak requested the Select Board review her current contract, which expires at the end of FY2025 and renegotiate the base salary for FY2025 to \$45,000. Discussion on how the current contract is written in regard to her annual base salary increases and the COLA. Alice further explained that there is language in the contract in the Termination section that references semi-annual tax billing, which is no longer relevant. The Board requested Alice send them her current contract to review, and she agreed.

General discussion on impact of health insurance premium increase and the COLA.

Old Business:

None

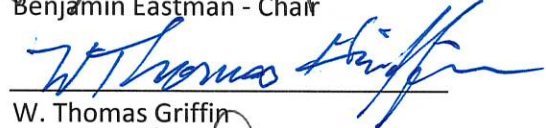
MOVED: Thom Griffin moved to dissolve the meeting at 7:00 pm.
Emily Thurber seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie Smith
Administrative Assistant

Accepted by the Select Board


Benjamin Eastman - Chair


W. Thomas Griffin


Emily Thurber

Documents Distributed to the Select Board Before the Meeting in a Packet or at the Meeting:

Select Board Meeting Notes

Emails between Brennan Tierney, MTRSD, and Kevin Fox, Town Administrator, dated 1/26/2024 and 1/25/2024, re: video recording of brief overview of the role of the Town Administrator and Select Board

Statement of the Role of the Select Board

Email from Michael Shuipis, Finance Committee, to Kevin Fox, Town Administrator, dated 2/8/2024 re: Request to meet with Select Board to Discuss FY2025 Budget

Finance Committee Notes re: FY2025 Budget

Emails between Jake Eberwein, BERK12, and Kevin Fox, Town Administrator, dated 2/8/2024 re: MTRSD Sustainability Study Presentation

Email from Alice Wozniak, Director of Assessing, to Kevin Fox, Town Administrator, dated 2/15/2024 re: Appointment to Discuss Employment Contract

Email from Susan Slowinski, Resident, to Kevin Fox, Town Administrator, dated 2/21/2024 re: Request for Appointment to Council on Aging

Letter from Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans' Services District to the Select Board dated 2/5/2024 re: Approval of Membership in the District

Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans' Services District Renewal Agreement

Original Letter from the Commonwealth of MA Executive Office of Health and Human Services dated 1/7/2022 re: Approval from the State of the Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans' Services District