

**Minutes of Regular Meeting
Select Board
Tuesday, February 27, 2024
Remote Online Meeting (Zoom 897 0561 3321)
Called to Order at 6:32 p.m.**

Remotely participating were Board members, Chair Laurie Bent, Thomas Palmer, Clerk, and Christopher Houston. Also present was Town Manager Leon A. Gaumond, Jr.

Ms. Bent called the remote meeting to order and read the following:

Under current state law public bodies may continue holding hybrid and fully remote meetings, without a quorum of the public body physically present, as long as adequate, alternative access is provided. Information about how to join a hybrid or fully remote hearing will be included in the required Open Meeting Law posting.

Resident Comments:

Chris Houston – Began his comment with a poem announcing his retirement.

It's been mostly fun,
But now I'm done.
Nine's been fine,
But now it's time
To end this rhyme.
Thanks for three terms, Weston.
You've been the best-un.

Mr. Houston added that he hoped that this spot on the Select Board would be filled by someone who will put a lot of effort into it. It is a really rewarding job at its best. He cautioned that, for anyone interested in running, it is a job requiring a good deal of work and is not just a matter of showing up for the meetings every other Tuesday having read the 100-page packet beforehand. Members of the Select Board must do a lot of hard work, including hard work on issues that the Select Board member may not be passionate about. One doesn't do this job to earn love, admiration, and respect. It is, however, gratifying to see the benefits of the hard work that the Select Board puts in, including, during his time on the Board, the Merriam Street sidewalk, the rail trail, the reduction in gas leaks, and the Town Center, including the JST and the Old Library/AIC. During his time on the Board, Select Board members have made a lot of improvements to the Town. Ms. Bent noted that, among Mr. Houston's many accomplishments, most of the roads in Weston now have a pavement condition index of 70 or better thanks to his initiative. Mr. Palmer also offered his thanks for Mr. Houston's hard work.

Adrienne Giske - Wanted to thank Chris for believing that the JST could be redone when a lot of people didn't. He believed that the Permanent Building Committee and others would get the work done. His support was important during the whole process.

Consider adoption of meals taxes in Weston:

Select Board member Tom Palmer proposed adopting a 0.75% meals tax in Weston, which is the maximum allowed under state law and has been adopted by most surrounding communities except Lincoln and Dover. The tax would apply to restaurants, private clubs, convenience stores, schools, and other establishments serving meals. It is estimated to generate \$100,000 annually with the existing

restaurants, not including the proposed JST restaurant; this additional revenue would help offset the \$125,000 cost of maintaining the recently renovated Town center.

The Select Board felt the tax was justified because many meals are consumed in the town center, which is maintained by the Town, the cost would mainly fall on consumers not businesses, it would raise some revenue from non-residents, and it is easy for the state to collect and remit to the town. Chris Houston supported the measure, seeing no downside since it is unlikely to change consumer behavior or hurt restaurants, and the revenue, while modest, would benefit the town. The Select Board plans to put the meals tax before the voters at Town Meeting, where it would require a majority vote to be adopted.

MOTION: Mr. Palmer moved to direct the Town Manager to include the appropriate article on the Town Meeting Warrant for the adoption of meals tax in Weston. 2nd by Mr. Houston.

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

Traffic & Sidewalk Candidate Interview: Ann Wiedie & Robert Cronin

Ann Wiedie and Robert Cronin were interviewed for two open positions on the Traffic and Sidewalk Committee.

Ann Wiedie highlighted her background as a math professor and involvement in various town committees, including serving on both Pay-As-You-Throw committees, as well as being a Trustee on Weston Forest & Trail. She attended a past Traffic and Sidewalk Committee meeting regarding a sidewalk issue on Highland Street and was impressed by their thorough, data-driven approach.

Robert Cronin grew up in Weston and recently moved back after careers in the Marine Corps (as a logistics officer) and federal government. He is a frequent walker and wants to tackle traffic issues and expand alternative transportation options to improve the quality of life in town. He is particularly interested in improving the sidewalks in Town.

The Select Board was impressed with both candidates' qualifications and enthusiasm.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved that the Board appoint Ann Wiedie to the traffic and Sidewalk Committee for a term expiring June 30, 2026, and Robert Cronin to the Traffic and Sidewalk Committee for a term expiring June 30, 2025. 2nd by Mr. Palmer.

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

Discussion with the School Committee seeking a MSBA Statement of Interest for the Weston High School/Middle School

School Committee Chair Kenneth Newberg and Superintendent Keren Zalesky presented the need to renovate or replace the 50+ year old Weston Middle and High School buildings. Major systems are reaching the end of life, and the buildings no longer fully meet modern educational needs.

Before making final decisions, the School Committee is hiring consultants to assess the buildings and identify options, costs, and tradeoffs between renovating, replacing, or potentially consolidating the schools. Ultimately, multiple town-wide votes would be required to approve any major project.

As a first step, the School Committee requested the Select Board authorize submitting Statements of Interest to the MSBA to potentially get on the list for state funding. There is no risk or commitment in doing so, and the requests must be submitted annually to stay on the list.

The Select Board asked clarifying questions about the process and thanked the School Committee for giving the town ample time to plan for these major capital projects.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved to resolve and authorize the Superintendent of the Weston Public Schools to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April 2024 for the Weston High School located at 444 Wellesley Street, which statement of interest describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority categories for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future. Seconded by Mr. Palmer.

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

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved to resolve and authorize the Superintendent of the Weston Public Schools to submit to the Massachusetts School Building Authority the Statement of Interest Form dated April 2024 for the Weston Middle School located at 456 Wellesley Street, respectively, which describes and explains the following deficiencies and the priority categories for which an application may be submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authority in the future. Seconded by Mr. Palmer.

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

Weston Media Budget presentation

Nathan Suher, director of the Weston Media Center, presented an overview of the center's achievements in the past year, including expanded government meeting coverage, equipment upgrades, and progress on a potential new local newspaper. He thanked his small but dedicated staff and board.

Board treasurer Joel Angiolillo presented the FY2024 budget, which projects \$223,500 in revenues, mainly from Comcast and Verizon fees, and \$246,800 in expenses, resulting in a \$23,300 deficit. Increases are driven by additional staffing, insurance, and the need to convert their tax status.

The Select Board appreciated Weston Media's valuable service to the community but expressed concerns about the long-term sustainability of its current funding model as cable revenues decline. They encouraged exploring alternative revenue sources like sponsorships and better tracking viewership data.

Board president Nicole Mordecai noted they are actively seeking new board members to help address these challenges. The center has \$140,000 in reserves to cover short-term deficits but agrees changes will be needed in the coming years.

MOTION:

No action necessary

Discussion on Cat Rock Water Tank Site (PP#01)

The Select Board addressed the siting of a new water tank at Cat Rock. Consultant Wright-Pierce had previously recommended "Alternative 1." Subsequently, an abutter hired experts who proposed a new "Alternative 2A" site and provided their analysis using the same matrix as Wright-Pierce.

Amy Coppers from Wright-Pierce presented their W-P's evaluation of Alternative 2A, independent of the analysis of Alternative 2A provided by the abutter's engineer and lawyer. Wright-Pierce's analysis scored Alternative 2A lower than Alternative 1 under the tank siting matrix analysis. Key factors affecting the score included more disturbance of conservation land, greater site challenges, greater construction risks, and higher costs. The W-P score was lower on these factors than the score provided by the abutter's engineer.

The abutter, Michael Chasen, shared renderings showing the visual impact of the tank at Alternative 1. He argued it would ruin the scenic view from the Cat Rock summit and urged reconsideration of Alternative 2A to preserve the cherished spot.

Amy Coppers showed some renderings of the tank at Alternative 1 that showed smaller visual impacts than were shown in the renderings shared by Mr. Chasen.

Dan Hill, attorney for the abutter, questioned some of Wright-Pierce's scoring and suggested that Alternative 2A's visual impact could be mitigated by plantings. He contended that the four-point difference in score between Alternative 1 and Alternative 2A did not justify the aesthetic harm of Alternative 1. Sean Reardon, engineer working for Mr. Chasen, questioned Wright-Pierce's evaluation of the site challenges of Alternative 1 versus Alternative 2A.

Other residents shared concerns about impacts to views, trails, property values, drainage, and the process which they perceived to be rushed. Some urged slowing down and separating the Cat Rock tank decision from two other tank projects.

The Select Board acknowledged the difficult trade-offs and lack of any solution that would satisfy all abutters and residents. The Board expressed the belief that the process has been thorough. The Board has made every effort to consider the additional alternative (Alternative 2A) recently put forward by an abutter. However, the Board felt that Alternative 1 best met the overall needs of the town for this essential water project. The Board concurred with Wright-Pierce's objective analysis and recommendations and did not see any value in further delaying the choice.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved to accept Wright-Pierce's report and designate Alternative 1 as the site for the Cat Rock Tank. 2nd by Mr. Palmer.

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

Consider Declaring Town Owned Property at 0 Hobbs Brook as Surplus Property

The Select Board discussed declaring the town-owned parcel at 0 Hobbs Brook Road as surplus. The landlocked 1-acre parcel was obtained through a tax foreclosure and has no access except through the surrounding private property, currently operated by Granite Brook Materials.

Declaring the parcel surplus would allow the Town Manager to prepare a Request for Proposals (RFP) to dispose of the land at a future Town Meeting, subject to various terms to protect the town's interests. It was noted that the current leaseholder is interested in acquiring the parcel.

The Select Board expressed support for crafting an RFP to get the best long-term value for the town. Michael Harrity noted the importance of setting a high bar since there may be only one bidder.

MOTION: Mr. Houston moved that the select board recommend and encourage that the town treasurer as tax title custodian for the town declare that the property located at 0 Hobbs Brook Road and shown as

assessor's parcel 019072000 currently held for tax title purposes is no longer needed for those purposes, and that, the property could be transferred to the select board for general municipal purposes and for the purpose of conveyance, and also to encourage the town manager, if that, occurs to, prepare an appropriate, a warrant for next steps, for the May Town meeting. 2nd by Mr. Palmer

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

Consider water abatement requests

The Select Board considered water bill abatement requests for four properties:

- 301 Meadow Brook Road - \$143 abatement, the lowest of the four, was readily approved.
- 94 Summer St - Over \$2,451.25 abatement for an outdoor irrigation leak that was discovered and fixed relatively quickly. The Select Board saw this as the most clear-cut case.
- 16 Pine Croft Road - \$3,913.60 abatement with no clear explanation for the usage spike. The Select Board was more hesitant to approve this abatement without a confirmed leak or other known issue.
- 63 Radcliff Road - Over \$3,300 abatement following a property sale; unclear if the excessive water use stemmed from a leak or the new owner not properly managing the irrigation system. The Board questioned abating charges disputed by a new owner for usage that occurred under the prior owner.

The Select Board recapped their typical approach of abating excess usage down to the Tier 1 base rate when there is a legitimate, one-time issue. Chris Houston agreed to document this informal policy. While not fully satisfied with the explanations for Pine Croft and Radcliff, the Select Board ultimately approved all four abatements as a one-time accommodation, with the understanding that future recurrences are unlikely to receive the same consideration. They expressed optimism that installing wireless meter reading will proactively flag leaks and reduce future billing disputes.

MOTION:

Mr. Houston moved to approve all four water abatement requests. 2nd by Mr. Palmer.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Houston, Mr. Palmer, and Ms. Bent all voted in the affirmative. **Unanimously approved.**

Consent Agenda:

MOTION: Mr. Palmer moved the Consent Agenda as follows. 2nd by Mr. Houston.

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Palmer, Mr. Houston, and Ms. Bent voted in the affirmative. **Unanimously Approved.**

Motion: Mr. Palmer moved to adjourn. 2nd by Mr. Houston

Roll Call Vote: Mr. Palmer, Mr. Houston, and Ms. Bent voted in the affirmative. **Unanimously Approved**

Regular Meeting Adjourned at 9:59 p.m.

Thomas Palmer
Clerk