

Greensboro Selectboard

January 14, 2021

Meeting Minutes

[Meeting was held via Zoom conference call]

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Peter Romans, Andy Kehler, Gary Circosta, Tracy Collier

SELECTBOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Matt McAllister

OTHERS PRESENT:

Kim Greaves

Josh Karp

Tim Nisbet

Bobbie Nisbet

Clive Gray

Nancy Hill

Liz Hatch

John Stone

Valerie Rooney

Ellen Celnik

Jennifer Ranz

David Kelley

Michael Cassidy

Anne Cassidy

June Cook

Judy Carpenter

Karl Stein

Lynnete Courtney

Mike Sardina

Anne Stevens

Peggy Lipscomb

Michael Porrazzo

Victoria von Hessert

Naomi Ranz-Schleifer

Nancy Reige

Tony Acheson

Isa Oehry

Mary White

Devin Burgess

Jerilyn Virden

Fan Watkinson

Becky Arnold

Stew Arnold

Rod Kerr

Elaine Cole-Kerr

Rosann Hickey

Mary White

Jannie Johnston

Ken Johnston

Wayne Young

Mary Young

Neal Burnham

Janine Marks

Susan Cammer

Christine Armstrong

Della Hall

CALLED TO ORDER: 6:30 PM

DISCUSSION OF TOWN MEETING 2021 – BUDGET AND BALLOT

Andy explained that the legislature empowered Selectboards to make the decision to hold town meeting by Australian Ballot in 2021, because traditional in-person meetings aren't possible due to the pandemic. This change would be for this year only.

The Greensboro Board discussed this, and voted to hold this year's town meeting by Australian Ballot.

This is the first night for the public to review and provide feedback on budget and ballot work that the Selectboard and town offices staff has done over the last few months. The Board appreciates the participation of everyone here.

The town will be mailing ballots to all registered voters. Australian ballot means no amending or discussion on town meeting day, but an informational meeting to explain and discuss Australian ballot items must be held within 10 days of town meeting day.

Jennifer Ranz read two petitions that she wrote and got signatures for, and thus they will be added to the warning:

Article 1: *Moving forward, any bylaw or ordinance change will be voted on by Australian ballot.*

Article 2: *Moving forward, all open elected positions will be voted on by Australian ballot.*

Discussion. Jennifer said that she proposed these articles so every voter can be heard and have a vote.

A number of those present were concerned that changing to Australian ballot means no amending or debating these items on the floor – an important part of a traditional town meeting.

Andy observed that there's an age-old tension between having an in-person debate – and having potentially more overall participation.

Budget. Andy explained the Selectboard's budgeting process. The Board was looking at a 9% education tax rate increase plus a 3% increase due to an unfavorable CLA. So, facing the biggest tax increase in ten years based on factors out of our control, the Board went into the municipal budgeting process understanding that there are many residents who can't sustain a 10-11% increase in their taxes. We did our best to keep the town budget as low as possible, scrutinizing every budget item. Andy said it was difficult to balance delivering services vs. working against these huge tax increases, but he felt that the budget presented by the Board achieved a reasonable balance.

- **Library.** Becky Arnold said that while the library requested \$25k, the proposed FY22 budget lowered that to \$15k. The library will be submitting a petition that asks the voters to restore their appropriation to \$25k. The library's budget is \$95k this year; this is the town appropriation plus \$15-20k from reserves, with the remainder raised via gifts. Becky said that the town is getting a \$95k library budget for a \$25k contribution.

Many of those present felt that the library is an important community hub, especially at this time when remote work and internet and computer access is so important. Children's programs also serve an important community need.

A number of suggestions were given on how to restore the library's appropriation to \$25k, including cutting fireworks and delaying some sidewalk and guardrail repairs.

- **Police.** Peter said that the Board has done careful research, and it appears that when the HPD is under budget, Greensboro doesn't receive funds back, even though the contract stipulates that we pay a set percentage of the HPD budget. We've been in negotiations for weeks but they're not answering our questions and not budging on the bottom line, they seem to expect us to just renew the contract with the same unfair structure.

Gary said the Board has estimated that the town overpaid \$125K during the current contract period alone. This is just not fair to our taxpayers, he said.

The Board has investigated alternatives to the HPD, including county sheriffs and the state police.

The Board put \$190k into the budget as a placeholder for police services, which is a significant decrease over the last few years.

Karl Stein said that while the overpayments sound outrageous, losing the HPD would negatively impact the Rescue Squad. For calls in Greensboro and Hardwick, the Rescue Squad benefits

from HPD officers on the scene protecting us and the community; they are often on the scene at 3 AM providing first responder care. Unless a sheriff keeps a car in the area, there could be a 20-30 minutes response time if the HPD is out of the picture.

Gary said that we are the outlier in the state – we have the highest per capita police cost for towns our size. The 24/7 coverage is great, but if we're the outlier, primarily due to a bad contract, it's not something we can support. Gary noted that Greensboro is the only town in Orleans County paying for 24/7 coverage other than Newport.

- **Driveway Plowing.** Discussion; should this service be cut? Peter said that it's not always the quickest service but it's a great deal for residents, we'd pay two or three times as much for plowing if we all hired our own contractor.
- Stew Arnold asked the Board to consider level funding or increasing the budget instead of making cuts. Tax money from out of state property owners can be thought of as funds coming into the town from outside that can be put to good use here. Locals can get income sensitivity from the state to offset a higher tax bill.

Treasurer. Town Treasurer Barbara Brooke resigned and moved away, and while Kim was appointed to serve as interim treasurer, this position will need to be filled. The Board is proposing to change the treasurer from an elected to an appointed position. While an elected treasurer must be a registered voter, an appointed treasurer does not need to live in town. It can be difficult to find a qualified registered voter who has the skill and experience for this job, and the ability to broaden the applicant pool would be a huge advantage. Peter noted that many towns are shifting to an appointed treasurer for this reason.

Constables. Peter said that the Board is also interested in changing the town constables from elected to appointed. Our current elected constables don't serve much of a function, and changing to appointed constables could allow the Board find a qualified individual if the constable role is ever expanded.

The second informational meeting will be held on Tuesday 1/19 at 6:30 PM.

Many participants thanked the Selectboard for their hard work during such a difficult time.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted: Josh Karp, Selectboard Clerk