



TOWN OF THORNTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Town of Thornton • 16 Merrill Access Road • Thornton NH, 03285 • 603.726.8168

Approved on: _____
BOS Initial: MP
Rec'd by Town Clerk on: 5/11/2020
Town Clerk Initials: djm

Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes March 30, 2020

4:00 P.M. Chairwoman Peabody opened the Thornton Board of Selectmen meeting work session with the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL: Chairwoman Marianne Peabody, Vice-Chairman Brad Benton, Selectman Roy Sabourn, Selectman Jack Gaites and Selectman Joseph Monti.

STAFF PRESENT: Debra Shepard, Town Administrator

The Board of Selectmen conducted their public board meeting utilizing conference calling to allow public members the opportunity to participate in the meeting while the Board adheres to social distance guidelines specified by the Governor. Access codes for the conference call were included on the posted agenda.

Chairwoman Peabody stated that there will be no public input allowed unless recognized by the Chairwoman. When speaking, she advised that participants speak loudly and clearly and address only the Chair. During the meeting all votes will be taken during roll call. The teleconference call will be finished and disconnected during non-public session.

Chairwoman Peabody stated that the meeting is being conducted to discuss extending the social distance order given by the Governor.

MOTION: "To approve the public Board of Selectmen meeting minutes of March 11, 2020 as written."

Motion: B. Benton

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

MOTION: "To approve the public Board of Selectmen meeting minutes of March 17, 2020 as written."

Motion: J. Monti

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

MOTION: "To approve the non-public Board of Selectmen meeting minutes of March 17, 2020 as written."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

COVID-19 Discussion

During the March 17 meeting, the Board discussed and moved decisions relative to the public closure of the town office and the postponement of all public board meetings until April 6, 2020. The Board had also motioned to restrict some services at the Transfer Station until April 6, 2020. These decisions were made as a result of the social distancing order received from the Governor's office.

The Board discussed the new recommendation from the Governor to extend the social distancing order through May 4, 2020.

MOTION: "To cancel all town Board/Committee meetings and close the town offices to in-person business until May 4, 2020."

Motion: B. Benton

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: R. Sabourn stated that he does not see the benefit of specifying the date until May 4, 2020. He recommends not including a specific date as the date of May 4th will likely be extended by the Governor again. J. Monti stated that he is not in favor of leaving the date open without an end date. R. Sabourn explained that the Planning Board had two meetings scheduled for last month that had to be canceled. The Planning Board continues to receive applications and the RSAs require the Planning Board to meet monthly. The Governor has not addressed these requirements as of today. R. Sabourn asked if the Planning Board would be able to meet to discuss the two applications received using a minimum four-person quorum and requiring the separation of applicants during the meeting. The application process had been started prior to the Board of Selectmen's decision to close the offices and cancel board meetings. R. Sabourn suggested that the Planning Board be allowed to hold electronic meetings to finish business that had been started prior to the closing of town offices. J. Monti stated that the decision to close town hall to all meetings until May 4th was the correct decision. The Planning Board could assemble electronically via conference call to finish their pending applications. R. Sabourn stated that notices could be resent to abutters with a date for a conference call meeting. After a lengthy discussion, the Board agreed to withdraw this motion and do a re-motion.

Motion Failed: 0 – Yes, 5 – No

MOTION: "To close the town hall to all public access and public meetings until May 4, 2020."

Motion: J. Monti

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

Chairwoman Peabody stated the previous motion made last meeting:

"To suspend recycling at the Transfer Station for the next 17 days. The Transfer Station will continue to accept household garbage only and order 2 additional cans to accommodate an increase in trash and encourage residents to hold their recyclables until further notice."

The Board discussed extending this motion until May 4, 2020.

MOTION: "To suspend recycling at the Transfer Station. The Transfer Station will continue to accept only household trash until further notice."

Motion: B. Benton

Seconded: R. Sabourn

Discussion: J. Monti suggested changing the wording of the motion. The Board agreed.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

Chairwoman Peabody stated the previous motion made last meeting:

"Effective immediately, the Transfer Station will not accept items requiring a fee or punch card for the 17 days until the Selectboard can make a further assessment. No more than one employee can be in the office (doghouse) at a time."

The Board discussed extending this motion until May 4, 2020.

MOTION: "The Transfer Station will not accept items requiring a fee or punch card until further notice."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: J. Monti stated that he would like to include that no more than one employee at a time can be allowed in the office at the Transfer Station. Chairwomen Peabody stated that this order was already given at their last meeting and is being followed.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

Chairwoman Peabody stated the previous motion was made during their previous meeting:

"The Highway Department will restrict public access to the Highway Department and will communicate with residents via phone calls for the next 17 days."

MOTION: "The Highway Department will restrict public access to the Highway Department and will communicate with residents via phone calls until further notice."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: B. Benton

Discussion: J. Monti stated that he would like the highway department employees to keep their cell phones on during their work day. TA Shepard assured Selectman Monti that she discussed this with John and Bruce and they have assured her that their town phones are on at all times and they do return any missed calls. However, due to their remote locations at times and the town garage being a large steel building, they may not be getting all calls.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes, Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

Staff Hour Review by Department Relative to Social Distancing

Chairwoman Peabody asked for input for department hours to encourage adequate social distancing. She explained that by reducing the hours, the staff will automatically be distanced further. J. Monti argued that reducing hours of staff only reduces their pay. He suggested moving staff in the office to provide more distancing. J. Monti also expects that the staff will continue to offer support and services remotely to residents.

TA Shepard made a proposal to enhance social distancing for staff working in the office without impacting their pay. The proposal includes paying staff their regular weekly wages while allowing them a day out of the office to assist with social distancing. TA Shepard explained that the staff currently works a 4day work week, and she suggested allowing them to work a 3 day work week while still paying them for their regular hours through the next 4 weeks.

J. Gaites stated that the staff is not having to serve the public at the same demand as when the office was open to the public. J. Monti asked if there is data that supports the decrease in workload as he has data that supports the opposite. TA Shepard confirmed that the workload has evened out and that they continue to serve remotely. Chairwoman Peabody stated that the Town of Campton and the local banks have adopted the same practice at this time. J. Monti stated that he does not have a problem with staff working remotely from home if they can continue to do their jobs. He does have a problem with paying staff when they are not doing their job. TA Shepard stated that the employees are not able to take work home and realistically completing work from home. The office staff would rather continue working in their current environment. J. Monti recommended moving the Planning Director to the meeting room to enhance social distancing. TA Shepard stated that the Planning Director is a vendor and can change his office hours as needed. She confirmed that he is only being paid for services provided.

Selectman Sabourn stated that he believes the work at the town hall is being completed. He does not have a problem with a staff member not coming in and receiving their full pay for the week. He stated that this can be justified for social distancing. He personally does not have a problem with this proposal until May 4. Chairwoman Peabody stated that in the consideration of public health she believes this is a logical proposal. TA Shepard stated that she can give work to employees to take home, although it may not be a full 8-hours worth of work.

Selectman Monti stated that he is against this proposal, and that this does nothing for social distancing. He stated that he understands the goal to spread employees out, but having employees work 3 days instead of 4 does not enhance the current social distance practices at town hall. J. Monti stated that he cannot in good faith, use taxpayer money to pay employees to take a day off from work and pay them their full weekly salary.

Selectman Gaites stated that the workload has decreased and having an additional day off could help them create more social distance.

Selectwoman Peabody stated that there seems to be a standstill with this discussion and recommended moving on to the next item of the agenda with more discussion on this proposal later in the meeting.

Spending Freeze

Chairwoman Peabody stated that they anticipate the municipalities will have a lower revenue due to the change in economy and unemployment. The board preemptively discussed freezing the budget for the time being. Selectman Sabourn highly encouraged to instruct department heads to not purchase items of magnitude that are not a necessity for the next 60 days or so until the Board knows where the economy is heading. Vice-Chairman Benton agreed that the Department Heads should not purchase items that are not a necessity at this time. TA Shepard stated that the town could postpone the purchase of the new phone system as well as smaller items such as new chairs for the conference/meeting room. Selectman Monti stated that postponing the purchase of the new phone system during this time of remote communication could be the wrong approach.

Discussion continued on purchases that could be unnecessary at this time. The Board agreed that they should ask the department heads to only purchase items that are necessary for their department at this time. Selectman Monti recommended asking the department heads to submit a list of items that they must purchase over the next few months and the Board can approve or deny these requests.

Selectman Sabourn stated that he would prefer that the Board inform the department heads of the town's concerns related to spending at this time, and allow the department heads to be responsible and make choices based on the budget concerns and their actual needs within their department for the next few months. The Board could monitor the expenses through the manifests. Selectman Sabourn requested that the Board allow and trust the department heads to be fiscally responsible at this time.

The Board agreed to inform the department heads that purchases made should only be necessary and ask them to be fiscally prudent for the next 90 days. Any major expenditures must be approved by the Select Board prior to purchasing. The Board will notify the Town of Campton of their request regarding fiscal responsibility as it relates to the Fire Department.

Selectman Monti asked if the town can suspend their contractual payments for a short time. Selectman Sabourn feels that if the town has a contract they should continue to pay for services rendered based on the contract. The freeze on any unnecessary expenditures is different than contracted services that are already in place. The rest of the board agreed with Selectman Sabourn.

MOTION: "To not interfere with ongoing the payments for signed contracts for services that are being provided."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: B. Benton

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – no, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 4 – Yes, 1 – No, Joseph Monti

Hiring Freeze

Chairwoman Peabody discussed the new hiring of employees, particularly the Police Department. Selectman Sabourn stated that a resignation has been received from one officer and he believes that this position should be filled immediately. However, he agreed that hiring the sixth officer position can be postponed. Chief Miller arrived at the meeting. Selectman Monti discussed the weekend home owners that make up a large part of the Thornton community. These homeowners are from neighboring states with a higher exposure rate than Thornton. The Board discussed the potential need for more police activity as the pandemic increases.

Selectman Monti agreed that filling the expected vacancy is reasonable but hiring the sixth officer may not be immediately necessary. Chief Miller stated that hiring a new officer takes months to complete and the town wouldn't start paying a new officer until the applicant is hired. Chief Miller estimated that this position would most likely not be filled until August at the earliest.

Out of State Travel

Chairwoman Peabody stated that the town needs to have some type of policy in place during this epidemic to try to protect the citizens and employees in the event that an employee chooses to venture out of state. The Governor has requested self-quarantine for 14 days if a person goes out of state. TA Shepard stated that several towns in the state are adopting policies that employees self-quarantine if they choose to leave the state. Selectman Sabourn stated that the Town of Lincoln has informed employees that if they choose to go out of state right now, they will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days, using their accrued time, before returning to work.

MOTION: "If a town employee chooses to travel out of state during this time, they will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days prior to returning to work using their own accrued time. This policy will stay in place until further notice."

Motion: B. Benton

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – abstained, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 4 – Yes, 0 – No

Abstained: Selectman Monti

Repayment Request

Jason Baird has been making regular monthly payments on his training agreement with the Police Department for several years. He has asked that the Board allow him to stop making payments for three months due to the financial impact of COVID-19. TA Shepard stated that Mr. Baird has been consistently making payments since 2017.

MOTION: "To provide a three month payment waiver to Jason Baird."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: B. Benton

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – yes, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

Draft Minute Posting

Resident William Rose has asked if the draft minutes for board meetings can be posted on the town website since the office is closed to the public at this time. TA Shepard stated that the draft watermark is included on the draft minutes. The Board agreed to post draft minutes on the website until the town office is open to the public again.

Staff Hour Review by Department Relative to Social Distancing (Continued)

Selectman Sabourn recommended that town hall staffing hours remain unchanged due to the divergence of opinions regarding this issue. Selectman Sabourn proposed allowing the Highway Department to go to their summer hours of four ten hour days effective Monday April 6, 2020. This is usually done after Memorial Day. . Selectman Sabourn stated that the board can revisit the social distancing for other town employees at a later date.

MOTION: "To keep the current town hall employee work schedule as is, and to allow the highway department to move to their summer schedule of four day 10 hour days beginning April 6, 2020."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: Marianne Peabody – no, Brad Benton – yes, Roy Sabourn – yes,
Joseph Monti – yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 4 – Yes, 1 – No, Marianne Peabody

5:56 P.M. MOTION: "To enter into nonpublic session pursuant to RSA 91A:3, II (a)."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: J. Monti

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: R. Sabourn – Yes, M. Peabody – Yes, Brad Benton – Yes, Joseph Monti – Yes, Jack Gaites – Yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

6:32 P.M. MOTION: "To come out of nonpublic session."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: B. Benton

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: R. Sabourn – Yes, M. Peabody – Yes, Brad Benton – Yes, Joseph Monti – Yes, Jack Gaites – Yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

MOTION: "To accept the resignation from Police Officer Ryan Harkonen effective April 10, 2020."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: B. Benton

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: R. Sabourn – Yes, M. Peabody – Yes, Brad Benton – Yes, Joseph Monti – Yes, Jack Gaites – Yes.

Motion Passes: 5 – Yes, 0 – No

MOTION: "To hire officer A as a full-time police officer at labor grade 8 step 12 effective April 12, 2020."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: B. Benton

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: R. Sabourn – abstained, M. Peabody – Yes, Brad Benton – Yes, Joseph Monti – Yes, Jack Gaites – abstained.

Motion Passes: 3 – Yes, 0 – No Abstained: R. Sabourn, J. Gaites

The Board signed the hiring letter for Applicant A.

6:40 p.m. MOTION: "To adjourn."

Motion: B. Benton

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Roll Call: R. Sabourn – yes, M. Peabody – Yes, Brad Benton – Yes, Joseph Monti – Yes, Jack Gaites – yes.

Motion Passes: 5 - 0

Respectfully submitted,

Jessi Fleury
Board Secretary