**Select Board Meeting Minutes March 14, 2022 Zoom Teleconference 5:30 pm**

**Call to Order**: Bob Manners called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Others present: Selectboard members Margaret Payne, Andrew Baker (arrived 5:48), and Town Administrator Terry Narkewicz.

**Acceptance of Meeting Minutes:** A motion was put forth by Margaret to approve the minutes of February 28. This was seconded by Bob. Roll call vote: Bob – yes; Margaret – yes. Motion passed 2-0-0.

**Department Liaison Reports:**

**Town Hall** – Terry said she has been working with the town’s IT provider to ensure that Shelburne has enough safeguards in place to protect its IT network from a cyber-attack. MIIA, the town’s insurer will not renew the town’s cyber insurance coverage unless the Town meets a variety of requirements. Terry is working with Northeast IT to see what areas if any, need to be enhanced.

**Highway Department** – Mark Shippee is having trouble with his computer. Northeast IT is working with Mark. The truck, authorized at last year’s Town Meeting has arrived. It will be getting a plow soon. As mud season has arrived some roads will be closed as needed.

**Appointments:**

**5:45 pm Jessica Atwood, FRCOG & Amy Shapiro of the FCCDC RE: Small Business Assistance Program** – Amy gave an overview of sources of COVID-related funding sources and how the money was distributed among businesses. The total amount given to Shelburne Falls businesses was $242,775. Jessica asked if towns are interested in joining together to do something regarding local business technical assistance with ARPA funds. Amy said this could be an opportunity for towns to help build vibrant business communities. Andrew said that Shelburne had just identified about 10 projects through the Rapid Recovery program. Amy said that businesses are now preparing for a “new normal.” Staffing is an issue, businesses are preparing for a new pandemic or more shutdowns, technical assistance is still needed. Amy said that business owners want to be able to connect and collaborate in order to grow their businesses. Andrew added that some help is needed to get the village task force going. Amy said the task force would be really important and asked the Board to let the CDC and FRCOG know what is needed. Bob asked if Buckland had been approached about business technical assistance. Jessica said they had not heard from Buckland.

**6:00 pm Linda Overing, Breezeway farm Consulting RE: FY’20 CDBG Public Hearing** – Bob opened the hearing at 6 pm. The FY’20 project is nearly complete, all that remains to be done is tree planting. Linda said there will be approximately $22,000 left over and it is time to re-program those funds. She proposed using $8,000 for an engineering design for a portion of the Bridge Street sewer system. GCG Associates proposed adding the sewer design on to the Bridge Street part 2 project when it is bid in June. The cost of the entire sewer project would be between $60,000 and $80,000, depending on what is found. The sewer work would be eligible for ARPA funds. Linda also recommended using CDBG funds to make the bathrooms at the Visitors Information Center handicap-accessible. The estimated cost for the work is $19,000. If the sewer engineering design is done, there would be $14,000 in CDBG funds available. The Board would need to commit to providing the additional $6,000. The bathroom accessibility is also ARPA eligible. There was no public comment. Bob closed the hearing at 6:11 pm.

A motion was made by Andrew to reprogram $22,000 in surplus CDBG grant funds, from FY’20, to other CDBG eligible projects, $8,000 for engineering design services for infrastructure projects, and $14,000 for renovations to the Visitors Information Center bathrooms to remove access barriers, for a total of $22,000. This was seconded by Margaret. Roll call vote: Bob – yes; Andrew – yes; Margaret – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

A motion was put forth by Margaret to commit $6,000 in ARPA funds for renovations and removal of access barriers at the Visitors Information Center bathrooms. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Bob – yes; Andrew – yes; Margaret – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**6:30 pm Kevin Parsons RE: Request to Modify TIF Agreement for Sweetheart Realty, LLC** (Jim Burnham, Deb Andrew, Finance Committee) **–** Kevin first thanked the Board for its supportin getting historic tax credits.

Kevin said he would like the TIF agreement, that had been made a few years ago, to be extended. He said the plan was to open at least the lower level of the building for business in May and asked for a town meeting warrant article to amend the TIF to have benefits start in FY’24. Kevin said he had no record of benefits since the value of the building hadn’t increased and would not until a certificate of occupancy was issued. Bob and Andrew said the business had already been receiving benefits. Terry said that according to the assessor’s office, benefits, amounting to $20,829, had already been provided by reducing taxes on the building. Kevin said he would need to have a conversation with the assessors and tax collector as it was his understanding that the credits were to be applied only to enhancements. Andrew said it appeared that the town was on track to fulfill its obligations and it was his sense that the Board of Assessors had been doing what the voters had approved.

**Old Business:**

**Senior Center Expansion RE: West County Senior Services District** – The Selectboards of the three member towns met on March 8. Margaret described it as a very positive meeting. The longest discussion was about how to divide any long-term debt among the towns. The present formula includes amount of usage, income of a town, and property values, in determining each town’s share. After discussion, it was decided to leave the formula as is. No debt can occur unless all three towns approve it at a town meeting. The district document will now be reviewed by Town Counsel. Then the Selectboards can decide whether to include it on town meeting warrants. The Ashfield Selectboard supports the formation of a senior district. Expansion could be a satellite center in Ashfield.

**Senior Center Director Position (Interviews scheduled)** – Three candidates have been interviewed and a selection has been made. The Board is waiting for the candidate’s response.

**New Business:**

**FY’23 Budget RE: Proposed Inflationary Increases** (Jim Burnham, Deb Andrew, Terri Mitchell, Finance Committee) – Andrew had asked to see numbers for an inflationary pay increase for all town employees. The currently proposed 2.5% pay increase would add $21,793 to the budget. Impacts of 3.5%, 4.5%, 5.5%, and 5.9% increases had been calculated. At 5.9% the budget would rise by $51,225. Andrew asked if the town wanted to help its employees as the rate of inflation is currently 7%. County Retirement is factoring in an increase of 7.75% and FRCOG is factoring a 6% increase. The numbers provided did not include the cost of benefits, just salaries. Bob asked the Finance Committee for their thoughts, recognizing the town’s commitment to its employees and the need to keep wages competitive. It was not known how much taxes might need to increase to cover higher wages. Deb felt the current situation was tenuous and permanent decisions should not be made now. Andrew said the wage increase would be for one year only and could be adjusted again next year. This will be discussed further at another meeting. It was also mentioned that other aspects of the budget, such as heating oil, gasoline, and diesel fuel, will also be increasing and that the school budget will also have to deal with such increases.

**Any Other Business:**

**Reopening Town Hall** – Now that the town mask mandate has been lifted, Bob felt it was time to plan for the reopening of Town Hall. Terry said that at a meeting with the Health Agent and the Board of Health, the Health Agent thought it best to consider reopening when windows could be open. It was also thought that one of the bathrooms should be for staff only. Currently masks are still required in the building and the public can access the building by appointment only. The waiver for in-person meetings will expire on July 15. Bob felt that date was too far out for Town Hall to reopen. Terry said that everyone who come to Town Hall is served whether or not they have an appointment. They have been keeping the numbers down so that there are no more than two or three people in any office at a time and masks are still required. Andrew thought that since the mask mandate had only been lifted for a week, it might be good to give a reopening decision some time and the comfort level of employees must be considered. Margaret will discuss reopening with the Town Hall employees before the next Board meeting. The message needs to go out to the public that everyone who needs something at Town Hall will be served even without an appointment,

**Correspondence:**

**Ellen Jenkins RE: Resignation from Conservation Commission** – A letter of resignation, to be effective as of March 7, has been received. A motion was made by Margaret to accept the resignation of Ellen Jenkins from the Conservation Commission. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Bob – yes; Margaret – yes; Andrew – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Public Comment:** None

**Adjournment**: At 7:10 pm a motion was made by Andrew to adjourn the meeting. This was seconded by Margaret. Roll call vote: Bob – yes; Margaret – yes; Andrew – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Faye Whitney, Recording Secretary