**Select Board Meeting Minutes February 24, 2025 Zoom Teleconference 5:30 pm**

**Call to Order**: Rick LaPierre called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Others present: Selectboard member Andrew Baker (joined 5:32 pm), Tricia Yacovone-Biagi, and Town Administrator Terry Narkewicz.

A motion was put forth by Tricia to approve the minutes of February 10. This was seconded by Rick. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 2-0-0.

**Department Liaison Reports:**

**Town Hall:** Excise tax bills were mailed on February 19. An insert was included notifying residents of the new tag system for transfer station.TheCowell Gym window replacement project has been advertised.  Proposals are due on March 6.  Terry had a preliminary meeting with the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS) last week to discuss the process for the database vulnerability study. The consultant will work with Northeast IT to access the town’s network.The town’s insurer (MIIA) will be sending out an appraiser next week to review some of the town-owned buildings to ensure that values are accurate.

**Emergency Management:** EMD Tom Williams attended an EOC (Emergency Operations Center) workshop at the regional office on February 20 2025. Tom is on the agenda for the next Rec Committee meeting to request a status on their decision about using the Cowell Gym as an emergency shelter/warming-cooling center.There was aproductive meeting of the Public information Officer (PIO) Team on February 17.At least one member has completed the FEMA PIO training and others' training are in progress.Theydefined their mission statement and different mission areas and are working on draft of a three-year plan to go to MEMA regional Coordinator and to Tricia**.** Tom is looking into how to secure engineering plans and drawings for generator(s) to fulfill some of the needs identified in our CEMP, Hazard Mitigation Plan, and in response to feedback from the table top exercise in the fall.Tom is pursuing the updates to Hazard Mitigation Plan which will expire in Jan 2026.On deck: Upcoming meeting with other West County EMDs in Ashfield on February 27 to debrief on sheltering and other needs of Hawley and Heath after the recent high winds, and to discuss other possibilities for regional cooperation.

**Senior Center / transition:** FY 26 Budget –The Board of Managers (BOM) have been working on the budget in a hybrid fashion this year as they are still formally the Consortium. They adopted a preliminary budget on December 6, 2024, which was presented to the Board of Directors for their approval on December 12. The Board of Managers also held a quasi-public hearing at the December 6 as noted on their agenda. Since then, the BOM have been researching and estimating costs for independent services; there have been a few revisions to the budget. In addition, the Senior Center adopted new attendance recording software that has been a great improvement but has also required additional time and attention when it comes verifying usage numbers for the town assessments.It was most recently decided at the February 10 BOM meeting on affirming the final components for towns' assessments.Juli has provided the town administrators with copies of the proposed FY26 budget for distribution to selectboards and finance committees. Copies have been presented with discussion to the joint Ashfield Selectboard and Finance Committee meeting. Juli and Buckland COA representatives will meet on Tuesday, February 18 and Shelburne Select Board and Finance Committee on Monday, February 24 with Juli and COA representatives. The BOM will ask for any additional comments from these meetings by March 12, which will be the time the Board of Managers will adopt the annual budget and notify towns.

RFPs – Upon discussion with their consultant, Bob Dean at FRCOG, as a small unit, they had options to consider for contracting with firms to provide accounting, treasurer and auditor services. As a result, they have received a proposal and interviewed VADAR Systems whose applications are built specifically for Massachusetts clients. VADAR supplies the software platform. Accounting, treasurer and auditor services are still being sought. The BOM voted to work with legal counsel to prepare a letter of intent for their services to be presented to the three selectboards for approval. They will need at least three months to complete preliminary work. Ashfield and Buckland currently use VADAR and also CBIZ and are satisfied with the work they are providing.

District By-Laws and Personnel Policies – The BOM has a preliminary draft of both documents. The focus has been on the fiscal components as there is needed lead time for the July 1 effective date. The BOM expects to have the final review of both completed once our fiscal piece is in place, perhaps sooner.
Other notes – The BOM has been in touch with the retirement system and are required to vote once we are a district on July 1. This is a procedural matter. The BOM voted (11/8/24) to join the present insurance plan as of July 1, 2025 and will work with them on this transition.Shelburne personnel policy – Regarding the wording in the current Shelburne personnel policy that lists the Senior Center as a unit of the town's government: The BOM’s suggestion would be that the normal personnel policy update procedure by the town be used to make the necessary change to the personnel policy, deleting the Senior Center as a unit of the town government.

**MVP** – Action grants were announced today. Applications are due by April 4. No match is required for small towns such as Shelburne and 50% of the grant can be requested up front.

**Highway Department** – The crew has been working on removing snow from the village and keeping drainage clear, in anticipation of a rain storm this week. Winter diesel, heat, and winter sand accounts are now overspent. The Iron Bridge is owned by the state but Shelburne plows its roadway. The sidewalks on the bridge are maintained cooperatively by the Towns of Buckland and Shelburne (each town cares for one side). Rick asked Andrew to check on the status of Eversource’s proposal to relocate poles near the temporary bridge on Shelburne Center Road.

**Police Services Advisory Committee** – The committee met on February 19 and reviewed and voted unanimously to support and recommend acceptance of the wage and classification study. It voted unanimously to recommend adoption of the updated job descriptions as presented in the study report.  It also voted unanimously to recommend approval of the police budget components as presented, which includes operating and salary budgets and two capital expense requests for FY’26. The Finance Committee chair will relay this information to his committee. The next meeting will be April 16.

**Mohawk Trail Regional School District Personnel Negotiations** **Subcommittee** – Executive session meetings with the Unit B - Paraprofessional’s Team are in progress and will continue frequently until negotiations are complete.

**Franklin Regional Transportation Authority Advisory Board** – The next meeting will be March 20.

**Appointments with Finance Committee Members: (**Todd Dubreuil, Jim Burnham, Terri Mitchell, Finance Committee)

**5:45 pm Juli Moreno, West County Senior Service District Budget** (Sylvia Smith, Christine Baronas) – As the transition from a consortium to a district takes place, some new line items appear in the budget. All three district towns declined the request to become their fiscal agent so those services will need to be outsourced. An accountant, bookkeeper/treasurer, legal expenses, and insurance need to be added. In the past the senior center had paid the Town of Shelburne to be fiscal agent, but the expense was minimal, at $7,900. Tricia asked about the new software. Was that something that will be purchased and licensed just once, or will there be annual renewals. Juli thought there would be a larger upfront cost and lesser amounts in the future. Insurance costs had been budgeted anticipating an 8% increase. Terry said it was more likely to be an 18% increase. Juli will revise the budget. Tricia asked if there was any plan to get more participation from Ashfield. Juli said transportation is the issue but more activities will be offered in Ashfield. Andrew suggested possibly getting the towns to share the fiscal agent role. Terry explained that because the district is a separate entity it must have its own books, software, computers, etc., things not easily shareable. Tricia said the district model does cost more but it is laying the groundwork for sustainability and growth.

**6:15 pm Council on Aging Budget Request** (Sue Bishop, Penny Spearance, Nancy Brewer) – The COA was asking for a new budget item. They hoped to get $1,000 to cover expenses previously paid by volunteers. Ashfield and Buckland COAs each get at least $1,000 annually, for activities complementing those of the senior center. Each COA does town-specific activities with the occasional shared events. Neither the Selectboard nor Finance Committee had any questions on this.

**6:30 pm Board of Assessors Budget Presentation** (Karen Tonelli, Assistant Assessor) – A new item in the budget is acquiring a lap top for the assessors. The estimated price is $2,000 with an additional $200 for licensing. Currently the assessors are using a laptop from the town of Montague. Karen is retiring from her position in Montague so that computer will no longer be available. The assessors are getting the 3% pay increase given to all town employees. Jim Burnham asked how much tax revenue the town will be losing now that they have purchased the street light fixtures from Eversource. Karen said she would look it up and report back.

Turning to the HERO Act, the assessors had recommended a 60% amount of reimbursement for veterans, Tricia had asked why not 80% which would only cost the town another $900. Karen said she did not think the assessors would have any objection to the 80% rate. She mentioned that in the Governor’s bill veterans’ monthly benefits had increased, their property tax exemptions had increased, and excise tax will no longer to collected on one vehicle per veteran. Andrew asked if exemptions were offered for others than disabled veterans. Karen clarified that the disability had to be service-connected and that there were different exemptions for those that were 100% disabled and those that were partially disabled. Other exemptions exist for any resident that is blind and for seniors who meet income and asset requirements. A motion was made by Tricia to put the HERO Act Clause 22J on the warrant for Annual Town Meeting. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0. A motion was put forth by Tricia to allow an 80% benefit provided that Clause 22J is accepted at Annual Town Meeting. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – no; Rick – yes. Motion passed 2-1-0.

**6:50 pm Ancient Glacier, LLC RE: Pocket Park Lease** (Josh Simpson, Cady Coleman, Susan Stark) – Ancient Glacier has requested to change the annual rent for the park from $3,700 to $4,245. Josh explained that they were only trying to cover expenses, including taxes, and make a very small profit to satisfy the IRS. Discussion followed on depreciation with Tricia wanting to know why that had increased so much. Susan said there were always unanticipated and unpredictable expenses. Susan and Josh offered to get details on the depreciation from their accountant. Josh said Ancient Glacier could have left the site as an open cellar hole with a fence around it, but instead filled it in with loam to make the site look good for the town. Rick said that having heard both sides, and considering the increase in rent was only $545, he thought there was no need for further details. Andrew said the net cost to the town of the pocket park was less than $3,000 per year and that it was a price worth paying. While the town and Ancient Glacier have a common interest in maintaining the pocket park, Tricia did not feel the town should be involved in helping a private business make a profit, even if that profit was less than $50 per year. It was agreed that further details from the accountant were not necessary. Tricia asked for more time to look at the lease.

**Old Business:**

**Community Action Food Pantry Services RE: Possible Funding Source** – Community Action had been asked to see if other towns that use the pantry could consider contributing to its upkeep. They were also asked for the minimum amount needed to keep the pantry sustainable. Answers to these questions arrived late today and will be discussed at a future meeting.

**Department of Veteran’s Services RE: Hero Act, Chapter 178 of the Acts of 2024** – See above discussion with Karen Tonelli.

**Overtime Policy Discussion** – Following the last meeting the Board reviewed the history of the policy via meeting minutes. It was then learned that Jeff Johnston had not seen those minutes. Now that he has them, it was decided to wait to discuss the OT policy until Jeff could be present. Rick said he felt the OT policy had a lot to do with long-term employees, who get cost of living adjustments, but no merit raises. Since any change to the policy would affect all town employees, Rick thought it might be better to pay employees what they are worth.

**New** **Business:**

**Ted Harvey, FRCOG RE: FY’26 Rural Downtown Coordinator Pilot Project – Seeking $4,000 allocation** – Rick said this project was one the Board had been a bit skeptical about, wondering how one person could serve three towns. Now the Board is being asked to add six months and $4,000 to the project before it even begins and before it is known if it will work. Terry said the project has been out to bid and there is only one proposer so far. Andrew said this could be a long process which would hopefully help the three towns develop models for moving ahead. He thought adding another six months to the project was a good idea. He added that since Shelburne and Buckland shared a business district, they should share the $4,000 cost. One of the other two towns in the project had an issue with that. The Board felt $2,000 from each town made sense. Rick was not convinced that extending the time for the project made sense since there was no indication that the project was going to provide results. Andrew said each town would have a working group that would be assisted by the staff person. Terry recommended that no action be taken now. She will contact Ted Harvey as well as Buckland.

**Police Department RE: Wage & Classification Study Draft Document** – As reported in liaison reports the Police Services Advisory Committee had approved the revised job descriptions and recommended that the Selectboard do the same. A motion was made by Andrew to accept the revised position descriptions. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0. A motion was made by Tricia to accept the wage and classification study document. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

**Any Other Business:**

**Hybrid Meetings** – Andrew mentioned an email from the Mass Municipal Association asking towns to lobby to be allowed to continue with hybrid meetings. Terry had already contacted Sen. Paul Mark and Rep. Natalie Blais asking them to support the continuance of remote meetings.

**Next Meeting** – The next Board meeting will be on March 10, at 5:30 pm via Zoom.

**John Walsh RE: Resignation as Cowell Gym Director** – John’s resignation will be effective on June 30, 2025. Rick said the situation was unfortunate and the discord at Cowell was “mind boggling.” John has agreed to see the projects he is working on through to completion. A motion was made by Andrew to accept the resignation of John Walsh with regret and the highest level of thanks. This was seconded by Tricia. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0. The position will be advertised right away.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Adjournment**: At 7:51 pm a motion was made by Tricia to adjourn the meeting. This was seconded by Andrew. Roll call vote: Tricia – yes; Andrew – yes; Rick – yes. Motion passed 3-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Faye Whitney, Recording Secretary