



SELECT BOARD

Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 28, 2022

7:30 PM

Virtual Meeting Only

Present: David Martin, Dean Charter, Jim Snyder-Grant, Fran Arsenault, Himaja Nagireddy, Town Manager John S. Mangiaratti, and Assistant Town Manager Mark Hald

Absent: None

Mr. Martin called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

I. Regular Business

1. Resident Concerns

Charlie Kadlec, Paul Revere Road – commented on ALG budget issues and concerned about the world changing over the past few days, fuel prices increased, concerned President Putin is irrational and will do something to contradict the sanctions against him, interrupt electrical grid which will interrupt ability to purchase fuel, and electricity use and concerned about municipal capability.

Madeline Cruz, Townhouse Lane – requested information how the town can assist renters be informed about issues in town such as water contaminants (e.g. PFAS).

Franny Osman, Half Moon Hill – the town is hosting a forum on transportation specifically for businesses, employees and residents March 2 at 6:00 PM and March 3 at 10:00.

Tom Gillispie, Thoreau Road – expressed support for supplying utility infrastructure on Quarry Road and support for the Norton family.

Terra, West Acton – commented on support for various agenda items, and questioned the Board on the status of the goal of supporting a Rehab Trust.

Kirsten Spargo, Yankee Village – grateful for the update on the town webpage for renter advocacy and asked about the process for tracking calls, plans for publicizing the information other than the website, suggested mailings, and the status of the internal working group.

Dana Snyder-Grant, Half Moon Hill – supports a short-term study on renters' needs.

Bob Van Meter – thanked the Select Board for its resource support for renters, suggested adding tenant representative to the internal working group, supported short-term study on renters' needs.

2. Chair Update/Town Manager Update/Members Minutes

Mr. Martin commented on moving forward from the pandemic and acknowledged the seriousness of the Russian war on Ukraine and the suffering of the Ukrainian people.

Next meeting will be a forum to allow public comment on whether to raise the Community Preservation Act surcharge and whether to put it on the ballot. Town



elections will be on March 29th with one contested race and Town Meeting will be held on May 16th. The Red Raven officially transferred ownership on Saturday and is now Frolic & Detour, the Asian Market opened on Great Road, and Eve & Murray's cheese shop opened in West Acton.

Mr. Mangiaratti announced there were 11 active COVID cases and the Board of Health voted to remove the mask mandate last week. The Open Space and Recreation Plan is in the process of being updated. We are conducting community engagement using an online survey and a postcard being sent by U.S. Mail. The Climate Action Plan is entering phase 2 and meeting on Wednesday, Transportation Public Forum on March 2nd at 6:00 PM and March 3rd at 10:00 AM, a public forum to discuss a possible archaeology bylaw sponsored by the Historical Commission on March 23rd at 7:00 PM. Town Counsel will host Open Meeting Law training on March 9th at 6:00 PM in-person. A Sewer Commissioner's workshop will take place March 17th at noon. Thanks to the Public Works team clearing the streets and sidewalks from the previous storms. There is a transition occurring within the Acton Memorial Library and we are in the process of recruiting a Library Director with the assistance of Interim Director Jennifer Harris. Ms. Nagireddy noted the Board of Health rescinded the mask mandate in public buildings, but businesses and people can continue wearing masks by choice. Mr. Snyder-Grant noted there are 44 virtual attendees in the meeting. Mr. Charter updated about the Community Preservation Committee prioritizing project requests and will be working over the next couple of weeks to compile a priority list for Town Meeting and will be updating the Finance Committee where the CPC is in that process.

II. Public Hearings

3. Class II Auto Dealership License, Advanced Auto Sciences, Inc., 140 Great Road
Mr. Martin read the public hearing notice. Representing Advanced Auto Sciences Inc is Dave Hackett. The Board had no questions. **Mr. Snyder-Grant moved, seconded by Mr. Charter to close the public hearing and voted unanimously 5-0. Mr. Charter moved, seconded by Ms. Arsenault to approve the Class II Auto Dealer License and voted unanimously 5-0.**

III. New/Special Business

4. Ban the Bag and More Presentation on Polystyrene and Disposable Plastic Reduction Bylaw and An Act Authorizing the Town of Acton to Establish a Minimum Charge for a Checkout Bag Home Rule Petition

Peter Berry from Ban the Bag and More presented to the Board for consideration of supporting potential warrant articles for a polystyrene and disposable plastic reduction bylaw, and a Home Rule Petition to establish a minimum charge for a checkout bag. The group surveyed 56 businesses: 23% are already using alternatives with 75% still using but mostly straws, and 3 businesses were concerned about costs switching over. An exemption would include any food packaging conducted outside of Acton and the Board of Health may exempt business for six months due to financial hardship. The home rule petition would authorize the town to charge fifteen



cents per checkout bag to incentivize consumers to re-use checkout bags, would generate revenue for retailers, and overall, reduce waste and costs of recycling. Both articles would be enforced by the Board of Health and would also have the authority to amend rules and regulations. Mr. Charter expressed concern over the cost for businesses to convert to alternative products, and mentioned this upcoming potential warrant article to the Economic Development Committee. Suggested a larger outreach to all businesses to see what potential impact this may have. The Senior Center through Minuteman Senior Services provides meals utilizing the polystyrene products to eliminate the need for dishwashing and should be considered regarding impact. Mr. Snyder-Grant commented that 23% of businesses are already converted to alternative products, and support the proposed ban. Ms. Arsenault commented that the home rule petition would encourage people to bring their own bags and supports both proposals. Ms. Nagireddy commented that recycling polystyrene is not cost effective, supports banning polystyrene and is part of the current goals of the Select Board. Mr. Martin commented that many communities have already put a ban in place with no problems, and would help push the State to unify a statewide ban on polystyrene and is in support.

Tom Gillispie, Thoreau Rd – suggests consider options with online pick up shopping bags.

Debra Simes, Concord Road – need to consider costs weighing in more on human health versus pennies on the dollar and encourages changing the food service at the Senior Center and utilize real plates and utensils.

Terra, West Acton – concerned about the Senior Center and disposable serving ware, suggests having the town go through a home rule review to compare how other towns enacted their bag bylaw, and add to banning polystyrene to ban chemical fertilizers. Mr. Martin clarified that the vote was to put the article on the Town Meeting warrant. A separate vote will be taken at a different meeting on the question of recommending the warrant article.

Mr. Snyder-Grant moved, seconded by Ms. Nagireddy to add the polystyrene ban to the Town Meeting warrant and voted unanimously 5-0.

Mr. Snyder-Grant moved, seconded by Ms. Nagireddy to add the Home Rule Petition to allow a minimum charge to check-out bags to the Town Meeting warrant and voted unanimously 5-0.

5. Discuss Program Design Options and Green Energy Mix for Upcoming Acton Power Choice Procurement

Paul Gromer from Peregrine Energy Group presented updates on the Town's Acton Power Choice program and upcoming procurement choices. Mr. Gromer explained the aggregation program, which is a way for the Town to procure electricity supply options for the electricity accounts in Acton. 150 towns and cities in Massachusetts now have these sorts of aggregation programs. 71% of the electricity accounts in Acton are currently enrolled in Acton Power Choice. The rest are either Eversource Basic service, or other competitive supplies. One advantage of these programs is price stability: the price stays the same for the length of each contract. We have had two



contracts so far, one of 2 years and one of 3 years. Eversource Basic service prices change every 6 months. Participants in Acton Power Choice have so far saved over \$2.5 million to date compared with Eversource Basic. The program currently has three levels for people to choose from, with different amounts of renewable power in the mix.

- Acton Power Choice: Basic matches the renewable energy levels that Eversource, or any electric utility, is required to provide. In 2022 that includes 20% renewable energy from Massachusetts Class I renewable energy via the purchase of Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) by the supplier. The price in the current contract is 10.741 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for the electricity supply.
- Acton Power Choice: Standard, the current default option, offers 10% additional class I RECs. The price in the current contract is 10.985 cents per kWh
- Acton Power Choice: Green includes 100% class I RECs, and costs 12.671 cents per kWh.

The current contract ends in September 2022 and plans to go out to bid this May. The way these programs work is that there is no cost to the Town. The administration of the program is handled by Peregrine. They are paid by a 100th of a cent fee on each kWh sold.

Over the last 4 months, electricity prices have currently gone up to high levels not seen since 2014. This is already visible in the Eversource Basic price, which has gone up about 50% to more than 15 cents / kWh. Eversource Basic will have a new price in June, which will also need to include this recent price run-up, unless there is a sudden collapse in prices. (In 2014, prices did fall suddenly). Acton's next contract, at all levels, will very likely have prices much higher than we have seen before.

A handful of Towns, in addition to buying class I RECs, will buy other kinds of renewable energy certificates that are much less expensive. Typically this means buying RECs from midwestern wind projects, which recently have cost 10 times less than the New England class I RECs. A concern that some towns have about these midwestern wind RECs is that they don't encourage the creation of new wind projects. The payments are so small because developing midwestern wind is profitable without any additional incentives: land is less expensive and the wind levels are higher. Also, essentially no midwestern wind energy will make its way to our New England grid. Despite these concerns, some towns have chosen to buy enough midwestern wind RECs to enable them to label their default program level as providing 100% renewable energy.

The Town will need to decide how long of a contract period to enter into, and how much renewable energy should be available at each level.

Ms. Arsenault questioned the advantage of saying we are at 100% renewable energy if we aren't buying class I Massachusetts RECs. Mr. Gromer explained that different towns



have made different judgments about this, but that most towns buying additional renewable energy have been buying only class I Massachusetts RECs.

Mr. Snyder-Grant explained that the final choices will be made after getting bids from suppliers, and the time to choose between the bids is typically less than a day, so the Town Manager and staff will be making the final choice, but they will want as much clear guidance from the Board as possible.

Mr. Martin clarified that today will be the first part of a longer discussion in March and April to develop that guidance.

Mr. Charter concerned about distribution of energy from Canada, and the environmental impact of the large hydro projects; and the difficulties of building transmission lines from Eastern Canada to Massachusetts. Mr Gromer explained that the definition of Class I Massachusetts excludes these large hydro projects. Also, class I RECs need to be brought in on existing transmission lines into the New England, so no power project that requires new transmission lines to be built will be part of the class I REC supply until after those lines are built.

Ms. Nagireddy questioned whether any of the choices we are making about the Power Choice program will impact the reliability of Acton's electricity infrastructure. Also asked for clarification on who chooses the various levels of the program. Mr. Gromer explained that reliability issues are still covered by Eversource, and customers pay for this on the distribution part of our electricity bills. Mr. Gromer also explained that after Acton sets the various levels, any electricity customer can choose any of those levels.

Mr. Snyder-Grant noted that the cost of electricity has risen over the past few months and customers have noticed a substantial increase on their bills without Acton Power Choice, recommends the town create a targeted communication for people who qualify for Eversource's subsidized rates, and encourage to push forward with pursuing the low-income community solar program that provides additional relief, and recommends to make the 100% renewable energy the default program. The renewable energy that is part of the Acton Power Choice program has a huge impact on the net emissions of the town, and this impact will grow as we switch more to electricity for uses such as heating and transportation. Mr. Charter notes the success of the program so far in steadyng rates and giving people choices. Mr Charter stated concern for residents to making the default for 100% renewable energy as the highest cost. Mr. Martin noted that only a few months ago we could have made 100% the default for a very reasonable price, and that we are now in a different situation. Mr. Martin has concern about marketing to encourage people to downgrade to a lower cost if the default is set to 100% renewable energy, and suggested the default to be 40% Class 1 and 60% National to the total of 100% renewable energy as a default program. The Board will continue discussion in the next couple of weeks.

6. Discuss Requests for Utility Infrastructure on Quarry Road

Mr. Mangiaratti summarized a request for electricity from a family on Quarry Road. The current utility pole is located in the area of the amphitheater at NARA Park, and the residential unit location is located past Miracle Field. There was originally ARPA



money designated to install utility poles further down Quarry Road for future needs in the amount of \$75,000. Eversource was contacted regarding the Phase 3 installation, and was quoted to be approximately \$50,000, which did not include adding access to the private property. Property owner Jamie Norton discussed her request with the Board. Mr. Martin noted that the town can provide power on public streets but not private residences. It would benefit the town to expand on Quarry for NARA Park. Mr. Charter is concerned the town paying for utility infrastructure setting a precedent for future developers on public roads. The parcel running through the Town Forest is under control of the Conservation Commission, which recently denied a request to add items for geocaching, and might not approve electrical services to be run through the property. Both Ms. Nagireddy and Mr. Snyder-Grant support adding pole placements on Quarry, but not supplying utilities to the private property. Mr. Martin proposed to not make a decision, but postpone a few months until other sources of funding may be available or possibly the use of ARPA funds. Mr. Martin will work with the Town Manager for funding options.

7. Discuss Return to In-Person Meetings

Mr. Mangiaratti reminded the Board that per the State, boards and committees may continue to meet virtually through July 2022. Mr. Charter recommended to have the Board meet in person with hybrid access for the public, and encourage other boards and committees to do so as well. Mr. Mangiaratti confirmed that town staff could work with their availability for monitoring hybrid meetings. Ms. Nagireddy recommends adding an optional choice for wearing a mask for in-person meetings, Mr. Snyder-Grant supports continuing hybrid meetings. The Board generally agreed to return to in-person and continue hybrid options, and that the option for hybrid meetings end on July 1, 2022.

8. Discuss Format and Logistics for the May 16, 2022 Annual Town Meeting

Mr. Mangiaratti noted the last few Town Meetings were held indoor and outdoor, but also provided some logistical challenges, and is requesting the Annual Town Meeting be held in the High School auditorium with overflow in the gymnasium. Mr. Snyder-Grant questioned if the seating will be distanced, Mr. Mangiaratti will consult with the Board of Health. Ms. Nagireddy questioned the cost difference conducting an indoor-outdoor meeting versus all indoors, Mr. Hald estimated it to be approximately \$10,000 more to accommodate that type of venue. Board members were generally in support of an all-indoor town meeting, with the understanding that there may need to be a change if there is a new significant surge in COVID-19 cases.

9. Update on Request for More Resources for Renters

Mr. Mangiaratti gave the Board an update as a result of requests from the public in previous meetings for the town provide advocacy for renters. The town set up a tenant support email address, tenantsupport@actonma.gov, and a comprehensive page on the town website listing resources for renters. Town Services Hotline staff has been



trained to handle calls that relate to the tenant services inquiries and an internal working group was established to help address inquiries. The email and town hotline staff, set up since January 28th, have received three calls and several emails looking for assistance. Also, looking to publicize more widely especially with property owners that own many apartment units in town. Mr. Snyder-Grant suggests sending a mailing to apartment dwellers, involving volunteers to gather information for the internal working group. Mr. Snyder-Grant asked what has been learned so far about where the Town can be effective and where it can't for now. Mr. Mangiaratti noted that the Town can't mediate disputes between neighbors, and also that for legal services, the Town can only refer people to other agencies, such as Metrowest legal services.

10. Reconsider Prioritization of Asa Parlin Project Community Preservation Act Funding Application to Change to High Priority

Ms. Arsenault reviewed the report from 2012, and expressed concern with the controversy on funding for the project, and would like to see this project move up in priority for funding, and feels that preserving the structure for now in phases to pursue further renovations should be considered. Mr. Charter expressed concern for prioritizing this project, and that the purpose was to create more meeting space, but recently focus has been on a cultural center which has different variations on what it would be used for. The Community Preservation Committee needs a concrete use of what the property will be used for. Mr. Martin suggested making the priority at a medium priority, with preserving it for use as a cultural center. Board members gave a majority "thumbs-up" to prioritize it as high priority to stabilize the building.

11. Discuss Acton Leadership Group Multi-Year Financial Model

Mr. Mangiaratti discussed strategies since last ALG meeting following the School budget changing their budget to an assessment of 3.18% from a much larger budget that contributed to a \$1.8 million deficit. ALG discussed different strategies to balance the budget for FY23, such as increasing the amount for allocating from free cash to \$250,000, changes to revenue assumptions related to new growth and local receipts, changes to assistance from abatements to fund tax relief programs. There was still a need to reduce town spending, proposing reducing \$133,000 from the Capital Plan. The new proposal would reduce the budget increase from 3.35% to 3.0%, and would reduce the capital spending by \$133,000. The Board will be voting on transmitting the budget to the Finance Committee at its next meeting.

Charlie Kadlec, Paul Revere Road – concerned about the war between Ukraine and Russia could pull the U.S. in with it. Suggests spending time to discuss this possibility and how it would affect Acton and to take it very seriously.

12. Eagle Scout Court of Honor, Mark Silva and Matthew Chytill, March 19, 2022, St. Matthews's United Methodist Church

Mr. Charter will attend the ceremony on behalf of the Board.



IV. Consent Items

Mr. Snyder-Grant held consent item 17. Mr. Snyder-Grant moved, seconded by Mr. Charter to approve consent items 13-16 and 18-22 inclusive and voted unanimously 5-0. Mr. Snyder-Grant couldn't find the packet item in Docushare and requested to revisit the consent item at the next meeting. Item 17 will be voted on at the next meeting and no action was taken.

Mr. Snyder-Grant moved, seconded by Ms. Arsenault to adjourn and voted unanimously 5-0. Meeting adjourned at 11:24 pm.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Agenda, February 28, 2022
- Class II Auto Dealership, Advanced Auto Sciences, Inc Application
- Ban the Bag and More Presentation on Polystyrene and Disposable Plastic Reduction Bylaw and An Act Authorizing the Town of Acton to Establish a Minimum Charge for a Checkout Bag Home Rule Petition
- Presentation from Paul Gromer on Acton Power Choice
- Eagle Scout Court of Honor Letter from William Ossmann
- Meeting Minutes, January 20, 2022
- Executive Session Minutes, January 27, 2022
- Easement Amendment, 300 Main Street
- Land Court Petition for Relocation of Hayward Road
- Refund Request Memo from Planning Division Dated February 16, 2022
- Accept Gift Memo from Acton Nursing Services Dated February 16, 2022
- Accept Gift Memo from Recreation Department Dated February 23, 2022
- Accept Gift Memo from Recreation Department Dated February 23, 2022
- Committee Appointment Recommendation from Volunteer Coordinating Committee for Ramachandran Balakrishna Dated December 9, 2022
- Committee Appointment Recommendation from Volunteer Coordinating Committee for Melissa Morse Dated February 17, 2022