

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
Minutes of January 18, 2022

CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Ross McLeod called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm; opening with the Pledge of Allegiance. Selectmen Bruce Breton, Jennifer Simmons, Heath Partington and Roger Hohenberger were present, as was Town Administrator David Sullivan.

Citizen Petition: Mr. McLeod noted a citizen petition had been received relative to hand counting of ballots as opposed to using machines, and that Town Counsel had provided an opinion to the Board regarding acceptance of same; the latter being related to the petition being submitted with electronic signatures.

Mr. Hohenberger noted that, if he did not know the laws, he would assume that business could be conducted electronically; adding however that he understood what Atty. Campbell was saying in that both parties needed to be aware of this beforehand. He indicated he did not think the petitioners were aware they had to ask first and, as such, he was okay accepting the petition.

Mrs. Simmons concurred, adding that the petition actually contains more information others; going on to note she was in favor of accepting electronic signatures for other business, as well.

Mr. Sullivan noted there are potential consequences to accepting electronic signatures, suggesting that possibility could be dealt with in the future and that the Board limit tonight's decision to just accepting this petition with electronic signatures.

Mr. Breton expressed concurrence with Mr. Hohenberger and Mrs. Simmons, and Mr. Partington indicated he would be okay with accepting it so long as the Board does not pick and choose what to accept. He felt that anything in the near future should be similarly accepted across the board.

Mr. McLeod noted he was opposed for a number reasons, including individuals using an electronic means to petition to get rid of electronics. He noted there are many signers who know the proper procedure, thus this is not an ignorance of the law. Mr. McLeod felt it does a disservice to retroactively say the petition will be allowed even though it was done incorrectly; adding he felt the Board should say no to this and then, going forward, determine if they will accept electronic signatures.

Kristi St. Laurent, Range Road, reminded the Board that, when input was being taken regarding selection of the auditor, there had been a large number of signatures submitted electronically and there had been concerns as to whether what those individuals had signed was the same as what was submitted. She noted that, with a physical petition, it is known what the person saw when they decided sign it, and the physical signature can be seen. Ms. St. Laurent noted there are proper programs available, and it cannot just be a Word document where someone inserts a signature. Discussion ensued regarding the differences between physical and electronic petitions and signatures.

Mr. Hohenberger then moved and Mr. Breton seconded to accept the petition. Passed 4-1, with Mr. McLeod opposed.

Discussion then moved to what the policy would be going forward, with Mr. Hohenberger clarifying he only wished to address this petition as, going forward, input is needed from Town Counsel, Mr. Sullivan, and perhaps the Town Clerk. He indicated there is a lot of written documentation that require in person signatures and he has no idea the extent that legal documents requiring signatures could be exempted for electronic ones.

After discussion regarding the current petition versus future documents, Mr. Hohenberger moved and Mr. Breton seconded to accept this one item only. Motion passed 3-2, with Mr. McLeod and Mr. Partington opposed; the latter reiterating he did not want to pick and choose.

Discussion ensued regarding a future agenda item with Town Counsel to discuss the Board's concerns regarding future acceptances, as well as whether to include a recommendation on the petition.

Mr. Partington then moved and Mrs. Simmons seconded to “not recommend” this article. After further discussion regarding the Board’s knowledge as election officials and their comfort with the machines, motion passed 4-1, with Mr. Breton opposed.

Expendable Trust Fund Article: Mr. Sullivan noted that the Board had discussed in September what type of article to put forward relative to the water allocation fee; and had decided that an expendable trust fund be established. Mr. Sullivan distributed the proposed article, and explained that this would seed the account for this year, and the intent is to establish the fund and make the Board the agent to expend same. He clarified that no money has come in as yet, but the agreement is locked in with Salem.

Lengthy discussion ensued regarding such a fund versus these future monies going into the unexpended fund balance, whether there was a need for this account at this time, and the pros and cons of each method. Mr. Sullivan indicated that his advice would be to wait and see how much money comes in, and use it as a revenue to recoup what the Town has spent so far; adding if there is large windfall of money in the future the Trust can be established then.

The Board took no action to move an article to the warrant.

Town Administrator Recruitment: The Board, with input from Mr. Sullivan and HR Coordinator Paula Carmichael, discussed the ongoing recruitment process, coming to the following consensuses:

- First round of interviews will be held on February 14 beginning at 5:30 PM
- Staff will endeavor to book the SAU for same
- MRI, along with Mr. Sullivan and Ms. Carmichael, will conduct the first round of interviews
- The timing of the second round of interviews of the narrowed pool of candidates, as well as any additional Department Heads or others who will be invited to participate, will be determined at the next meeting

Mr. Partington sought clarification from Mr. Sullivan whether employees who are required to quarantine but are willing and able to work can still do so from home. Mr. Sullivan replied in the negative and a discussion ensued.

Mr. Sullivan advised that the Board will be asked to codify at the next meeting that those who test positive will be paid from ARPA money, as well whether those who are exposed and by CDC guidelines have to be out for five days will, as well. Further discussion ensued regarding exposures, vaccinations and CDC guidelines, and the lack of air circulation in the meeting room.

Mr. Sullivan advised that, as to the latter, a proposal has been obtained to address it, which will be discussed at the next meeting.

No decisions were made.

Mr. Hohenberger moved and Mr. Breton seconded to adjourn. Passed unanimously.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Wendi Devlin, Administrative Assistant