

April 21, 2020

**Board of Selectmen  
April 21, 2020  
Town Hall**

**Present:**

Mary Blanchard, Chairman  
Mary Dowling, Vice Chairman  
Selectman Suprenant  
Priscilla Gimas  
Selectman Kaitbenski

**Staff:**

Jeff Bridges, Town Administrator  
Andrea Mensen, Administrative Assistant

**Chair Blanchard called the meeting to order at 6:30pm**

**The Selectmen led the Pledge of Allegiance**

**Chair Blanchard read through the agenda.**

**Chair Blanchard read the following statement:** Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting law, G.L. c. 30A Section 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Sturbridge Board of Selectmen will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation can be found on the Town's website at <https://www.sturbridge.gov/town-administrator/pages/how-access-virtual-meeting>. For this meeting, members of the public who wish to listen and or watch the meeting either online via the Town's on demand video broadcast, on cable television on channel 191, or dial into the meeting at 774-304-1455, enter 1428# for the meeting number and 12345 for the access code. (This phone number is only active for the public during public meetings). No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings in real time, via technological means. In the event that we are unable to do so, despite best efforts, we will post of the Town's website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of the proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting.

Chair Blanchard thanked the town employees on behalf of the Board of Selectmen for working to help the community as a whole through the COVID-19 pandemic. She also extended thanks to the boards and committees for adapting to the new normal.

**Public Service Announcements**

Vice Chair Dowling stated that the state is publishing the number of cases of COVID-19 on a town by town basis on their website and it is updated every Wednesday. She stated that the town of Sturbridge's website states the total number of active cases.

Selectman Kaitbenski wished all of the residents well during this quarantine time.

Selectman Suprenant stated that he appreciates all the town employees and everything they do on an everyday basis.

### **Department Reports**

#### **Town Administrator**

Mr. Bridges stated that boards and committees have started to meet remotely. He informed the Board that the purchase of 501 Main Street was completed, so it is now owned by the Town and they will begin to look for an engineer to design the improvements which will be brought to Town Meeting. Mr. Bridges stated that the Economic Development Coordinator and Emergency Management Coordinator positions have been posted, and that the Police Chief is reviewing the applications for the Emergency Management Coordinator. He also informed the Board that the Police Chief recruitment advertisement was in the process of being completed. Mr. Bridges stated that the Town has been fortunate to have been receiving shipments of Personal Protective Equipment and donations.

Mr. Bridges thanked several different department heads that have done a great job through this COVID-19 crisis.

#### **Police Department**

Chief Ford phoned in to give the Board his department report. He mentioned that the February report was pretty standard and included training and operation events. Chief Ford stated that March was also a normal month until the pandemic took hold, and that put a restriction on the department's trainings, and shifted their operation approach. He said fortunately business has been normal, everyone is healthy, and they are just responding to the needs of the community. Vice Chair Dowling asked if anyone in the department had been tested for COVID-19. Chief Ford said one dispatcher had a precautionary test, due to a temperature, and the test was negative.

Chief Ford thanked the men and woman of the police department for continuing to put their best abilities forward during such difficult times and he stated he is impressed daily, and he is very thankful for them. He also thanked the Board for acknowledging them.

#### **Department of Public Works**

Butch Jackson, Department of Public Works Director, phoned in to provide the Board with his February and March reports. He mentioned that in February they were doing renovations in the garage, and informed the Board that there was a lot of tree and ice damage over the month of February. Mr. Jackson mentioned that in March they moved into the issues with COVID-19. He stated at first Personal Protective Equipment was a problem, but with Veolia's help the department was able to get what they

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needed and now they are all set. He stated that they are preparing for summer paving, picking which roads will be paved and beginning to measure. Vice Chair Dowling asked if the department had been following a protocol for employees such as taking their temperature before they enter for work. Mr. Jackson stated that they aren't doing that now but he thinks they will eventually implement that. Vice Chair Dowling suggested that the Town look into this idea. Selectman Suprenant asked if the department had completed the stage one training on gas pumps. Mr. Jackson stated that they had, and they can now do weekly inspections.

**Accept the donation of personal protective equipment from OFS and Flexcon of Spencer for the Sturbridge Fire Department**

**Motion: To accept the donations of personal protective equipment from OFS and Flexcon of Spencer to the Sturbridge Fire Department By: Selectman Suprenant**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Vice Chair Dowling**

**Roll Call Vote: Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES**

**All in Favor (5-0)**

Vice Chair Dowling asked the Town Administrator to write letters of thanks.

Mr. Bridges mentioned another donation given to the Fire Department, from Ocean State Job Lot.

**Motion: To accept the donation from Ocean State Job Lot to the Sturbridge Fire Department By: Selectwoman Gimas**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Suprenant**

**Roll Call Vote: Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES**

**All in Favor (5-0)**

Chair Blanchard asked Mr. Bridges to include them in his letters of thanks.

**Concur with the appointment of Earl Dessert as interim Chief of Police for the Sturbridge Police Department**

Mr. Bridges stated that with the impending retirement of Chief Ford, they will need to appoint someone to act as the interim Chief of Police. He stated that Lieutenant Dessert has certainly earned that opportunity. Selectwoman Gimas asked if this will still allow him to apply for the permanent position of Police Chief. Mr. Bridges stated it would still allow him the chance to apply for the position if he wished to.

**Motion: To concur with the appointment of Lt. Earl Dessert as Interim Chief of Police for the Sturbridge Police Department, effective May 13, 2020 with a salary of \$62.02 per hour By: Selectwoman Gimas**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Vice Chair Dowling**

**Roll Call Vote: Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES**

**All in Favor (5-0)**

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Vice Chair Dowling stated that they will also need to appoint an Emergency Management Director, since that is also a position that Chief Ford holds. She stated she is not sure if Mr. Bridges had someone in mind to bring before the Board but she suggested that Chief Grasso, Fire Chief, would be a good choice.

**Agreement for COVID-19 isolation / quarantine location**

**Motion:** To approve the agreement with Comfort Inn, effective April 10, 2020, for locations for isolation/quarantine of Town employees / first responders By: Selectman Kaitbenski

**2<sup>nd</sup>:** Selectwoman Gimas

**Roll Call Vote:** Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES

**All in Favor (5-0)**

**Acceptance of resignation of James Kodzis as a full time police officer from the Sturbridge Police Department effective April 30, 2020**

Chair Blanchard stated she mentioned that before she can vote on this she would like to see the job description for a part time police officer. She stated she wanted to know how it differed from a full time officer. Chief Ford stated that the job description for a part time police officer is very similar to that of a full time police officer. He stated that Mr. Kodzis originally applied for the position of a part time officer, but there was a full time position opportunity and Chief Ford convinced him to come on as full time. Chief Ford stated that his recommendation to appoint Mr. Kodzis to part time would be because they have already committed to him in so many ways, and he is well suited and well certified to work for the Sturbridge Police Department.

**Motion:** To accept the resignation of James Kodzis as a full time Police Officer with the Sturbridge Police Department effective April 30, 2020 By: Selectwoman Gimas

**2<sup>nd</sup>:** Selectman Kaitbenski

**Roll Call Vote:** Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES

**All in Favor (5-0)**

**Concur with the appointment of James Kodzis as a part time police officer with the Sturbridge Police Department effective May 1, 2020.**

**Motion:** To concur with the appointment of James Kodzis as a part time Police Officer with the Sturbridge Police Department effective May 1, 2020 with a wage of \$32.95 per hour By: Vice Chair Dowling

**2<sup>nd</sup>:** Selectwoman Gimas

**Roll Call Vote:** Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: NO

**(4-1) (Chair Blanchard opposed)**

**Acceptance of donations to the Sturbridge Senior Center**

**Motion:** To accept the donations to the Sturbridge Senior Center and send letters of appreciation By: Selectwoman Gimas

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**2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Kaitbenski**

**Roll Call Vote: Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES**

**All in Favor (5-0)**

Mr. Bridges mentioned that there were a couple more donations that had just come in.

**Motion: To accept the additional donations to the Senior Center and send letters of thanks By: Selectwoman Gimas**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Kaitbenski**

**Roll Call Vote: Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES**

**All in Favor (5-0)**

### **Old Business**

### **COVID-19 Update**

Mr. Bridges gave the Board an update of the Covid- 19. His update included:

According to the Board of Health, there are five active COVID-19 cases in town today. The Board of Health has been employing school nurses to do contact tracing. (This work is being done outside of their responsibilities to the school).

There are not active cases amongst the Town's essential employees at this time.

The Police and Fire Departments continue operations as normal except for some administrative functions and access to the lobby at the Department of Public Safety Building. Supplies of personal protective equipment are adequate at this time. Donations and purchases have been received.

Council on Aging continues to service seniors and collaborate with other agencies of support for other members of the community. Some staff work from home making contact with seniors and coordinating resources while Director Wong and others get the necessary food or medicine in the hands of those in need. Other support, such as broadcasting of exercise videos has taken place for the seniors, or any member of the community, to watch at home.

Department of Public Works is on a split shift schedule to keep the employees separate and reducing the possibility of contaminating the entire department.

Boards and Committees have begun to meet remotely. So far the Board of Selectmen, Planning Board, Recreation Committee, Board of Health, and Finance Committee all have had remote meetings.

As of noon today, Governor Baker has announced that schools in the Commonwealth will be closed for the rest of the academic year.

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Most administrative personnel are working from home with periodic days in the office. The Town Clerk's Office is staffed every day.

The Recreation Department continues to reach out to the community to provide activities and positive experiences for the community. Please visit the Sturbridge Recreation Facebook page for a list of activities.

We continue to provide information the business community on opportunities for assistance from the Federal Government and the Commonwealth.

Mr. Bridges also went over the Federal Family First Act and its three elements which are as follows:

1. Two weeks (up to 80 hours) of paid sick leave at the employee's regular rate of pay if the employee is quarantined and or seeking a diagnosis due to COVID-19 symptoms. *(Action of the Board of Selectmen is consistent with this requirement).*

2. Two weeks (80 hours) of paid sick leave at 2/3 the employee's regular rate of pay because the employee is unable to work due to a bona fide need to care for an individual subject to quarantine or whose school or child care provider is closed or unavailable for reasons related to COVID-19. *(The Commonwealth is allowing child care to remain open for essential employees in the Commonwealth. To date we have not had an employee access this type of leave. In addition, many non-essential employees are working from home). The actions taken by the Board of Selectmen are consistent with this requirement.*

3. Up to 10 additional weeks of paid expanded family and medical leave at 2/3 the employee's regular rate of pay where an employee is unable to work due to a bona fide need for leave to care for a child whose school is closed or child care provider is closed or unable for reasons related to Covid-19. *(The Town has not had any of these issues to date. Child care for essential employees is still available and many employees can work from home).*

### New Business

#### Town Administrators Review

Chair Blanchard stated that they had a couple glitches so the Board will postpone the Town Administrators review to their next meeting.

Chair Blanchard asked Mr. Bridges the status of the Warrant Articles. The Board discussed and scheduled a special meeting time and date to go over the Warrant.

### Correspondence

NONE

### Approval of Minutes

April 6, 2020

**Motion: To approve the minutes of April 6, 2020 as amended By: Selectwoman Gimas  
2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Kaitbenski**

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Roll Call Vote: Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES,  
Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES  
All in Favor (5-0)

Citizen's forum

NONE

Adjourn

Motion: To adjourn at 7:35p.m. By: Selectwoman Gimas  
2<sup>nd</sup>: Selectman Kaitbenski

Roll Call Vote: Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectwoman Gimas: YES,  
Selectman Suprenant: YES, Chair Blanchard: YES  
All in Favor (5-0)

Minutes prepared by: Andrea Mensen

Clerk of the Board: Michael D. Suprenant Date signed: 06-29-2020