

January 21, 2021

**Board of Selectmen  
January 21, 2021  
Town Hall**

**Present:**

Mary Blanchard, Chair  
Mary Dowling, Vice Chair  
Selectman Michael Suprenant  
Selectman Chase Kaibenski

**Absent:**

Selectman Ian Dunnigan

**Staff:**

Jeff Bridges, Town Administrator  
Alex McConnon, Administrative Assistant

**Absent:**

**Chair Blanchard called the meeting to order at 5:07 p.m.**

**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 on the Town's website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of the proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting.

**The Selectmen led the Pledge of Allegiance.**

**Chair Blanchard read the Agenda.**

**Public Service Announcements**

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Mr. Bridges said that the Town of Sturbridge is now accepting applications for the Town of Sturbridge tax assistance for low-income senior and disabled citizens program. The Program is for assistance in paying real estate taxes and is for if an individual is 65 years or older or has a state recognized disability and their total gross actual income does not exceed \$26,732 for single individuals or \$33,272 for married individuals. Per Mr. Bridges, applications can be found online at <https://www.sturbridge.gov/> or those interested can call the Finance Department at (508) 347-2509. Per Mr. Bridges, the deadline to apply is February 15, 2021.

### **Moment of Silence**

The Selectmen held a moment of silence in honor of all those affected from COVID-19.

### **Presentation – Senior Center Study Results**

Ms. Robyn Chrabasz, Facilities Coordinator said the town appropriated funds for a feasibility study for the Senior Center. Ms. Leslie Wong, Senior Center Director, Mr. Ken White from the Committee and Rebecca Mimeault all joined in as well.

Ms. Chrabasz started the presentation with a background of the project followed by the design team members from Bargmann Hendrie + Archetype, Inc. (BH+A) going into detail about the proposed spaces and examples of different spaces. BH+A spoke about the different needs of the senior population and how they could accommodate different subsets for them.

BH+A discussed the current Senior Center facilities at 480 Main Street in Sturbridge and the three sites in question. The firm spoke about their floor plan proposal to include seating areas, multipurpose rooms, Administrative areas and offices, conference rooms, and an exercise room.

After the presentation, Vice Chair Dowling asked if the Board of Selectmen could hold at least one public hearing so that the residents could come forward to say what their needs are and to have a chance to voice their opinion.

The Board will continue to discuss the study and project.

### **Department Reports:**

#### **Police Department**

Chief Dessert presented on November and December 2020. In November, the staff has been training remotely and at a few other locations. In December, Village Pizza donated food and they created a drive-through for the seniors for the Senior Dinner. The Police Department also held their annual toy drive for the holidays and they accompanied the Fire Department with the Santa Claus ride through town. The Police Department also welcomed back Officer Patterson after her time in Afghanistan.

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Chair Blanchard asked about the number of cars being stolen as referenced in the Police Department report and Chief Dessert said it is mostly a result of people leaving their car unlocked while having their keys inside and urged everyone to take their keys in and lock their cars.

### **Building Department**

Nelson Burlingame, Building Commissioner & Zoning Enforcement Officer reported on November and December 2020. Mr. Burlingame listed the permits issued and ongoing and possible upcoming projects.

### **Town Administrator**

Mr. Bridges reported that the town received notice from the union with the Fire Fighters to start negotiations on a new contract. He also said that Mr. Butch Jackson, Department of Public Works Director was available to answer any questions about the issue with well #1 with the fuel leak at the Old Sturbridge Village lodges. Mr. Bridges also stated that the Board of Selectmen Retreat date is set for Saturday, January 30, 2021.

### **Consideration and possible action on the appointment of Philip Derry as a full time police officer.**

Chief Dessert said that Officer Derry currently lives in Florida and is relocating to Massachusetts. Per Chief Dessert, Officer Derry is a former Army Military Police Officer and is currently working on his degree towards psychology.

**Motion: Confirm the appointment of Phillip Derry as a full-time Police Officer with the Sturbridge Police Department effective January 22, 2021 at a starting salary of \$29.15 per hour.**

**By: Selectman Kaitbenski**

**2nd: Selectman Suprenant**

**Roll Call Vote:**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectman Dunnigan: ABSENT**

**Vote: 4-0 (Selectman Dunnigan absent)**

### **Consideration and possible action on the Massachusetts Historical Commission Grant Application.**

Ms. Jean Bubon, Town Planner said that the Historical Commission has completed the application. Per Ms. Bubon, The total amount of the project cost is projected to be \$30,000 with the grant request of \$15,000 and would create a community-wide historical preservation plan. Ms. Bubon said this will be a great tool for preserving what is important in community and also educating policy makers and asked the Board of Selectmen to authorize the Chair to sign the grant application.

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**Motion: Authorize permission of the grant request by the Historical Commission and to have the Chair sign the grant application.**

**By: Selectman Suprenant**

**2nd: Selectman Kaitbenski**

**Roll Call Vote:**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectman Dunnigan: ABSENT**

**Vote: 4-0 (Selectman Dunnigan absent)**

**Consideration and possible action on a 2021 Dock Permit for the residence at 76 South Shore Drive.**

Mr. Bridges said there is an existing dock at the property already and the applicant is just updating it.

**Motion: Approve the dock permit for 76 South Shore drive.**

**By: Selectman Kaitbenski**

**2nd: Selectman Suprenant**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectman Dunnigan: ABSENT**

**Vote: 4-0 (Selectman Dunnigan absent)**

**Consideration and possible action on the appointment of Ben Burlingame as a Heavy Equipment Operator in the Department of Public Works.**

Mr. Butch Jackson, Department of Public Works Director said that Mr. Burlingame is an internal applicant who already has many licenses within the department. Mr. Jackson said Mr. Burlingame was working as a mechanic for years and wants to get back out in the field.

**Motion: Confirm the appoint of Ben Burlingame as a Heavy Equipment Operator in the Sturbridge Department of Public Works effective immediately.**

**By: Selectman Suprenant**

**2nd: Selectman Kaitbenski**

**Roll Call Vote:**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectman Dunnigan: ABSENT**

**Vote: 4-0 (Selectman Dunnigan absent)**

**Consideration and possible action on appraisal services for 8 Brookfield Road.**

Mr. Bridges said the town is in the process of developing the request for proposals (RFP) for sale and lease of 8 Brookfield Road. Per Mr. Bridges, in order to dispose the property, the town will need an appraisal. Mr. Bridges reached out to the company who has worked with the town in the past on appraisals and asked the Board of Selectmen to authorize the money from the Town Administrators special project fund.

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**Motion: Accept the proposal for the appraisal and authorize the use of the \$5,800 from the Town Administrator's project funds.**

**By: Selectman Suprenant**

**2nd: Selectman Kaibenski**

**Roll Call Vote:**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaibenski: YES, Selectman Dunnigan: ABSENT**

**Vote: 4-0 (Selectman Dunnigan absent)**

**Consideration and possible acceptance of a gift of \$50.00 to the Sturbridge Fire Department from Robert and Lynn Barnes of 42 Fiske Hill Road.**

**Motion: Accept the gift from Mr. and Mrs. Barnes with thanks and authorize the use thereof.**

**By: Selectman Suprenant**

**2nd: Selectman Kaibenski**

Chair Blanchard read the letter of appreciation from Mr. and Mrs. Barnes that they wrote to the Fire Department.

**Roll Call Vote:**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaibenski: YES, Selectman Dunnigan: ABSENT**

**Vote: 4-0 (Selectman Dunnigan absent)**

**Old Business:**

Vice Chair Dowling asked about Citizen Emergency Response Team (C.E.R.T.) members getting priority to be vaccinated. Per Mr. Bridges, Harrington Hospital had them in but the state said not for Phase 1. Per, Bridges, Harrington Hospital was willing to expand but was not allowed to vaccinate persons not on the priority list.

**COVID-19 Update**

Mr. Bridges said the vaccine is slowly being distributed and Harrington Hospital is the regional provider. Ms. Leslie Wong is working with the Health Department for the vaccine for the Senior Citizens as it becomes available and Massachusetts works through the phases.

Vice Chair Dowling asked if residents could put their name on a list at the Senior Center and Mr. Bridges said he does not yet know what the procedure is going to be as Ms. Wong works with the Health Department.

**New Business:**

Mr. Bridges said the presentation for the Route 20 project at MPO went well when MassDOT presented. Per Mr. Bridges, no votes were taken, those projects are being stored, and sometime in

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March, there will be a conclusion on which ones will be involved in the transportation improvement program.

Selectman Suprenant said the MMA Conference was this evening and there was a discussion about social equity and what municipalities are doing with that and requested to discuss it more at the upcoming Board of Selectmen retreat.

### **Classification and Compensation Study**

Mr. Bridges said there were three reasons why this study was undertaken. The first reason was to provide better definition for the different levels of Administrative Assistant positions. Second, there was concern from the Finance Committee that the salaried employees were in a grade and step plan similar to the hourly employees. Per Mr. Bridges, the Finance Committee wanted them to relook at a merit base program for the salaried employees. The third reason was to make sure employees are compensated comparable to their market. The Personnel Committee has been the lead agency on this study and has approved the product. However, Mr. Bridges said that there are some concerns from the salaried employees which are moving away from the grade and step plan.

Mr. Bridges proceeded to explain the compensation plan to the Board of Selectmen. The hourly employees will remain on a grade and step plan and the salaried employees will return to a merit-based plan.

Mr. Bridges said for the salaried employees, they will move through the range with merit increases. Instead of getting a separate merit check, the merit will now be part of the base pay. Selectman Suprenant asked if intermediate management employees get performance evaluation and Mr. Bridges confirmed.

Mr. Bridges stated that the issue he is running into is that some of the salaried employees were hired into a step and grade plan, which is one of the things that attracted them to the position. The concern is that since they were on a merit base plan and they moved away from that, going back to it wages would stagnate again. Per Mr. Bridges, these merit movements need to be robust to move them through a range as they currently do on the step plan and there has to be movement or they will fall behind in the market place. Vice Chair Dowling was concerned for people falling behind the market because of new hires making more money than current employees.

Mr. Bridges said there needs to be a conclusion that the town adopts for multiple years to make the employees comfortable. Per Mr. Bridges, several employees were unhappy with returning to a merit-based plan.

The hourly employees will remain on a grade and step plan with new grades and salary ranges. The big difference is that the steps for the employees will have a 3.0% increment for the first six

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years and 2.5% increment for the last six (12 step plan). In the current plan, there are 10 steps with a 2.0% increment.

Mr. Bridges said overall, the product is successful and wants to see where the Board of Selectmen are with adopting this and making adjustments. Mr. Bridges also said there are a series of title changes but not many employees need to be adjusted.

Mr. Bridges would like to look at keeping the employees in grades 7 and 8 on a grade and step plan and come back to the Board of Selectmen.

Vice Chair Dowling asked if this plan could be adopted all at once on the same night and Chair Blanchard agreed.

**Correspondence:**

Selectman Suprenant read the correspondence.

**Approval of Minutes:**

January 4, 2021.

**Motion: To approve minutes of January 4, 2021, as written.**

**By: Selectman Suprenant**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Chair Blanchard**

**Roll Call Vote:**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: ABSTAINED, Selectman Dunnigan: ABSENT**

**Vote: 3-0-1 (Selectman Dunnigan absent, Selectman Kaitbenski abstained)**

**Citizen's forum:**

NONE

**Adjourn**

**Motion: To adjourn at 7:42 p.m.**

**By: Chair Blanchard**

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

**Roll Call Vote:**

**Chair Blanchard: YES, Vice Chair Dowling: YES, Selectman Suprenant: YES, Selectman Kaitbenski: YES, Selectman Dunnigan: YES**

**Vote: 4-0 (Selectman Dunnigan absent)**

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**Adjourned at 7:42 p.m.**

**Minutes prepared by: Alex McConnon**

**Clerk of the Board:**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Supina", written over a horizontal line.

**Date signed:**

02-11-2021