



Town of Swampscott
Select Board Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 10, 2020 – 6:00 PM
Virtual Meeting

SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Peter Spellos (Chair), Polly Titcomb, Neal Duffy, David Grishman, Don Hause

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

OTHER TOWN OFFICIALS PRESENT

Sean Fitzgerald, Town Administrator; Allie Fiske, Assistant to the Town Administrator; Ron Mendes, Assistant Town Administrator – Administration and Finance; Marzie Galazka, Director of Community & Economic Development; Mike McClung, Town Moderator

The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm

PUBLIC COMMENT

Erik Schneider spoke regarding Article 15, the Citizen's Petition. His intention is to ensure the community sees the need to commit funds to give the facilities department the ability to find solutions to needed maintenance and safety in the Clarke, Hadley, and Stanley Schools. He feels this Article helps address some inequities in the school system.

PRESENTATION ON THE PRELIMINARY TAX RECAP

Assistant Town Administrator of Administration and Finance Ron Mendes provided a thorough presentation on the Tax Rate Recap.

Patriot Properties valued every property in town and provided a summary of the values. There has been a 3.8% increase in the value of single-family homes and the value of condominiums has increased 12.8%. Commercial property value has seen an increase of 8.9%,. These are based on values from January 1, 2020.

The Select Board the increase in the assessed value and the fact that it appears low. Town Administrator Fitzgerald will reach out to Patriot Properties to better understand the valuation and particularly why there is a disparity between single-family homes and condos. Asst. Town Administrator Mendes suspects that the high-end properties are not selling quickly, where as the

condos are seeing greater sales. Greenwood Ave. condominiums could also be contributing to the 12.8% increase in condo value.

Mr. Mendes showed the levy analysis from 2011-2020 and the excess levy capacity for 2021 and free cash balance. The Town Administrator proposed a \$1,550,000 free cash transfer.

Mr. Mendes reviewed the 5 levers that the Town has at its disposal to manage tax policy: 1. Setting the Town Budget; 2. Estimating Local Receipts; 3. Transferring from Free Cash/Reserves; 4. Small Business/Residential Exemption; 5. Split Tax Rate.

Mr. Mendes reviewed options for splitting the tax rate between Commercial/Industrial Properties (CIP) and Residential Properties. The Town Administrator's recommendation is to make a 1.7 shift and increase the CIP rate from 7.14% to 12.14% and decrease residential from 92.85% to 87.86%. This would keep the single-family tax bill the same as last year, with a \$0 increase. Shifting by 1.75 would keep the single-family and condo rate the same, requiring a lesser transfer of free cash, but transfer more tax burden onto commercial properties.

Mr. Mendes reviewed the Small Commercial Exemption option which shifts tax burden from small properties that have an annual cumulative employment of less than 10 employees and property value of less than 1 million. If they meet this requirement, they receive a 10% reduction in tax bill, which is achieved by increasing taxes on commercial and industrial properties. Total exemptions for FY21 would be \$26,046. This exemption has been voted affirmatively two years in a row. Chairperson Spellios asked if we've seen any benefits or improvements made by businesses due to this money they are not spending on taxes (improvements in properties, for instance). He requested that the Office of Community and Economic Development reach out to businesses to determine if they have seen benefits of these savings.

Mr. Mendes also outlined a residential exemption option which shifts the tax burden from low value residential properties to non owner-occupied and higher-valued residential properties. He provided different options to show what combination of considerations would result in what tax bills, with the goal of potentially maintaining the same tax rate as FY21.

Chairperson Spellios asked that Mr. Mendes refer to median home values rather than average at the December 2nd official Tax Recap.

TOWN MEETING WARRANT

Article 4 – Approve Transfer of Free Cash – Collective Bargaining Agreements

The Select Board not vote on 11/10 but will get recommendation from Finance Committee and then meet before Town Meeting to vote on recommendation

Article 2 – Amend Appropriation for Fiscal Year 2021 Operating Budget

On MOTION (Titcomb) and **SECONDED** (Grishman) it was **VOTED** by roll call to recommend favorable passage to Article 2 as amended by Finance Committee. Roll call: Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

Article 6 – Authorize Increase for Retirees Cost of Living Base (COLA)

On **MOTION** (Titcomb) and **SECONDED** (Grishman) it was **VOTED** by roll call to recommend indefinite postponement of Article 6. Roll call: Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

Article 8 – Appropriation for Capital Project – Former Police Station

On **MOTION** (Titcomb) and **SECONDED** (Grishman) it was **VOTED** by roll call to recommend favorable action on Article 8. Roll call: Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

Article 10 – Zoning Bylaw Amendment – Technical Amendments

The Public Hearing for the ZBA was not posted in Town Hall on time. On **MOTION** (Hause) and **SECONDED** (Titcomb) it was **VOTED** by roll call to recommend indefinite postponement of Article 10. Roll call: Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

Article 12 – General Bylaw Amendment – Adoption of Noise Bylaw

Chairperson Spellios explained that the bylaw is not ready. Town Administrator Fitzgerald stated next steps are to build off of other bylaws and talk to Town Counsel about enforceability.

On **MOTION** (Titcomb) and **SECONDED** (Hause) it was **VOTED** by roll call to recommend indefinite postponement of Article 12. Roll call: Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios

Article 14 – General Bylaw Amendment – Marijuana Licensing

Bylaw language has been cleared up to consist of only one section limiting number of licenses.

On **MOTION** (Grishman) and **SECONDED** (Hause) it was **VOTED** by roll call to recommend favorable action on Article 8. Roll call: Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

Article 15 – Proposed Capital Project – Repair our Elementary Schools

Peter explained that the Article has to go to the floor as it is written. It requires 3,000,000 to be added to the tax levy. The language cannot be changed to alter the funding mechanism (borrowing vs. tax-funded).

Terry Lorber spoke to describe Article 15.

On **MOTION** (Hause) and **SECONDED** (Grishman) it was **VOTED** by roll call to recommend indefinitely postponement of Article 15. Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

CONSENT AGENDA

- Vote to approve \$1.1 million zero-interest loan from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority and sign the water bond. On **MOTION** (Hause) and **SECONDED** (Titcomb) it was **VOTED** by roll call to adopt the vote as indicated on the screen and indicated in

their materials. Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

- On **MOTION** (Grishman) and **SECONDED** (Hause) it was VOTED by roll call to accept the minutes of the November 4 meeting minutes. Titcomb (YES) Hause (YES) Grishman (YES) Duffy (YES) Spellios (YES)

STATEMENT REGARDING PROTESTS

Chairperson Spellios shared an Open Letter to Dianna Ploss from the Town of Swampscott. There was a discussion regarding the possibility of making the letter directed at protests in general as opposed to just Dianna Ploss. The letter was amended to be addressed generally.

On MOTION (Hause) and SECONDED (Grishman) it was VOTED by roll call to approve the statement with the changes to make it third person and omission of Ms. Ploss' name. Hause (YES) Titcomb (YES) Duffy (YES) Grishman (YES) Spellios (YES)

The next meeting will take place on Monday, November 16 at 5:30pm before Select Board meeting.

On **MOTION** (Hause) and **SECONDED** (Grishman) it was **VOTED** by roll call to adjourn the meeting. Roll call: Grishman (YES) Titcomb (YES) Duffy (YES) Titcomb (YES)

Meeting adjourned at 8:34 PM

True Attest,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Allie Fiske". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Allie Fiske, Assistant to the Town Administrator

Minutes APPROVED by vote of the Select Board 11/24/2020