

TOWN OF CANTON - BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Regular Hybrid Meeting

Wednesday, July 10, 2024 – 7:00 pm

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: First Selectman Kevin Witkos, Tim LeGeyt, William Volovski, and Elizabeth Corkum Winsor.

Members Absent: Stephen Sedor

Also Present: CAO Robert Skinner, Director of Planning/Community Development Neil Pade, EDA Chair Matt Dingee, EDA Members Bob Bessel and Russ Asklof, Recording Secretary Maureen Griffin

Call to Order: K. Witkos called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Add Agenda Item:

Motion: K. Witkos moved to add as an agenda item: Executive Session to discuss personnel—the Interim Chief Administrator Officer position.

Seconded by: T. LeGeyt

The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

-Lisa Coggins (Daynard Drive) thanked the BOS for holding the Town Meeting on the question of funding a study for use of the old firehouse. She said that storage needs are still an issue. She asked the BOS to have department heads provide an inventory of their storage needs to help plan for the future. She said that she would like to hear a response to Mr. Barlow's comments at the prior BOS meeting about the Brownfields Liability Relief program that could be utilized for site clean-up at 51 Albany Turnpike; she would like to learn more about this. She commented on the bonding for CIP projects and possible use of existing funds (including ARPA funds) to cover some costs, resulting in less bonding. She referenced specific funds shown in the recent Town financial reports.

-Ted Kurnat (Bridge Street) addressed the change in buoy location which will result in removal of river access on the river's west side. When residents voted for the hydro plant there was going to be improved access for them. It is alarming that there is now a proposal to remove the access—this is not fair; it is not feasible to cross the bridge to the other portage. He hopes that there is a better solution, and asks that the BOS to be mindful that this access is important to residents.

-Sarah Faulkner (Dyer Avenue) expressed concern that the River Access Subcommittee was shut down. She served on the committee and said that they worked on the entire riverfront, and with many conservation organizations. She asked the BOS to consider reconstituting the subcommittee. She spoke about the EDA's report/presentation and the POCD. There is a push for more apartments as a way to increase the tax base. She commented that it should be balanced—apartment complexes must fit with the character of the Town, its residents, and under the POCD. It is a beautiful town with a lot of open space that is valued; a broad philosophy is needed.

-Richard Barlow (Cherry Brook Road) addressed the proposed bonding package. His concern is about the renovation of the CIS cafeteria. This has never been on a CIP list. Now that there is a pool of money being discussed, the project has suddenly surfaced. He does not support including this project for bonding. He added that we should not be bonding for pavement management. This is routine maintenance; it is a slippery slope for our fiscal situation to include this. He recommends adding a 10% contingency for the remaining proposed projects which would bring the total to just short of the \$4.75M target.

-Bob Namnoun (Cherry Brook Road) identified himself as the Chair of the Energy Committee. He pointed out a DPW line item in the budget (\$4,725) that is to be cut. He said that this money is the culmination of 6 years of work done by the Energy Committee. It is for a company that will

monitor our electric billing online. We now have the ability, with this company, to do real time searches of energy utilization in areas that Town government manages. We are alerted to malfunctions as they occur and we can address them immediately. It is important to know that this is the only way to effectively monitor energy uses. Town staff utilizes this information for management decisions. The Energy Committee is asking for reconsideration of this decision and for the BOS to restore these funds.

-Diana Hiza (Torrington Avenue) said that her concern is about the buoy placement. The proposed change locks residents in to limited accessible points. One of the project engineers told her possible to go over the cable and buoy system to get by it; she asks if this is true.

ACTION ITEMS:

Economic Development Agency presentation regarding economic conditions and trends in Canton.

Matt Dingee, EDA Chair led the presentation on Canton's economic landscape. They have looked at demographic trends and economic conditions, especially in light of the influx of new development. They relied on underlying data, and spoke with residents in regard to increased taxes and newly built apartment complexes. He emphasized that committee members are Town residents and are volunteers, appointed by the BOS, to foster and support economic development. They serve as an advisory board to the BOS and they promote sustainable economic growth that is consistent with the POCD. He gave an overview of topics: the case for development; challenges for developers; types of development being pursued; and reasons/economic rationale for apartments. Mr. Dingee presented a chart that showed median home values over time and the tax burden for homeowners. Values are soaring. More development is needed to ease the tax burden. They utilized Goman & York Property Advisors to do a fiscal impact analysis. The firm provided feedback on how developers view Canton. The Town is far from highways which is not conducive for distribution centers or large corporate locations. It is a small town, 30% of residents are age 55 or older. There is a small stock of land designated for commercial development/apartments. Building/development is more expensive due to topography. There is limited utility access in areas and wetlands considerations. Canton has a reputation for not being development friendly due to land use policies and public opposition to growth. He presented data on the types of possible development, rated by net economic impact. Single family homes are a net negative due to cost of services and number of school age children. Open space is desirable but does not provide revenue. Commercial development has moderate economic impact but absorbs scarce land assets.

Apartments, contrary to public opinion, do not have a high cost of services or many school age children. An optimal situation would be mixed use—commercial and residential. He addressed the question about apartment development in Town. He stated that the EDA does not serve as real estate brokers; projects have been due to market forces. Canton has a low inventory of single family homes which drives up demand for apartments. Apartments are more affordable than homes. They analyzed demographics which provided an economic rationale for apartments. Population growth has been stagnant, or negative, in recent years. Apartments would attract young professionals, and seniors. R. Bessel pointed out that apartments are rapidly filled and they are a way to help us retain people in Town—there is a demand. Mr. Dingee said that apartments help achieve a balance of young professionals and retirees. He showed data on local discretionary spending; conservative estimates show \$560,000 that would support area businesses and help fill empty storefronts. He addressed some resident concerns and how data is misconstrued. Academic data shows that apartment residents do not inundate schools and they do not drain town services. They are net tax positive; they bring in twice the revenue vs. cost of services. DOT data shows that traffic volume will not be greatly affected. R. Bessel added that the biggest obstacle for developers is obtaining funding. Investors want to avoid risk. They are currently seeing apartments as less risky than commercial/retail. The state has a problem filling jobs and having housing for workers. Canton is a desired location; apartments help us provide workforce housing. Selectmen discussed changes made in Town regulations (eg. lowering sewer fees and form-based code) which have made the Town friendlier to development. They also commented on the recent EDA survey that has received 500

responses to date. They emphasized the need to educate the public on EDA/development issues. Residents commented on the need for more data (national data) and the possibility of getting existing data from the BOE; whether apartments are tax positive; the number of existing apartments in Town and potential locations for more apartments; affordable housing; studies/comparisons to other area towns; if tax revenues from apartments include motor vehicle taxes; accurate numbers for school age children; and making EDA's presentation available to the public on the Town website.

Review and possibly approve a federal Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant in the amount of \$200,000 to draft a complete streets, Vision Zero and Comprehensive Safety Action Plan for the Town of Canton and refer to the Board of Finance for their review and possible approval.

Selectmen discussed the source for matching funds required (\$40,000) and whether there will be requirement placed on the Town as part of these plans. Neil Pade explained that these plans and policies go beyond public safety—they make us compliant; other grants require this information. They will not force change; the data provided will be beneficial. He added that matching funds will come from remaining CIP funds and 2024-25 CIP. R. Skinner said that there are significant funds in Undesignated Funds and that these plans will improve street safety and provide actual design plans. He said there is a ton of grant money available for these projects but the tools are needed. K. Witkos said that the investment will provide the tools and expertise that are needed to move forward.

Motion: K. Witkos moved to approve a federal Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant in the amount of \$200,000 to draft a complete streets, Vision Zero and Comprehensive Safety Action Plan for the Town of Canton and refer to the Board of Finance for final approval.

Seconded by: W. Volovski

The motion passed unanimously.

Review and possibly approve an easement from Applegate Village along Lawton and Washburn Roads for the purpose of locating a segment of the Farmington River Trail.

K. Witkos asked about the zoning process. N. Pade explained that it is a unique project to our system; there are few common area improvements. It is similar to residential subdivision projects. K. Witkos commented that there is a safety benefit because it is a heavily travelled road.

Motion: K. Witkos moved to approve an easement from Applegate Village along Lawton and Washburn Roads for the purpose of locating a segment of the Farmington River Trail.

Seconded by: E. Corkum Winsor

The motion passed unanimously.

Review building fees charged by the Town of Canton.

W. Volovski explained that he raised this issue several months ago. The Town has not increased building permit fees in approximately 15 years. The Building Official provided data on area fees which show fees of \$15 to \$17 per 1K. If we raise our fees from \$14 to \$15 it would result in an additional \$30,000 (based on last year's permit income). W. Volovski added that the Building Official position has changed from part time to full time. This additional income would be a way to compensate for that increase. K. Witkos expressed concern about the impact to homeowners. R. Skinner suggested eliminating the fee on the first \$2,000 as a way to benefit homeowners who are doing small repairs. Selectmen agreed to table this item until there are further discussions that will include the Building Official.

Update and comment on possible capital projects for bonding.

R. Skinner provided the most recent cost estimates for the proposed projects for bonding:

Classrooms - \$1.2 - \$2M; a formal cost estimate will be done. There is no state reimbursement.

CIS Roof - \$700,000 - \$1M; there will be a 40% state reimbursement.

CIS Cafeteria and Kitchen Renovation – a rough estimate is \$1.4-1.8M which is subject to 40% reimbursement. A separate estimate for the kitchen renovation only is to be done.

Tennis and Basketball Courts - \$1.2-1.3M

Fire Department Air Packs - \$450,000 which is based on an RFP from Burlington.

Pavement Management - \$1M

The total (with reimbursements factored in) is \$5.16–6.43M

The BOF capped the bond amount at \$4.75M

K. Witkos suggested tabling this item. More information is needed (eg. condition of the school roof) and more specific estimates. Selectmen suggested removing the CIS Cafeteria and Kitchen Renovation project from the proposed projects. W. Volovski commented that it is important to have a contingency, as was pointed out during public participation.

Review and comment on the proposed location of the Canton Hydro Dam Safety Buoys and boat takeout.

R. Skinner reported that he sent the BOS comments to Canton Hydro. He spoke with their principle who said they have to abide by FERC regulations and must provide a buoy system for safety. The location of buoys was shown on the map provided. Buoys must be a certain distance from the dam to create awareness and serve as a physical barrier. He also said that they had to do something temporary for the July 4th weekend. Selectmen discussed Town rights in determining placement and other considerations; aesthetics and functionality; relocation of a takeout point; west side access; and harm to the community in loss of portage which was not part of the original plan. R. Skinner will communicate with Canton Hydro to give the BOS response that the buoys and portage should remain at the original location.

Review proposal to have a four-day work week for certain Town staff.

R. Skinner provided the BOS with staff comments about the proposed schedule change that includes a 4-day work week if possible for positions/departments, longer hours on work days, and Town Hall being closed on Fridays. Staff appreciated this option; it does not work for all departments (P&R, Library, DPW, Police). Town Hall hours would be: Monday – Wednesday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Staff members who are not public-facing would be able to work on Fridays. K. Wikos explained that this idea was pursued because Canton is one of the lowest paying towns in Farmington Valley. This provides good work/life balance. Other towns have had success with a 4-day work week. Staff morale and productivity improves. Residents would have greater access to Town Hall (evening hours). R. Skinner said that a work-around must be found for Friday holidays – possibly a floating holiday. E. Corkum Winsor commented that this is a progressive idea. It provides a solution for stress issues and is a good response to the employee survey. It must be implemented department by department and could be started as a pilot program. There should not be an impact on Town services. Selectmen discussed when this proposed schedule change might start. R. Skinner will create a proposal for BOS review at the next meeting. Doreen DePaul (High Hill Road) was recognized and commented that this is progressive and innovative, but there are trade-offs. There must be benefits to taxpayers. She recommended checking the laws about paid holidays on days when employees are not scheduled to work (Fridays). She asked the BOS to consider the tax payers in this decision.

ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA

Motion: W. Volovski moved to approve the Consent Agenda.

Seconded by: E. Corkum Winsor

The motion passed unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Motion: E. Corkum Winsor moved to enter Executive Session at 9:40 p.m. to discuss the position of interim CAO.

The motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT: