

Freetown Board of Selectmen
Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 5, 2024, 6:00pm
Police Station Community Room
15 Memorial Drive, East Freetown, MA

FREETOWN CLERK
REC'D FEB 21 2024 PM5:16

Call to Order

Selectmen Trevor Matthews called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Selectmen Jared Zager, Selectmen Carlos Lopes, Town Administrator Deb Pettey and Executive Assistant Lu-Ann Souza were also present. Selectmen Matthews noted the meeting was being recorded and would be available on the Town's YouTube Channel. He also noted the Board would be going into Executive Session for reason number one below and would be returning to open session.

- Motion to go into Executive Session was made at 6:01pm by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes.
- Vote: was approved in a unanimous roll call vote
- Vote: Selectmen Lopes – yes, Selectmen Zager – yes, Selectmen Matthews - yes

Executive Session

Discussion/possible action on the following topics:

1. M.G.L. c.30A, Sec. 21(a)(1) – To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual

Board of Selectmen

Discussion/possible action on the following topics:

2. Discussion, and vote on whether to approve, not release, the executive session minutes from 1/29/24
 - Motion to approve, not release, the executive session minutes from 1/29/24 was made by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes
 - Vote: Selectmen Lopes – yes, Selectmen Zager – yes, Selectmen Matthews - abstain
3. Discussion, and vote on whether to approve the open session minutes from 1/29/24
 - Motion to approve the open session minutes from 1/29/24 was made by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes
 - Vote: Selectmen Lopes – yes, Selectmen Zager – yes, Selectmen Matthews - abstain
4. Discussion, and vote on additional drop box for document collection at an East Freetown location
There was a discussion a few weeks ago on the drop box for document collection at an East Freetown location. Town Clerk Cheryl Estrella shared her thoughts on the

subject. She is not in favor of a dedicated box at the Police Station for the Town Clerk and Elections as there are rules and regulations, she needs to follow for processing the ballots on Election Day. She reached out to towns who had more than one ballot box for their town populations and them being in the thousands feels our population being 9206 and voters being 7200 residents does not warrant a drop box for elections. State deadlines the way they are, she would not have the time to go back to the office and then back to the polling location for processing on election days in a timely manner. She is in favor for the general box for other items and departments.

5. Discussion, and vote on percentage of town contribution toward retirees' supplemental insurance

Ms. Pettey stated we are paying 95% toward retirees' supplemental health insurance premium when they turn 65. Attorney Joe Fair has said it's against the law for us to be paying that amount. It is about \$30,000.00 a month. Attorney Fair stated the Town needs to adopt Mass General Law 32b Section 9a or 9c and that will drive what we charge. Because we have not adopted a subsection, we should not be contributing at all. We need to draft a bylaw to go to town meeting to adopt one or the other subsection Then it will come before the Board of Selectmen. There are 102 retirees this will affect next January.

6. Discussion, and vote on whether to approve Bristol County Mosquito to use airspace over Freetown for annual aerial application scheduled for April, weather permitting.

- Motion to approve Bristol County Mosquito to use airspace over Freetown for annual aerial application scheduled for April, weather permitting was made by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes
- Vote: was approved in a unanimous roll call vote

7. Discussion, and vote whether to approve the Annual Town Report for Fiscal Year 2023

- Motion to approve the Annual Town Report for Fiscal Year 2023 was made by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes
- Vote: was approved in a unanimous roll call vote

8. Discussion, and vote whether to approve the placement of a weather station at the summit of the landfill on Howland Road by the DCR State Fire Control Warden's request

- Motion to approve the placement of a weather station at the summit of the landfill on Howland Road by the DCR State Fire Control Warden's request was made by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes
- Vote: was approved in a unanimous roll call vote

9. Discussion, and vote whether to approve the creation of two new Freetownma.gov email addresses for Fire Dept grants and in house IT
 - Motion to approve the creation of two new Freetownma.gov email addresses for Fire Dept grants and in house IT was made by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes
 - Vote: was approved in a unanimous roll call vote
10. Discussion on Community Electrical Aggregation program

Ms. Pettey gave a brief overview regarding the new electrical rates that residents have had comments about their electric bill going up. A company called Good Energy works with us and 25 other towns that are in this aggregate, to use the buying power to get a cheaper rate and offer that back to all our residents. Good Energy actually puts this out to bid to get the cheapest rate possible. We originally received 2 bids for electricity, however before we could vote on them, one backed out. So that left Constellation the only one that offered us any aggregate number. It is the uncertainty of the cost of natural gas that drives the cost of electricity. We were at a much lower cost rate than we had prior to the new change and was much lower than Eversource. Constellation felt that. It was a three-year contract and they were stuck with that rate and had to offer the electricity at the lower rate. The rate is still lower than Eversource at this time. It is a guaranteed rate until November 2025. However, there are other suppliers of electricity that the public can buy from, but you still have to pay the delivery to Eversource. We do not control Eversource. They are a utility and can charge what they want. There was a letter sent out in November letting everyone know the change was coming. On our website main page, under Community Electricity, Energy Switch Massachusetts, is other companies to choose from with their rates and fees.

Personnel Board

Discussion/possible action on the following topics:

11. Discussion, and vote whether to appoint Kylie Botelho as Community Program Director effective 2/12/24-6/30/24
 - Motion to appoint Kylie Botelho as Community Program Director effective 2/12/24-6/30/24 was made by Selectmen Matthews and seconded by Selectmen Zager
 - Vote: was approved in a unanimous roll call vote

Board of Parks Commission

Discussion/possible action on the following topics:

- No topics for discussion

Town Administrator's Report

Discussion/possible action on the following topics:

12. Updates on status of various projects and grants, including but not limited to:

a. Sewer line extension project

This project comes in through Fall River on the Assonet line down Main Street to Stop and Shop. This is for the engineering that would bring the sewer line from Stop and Shop all the way down to the Four Corners where Town Hall is. A feasibility study was done in 2019. We received a \$775,000.00 grant for this and we matched it with ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds of \$200,000.00 for a total project cost of \$975,000.00. We are on course but we are \$30,000.00 over budget because of surveying issues. We will be looking into funding this with Bristol County ARPA money. It is a 2-year project. Estimates on the engineering and permitting will be done by December of 2025 and is on schedule. We will be looking for construction grants for the next steps. The new sewer and its flows will benefit businesses, the MBTA, new zoning and housing issues. Americann is expanding and would benefit also from this. There is an approved project on 125 South Main Street for 72 housing units, also included is every single house along the way and Crystal Springs School. Another issue is the dams. Ms. Pettey would like to thank Victoria Alfaro Duran from the Planning Department and Jim Rezendes volunteering his time to this project.

b. Council on Aging temporary pods

This project is moving forward. We have been working with procurement and the engineers. There is a meeting coming up with the maker of the pods. There is a quote of \$262,000.00 to order it, but we have some final question before we sign the quote. We have met with Carl Bizarro Building Inspector, Rebecca Frias COA Director and members of the COA Board. The pod could not fit up to the righthand side of the existing COA so we had to pull it forward. A vestibule/entry way will be built from the existing building to the end of the pod. The cost is unknown right now as she has not designed it yet. The original budget was \$300,000.00. This piece of it may cost \$262,000.00. We will be looking to get it lower. It may go over budget but not by a lot, we will know more after the building of the entry way. Keep in mind this is a temporary office trailer and it will stay on a steel frame. The engineers said they are going to drop the elevation of the parking lot and dig down so it will be level with the existing building. The Highway Department will be doing some of the work for the parking lot. Once they are set, the electrical will be hooked up along with the mini splits. No bathrooms, so no plumbing is needed. It should be here in July and functioning in some level but not completely done until the fall. The COA would like to have a patio outside the door like a courtyard. We will reach out to Bristol Aggie to try and get some of that work done at cost.

c. Public Safety communication upgrades

This is the second year of the Tower project. Lots of hurdles but now we are near the end. We will be signing purchase orders for the remaining equipment needed totaling about \$500,000.00. Original equipment that was used in another town and failed. We went back to the drawing board to get new equipment. One of the purchase orders is for \$400,000.00 and it included \$56,000.00 for a third-year warranty after the first two years. We do not want to pay for this and we asked for it to be taken off. We want to order it now as it has a 14-week lead time. We will continue to work on this with the Chiefs and Chris Langois to figure it all out. The time line is for July so that the radios can be working for the July 4th parade. We are sticking to this budget and not going over it. We are funded to finish this with ARPA money. Selectmen Lopes asked if any companies asked to lease the towers. Ms. Pettey stated we can only do that for the tower that we own and she has not started that project yet.

d. Municipal Fiber project

We received a grant to fund a portion of it and ARPA funds to pay the residual portion of it. We had a meeting last week with everyone involved and it went very well. Our telephone polls are owned by Verizon and Eversource jointly. We are working with them to sign off on us attaching to the poles. We need to apply to ARPA to actually get the funding from them and don't anticipate any issues. Because we are using federal ARPA money we need to make sure that we use a company who are on the state bid list. They design where the fiber will go to connect all our town buildings. We are currently paying for 19 internet subscriptions. This project means we will no longer have to pay for them. We will have one internet and every town building will be connected, except the Police Station for security purposes. We will also be connected to our towers in East Freetown, Berkley and back to the Police Station which means if the microwave signals go down, they have fiber signals to back up. It will also connect the Police Station directly to the Freetown Elementary School and the Lakeville campus of the middle and high school. This is why it is so expensive. We are covering a lot of ground. Because they own the lines, we have to bring in TMLP to do the piece in Berkley and then contract out to do the rest for our town. The project cost is about \$600,000.00. We have about \$655,000.00 in funding. We will be paying for the police details. We are paying \$3,000.00 a month for internet services now, so in the long term this is a good thing for the town. The capacity will be there for future businesses as well. It will have 144 strands, but one long run on Slab Bridge Rd had to be reduced to 72 strands because of the budget. We made sure the tower project can take the fiber lines as well. We are ready to move forward with this project. It will take four months to put all the fiber up.

e. Fire Station addition/renovation

They are in the design documents phase on how we are going to construct it. They are deciding on the details. Ms. Pettey has stayed out of the design phase, as she is working on the budget. Once they have made their decisions, she will receive an update on the budget. We were budgeted for \$3 million, and over budget by \$1million maybe \$1.5 million. They are working on design features and cutting things out to get to where it needs to be. They are hoping to break ground sometime in early June or July. It is a 5,000-foot addition.

f. South Main Street bridge

This bridge needs work. It has a crack down the middle of the bridge. It was repaired in 2019 and cost the town \$800,000.00. The engineers have stated if the bridge starts to move all bets are off and is shut down on that day. It is holding its own right now. It is the last bridge in town that needs to be addressed. Chuck Macomber, the Highway Surveyor agreed to use Chapter 90 money to have the bridge study done. It takes time to plan the repair a bridge and close the road down. We are laying the ground work for what will take place three to five years from now. Congressmen Jake Auchincloss has been here and has put some earmark money away that hasn't been finalized yet, so we do not know whether we will get the money. There are three options requiring to replacing the bridge It being a historical bridge is a big issue. An option is overlaying it like we did the other bridges in town, which is a steel plate that overlays it and takes the weight off of the existing bridge and carries it outward. Much cheaper and quicker because we do not know how long that road is going to be closed down for. Time wise the overlaying would be a 12-month shutdown of the road. Replacing the bridge is anywhere from 24 to 36 to 48 months of closure.

g. Water meter project

We replaced all the water meters using ARPA money and now this project is done. It is working and working well.

h. Freetown Elementary School solar project

A grant was coming down to replace roofs if they were going to be solar ready. Solar Select Company came out and did a free assessment. The roof is 23 years old and made out of PVC. PVC roofs last from 25 to 30 years. A meeting with the Building Commissioner, the Principal and the facilities maintenance person to see what else will need to be done to the school in the near future. We need to budget for these kinds of repairs. An overlay can be done to the roof for about \$2 Million Dollars or replace the whole roof for \$3

Million Dollars. There is fluid applied restoration that will last 20 years and will cost \$2 Million. We may do an IR Scan for \$5,000.00 to let us know the condition of the roof. We need to take care of the roof before putting solar on it. The grant will not be available until 2026. We wonder what other items might be in need of repair. We want to make a list of what needs fixing and make a 5-year Capital Improvement Plan for the school.

- i. Old Schoolhouse renovation project
We will be working on feasibility study and RFP soon
- j. Assonet Four Corners improvements
We have talked about a signal or roundabout. We had the mock roundabout at the Elementary School with trucks and fire engines to make sure they could maneuver through it. 2 new roundabout drawings are available but the traffic signal is also still on the table. An informational meeting is planned for March 12. The grant is due in May that would pay for this but we are not rushing into this until the Town has heard and weighed all the options.
- k. 4 South Main Street
This needs to be demolished. We are looking for grants to help. Because of the asbestos and it being condemned we cannot go in to contain the asbestos. The cost will be astronomical. We also need to fill in the hole. We are working on getting quotes on logistics on taking it down and its removal. Once it is gone, we are hoping to put a submersible pump station for the sewer line underground. Maybe adding a park with a Veterans Memorial and plaques with Assonet history.

Ms. Pettey also announced we received the ADA Grant for the bathrooms at Town Hall but not the LULA lift for the Council on Aging. We will get quotes from the engineers for a LULA lift, and see if the COA wants to go to town meeting to reallocate some of their money to pay for it.

Old Business:

Potential discussion on pending items – action will not be taken at this meeting:

Public Input

Kayla Churchill asked about her appointment to the Finance Committee. Margaret French is working on getting a joint meeting with a quorum for the next Board of Selectmen meeting on February 20. She also asked questions about the roofs at the Freetown Elementary School and Apponequet High School along with questions on safety signs at the schools.

The Board signed documents associated with tonight's meeting.

- Motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 8:17pm by Selectmen Zager and seconded by Selectmen Lopes
- Vote approved by a unanimous roll call vote

Respectfully Submitted,



Lola Furtado

Administrative Assistant

List of Documents/Exhibits utilized by the Board during this meeting:

- Agenda
- Meeting Minutes from 1/29/24
- Memo – Drop Box Location in East Freetown
- Agricultural Aircraft Operations
- Annual Town Report - Board of Selectmen & Town Administrator
- DCR Weather Station at Landfill Request
- Fire Department - Freetownma.gov email requests
- Community Electricity Aggregation updates
- Certificate of Appointment – Kylie Botelho, Community Program Director
- Sewer Line Extension
- Council on Aging Pods Temporary Space Elevation Draft Plan
- Municipal Fiber layout
- Fire Station Renovation
- Freetown Elementary School Solar
- Assonet Four Corners Roadway Diagrams
- South Main St. Bridge Replacement Options Study