

**Freetown Board of Assessors**  
Minutes of Wednesday, June 3, 2020  
Virtual Meeting – Zoom.us

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FREETOWN TOWN CLERK

2020 JUN 23 PM 3:32

*Ja Brown*

**Present:** Jeff Field and Mike Motta.

**Absent:** Sue Parker.

**Call to order:** Mike Motta called the meeting to order at 2:32 p.m. The clerk then read a statement describing orders by the Governor suspending the Open Meeting Law and permitting the holding of meetings via remote participation during the coronavirus pandemic. Also, in conformance with these orders, all votes taken during this meeting were by roll call.

**Approval of Minutes**

This item was temporarily passed over. See again below.

**Report of Clerk**

- a. The clerk reviewed the allowance under M.G.L. Chapter 41, Section 56, to have a single member sign bills, payrolls, etc. He recommended that Mr. Field be appointed to do this in cases where an actual signature may be required. Mr. Field asked about the requirement for producing a report of bills, payrolls, etc., that are signed between meetings, and the clerk stated the clerk would prepare the list prior to each meeting. Mr. Field stated he was willing to accept that responsibility. A motion was made by Mr. Motta, seconded by Mr. Field, to designate Mr. Field to sign bills, payrolls, etc., requiring an actual signature. The motion carried 2-0-0.
- b. The clerk stated the signature stamps are generally used for motor vehicle excise abatements and occasional other "real-time" processes; if remote meetings continue, it may be necessary to stamp bills and other items approved during meetings. Mr. Motta asked if there was a log of what was being stamped, and the clerk stated that the abatements are logged but nothing else. Mr. Motta felt that a log should be kept of anything stamped other than abatement receipts. Mr. Field noted that he does not yet have a signature stamp, and the clerk stated that would be taken care of following the election on June 16th. A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to authorize use of the signature stamps provided a log is kept of items stamped other than abatements. The motion carried 2-0-0.
- c. The clerk reviewed the need to request proposals for the revaluation ("reval") program. Although proposals had been obtained in 2019 for the fiscal years 2020, 2021, and 2022, an error in the procurement methodology rendered the proposals acceptable for only one year. He stated that when discussing a two-year proposal, Paul Kapinos recommended a three-year proposal to line up with the town's recertification year in FY23. The clerk recommended following Mr. Kapinos' advice, in part due to budget and staffing issues to be discussed under item #3(e). Mr. Motta reviewed the RFP that was used in 2019, including the separate technical (non-price) and price proposals. Mr. Field noted the new RFP would be for FY21 through FY23. Mr. Motta agreed, and also noted that the RFP documents looked the same as in the past, including appropriate general, liability, and workman's comp insurances. A motion was then made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to follow the advice of Paul Kapinos to issue a new three-year RFP to line up with the recertification year. The motion carried 2-0-0.

- d. The clerk recounted that one article was submitted for the Annual Town Meeting, allowing for a certified Assessor or Assistant Assessor to receive a stipend for maintaining certification. He stated that the article is supported by the Finance Committee, and that the one question he knew of that had arisen was if the article applied to the clerk; since the clerk is not certified and is not an Assistant Assessor, it does not apply to him.
- e. The clerk summarized the FY21 budget recommendations and staffing status. The Finance Committee, along with the Selectmen, have recommended level-funded budgets other than contractual requirements, due to a perception that the state will shortchange local aid. Since the budget will likely remain level-funded, it will not support the new "Director of Assessing" position; it would only support existing positions. The clerk also stated that the Town Administrator had discussed instituting a hiring freeze, preventing new positions and new employees. For these reasons, the "Director of Assessing" position would likely be off the table until at least the fall Special Town Meeting, likely in October. Also, the changes to the hours of the Assistant Assessor are still up in the air due to a requirement that the union agree to reducing the hours; last information available was that the discussion had begun, but that the union had not yet responded.

The clerk continued by recapping the current office staffing, which is for 30 hours per week having started in February, and stated that he felt 30 hours was working well at the moment, especially as the town hall is not currently open to the public. He suggested amending the Assistant Assessor request to be 30 hours. Mr. Motta asked if there was anything that needed to be done regarding the hours, and the clerk suggested sending a new letter to propose a 30-hour Assistant Assessor rather than a 20-hour Assistant Assessor, or somewhere between 20 and 30 hours. The clerk stated it was his understanding that the union must approve anything less than 40 hours unless the budget is cut so as not to allow for 40 hours.

Mr. Field agreed that it was necessary to have the office staffed more than 15 hours, since Karen Mello had worked 40 hours and the Senior Clerk position was for 15 hours. Mr. Field asked if the Assistant Assessor position was made 30 hours, would there be money in the budget for a consultant again if needed in the fall of 2020. The clerk stated there would be, similar to how funds were transferred between personnel and expenses at the 2019 fall town meeting. The clerk felt that the uncertainty of the staffing in the office was why the budget was left level and not cut further. The clerk felt that other than a week or so when the first excise commitment for 2020 issued, the 30-hour schedule has been working very well.

Mr. Field asked if there was anything needed to make the current 30-hour arrangement permanent. The clerk stated that a letter would need to be sent, saying that the permanent solution should be for 30 hours rather than 20 hours. Mr. Motta asked when the temporary end date was, and the clerk stated it was meant to run through June 30th since the staffing arrangements were supposed to change in July. The clerk stated that the temporary solution was because the office had been too backed up when

it was only staffed 15 hours per week. Mr. Motta stated that it sounded like there needed to be an extension. The clerk stated this should either be an extension of the temporary hours or a permanent solution. Mr. Field that the hours should be extended through December, to allow to see what the fall town meeting would bring. Mr. Motta agreed that the hours need to continue while finances are sorted out. The clerk stated an answer should be given to the question of the Assistant Assessor position's hours, because the arrangement of having no Assistant Assessor at all was supposed to be resolved by the end of June; work above the classification of clerical has been being done so that it would get done, but should not continue this way indefinitely. Mr. Motta stated that the hours at least needed to be extended right now to see what happens following the election.

A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to have the clerk draft a letter to the selectmen stating that the clerk's hours should remain at 30 through at least December 2020. The motion carried 2-0-0.

#### **Motor Vehicle or Boat Excise Abatement Reports**

The clerk referred the members to the abatement reports that had been e-mailed to them. Mr. Motta noted there have been issues in other communities with Toyota lease vehicles, and incorrect abatement applications. A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to approve abatement reports in the amounts of \$1,345.09, \$36.88, and \$92.50. The motion carried 2-0-0.

#### **Review of Recent Real Estate Sales of Interest**

The clerk reported having nothing to report.

#### **Any Other Business Properly Before the Board**

The clerk stated Motor Vehicle Excise Commitment 2020-80 needed to be approved. A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to approve Commitment 2020-80 in the amount of \$148.75. The motion carried 2-0-0.

A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to approve payment of a bill for \$101.90 to W. B. Mason Co., Inc., for office supplies. The motion carried 2-0-0.

The clerk reported that the office air-conditioner was in disrepair and needed to be replaced, and that the units are considered the responsibility of the department. Mr. Motta asked what budget line it would come out of, and the clerk stated likely office supplies as it was the only line remotely close to "air-conditioner". Mr. Motta asked if there was enough available, and the clerk stated yes. Mr. Motta asked if there would be quotes, and the clerk stated that the estimate of \$150-\$200 was well below the necessity for quotes. Where the town has a charge account with Home Depot, it will likely come off the shelf. Consensus was to "keep the office cool".

Discussion was held on the MAAO summer courses being held online rather than on Cape Cod this summer. The clerk stated that the three-day course is \$150, or individual classes are around \$40 each. He stated he planned

to register for the courses or total event, whichever was most advantageous. Mr. Motta asked if there was enough money available, and the clerk responded yes. Mr. Motta asked to be registered for the three-day option. Mr. Field asked to have information on the courses sent to him. Mr. Field made a motion to approve paying for the two Mikes; after discussion, the motion was amended to allow anyone in the office wanting to go, which received a second from Mr. Motta. The motion carried 2-0-0.

### **Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to accept the minutes of March 4, 2020 and March 9, 2020. The clerk stated the March 9th Executive Session was not ready for release. It was acknowledged that the Executive Session minutes would not be ready for release. The motion carried 2-0-0.

### **Executive Session**

Discussion was held on how to pause the audio recording for the Executive Session, and on the need to return to Open Session if any votes of approval/denial are made during the Executive Session

A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to enter into executive session to comply with the provisions of any general or special law; specifically, to discuss Real Estate and Personal Property abatement applications which are not open to public inspection (per M.G.L. Chapter 59, Section 60); and also, to discuss strategy with respect to litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the government's litigating position; specifically, *Marie's Way Solar 1, LLC vs. Board of Assessors of the Town of Freetown*; and *Brale Road Solar 4, LLC vs. Board of Assessors of the Town of Freetown*, and to return to open session afterward. Mr. Motta asked if anyone other than Assessors and staff were present in the meeting, and the clerk responded there was nobody else. When polled, the members voted as follows: Motta – Aye, Parker – Absent, Field – Aye.

### **Results of Executive Session**

Results of decisions made were announced as follows:

- #8 136 South Main Street, Assonet
- #9 170-Rear South Main Street, Assonet
- #10 94 South Main Street, Assonet
- #11 10 Orchard Street, Assonet
- #12 170 South Main Street, Assonet
- #13 0 Mill Street, Assonet
- #14 134 South Main Street, Assonet
- #16 84 Chace Road, East Freetown
- #30 30 Washburn Road, East Freetown

Voted to take no action on the above items, as no extension was requested or granted and the 90-day window to act on the applications had expired. They are technically "deemed denied".

Also voted to permit the signature stamps to be used on the notice that the items were "deemed denied".

**Meeting Adjourned**

A motion was made by Mr. Field, seconded by Mr. Motta, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:01 p.m. The recording was ended at this time.

This is a True Record by me.

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Senior Clerk