

Town of Needham
Select Board
Minutes for Tuesday, February 9, 2021
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83012497485>

5:15 p.m. Executive Session: Exception 3 - Collective Bargaining
A meeting of the Select Board was convened by Chair Maurice P. Handel. Those present were Matthew D. Borrelli, Marianne B. Cooley, Daniel P. Matthews, John Bulian, and Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick. Also attending were Dave Davison, ATM/Finance and Katie King ATM/Operations. Recording Secretary Mary Hunt joined the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Motion by Mr. Handel that the Select Board vote to enter into Executive Session.

Exception 3 - To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares.

Second: Mr. Bulian. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

5:45 p.m. Informal Meeting with Citizens: No Activity.

6:00 p.m. Call to Order:
The public portion of the Select Board meeting of February 9, 2021 was convened by Chairman Maurice Handel.

Mr. Handel announced this open meeting is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020 due to the current state of emergency from the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. He noted all public gatherings have been suspended as advised and directed by the Commonwealth. And, as such, suspending the requirement of the open meeting law to have all meetings in a public, accessible, physical location while encouraging and allowing members of all public bodies to participate remotely. Mr. Handel stated the meeting will not include public comment and the Needham Select Board and all attendees are convening by Zoom, as posted on the Town's website identifying how the public may join. He said all supporting documents used at this meeting are available on the Town's website www.needhamma.gov.

Motion by Mr. Matthews that this meeting be continued to the Select Board's next scheduled meeting on Tuesday, February 23, 2021, if a technical problem develops that makes it impossible for the Select Board to conduct the meeting in this format.

Second: Mr. Bulian. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

6:02 p.m. COVID-19 Pandemic Update:

Tim McDonald, Director of Health & Human Services and Tiffany Zike, Assistant Director of Public Health updated the Board regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

A PowerPoint presentation was viewed titled “Joint Health and Safety Committee, Weekly Update” dated February 1, 2021.

Mr. McDonald spoke about the historical risk level, noting mid-January was the highest risk period. He commented on the number of cases by age bracket, average daily cases per 100,000 and the risk level in the Commonwealth.

Ms. Zike reminded the Board that COVID vaccinations began in January with first responders. She said 1,628 doses have been distributed to date. Ms. Zike said the first local clinic was held for ages 75+ where 1,166 doses were administered to residents of Needham and surrounding communities. She thanked all Town departments, volunteers, the medical reserve corp., and staff for their assistance. She said the clinic, held at the CATH, was appreciated by the attendees. She said the clinic was also an opportunity to sign up people for their second dose.

Mr. McDonald explained some towns have chosen to limit clinics to only their community, noting Needham has many resources to serve the population and has made COVID vaccinations available as broadly as possible to promote equity. He said communities who have had restricted clinics have received 100 doses/week. He noted Needham has received over 1,000 doses, partly because of having an ultra-cold freezer for the vaccine, but also because clinics are open to anyone. He concluded by saying promoting regional access and equity also directly benefits Needham residents.

Discussion ensued on a variant strain of the virus, fully reopening the schools and library, arranging additional clinics, and a call list to fill spots for when people do not show up or cancel their appointment.

The Board thanked Mr. McDonald and Ms. Zike for their work.

6:32 p.m.

Appointments and Consent Agenda:

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to approve the Appointments and Consent Agenda as presented.

APPOINTMENTS:

- 1. Patrick Wrenn Property Tax Assistance Committee (term expires 6/30/2024)**
- 2. Patrick Wrenn Taxation Aid Committee (term expires 6/30/2024)**
- 3. Helen Newton Property Tax Assistance Committee (term expires 6/30/2024)**

CONSENT AGENDA: *=Backup attached

- 1. Accept a \$2,000 donation made to the Needham Health Division’s Traveling Meals Program from the Darshana Thakore Family Fund.**

- 2.* **Support Youth Services’ “Needham Unplugged” for the month of March 2021 including its annual no-meeting night/no-homework night which will be held on Thursday, March 11, 2021.**
- 3.* **Approve open session minutes of January 26, 2021 and March 20, 2020.**
4. **Accept a \$250 donation made to Needham Youth & Family Services from the Patrick & Patricia Forde Memorial Fund. The monies will be used towards future programs in the Youth & Family Services Department.**
- 5.* **Water and Sewer Abatement Order #1303.**

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

6:33 p.m. FY2020 Financial Audit Presentation:
Alina Korsak, Melanson (Independent Auditors) and David Davison, Assistant Town Manager/Director of Finance updated the Board on the recently completed audit of the Town’s general purpose financial statements for fiscal year 2020 and their recommendations.

Ms. Korsak presented a PowerPoint presentation, giving a brief overview of the Town’s Financial Statements for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2020. She reviewed the audit process and MHC’s comments regarding their recommendations to management. Ms. Korsak commented on the Management’s Discussion and Analysis, including the General Unassigned Fund Balance of \$28,831,766, noting Standard and Poor’s calls the fund balance “healthy and strong.”

Mr. Davison said an invitation was extended to School Committee and Finance Committee members to attend this Zoom presentation. He reminded the Board that, due to COVID-19, deliberate and proactive steps were taken in FY20 to conserve resources, including delaying hiring, cutting back on expenditures, and delaying services in order to conserve revenue. He said the Town chose not to appropriate \$4,000,000 of last year’s certified free cash, recognizing it will be used to address some one-time cost appropriations at the Annual Town Meeting. He commented on the decline in surplus revenue, proactive steps, and FY2022 recommendations.

Mr. Matthews commented on pension liability and the change in the discount rate assumption. He noted a more conservative discount rate.

Mr. Borrelli said the audit highlights Needham’s sound financial plan during an incredibly difficult year. He commented on OPEB and how the Town “tries to stay ahead of it.”

The Board thanked Ms. Korsak and Mr. Davison for their presentation.

6:52 p.m. N2025 Presentation:
Ms. Cooley said the project began a few years ago, with the goal of assessing the Town’s infrastructure, vulnerabilities, population, and future growth.

A PowerPoint was viewed titled “Needham 2025, Commercial and Residential Growth Impact Study.”

Ms. Cooley commented the study was commissioned to assess growth impact on traffic, transportation, water, sewer, drains, road and bridges, technology, and school facilities. She said information in the study includes demographics, age population, educational attainment, household income, trends in housing stock, home sale prices, and economic trends, among other categories. She noted traffic data in the study is pre-pandemic, saying it will be interesting to see shifts in traffic trends post pandemic, if more people continue working from home. Ms. Cooley commented on the school population, noting it is generally believed school enrollment will remain flat as it relates to the number of additional housing units. She particularly noted, if the Town significantly adds housing units in a way that would require building a school or adding space, hundreds of millions of dollars would be necessary. Ms. Cooley said added housing must be carefully watched, commenting on the tremendous desire by Needham residents for more senior housing for people who wish to sell their home and remain in town. She said she believes the study has some interesting takeaways and validates the Town’s fundamental planning over the years.

Mr. Bulian commented on population and the Town census. He noted college students living away from home and “snowbirds” who are not in Needham during the winter. He said where people are domiciled and where they vote should be the guiding number, and that the town census number is different from the federal census number.

Discussion ensued on students at local colleges who are counted in the census, as well as Needham college students who tend not to return to town.

Mr. Handel asked if racial and economic diversity was considered in the study.

Ms. Cooley said the question is very good. She said racial diversity was not part of the report, but economic diversity information is in the study.

Mr. Borrelli said he was struck how some data will constantly need updating, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. He commented on the gateways to Needham, the need for 55+ housing, and traffic. Mr. Borrelli commented on zoning in the lower Chestnut Street area and redevelopment.

Mr. Matthews commented on the 700 additional rental units in town, economic diversity, market forces driving prices up, and state regulations. He said adding 700 rental units to town will bring changes which won’t be felt for a few years. He said cautious opportunity is a good approach but wondered what the best direction is for the town over the next decade.

Mr. Bulian commented on school enrollment and additional housing units. He said the trick is to continue to add housing, but not to the point where it triggers the need for another large capital project like a school, thereby placing an undue burden on middle class households. He concluded the Town should not underestimate the actions it takes and their effect on people in the middle who are continually being “squeezed.”

Mr. Handel said housing policy is extremely complex and important, and town policy must be coordinated with surrounding communities. He said the report helps formulate a vision for the area’s housing problem.

7:35 p.m.

Director of Public Works:

Carys Lustig, Interim Director of Public Works spoke with the Board regarding 1 item:

1. Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

Ms. Lustig told the Board about an opportunity for the Town to receive grant funding through the state and partnership funding through Eversource to add electric vehicle chargers to the Town’s inventory at no or low cost. She said the Town presently has two electric vehicles, as well as 3 charging stations at PSAB and Williams School that are available for Town vehicles and public use. She said the use of electric vehicles will become more prominent. Ms. Lustig commented the first goal in utilizing the grant program is to provide one charger at the PSAB exclusive for Town of Needham vehicles. She said the second goal of the program is to provide chargers at public buildings and public parking lots. Ms. Lustig asked for the Board’s perspective on the priority of engaging in modernizing some of the Town’s parking lots to allow for people to charge their electric vehicles.

Mr. Handel said the grant opportunity is great, cautioning there are some policy challenges people don’t often think about: How to keep people without electric vehicles from parking in an electric vehicle charging space? He said electric vehicles are a “coming wave.”

Ms. Cooley said she supports the idea and would like to see the Town charge a fee for public use.

Mr. Bulian concurred there should be a fee for use. He commented, post pandemic, there will be times when parking will be challenging. He concurred with Mr. Handel, saying people will park in a charging station parking space if they have no other option. He said the biggest issue for him regarding electric vehicles is the range and availability of charging stations. He said he hopes the range increases and the time to charge a vehicle becomes less.

Mr. Borrelli said he agrees with limiting the amount of time a vehicle can stay in one space. He questioned the location of a charging station at PSAB, so as not to affect the current parking lot. He said he is concerned with losing public parking spaces and asked for data that electric charging stations will actually be used.

Mr. Matthews said changes are coming and the Town needs to be ready.

7:51 p.m.

Town Manager:

Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager spoke with the Board regarding two items:

1. Close Annual Town Meeting Warrant

Ms. Fitzpatrick reviewed changes made to the Annual Town Meeting Warrant with the Board and asked for a vote to close the warrant. She commented, due to the pandemic, a proposal is forthcoming on how to hold Town Meeting outdoors over a weekend.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Board vote to close the warrant for the 2021 Annual Town Meeting.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

2. Town Manager Report

Ms. Fitzpatrick reminded residents that the Town's emergency rental assistance program is open, and applications are being accepted.

Katie King, ATM/Operations reported that earlier this year the state made \$668,000,000 available to small businesses financially impacted by the pandemic. She said, thus far, four waves of grants have been awarded and, to date, 47 small businesses in Needham have received grants totaling \$2,585,000. She said 10 restaurants, 11 personal care businesses, five gyms, five retail stores, four medical offices, early childhood education centers, and construction and manufacturing companies have received grant money. Ms. King said Amy Haelsen, Economic Development Manager has been working with small businesses to help direct them to grant opportunities. She asked that any small business wanting to be connected to reach out by email to economicdevelopment@needhamma.gov.

7:57 p.m.

Board Discussion:

1. NUARI Vision Statement

Ms. Cooley said NUARI met last night and continued discussion on its vision and guiding principles statement. She said the discussion has been thoughtful, painstaking, and dedicated work, where every word has been considered. She said the conversation was also candid, authentic, direct, and remained respectful to differing points of view. Ms. Cooley said NUARI is ready to recommend its vision statement and some guiding principles to the Select Board for adoption.

Discussion ensued on the process of developing NUARI's vision and guiding principles. Ms. Cooley asked the Select Board to adopt the vision statement and guiding principles and to send them to other boards and committees for adoption and integration into their work. She suggested the Select Board consider holding an annual Town summit with all boards and committees to discuss the work and progress made in contributing to making Needham a welcoming and better place for all to live. She also suggested the Select Board consider asking Town Meeting

to adopt and affirm NUARI's vision statement and guiding principles as part of its work.

Mr. Borrelli said last night's conversation was difficult, deep, and productive. He said with the help of Lisa Smith McQueeney the committee was able to form a vision statement. He concurred with bringing the vision statement to Town Meeting. He commented he voiced his concern for some of the language. However, in its entirety, he said, the vision statement and guiding principles are something we can all support. He concluded the goal is to move Needham forward and make it a better place for everybody.

Mr. Handel commented the vision statement and guiding principles must be promoted to the community at large and get more buy-in, rather than just a world of active people who care enough about the Town to be active in it.

Ms. Cooley read the vision statement:

"Needham will be a community free of racism, racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Our residents, schools, businesses, organizations and government will work together to identify barriers to racial equity and create solutions, opportunities, resources, and support for removing them."

She said the committee wanted an optimistic, forward-thinking vision statement, acknowledging this statement describes a community they would like to live in.

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to adopt the vision statement and guiding principles as recommended by the NUARI working group.
Second: Mr. Matthews. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Bulian said as a spectator to the meeting, he noted the hard work of the committee. He said it has been eye-opening and he has enjoyed the process, thanking Ms. Cooley and Mr. Borrelli for their work.

Mr. Matthews concurred, saying the conversations have been difficult. He said this is a rare and necessary moment for significant progress on race equity in Needham and everywhere in the county. Mr. Matthews said he is satisfied, and that the vision statement represents a level of input that was intense and thought out. Mr. Matthews thanked the committee for forwarding the additional principles still under discussion, saying the work is good and he would be ready to vote on them as well. He suggested waiting until the full document is completed before sending it out to other boards and committees.

Mr. Handel said NUARI meetings can be viewed on YouTube through the Town's website.

Ms. Cooley read the names of members of the NUARI Committee: Marianne Cooley, Matt Borrelli, Sue Neckes, Jen Howard, Marcus Nelson, Jay Spencer, Rameen Abrashamian, Vivian Chu, Natasha Espada, and Dr. Toyen Fayemi. She thanked the facilitator of NUARI's meetings, Lisa Smith McQueeney, as well as Ms. Fitzpatrick and Ms. King.

2. Committee Reports

No Committee Reports were made.

8:15 p.m.

Adjourn:

Motion by Mr. Bulian that the Select Board vote to adjourn the Select Board meeting on Tuesday, February 9, 2021.

Second: Mr. Borrelli. Unanimously approved 5-0 by roll call vote.

A list of all documents used at this Select Board meeting is available at:

<http://www.needhamma.gov/Archive.aspx?AMID=99&Type=&ADID=>