

APPROVED

**MINUTES
SELECTMEN'S MEETING
REMOTE PARTICIPATION ONLY
THURSDAY, April 9, 2020
6:30 P.M.**

RELEASED

SELECTMEN PARTICIPATING: Ballantine, Ford, Howell, MacAskill, McManus.

ALSO PARTICIPATING: Interim Town Administrator, Joseph Powers; Meggan Eldredge, Health Director; and Chief Norman Clarke.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Ballantine opened the meeting at 6:30PM and called to order the Board of Selectmen. Roll-call: Mr. MacAskill – Here, Mr. Ford – Here, Mr. Ballantine – Here, Mr. Howell – Here, Mr. McManus – Here.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Coronavirus – COVID-19 Update

Mr. Powers advised the Board on how he and Ms. Eldredge have been working on developing operational plans in anticipation of an expected surge in positive cases of the COVID-19. He said April 11 through April 20 is the peak week for the virus. He said their goal will have minimal impact on the general public but more of an impact on Town employees and Town buildings.

Ms. Eldredge repeated Governor Baker's report on the numbers of cases requiring hospitalization and numbers of deaths, stressing the increased impact on emergency personnel. She said people continuing to remain at home will lessen the burden during this critical week. She said Cape Cod Hospital will experience a different surge than the Boston hospitals. Ms. Eldredge said CCH has set up a field hospital at the Otis Air Field Base and another one is planned in Harwich. She said everything possible is being done to help people get through this process.

Mr. Howell said he has seen dogs running off-leash at Red River Beach and people running after them. Ms. Eldredge said she will contact the Animal Control Officer and more patrols can be put in place. She said people should not pet dogs; she said “leash signs” can be put up at the beaches.

Mr. Ford asked if more testing is being done. Ms. Eldredge said the more people that are tested, the more people will come out positive, adding that more and more tests are being done, with positive results being obtained within 24 to 48 hours. She added negative test results require 3 to 4 days.

Mr. Ford asked what the causes for the surge are. Ms. Eldredge replied one person can infect 2.3 persons, and that is the basis for forecasting.

Mr. Powers said the new traffic flow at the Transfer Station is successful. He said more staff is required out of the building; however, the system emphasizes social distancing and keeps people off the roads.

Ms. Eldredge discussed the employee of Allen Harbor Marine Service who died as a result of the COVID-19. She said because he was not a resident of Harwich, his death was not reported to her, but rather to the Town in which he resided.

- a. Discussion and possible vote on the pros/cons of the Health Director releasing Town of Harwich COVID-19 case number to the public

Ms. Eldredge said originally when an update on the Town’s number of cases was released, the Department of Public Health directive was not to release them. She said then DPH reversed that decision and said it is now up to the discretion of each Town. Ms. Eldredge added that is up to the Board as to whether or not they want her to release case numbers. She stated the pros:

- Maintain transparency
- Public awareness
- Decrease anxiety, panic

She stated the cons:

- Case numbers are not always accurate
- Comparison with other Town numbers could increase panic; for example, if case numbers in Brewster are lower than those in Harwich, that could attract Brewster residents to come to Harwich to do their shopping, and vice versa

Mr. Howell said a lot of Towns on the Cape are releasing data and social media is putting out information. He said he would prefer that accurate data be disseminated.

Mr. McManus asked if the DPH has issued any information on this issue to be reviewed. Mr. Powers said nothing has come from DPH. Ms. Eldredge said there is a statement about releasing data on the DPH website. Mr. McManus agreed with Mr. Howell about the release of accurate case numbers.

Mr. MacAskill said although he agrees with Mr. Howell and Mr. McManus, he has respect for the Health Director who has given us good reasons why we shouldn't publicize information. He said the Board should follow her information, adding he does not support releasing COVID19 case numbers unless she does.

Mr. Ford said he agrees with both sides; however, he said he feels transparency is the best policy, He said Harwich should get the numbers out there – but no more information beyond the case numbers.

Mr. Ballantine said he does not have a strong opinion either way, adding that the primary objective in releasing the numbers would be to influence proper behavior, like social distancing. He said if the effect of releasing the information is not helping people, then he is against it.

Mr. Howell moved to release Town of Harwich COVID-19 case numbers to the public, on a weekly basis, through Meggan Eldredge, Health Director, without any other information associated with it. Mr. McManus seconded.

Mr. MacAskill said he would rather not release the information; however, he will abide by the Board's decision.

Mr. Howell asked Ms. Eldredge if the Harwich Board of Health has weighed in on this issue. Ms. Eldredge replied that she has not heard from the Board of Health since last March. Mr. MacAskill said his faith is with the Department Head.

Mr. Ballantine said we have a motion and a second. Roll-call vote: Mr. MacAskill – No, Mr. Howell – Yes, Mr. McManus – Yes, Mr. Ford – Yes, Mr. Ballantine – Yes. Motion carried by a vote of 4-1.

B. Town Administrator Search Committee Update – Chief Norman Clarke, Chairman (NOTE; Mr. Powers recused himself from participating in this agenda item)

Mr. Clarke said the Board and the Town are in good hands with Mr. Powers and Ms. Eldredge. He said his Town Administrator Search Committee met April 8 by remote participation. Mr. Clarke said his committee was in agreement that although the decision had been made to hire a consulting firm to assist with the process, the committee is unanimous that because we are in a state of emergency this is not the time to spend dollars on a consulting firm. He said his committee is also unanimous that the process should be expedited. He said the Board should move quickly to get a permanent Town Administrator on board.

Mr. Ballantine asked what moving forward means. Mr. Clarke replied: advertising in a proper fashion according to the Charter, with local ads, State-wide ads, the HERALD or the GLOBE, and Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA).

Mr. Howell asked when the committee was created. Mr. Clarke replied two months ago and that they have had to cancel two meetings. Mr. Clarke said, as Harwich Fire Chief, his attention has been consumed solely by the COVID-19 situation and in keeping the citizens of Harwich safe.

Mr. Ford asked that since the Board did vote to hire a consulting firm, how that could be reversed. Mr. Ballantine noted that no contract has been signed.

Mr. MacAskill asked Mr. Clarke when the Board could expect minutes from his committee's meeting. Mr. Clarke said their Clerk is Linda Cebula and she will have the minutes completed quickly. Mr. MacAskill noted that they would be draft minutes since the committee would need another meeting to vote approval of them.

Mr. Ford asked if a vote to rescind the vote to hire a consulting company is required. Mr. Ballantine said he will work with Bob Lawton, Interim Assistant Town Administrator, to develop two items for the next agenda -- the vote to rescind and the development of an ad for the position.

Mr. Howell said he agreed and cautioned that the contract should not be signed and sent out. Mr. Ballantine said he will check on that.

Mr. MacAskill asked what the Board wants in a Town Administrator. He said the Board hasn't had that conversation. He said he is not in a hurry to pick a new leader. He said the Board needs to decide the pay scale and what needs to go into an advertisement. Mr. MacAskill asked that these issues be placed on an agenda.

OPEN PUBLIC FORUM

The Chairman opened the Open Public Forum. The public was invited to call in and participate in the meeting to offer comments and/or questions. Scott Tyldesley reviewed the procedure for remote participation. The appropriate phone number was displayed. He said no emails were received, and following a two-minute waiting period, no one dialed in.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORTS

Mr. Powers rejoined the meeting and reported, on a positive note, that the Cape Cod & Islands Major Crisis Relief Fund is available to help with mortgage payments, car payments, and medical bills. Donations to the fund can be made and all funds remain in the community. The website is MajorCrisisReliefFund.org.

SELECTMEN'S REPORT

Mr. MacAskill said he would like an agenda item for tax bills and when they are due. He thanked Mr. Ballantine for getting some of the answers to some of his questions, and he said he would like to see some of that information in a Selectmen's meeting packet. Mr. Powers said staff is working on tax bills and water bills item in conjunction with the Water/Wastewater Superintendent, the Finance Director, and the Assessing Director. He said this will be reviewed at the April 16th meeting.

Mr. MacAskill said the Animal Control Office has pertinent information on her social media page, and it could be linked to the Town website.

Mr. Ford thanked the Search Committee, adding that they have the background and the knowledge to identify the best candidate.

Mr. Howell asked everyone to stay safe and be well. Mr. Ballantine agreed, adding that everyone is doing a good job.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Howell moved to adjourn. Mr. Ford seconded. Roll-call vote: Mr. MacAskill – Yes, Mr. Ford – Yes, Mr. Howell – Yes, Mr. Ballantine – Yes. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Dorothy G. Hemmings
Recording Secretary
Pro Tem