

BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING

February 26, 2024

A meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order by Chairman Collins at 7:00 PM, Northbridge Town Hall, 7 Main Street, Whitinsville, MA. Board Members Present: Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus. Selectman Begin was absent and it is duly noted. **Also Present:** Town Manager Adam D. Gaudette.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by those present.

Chairman Collins announced that the Board of Selectmen would first be moving on to Appointments because it was not yet 7:05PM – for the public hearing.

APPOINTMENTS / By the Town Manager (Vote to Affirm): B. Christopher Dutting, Student Police Officer/Present: Timothy Labrie, Police Chief. Chief Labrie explained that a couple of years ago the Police Department exited Civil Service, so they were able to run their first entry level exam process. The test was offered back in October, where 18 people signed up to take the test, and 10 of the 18 completed the application after the test and agreed to a background check. From there, they had a selection of 7 candidates, for which they formed an interview panel as part of the process. The panel chose Mr. Dutting as the top candidate and was presented to the Chief. Chief Labrie stated that he has no doubt in his mind that Mr. Dutting is going to be a great officer. Mr. Dutting stated that he was born in Charlton and grew up there and attended Springfield College for Physical Education. He stated that his overall goal was to play Division 1 football, so he transferred to the University of Rhode Island and studied Finance and Economics and played 3 years of football. After graduating, he was hired as a Finance Manager with Flagg RV, which then became Camping World. He was laid off in September, but it ended up working out perfectly. Selectmen Ampagoomian asked what drew him to wanting to become a Police Officer. Mr. Dutting replied that he was looking for a more fulfilling career with more responsibility. A motion/Mr. Melia, seconded/Mr. Ampagoomian to appoint Mr. Christopher Dutting as a Student Police Officer. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES/None

PUBLIC HEARING: 7:05 PM - 1) Report progress of the Town's FY 2020 (CDF) Community Development Fund Grant; and 2) FY 2024 Community Development Block Grant Program: Discuss proposed application to Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities for funding as part of FY 2024 CDF Program / Vote to submit application Present: Wayne Darragh, Community Opportunities Group and Gary Bechtholdt, Town Planner. A motion/Mr. Ampagoomian, seconded/Mr. Melia to open the public hearing at 7:09 PM. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia, and Paulhus. A motion/Mr. Ampagoomian, seconded/Mr. Melia to waive the reading of the public hearing notice. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus. Mr. Bechtholdt stated that the notification requirements for the public hearing have been satisfied. He explained that they are currently wrapping up the FY2020 grant and as part of that they did an aggressive housing rehab program and were fortunate enough to have funding for 14 units/property owners and tenants. In addition, they prepared Slum and Blight inventory reports, one within New Village and the second within the Rockdale neighborhood. They received the designation from the State, which allows us to proceed in doing some national directives in addressing the Slum and Blight communities. In addition, they hired a consultant to prepare construction documents for the next application phase, which is up for discussion tonight. Mr. Bechtholdt reminded the Board that the application entails infrastructure improvements on Church Avenue in Rockdale, which is one of the Slum and Blight inventory designated areas. Previously, the Board met with Mr. Darragh and with DPW Director Jamie Luchini to discuss the application. Mr. Darragh said that tonight he would be reviewing the status of the FY2020 grant, discussing the limitations and eligible activities that the town can pursue under the CDBG Grant program and what we are specifically looking to move forward with on the current application. The Community Development Block Grant program is managed at the state level by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, who receives money from Housing and Urban Development, and then decides how they want to disburse it. Mr. Darragh further

explained that Northbridge is considered a competitive community, which entails submitting an application that will be scored and compared to the other applications that are submitted. He is confident that they will do a good job and get Northbridge funded. The CDBG program is flexible in terms of the different projects such as housing rehab, infrastructure projects, public social services, and planning projects as long as the projects meet certain thresholds. Any project the town moves forward with will need to meet one of three national objectives, which includes assistance to low/moderate income persons, projects to eliminate slums or blight or meets a critical community need. The justification used for the FY2020 rehab program was to assist low/moderate income persons, and anyone who received assistance had to meet certain income guidelines. The project being discussed tonight would be considered as eliminating slums or blight. Mr. Darragh noted that the critical community need category is a very specific circumstance and has never had a project that fell under that category. He also acknowledged that we will need to meet the Commonwealth's sustainable development principles, which come down to reuse, redevelop and try to build where there is infrastructure and avoid building in open space. There is a requirement to have the 2020 grant funding 100% expended by the time the application is due, which is March 25, 2024. Mr. Darragh then commented that he did request a waiver of that requirement, but noted that we are very close to being 100% expended. The final housing rehab project is completed, but the final invoices haven't been processed yet so there are some outstanding admin payments, some of which COG will not be able to bill the Town for until after the March 25th date. He does not foresee EOHLC not providing them with the waiver. The town rehabbed 14 units with the 2020 grant, which took a long time to get started, due to applicants withdrawing for various reasons, but after sending out a mailing they received a lot more interest, which allowed them to move forward and complete the program. Both of the slum and blight inventories provided them with the information they expected; in the areas that were studied at least 25% of the building were judged to be in fair or poor condition and at least 25% of the infrastructure was judged to be in fair or poor condition. The inventories are good for ten years, so the town can move forward to address issues with projects in those areas. The maximum amount a single community can apply for has been increased this year to \$950,000. This came at a great time as we are looking at a large project that will take at least three or four funding cycles in order to complete. The project will be phased to complete as much as the budget will allow in any given funding year. There was a preliminary meeting in January to elicit public comments about potential projects. A mailer was also sent to all residents informing them of the CDBG funding opportunity, the dates and times of the information meeting (January 22, 2024, and tonight's Public Hearing). Residents were advised that they could submit comments and questions at either of these meetings or in writing. The DPW Director Jamie Luchini also provided our grant consultants with background information that makes the application stronger, and they are currently waiting for some final plans from the engineering consultant, so we know exactly what the limits of work are going to be for this phase. Selectman Melia commented that he feels the entire Board is in support of this project. Selectman Melia asked if we receive the grant this year, is there a good chance we would receive the grant in subsequent years. Mr. Darragh replied that they are independent processes year to year, but he feels that if the State sees that we are performing in a timely manner and moving the money and completing the projects it would give Northbridge a more favorable position for the next grant application. There were no comments from those present. A motion/Mr. Melia seconded/Mr. Ampagoomian to submit the Community Development Block Grant FY2024 grant application in an amount not to exceed \$950,000 for the purposes of completing phase 1 of the Church Avenue Phase 1 reconstruction. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus. A motion/Mr. Melia, seconded/Mr. Ampagoomian to appoint Town Planner R. Gary Bechtholdt as the Environmental Certifying Officer for purposes of the grant application. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus. A motion/Mr. Melia, seconded/Mr. Ampagoomian to authorize Chairman Collins to sign any necessary forms required for the full submission of the application. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus. A motion/Mr. Ampagoomian, seconded/Mr. Melia to close the public hearing. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia, and Paulhus. The public hearing was closed at 7:20 PM.

CITIZENS' COMMENTS/INPUT/None

Amanda Catherine Guillette d/b/a Robyn's Table. Application for a Non-Alcoholic Common Victualler License for 670 Linwood Avenue, Bldg C., Whitinsville, MA 01588. Ms. Guillette stated that she has a passion for creating charcuterie and grazing boards and she has been provided with an opportunity to serve them at Murder Hill Brewery at the above location. She explained that she will be selling her products out of the

brewery. A motion/Mr. Melia, seconded/Mr. Ampagoomian to approve the above request for a Non-Alcoholic Common Victualler License for Amanda Catherine Guillette d/b/a Robyn's Table at 670 Linwood Avenue, Bldg C., Whitinsville, MA 01588. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus.

Selectman Collins noted that they would be taking some agenda items out of order.

Land/Trail Stewardship Committee / Request to revise the composition of the committee by adding 4 Member-at-Large seats appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Present: David Pickart, Conservation Agent. Mr. Pickart explained that the makeup of the committee is changing a bit and the easiest way would be to change it to four at-large members. A motion/Mr. Ampagoomian, seconded/Mr. Melia to revise the composition of the Land/Trail Stewardship Committee by adding 4 Member-at-Large seats appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus.

Presentation to the Board of Selectmen: Request for Proposals Response for 44 Cross Street (former Northbridge Elementary School). Present: Lobisser & Ferreria Construction Corp. Present: Kevin Lobisser, owner and president of Lobisser Building Corp., explained that Lobisser & Ferreria Construction Corp. is a subsidiary and is their general contracting side of the company. They are a real estate company that has been serving Central and Eastern Massachusetts for over 27 years. Locally, they have been creating successful real estate developments in Upton, Milford, Bellingham, Hopkinton, Franklin, Lakeville, Sudbury, Oxford, Medway, Douglas and Northbridge. He explained that in Northbridge the project they would be familiar with is the Osterman Commerce Park. Mr. Lobisser noted that they build town homes, single family homes, active adult communities as well as medical office buildings and residential apartments. They currently own and manage over 50,000 sq. ft. of medical office and residential apartment assets. He outlined that they like to consider themselves an A to Z company, purchasing, entitling, building, managing and maintaining all their own properties. Mr. Lobisser stated that they are before the Selectmen for approval for the RFP for the former Northbridge Elementary School project. They consider the location to be a great cross road for businesses, town amenities and gathering spaces. He stated they have worked on many projects like this before but this one feels like a real winner because of the close proximity to downtown. They feel strongly that a redevelopment of this site will help both the town's downtown activity and add a great source of revenue for the town. They would be looking at a total of 46 rental units in two buildings, one of which would be 36 garden style apartments and 10 town houses. This combines both of the ideas from the RFP. Twelve of the units would be considered affordable, which is the 80% of median income and will be prorated among unit types and distributed throughout the building. All 46 units would increase the town's subsidized housing. All apartments will have elevator access and the building would be attractive to seniors, empty-nesters, young professionals and residents who require accessible units. There would be a total of 74 parking spaces, 54 for the garden style and 20 for the town homes. Building amenities would include a rental office, coworking and multipurpose rooms, package delivery room, fitness room, protective bike storage, electric vehicle charging stations, small playground and grill area as well as a dog walk. Trash, recycling, and snow removal services on the site would be provided. Selectman Paulhus asked if the lot that abuts the administration building was included in this project. Mr. Lobisser explained that it was in the RFP as an option, but it is not part of their plan. Town Manager Gaudette explained that they have done surveys for the site and analysis, and if they are not interested in lot 1, what they would do is move forward with an A&R plan, which is approval not required plan with the Planning Board, create a new lot line and then continue the current use at that site. Town Manager Gaudette said that once this property was turned over to the town the Selectmen asked the BPCC to do a feasibility study and surveys to prepare it for advertising. While that was going on, the Selectmen brought an article to Town Meeting to give permission to the Selectmen to advertise and sell the property. This did not pass as the voters requested the RFPs be completed to see what the Town gets for proposals and then go back to town meeting so that the voters have a better idea of what is intended for the site. Town Manager Gaudette noted that there was only one proposal that was submitted to the town. Tonight, the Board would vote to place an article on the warrant again to sell the property. He explained that it is not specifically for this group as that is not how the language is read. If the Board approves, they would then look to have a public hearing and prepare for the town meeting on May 7, 2024. If the voters approve, Lobisser would need to go through the permitting process and additional hearings with the permitting boards. This would be a couple-year process. Selectman Ampagoomian asked if the playground would remain or be removed. Mr.

Lobisser stated that it would be removed. He followed up about the onsite dog walking area and if it would be accessible only to the residents of the proposed buildings. Mr. Lobisser stated that typically it would be for the community that they have built, but the town owns this property so they could discuss it. Town Manager Gaudette added that the town is working on the Mumford Riverwalk and it was brought up that it would be a great addition to have an access point to cross Linwood Ave. to get to the Riverwalk. Selectman Ampagoomian asked about the 12-month permitting phase. Town Manager Gaudette explained that they need to wait until the May town meeting and if approval is granted, every penny they spend is at their own risk, they may have on site testing, razing the building, hazardous waste removal and the permitting from local board and the State. Mr. Lobisser brought up the LIP, which he explained is a friendly 40B, and asked what the process would be. Town Manager Gaudette explained that the zoning does not allow for this type of density and in order to make this project possible they would need a certain amount of units because they have to spend millions of dollars to get the site prepped, which would not make it an affordable project. He explained that one option is to change the zoning, the other is this Local Initiative Project (LIP), which would allow them to do this type of density, have an affordable component that would be supported by the town and get through the State process. He added that there will be many permits and hearings before the Planning Board, but the main one will be for the LIP through the State. Selectman Melia felt this was the best option for the town and neighborhood. Town Manager Gaudette mentioned that the Board will be voting to put articles on the warrant next, then after that we will be setting up some public meetings for any questions.

Spring Annual Town Meeting [May 7, 2024] / Vote to place Selectmen's articles on the warrant. Town Manager Gaudette went through the articles. Article 1: Prior year bills – He noted that there are currently none. Article 2: Omnibus Burdge Article – He noted that this is a housekeeping article to level out the current budget. He noted that some expenses were a bit higher than what was originally expected. Article 3: Pine Grove Cemetery Fund – He noted that this is for next year's budget based on the proposed amount if incoming revenue. Article 4 & 5: Sewer and Water Enterprise funds. He noted that these are housekeeping articles. Article 6: Chapter 90 – This is a housekeeping article to approve spending for chapter 90, which is the money received from the state for roads. Article 7: Compensating Balance Agreements – housekeeping article. Article 8: Revolving Funds – He noted that the statute requires us to set a spending limit, those numbers have not changed. Article 9: this article will be combined and incorporated into the Omnibus budget. Articles 9-12: Community Preservation Articles – The Selectmen will not vote to put these articles on the warrant as the Community Preservation Commission will vote to put them on the warrant. Article 13: Pine Grove Cemetery – Maintenance and equipment at the cemetery. Article 14: Sewer enterprise fund – retained earnings to fund upgrades. Article 15: Water Enterprise Fund - retained earnings for projects. Article 16: Free Cash – Capital projects. He noted that the items may change based on any funds that are left over or taken from snow and ice. Article 17: Unexpended Sums – he explained that these are closed-out projects with leftover funds and he is recommending that we use those funds for capital items. Article 18: Building Maintenance Fund – Some items are for the school and others for the town. Article 19: Quaker Street Landfill – Funds for the mandate action plan provided by the Department of Environmental Protection. Article 20: Elementary School – This will transfer the custody of the former NES (school) at 30 Cross Street. Articles 21 & 22: Bylaw Review Committee articles. Article 23: Change to the Stormwater Management Bylaw. Article 24: transfer of money received from the Opioid Settlement Fund, which is required to be transferred into a trust fund. Article 25: transfer of leftover money from free cash to the Stabilization Fund. A motion/Mr. Ampagoomian, seconded/Mr. Melia to place Selectmen's articles on the warrant Spring Annual Town Meeting [May 7, 2024]. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus.

2024 Town Manager Goals. Town Manager Gaudette explained that there are no changes from the last discussion. A motion/Mr. Melia, seconded/Mr. Ampagoomian to approve the 2024 goals for the Town Manager. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT/None

SELECTMEN'S CONCERNS: Selectman Ampagoomian 1) asked when we would hear about the results of the Water Company rate hearing. Town Manager Gaudette replied that there has been nothing since the last meeting. 2) asked if there was an update on the cable contract. Town Manager Gaudette reported that there was

no update on that either. **3)** asked if the Governor's 9C cuts will impact us. Town Manager Gaudette stated that there was one earmark under the Executive Office of Public Safety to be used on small capital items, which was reduced. **4)** asked for an update on the Riverdale Cemetery roadway. DPW Director Mr. Luchini explained that it is on this year's capital projects list and will need an estimate, which he hopes to have done by the fall. **5)** sends his condolences to the family of Doug Woeller. **Selectman Melia** received a call from someone that was agitated about the purchase of property for the Whitinsville Social Library. He also noted that we are appropriating money for the Whitinsville Social Library and asked why we are doing this if the Library has their own funds through the Trustees. Town Manager Gaudette explained that the Library is a non-profit and the property is also owned by the town. He further explained that the statute allows for the Trustees to oversee the property, collect funds and contribute to capital or library items. The Trustees have moved forward with the purchase of three houses behind the Library for expansion of the Library along Cottage Street, with their own funds. Based on them taking that action the town has dedicated some funds for a feasibility study, which would allow us to assess the existing condition of the facility and work towards an application with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. A grant program that has been gone for a long time has been revisited, which allows the MBLC to invest capital funds from the state that go into local libraries. It is a very competitive process and one of the things they require is a feasibility study. They also require the town to match funds for construction. The Town has not contributed anything to the purchase of the three houses. **Selectman Paulhus** gave kudos to the DPW for their work around Arcade Pond.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDA/None

CORRESPONDENCE/None

EXECUTIVE SESSION/None

Chairman Collins announced that the next meeting is scheduled for March 11, 2024, but it may change.

A motion/Mr. Ampagoomian, seconded/Mr. Melia to adjourn the public meeting. Vote yes/Ampagoomian, Collins, Melia and Paulhus.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:05 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Russell Collins, Acting Clerk

/mjc

LIST OF DOCUMENTATION

BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING - OPEN SESSION

February 26, 2024

- I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES/None**
- II. PUBLIC HEARING: A. 7:05 PM - 1) Report progress of the Town's FY 2020 (CDF) Community Development Fund Grant; and (2) FY 2024 Community Development Block Grant Program: Discuss proposed application to Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing & Livable Communities for funding as part of FY 2024 CDF Program / Vote to submit application Present: Wayne Darragh, Community Opportunities Group and Gary Bechtholdt, Town Planner**
 - Copy of public hearing notice**
- III. APPOINTMENTS / By the Town Manager (Vote to Affirm): B. Christopher Dutting, Student Police Officer / Present: Timothy Labrie, Police Chief**
 - Copy of cover letter**
 - Copy of resume**
- IV. CITIZENS' COMMENTS/INPUT**
- V. DECISIONS**
 - C. Amanda Catherine Guillette d/b/a Robyn's Table/Application for a Non-Alcoholic Common Victualler License for 670 Linwood Avenue, Bldg C., Whitinsville, MA 01588**
 - Copy of Common Victualler Application**
 - D. Spring Annual Town Meeting [May 7, 2024] / Vote to place Selectmen's articles on the warrant**
 - Copy of draft warrant**
 - E. Land/Trail Stewardship Committee / Request to revise the composition of the committee by adding 4 Member-at-Large seats appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Present: David Pickart, Conservation Agent**
 - Copy of memorandum**
 - F. 2024 Town Manager Goals**
 - Copy of 2024 Town Manager Goals**
- VI. DISCUSSIONS**
 - G. Presentation to the Board of Selectmen: Request for Proposals Response for 44 Cross Street (former Northbridge Elementary School). Present: Lobisser & Ferreria Construction Corp./No documentation**
- VII. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT/None**
- VIII. SELECTMEN'S CONCERNS/No documentation**
- IX. ITEMS FOR FUTURE AGENDA/None**
- X. CORRESPONDENCE/None**
- XI. EXECUTIVE SESSION/None**