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NEWTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN
DATE: WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2020
TIME: 6:00PM
CONFERENCE CALL

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

I. Call to Order

This meeting was held to bring the Selectmen and public up to date on the COVID-19 virus. The public meeting was held via conference call. On the phone was Chairman Matthew A. Burrill, Selectmen Lisa L. Gonyer, Kathryn Michaels, Lawrence B. Foote, Charles R. Melvin Sr., Town Administrator Nancy Wrigley, and Secretary Diane Morin. The public session was audio taped. The public meeting minutes were transcribed and typed by Secretary Morin.

Other conference call attendees were Tina O'Rourke, Chief Alcaldinho, Trisha McCarthy, Terry Caswell, Pete Gagnon, Chief Jewett, Jack Kozec, and members of the public.

Chairman Burrill called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

II. Scheduled Business

A. Update – COVID-19 virus

Chairman Burrill explained the reason for the meeting was to bring the Board and public up to date on guidelines to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Mrs. McCarthy briefed the Board with new updates from the State conference calls held on Tuesday, April 14, 2020.

PPE's are being distributed by the State to where they are needed. For tracking COVID-19, the State has added employees who work in long term care.

Mrs. McCarthy reviewed the State statistics for COVID-19 patients including First Responders.

PPE's will be distributed to Search and Rescue teams.

The State is developing security procedures for Food Banks and distributions of PPE's.

The State is still considering whether to allow campgrounds to open. More information will be forth coming. Hotels, Airbnb, motels, and inns should not be taking online reservations. If a guest is already at the place, they can remain.

Attorney General's Office is still working on guidelines for upcoming elections.

Out of State homeowners can go to their home and are expected to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Mrs. McCarthy briefed the Board with new updates from the State conference calls held on Wednesday, April 15, 2020.

The State will be providing a stipend to employees at long term care facilities for the work they are doing supporting the patients in the facilities.

Mrs. McCarthy reviewed the statistics associated with COVID-19. The death rate went up to 27.

The State is noticing an uptick on mental health issues which may be caused by unemployment.

The State's Health Department mobile units are performing tests at multiple sites that had an outbreak of COVID-19.

The National Guard is looking at Exeter Hospital as another alternate care site. An alternate care site is being setup at Daniel Webster College.

Chief Alcaldinho, Chief Jewett and EMD Foote each have guidance and correspondences on handling quarantine, isolation and/or process flow for their respective departments that could be shared with other Towns/Cities and States.

Employees working in long term care facilities will now be tested for COVID-19.

The Attorney General's Office warned of an online scam targeting older residents.

The essential business document provided by the State is a living document is always being updated.

Campgrounds can open for tent and RV rentals. They cannot rent cabins/cottages or open their recreational halls. They must adhere to the no more than 10 people gathering rules. Campgrounds can require out of state guest to self-quarantine for 14 days.

Farmer Markets are considered essential business because they are selling food.

The State is continuing contact tracing on patients that have tested positive for COVID-19.

EMD Foote will be visiting the local campgrounds in Town to provide them with guidance on opening their campground to the public.

Chairman Burrill stated that the number of cases in Town has increased.

Chairman Burrill reviewed that on March 17, 2020 the Board voted to pay employees that are not able to perform their duties because the Town buildings were closed due to

COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the vote, the Board had hoped the Town would be reimbursed for paying employees. Other Towns have furloughed nonessential employees. The Town is now in a position that the Board needs to consider the financial impact of continuing to pay employees affected by closing Town Buildings. Some essential employees are now working extra hours due to the pandemic. Even though the budget was approved, and displaced employees pay was part of the budget the increase to essential employees may cause the payroll budget to be over extended.

Selectman Foote stated that we could allow employees to come back to work but not allow the public into the buildings. If the employee chooses not to return until the pandemic is considered over then they would be furloughed. Chairman Burrill stated that most of the affected employees interact with the public. What would they do for work?

Selectman Michaels expressed concern about the risk factor if we let employees back into the buildings.

Chairman Burrill stated that there are 4 part-time employees affected by the closure. Three interact with the public and one does not.

Selectman Gonyer stated displaced employees may come in contact from the outside with COVID-19 and bring it into the Town Buildings. This is what the Board is trying to avoid by closing the buildings. The Town Hall office space is limited, and it would be hard for employees to keep the 6-foot distance from each other. There are some departments that will need to increase their budget to cover the added payroll expense. While other departments will need to reduce so the Town does not go over budget.

Selectman Michaels stated that now is the time to be frugal because it is unknown how long the pandemic will go on.

Selectman Melvin stated that he would like to continue paying displaced employees because it is difficult to retain good employees and out of loyalty to the employee. He would like to see a stipend paid to employees at the Transfer Station because of the exposure they risk contacting COVID-19. Selectman Melvin estimated the cost would be \$1,800 a week to keep paying displaced employees and adding a \$50.00 a week stipend for the Transfer Station employees. Selectman Gonyer asked where the funds would come from to pay this. Selectman Melvin stated if the budget is over extended, we could go to DRA and make a request to allow the Board to tap the unexpended fund.

Selectman Foote stated that he expects FEMA to cover 75% of the cost to run the EOC, and cover the extra hours worked by First Responders. Chairman Burrill asked if he had that in writing. Selectman Foote stated that from past experience FEMA has covered these costs. Mrs. McCarthy stated that there is hope expenses will be covered at 100%. Chairman Burrill stated that this is a global pandemic versus a local storm.

Selectman Michaels stated that she would like the Board to consider extending paying displaced employees until May 4, 2020 and then revisit the issue. Chairman Burrill stated that the Board would need to make the decision based on pay periods. He stated

that there are residents who were working but now are unemployed. Chairman Burrill stated that he is hearing/reading that re-opening the State/Country will be a slow process. Selectman Gonyer stated that the positions will still be there after the pandemic is over whereas some residents may not have a job to return to. Selectman Melvin stated that it is hard to retain employees and the Board should continue to pay displaced employees.

Selectman Foote asked if the Town would pay for actual work performed and then the employee would need to file for unemployment. Selectman Gonyer stated that is what the Board needs to decide on. The employee will need to decide if they wish to file for unemployment. Selectman Michaels stated that the Unemployment Agency would determine the amount of benefits the employee would receive.

Secretary Morin stated that we are already in a pay period. She suggested to continue to pay employees for this pay period and as of April 26, 2020 then furlough the displaced employees. Chairman Burrill stated that has been proposed.

Selectman Gonyer moved to institute a furlough and/or reduction in hours effective April 26, 2020 for nonessential employees unable to perform their duties caused by Town Buildings closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and to notify the affected employees in writing by April 24, 2020. Seconded by Chairman Burrill for discussion.

Selectman Gonyer stated this gives the Board a chance to retract the motion should it not be needed.

Selectman Melvin suggested a friendly amendment to the motion to change "effective" to "reconsider". Selectman Gonyer stated that the Board can rescind the motion later.

Selectman Michaels asked how long have displaced employee been paid. Chairman Burrill stated since March 16, 2020.

The motion failed. Burrill – aye, Gonyer – aye, Michaels – nay, Foote – nay, Melvin – nay

Selectman Gonyer urged the members of the public to reach out to the Selectmen and let them know their opinions.

Secretary Morin asked for clarification on moving forward with paying displaced employees. Chairman Burrill stated that for this pay period all employees will continue to be paid.

The Board asked to have this issue placed on the April 21, 2020 agenda.

Selectman Michaels asked when the Town might be reimbursed. Mrs. McCarthy stated it could be several months before the Town receives any funds.

Secretary Morin informed the Board that she received a phone call from a resident who expressed concerns with the local campgrounds opening. Chairman Burrill stated that the decision to allow campgrounds to open is made at the State level and not the local governing body.

Selectman Gonyer moved to accept the public meeting minutes dated April 10, 2020 as written. Seconded by Selectman Melvin. Burrill – aye, Gonyer – aye, Michaels – aye, Foote – aye, Melvin – aye

Mrs. McCarthy would like to thank Jamie Saucier and Diane Morin for their work on keeping the Town's website up to date.

III. Adjourn

Selectman Melvin moved to adjourn at 7:06pm. Seconded by Selectman Gonyer. Burrill – aye, Gonyer – aye, Michaels – aye, Foote – aye, Melvin – aye

Respectfully submitted,

Diane M. Morin
Board of Selectmen Secretary