

Leyden Select Board and Finance Committee Minutes
Leyden Town Offices
Regular Session Minutes
October 14, 2021
6:00pm

Select Board Members Present: Jeff Neipp, Bill Glabach, Erica Jensen

Others Present: Michele Giarusso, John Higgins, Michele Higgins, Ginger Robinson, Sara Seinberg, Barbara Wallace, Liz Kidder, Anders Ferguson, Nancy Edwards, Ginny Rockwood, Robert Anson, Anne Garvey, Pam Brown, Aaron Dulles, Glenn Caffrey, Zack Delucca, Colleen Caffery, Dave Vreeland, Merry Lein, Beth Kuzdeba, Jeffrey Glabach, Tony Streeter, Emily Yazwinski, Gilda Galvis, Jack Golden, Sarah Bartholomew, Candace Hope, Dave Curtis, Lisa Lamont

Jeff called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm. Jeff stated he was putting a poster up on smart use of guns, BeSmartforkids.org an organization his wife belongs to.

Select board signed FY 22 warrants. Jeff signed contract with NSTAR Electric d/b/a Eversource Energy for Electric Vehicle Charges Site Host agreement. Michele reminded the board for Erica's knowledge she applied for a grant for electric charging stations last year per the select board's direction.

Motion: Erica moved the Sept.27, 2021, meeting minutes as written. Bill seconded. Unanimous.

Highway Update-Jeff stated there is one applicant who applied for the laborer's position, but he is not available to work every other weekend because he has his children. Michele asked when the applicant was interviewed, she did not know about an interview being set up and Erica mentioned she asked at a previous select board meeting and it is in the meeting minutes that the select board interview any applicant. Jeff stated Dave must of talked to him but he will find out. Sara Steinberg asked Jeff to explain when the applicant was interviewed, and Jeff said he would find out. Jeff went on to say that Dave suggested we advertise in the Brattleboro Reformer we may receive more applicants from there. Michele will investigate the cost of advertising in the Reformer and if we have an account.

Public Comments-Barbara Wallace stated she is following up on her fire issue of the August 30 and September 27 questions she posed to the select board. She stated being serviced by the Colrain Fire Department where she lives is not acceptable to her. She also wants answers to the trees that still need to be taken down before winter. Eversource has taken out some trees but there are still trees left to be addressed. There are a lot of issues citizens need to be aware of and we need clarity and decisiveness on the fire department about my calling them on August 30th. Has anything been done about these issues?

Emily Yazwinski -stated we do have to remember it is a volunteer fire department and a lot of small towns like ours have volunteer fire departments. We all chose to live in a rural community where we have to realize we do not have all the services that larger towns have but, we do have mutual aid, we rely on these other towns to help us.

Jeff Neipp-replied we tried working with Greenfield and Bernardston in the pasty but each of them has their hands full right now. Colrain has a good fire department. We will try and address your concerns.

Tony Streeter-I am here to discuss Hunt Hill. I had my property surveyed and I want the town to know that half of Hunt Hill is currently on my land. If the town is going to put dirt on it they should know this.

Erica Jensen responded, there is a whole host of issues that need to be addressed with Hunt Hill before anything will be done.

Jeff Glabach-a survey has to be done before you decide to do anything with that road.

Tony replied-as you move forward, just know the road is on my property.

Liz Kidder-George Lamb Road is owned by the residents we have found out, it is a right of way to the town. It is not a town owned road. The town does take care of it.

Aaron Dulles-asked if all town roads were county roads at one time? If they were and then the county government dissolved MassDOT should be taking care of all roads. We should look into this.

Bill Glabach-replied yes, some of our roads were county roads. We have a plan for fixing roads but the roads that have not been maintained by the town we have sometimes worked with the property owners, and they offer to help pay for materials.

Sara Seiberg-Sara stated she wants to follow up from the last meeting. Eighty-eight residents signed the petition I presented you. Recently a neighbor of mine had a head of a nonprofit organization to their house as a guest. Upon leaving they requested their white host escort them out of town. People of color are afraid to be in this town. My own first encounter with Chief Galvis was not a pleasant experience with my 80-year-old mom. He utilized an age-old intimidation tactic towards me. He referred to me and my partner as those lesbians on the hill. People still have said they cannot sign this petition for fear of retaliation.

I would like answers to the oversight of the police department. What is the progress or policy?

Jeff Neipp-replied we have to have a written statement from the resident or a phone call about the complaint. The select board would then bring in the officer and discuss it with them.

Bill Glabach-added, we record our stops, we were one of the first small towns to do so. Early on we sat here with the ACLU and discussed this. They had many questions for us. So now we have something to review.

Erica Jensen-added we watched a film recording of a stop recently.

Someone from the audience stated retrain the entire police force and town employees and reappoint a civil rights officer.

Erica- I spoke to Dan and called the state. Dan has never been a Civil Rights Officer. The new Police Reform Act negated this. The Bridge Academy will cover all this training under the Police Reform Act. They will be forced to take bias trainings. Chief Galvis has shown his bias through his emails.

Sara Seiberg-what are the fiscal repercussions when we get sued? Can we find out through our insurance company? Can you ask Town Counsel what our exposure is? Did you ask Town Counsel yet?

Jeff replied he will ask Town Counsel on Monday. I received a phone call from Ann Lynch from the Attorney General's office in Springfield. She asked about minutes of our past meetings. Someone had filed a complaint.

Erica interjected-how come you did not tell the other members of this board?

Jeff replied I am telling you now.

Sara-I spoke to the Attorney General's office this morning. They said they have received several complaints; they have been reading the newspaper articles and watching the outcome of what is happening in Leyden. Sara then asked Jeff if he read his emails in 2015.

Jeff replied he never read the emails.

Sara- Why? Chief Galvis's official email for town business was set up years ago, it was the one he sent the emails on. You have answered my emails and other emails when sent to you, why not from the Chief of police?

Jeff-why didn't anyone bring up these emails before?

Sara-You have not even made a statement about these emails. You have not addressed this.

Jeff-We are having a meeting on Monday.

Sara-Captain Galvis is the second in command. Why did she not report her chief was sending racist emails? Sara then went on to read emails from Colleen Caffrey and Merry Lein. I want to thank you for your time. I want to thank residents for their oral history of this town. The kind of

fear people that people tell me about. On the face of it these emails are obviously disgusting and disqualifying, and I appreciate what you are going through is a difficult process.

Ginger Robinson-everyone has a right to due process, usually someone is put on suspension until there is an investigation. I am wondering why Dan was not put on immediate suspension. I am disgusted Dan is allowed to carry his gun in this town.

Beth Kuzdeba-I want to know what kind of training Dan has to go through if he is going to be retiring in June? He will not have to do the trainings for a year and if he retires before a year, he will get a slide.

Sara to Jeff-you gave a passionate statement about nepotism at a previous meeting. I wonder now how you feel in this case?

Jeff-we struggle to get applicants in this small town. The pool of applicants is just not there. Believe me I want to leave office now but there is a lot of work to be done.

Sara-I want to know what you think about the police department having so much power in one department?

Erica-you have a long-time chief who appointed his wife Captain. I absolutely understand what Sara is saying. We can go through training though.

Bill-Out of necessity I have seen Dan and Gilda work together. Dan has not given her preferred treatment. Dan's bedside manner so to speak is his own worst enemy. I do not think Dan or Gilda are racist. We were trying to make a good faith effort to work on this with Tina.

Erica-this does not have anything to do with Tina.

Bob Anson-I want to thank Erica for saying that, there is an issue here.

Aaron Dulles- Lets start talking about what the issue is. You do not understand what implicit bias means, you need to go to anti bias training. You are woefully mistaken about bias; an absence of complaints is not evidence of a lack of bias. Bias and discrimination do not lend itself to speaking out. Those emails that your chief sent you are trash. What is your timeline for taking action?

Erica replied-there is a meeting next Monday.

John Higgins-maybe the Executive Session will answer all the questions people have and then the training can begin after that.

Glen Caffrey-This is a concrete urgent issue for the town of Leyden, an urgent and unacceptable issue about one employee. I want to make one point. Why did no recipients of these emails bring up that it was not acceptable to send these emails? These were leaders in our town.

Candance Hope-the meeting on Monday-who is going to ask the questions? Can we know the list of questions ahead of time?

Anders Ferguson-I like the comment that was in the letter Sara read, what would happen to a person in Corporate America who did this? The answer is he would be gone, no question. I ask that you do this fast, it has been several months. I hope it does not drag on.

Erica-Gilda are you willing to do implicit bias training?

Gilda Galvis-yes, we have done some training on this.

Jeff Neipp-I know it seems like this has been a slow process. We had our first meeting on July 20.

Sara Seinberg interjected-no it was Sept. 7. It is now October 14th. I have no idea if Monday's meeting will be fruitful.

Ginger Robinson-has Dan apologized to the select board for his actions?

Erica replied-no he has not apologized.

Sara Seinberg-do you not understand that people are afraid to be in Leyden? The police department is responsible for protecting the people in this town, yet people do not feel safe.

Gilda Galvis- we have a black officer on the police force, and he said he feels unsafe driving around town people just stare at him.

Emily Yazwinski-At some point I would like to meet the police officers so that we can welcome them.

Erica-I have asked to meet all the officers. I am the liaison to the police department for the select board and I have not met any of them yet.

Beth Kuzdeba- months ago I mentioned at a select board meeting that West Springfield had a meet and greet with residents. I has the same conversation with dan too but it went no where.

Jeff -People should not think that just because they see a cruiser on the side of the road that they are there to stop cars for speeding. The cruiser is out there to respond to calls with 5-8 minutes.

Erica-Community policing is what we need I would just like our police officers to look me in the eye when I drive by and acknowledge me. When I waive I do not get a waive back.

Municipal Assistant update-Michele shared the IT Community Compact grant has been submitted for \$75,000. The Cares Act final report is due by October 29. One survey quote has come in for East Hill Road it is a slow process surveyors are just not responding. Amy St Clair has asked for money to print a new Leyden directory. There was discussion that there may be people who do not want their information given out and the town should not be in the business to give out this information without permission. In addition, many people got rid of their land lines when the town went with fiber. Our insurance company MIIA has asked for questions to be answered about our written policies and procedures for police and public official liability. Jeff signed the paperwork.

Motion: Bill moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:45pm. Erica seconded. Unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,
Michele Giarusso