

Leyden Select Board Meeting Minutes
Leyden Town Office Building
Regular Session
December 27, 2023
9:00 am

Select Board Members Present: Glenn Caffery, Katherine DiMatteo, Erica Jensen

Others Present: Janell Howard, Beth Kuzdeba-remote, Liz Kidder

Glenn called the meeting to order at 9:00 am.

MOTION: Katherine moved to approve the minutes of December 4, 2023, with corrections of spelling of Tom Rafensperger, Randy Crochier, Stephen Foley. Erica seconded the motion.

Glenn amended under the Tax Collector interview for Susan Bobe that “Susan estimated that the two jobs combined would be 12-15 hours a week with more hours per week depending on the season.”

Katherine and Erica accepted the amendments. Approved unanimously.

MOTION: Katherine moved to approve the minutes of December 11, 2023, with amendment to the Fire Department agenda item: add to third paragraph “Cost for turn-out gear is \$53,000 and would come from the grant if received plus \$10,500 from the Fire Department expense line item.” Also add to the motion made by Erica on 10-mile bridge contract, the amount of the bid awarded: \$185,795. Erica second the motion.

Glenn requested that the minutes be amended in the cybersecurity and audit readiness report from Town Coordinator to state: “Glenn asked Michele to ensure that the administration passwords from Montague Webworks are compliant with password policy last year approved last year.”

Katherine and Erica accepted amendments. Approved unanimously.

MOTION: Katherine moved to approve the minutes September 18 with amendments to the Board of Health Training Program: “Within the budget currently there is no money for paying people to go to the training. Would have to be added to the budget for next year. For this year, money would have to be allocated at a Special Town Meeting.” And to correct the motion to read: “Katherine moved to have a warrant article for a Special Town Meeting for funds to pay Board of Health members to attend required Training.” Amendment to the Tax Collector agenda item, add “The Select Board asked Michele to find out from DLS what the next steps the town should take after the 3-month period.” Erica seconded the motion.

Glenn requested that the minutes on the discussion with Eversource not include the following “since there are some roads exempted in our shade tree plan” because Barry did not state such. Also, to amend the following motion: “Katherine moved if there is an emergency public health and safety hazard Bill Brooks has permission to contact Beaver Solutions to control the water. If Beaver Solutions thinks this needs to happen quickly Bill will receive permission from the landowners and ask them to split the cost with the town. However, if the landowners refuse, the town will pay if the road is at imminent risk. This is a one-time payment, and the property owners are responsible for the yearly ongoing maintenance cost to control the dam(s) and beavers. Erica seconded the motion. Unanimous.” Amend the Complete Streets Discussion, answer #1 to: “Beth thought that dirt roads currently were not qualified. Beth will check with MADOT if dirt roads can qualify for this program.” Amend under Select Board Updates that “Glenn

attended another public presentation of the report and brought two 3 ring binders to read over that are the consultant's report and recommendations. The presentations are available on YouTube to listen to, and Glenn will send a link. Michele, as a member of the school committee, has also heard the presentation. It is not clear whether there will be time for the Select Board, Finance Committee and School Committee to discuss whether Leyden agrees/accepts the recommendation."

Katherine and Erica accepted the amendments, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

There was a discussion of trees, scenic roads, shade trees and Eversource. Also, a discussion of the situation on West Leyden Road after the rainstorm of the 18th and whether the beaver dam was responsible. Glenn reported that the culverts appeared to not be able to keep up with the water, and the high water was not a backup from the beaver dam.

The discussion with Janell about her role and priorities was moved to later in the meeting.

Public Safety:

Liz Kidder asked that the Select Board respond to Michele's memo that since the EMPG grant is reimbursable that it should have approval before submission.

MOTION: Erica moved that the application for the EMPG grant for cell phone boosters for \$2500 be submitted as written. Katherine second. Approved unanimously.

The contract extension with Community 911 needs to be signed by the Select Board but needs only one signature. **ACTION:** Glenn will check with Michele, and he will sign on behalf of the Select Board.

Green Community:

Action: Glenn will follow up with Michele to get the submission completed by the end of the week.

Revise Flag Policy:

Erica presented edits to the previously approved Flag Policy to clearly state that the policy also includes banners.

MOTION: Katherine moved to accept the changes presented. Erica seconded. Approved unanimously.

ACTION: Glenn will post this version of the policy on the website.

Discussion of Stipends:

Glenn did a review of the current situation regarding who gets stipends versus salaries and the inconsistency and inequality in the system. The Fire Department has asked to add a stipend for a Deputy Fire Chief, but it is currently not built into the budget and the Finance Committee asked the Select Board to review the stipends allocated across the board. When is there a salary versus stipends. What is the purpose of the stipends? Why do some committees get stipends and others do not? Erica noted that the elected officials get stipends versus appointed committees that are volunteers do not. The Fire Department has both salaries and stipends. What about Barn & Animal Inspector, it is listed as an expense but is paid once a year and does not reflect hours worked?

After discussion, the Select Board agreed that salaries are for those who are paid based on hours worked, and stipends for other elected officials. The accounting references need to be changed to align with this understanding. The following should be listed as salaries: Constables, and the following should be listed as stipends: Assessors Chair, Assessors Members, Planning Board Chair, Planning Board Members, Fire Chief, Captain, EMS Coordinator, Barn & Animal Inspector, Board of Health Chair, Board of Health Members.

The Fire Chief is appointed but because the department is a public service, it is treated differently from other appointed committees. Glenn suggested we do a review of the chief contract which was a interim model for one year. With the addition of a proposed deputy chief, it is necessary to have a discussion with the Fire Chief and Captain about what model for the department is right for the town. Fire department is unique in the town. Erica requested to have an executive session to discuss the Fire department. Glenn noted MGL restrictions on executive sessions. Erica would like to have a Select Board only discussion of the Fire department based on complaints received. Glenn thought this would fall under Section 21. (a) A public body may meet in executive session only for the following purposes:

(1) To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or to discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual.

Will schedule for our next meeting.

ACTION: Erica will contact Angelica, Town Accountant, and ask her to change the accounts to reflect the Select Board decision.

It was noted that the amount budgeted for the assessors are not equitable with other stipends of elected officials. However, any reduction to the amount has been defeated on town floor a number of times because it is perceived as one of the most important positions in town. Glenn noted that there should be a discussion with assessors and come to an agreement about the stipend. The Finance Committee spoke with Assessors last year and Glenn attended that meeting. The assessors' inspection responsibilities is to work toward equitable valuations of fall into three areas: building permits, property changing hands, and a schedule of going to every dwelling to make sure that the assessment of property is up to date. The assessors have not done this onsite visit to properties in several years. Since this critical day-to-day work of assessors hasn't been done, they are being compensated for work not done. However, some citizens don't want assessors or anyone on their property or to go up long driveways, so there is some reluctance on the part of the assessors to do the onsite visits. Perhaps, it could be hired out and handled differently by the assessors. Larger stipend for assessors has historically been based on the perception that they would do day-to-day work. Another consideration for higher stipends has been the training needed and hours required to complete the training. Training for assessors is in their budget and includes training for the Assistant Assessor. Question: how often is training required? It is a concern that assessors are being overcompensated and is not in the best interest of the town. With the hiring of the Assistant Assessor the role of the assessors has changed. Can assessors be compensated for training, like the BOH proposal, and perhaps paid an hourly rate for inspections, like call pay for firefighters?

Katherine noted that Library Trustees are also elected officials but do not receive a stipend. There may be some restriction for Library Trustees. **ACTION:** Katherine will check with Library trustees about why they don't get a stipend.

Glenn noted that we established appointed constable positions but have not yet filled them. **ACTION:** Glenn will approach the town clerk about appointment of alternate constables.

Admin Assistant workload and priorities check-in:

Janell reported that it is nice having an office and desk now, and that she likes working with Fire, Highway, and Michele. She likes the job, likes doing different things. My job is varied, not boring. She

sets a priority list based on her own assessment of what is important. List continues to grow as she is getting experienced working with the town. Assists Michele with grants –this has slowed her down, will get faster as she learns. Examples of the assistance for grants: Get invoices for reconciliation, liaison with Fire department on the grant that was to be submitted. Getting quotes, taking pictures for grants.

There has been a mess with Amazon bills due to growing pain with a new vendor. Paperwork for payment is not submitted at times. Orders went in without the paperwork. Order number and invoice number were not being submitted/recorded. Janell has been researching and correcting or suggesting improvements. Glenn thanks her for attention to detail. Overlap with Michele is useful, so Janell is familiar with some of the Town Coordinator's work. Glenn explained expectations when developing the role that the Admin Assistant would be in the front office and interaction with public. Erica asked if the office being closed on certain days/time helps with interruptions. Janell responded that the doors are never locked. Glenn noted that closing the office hours was temporary until there was an Admin Assistant. Erica's expectations were that the door would be locked and not opened so there was quiet time for concentrated work. Janell is comfortable with working in the front office, most people want answers to questions, not to chat. Glenn noted that there is a need to resolve issues around quiet time work. Janell works 8am-2pm some days and 8am-Noon other days.

The bill schedule and payroll are top priority. Still learning, doesn't know all the laws, researching for answers and information takes time. Glenn remarked that Janell is completion-oriented, and this is useful, and is good at noticing things that can be done better. This orientation will help get things done. Select Board is satisfied with what they have observed, and probationary period is 6 months. Janell noted that her position and Michele's are sensitive positions with a need to be cautious in interactions with citizens and teams. Janell was encouraged not to hesitate to ask questions or for training. Janell responded that she would tell us when she can take on more work. Janell noted the Town Clerk wants to do all the official duties himself, so he has asked Janell to do the admin work like shredding papers. Town Clerk made Michele his assistant for official duties.

Decision on the town office sign:

The three options were reviewed and there was unanimous agreement on one of the options. Janell will ask for a quote and bring that back to the Select Board for discussion. Katherine pointed out that there is another sign on the town common that could also use a refresh.

Schedule for Annual Town Meeting and Report:

At the end of the first week of January notes are to request reports and pictures with March 31 as the due dates for submission. Katherine initiated a discussion about the town report and what time period the reports were covering. The accountant's financial report for the town is based on fiscal year: July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023. Other committees and officials report on a calendar year. Changing to a fiscal year annual report will be confusing at first but would be consistent. There was agreement on aligning the reports with the fiscal year.

ACTION: Katherine will write an explanation about this change and ask for reports by March 31st. Glenn will do the formatting and provide a template to use. Katherine will ask Michele for the saved digital version of last year's report.

Next meeting agenda:

Continue the discussion of preparation for Annual and Special Town Meetings and warrants, check-in with Michele's on the Town Coordinator role.

Next meeting will be Wednesday, January 3 at 5:30pm.

MOTION: Katherine made a motion that Erica contact Town Counsel regarding scheduling an executive session. Erica second. Unanimously approved.

MOTION: Erica moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:05pm. Katherine seconded the motion. Approved unanimously.