

BOARD OF SELECTMEN – APRIL 9, 2020, SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES:

(Note: This is a virtual meeting and the recording of the meeting is on the Town website at <https://www.barkhamsted.us/board-selectmen/minutes/board-selectmen-virtual-meeting-recording-0>

Meeting called to order at 5:07 PM. Present were First Selectman Don Stein and Selectmen Ray Pech and Nick Lukiwsky. Also present was Kathryn Boughton, a member of the press, and Debbie Brydon joined for the discussion of the services the town can provide.

DELEGATIONS: No delegations were present.

PUBLIC COMMENT: No public comments were made.

MOTION: A motion was made by Nick Lukiwsky seconded by Ray Pech, and passed unanimously to approve the minutes of the March 24, 2020 meeting.

MOTION: There were no tax refunds to consider

DISCUSSION: The Selectmen reviewed the budget actuals through March 31 for the General Government budget and did not see any areas of significant concern. The Town Counsel line is still significantly over budget due to the ongoing lawsuits, but the rate of expenditures has slowed due to the courts being closed and the inability of people to travel to pursue these cases. The expectation is that the lower cost for the Resident Trooper will mostly offset this overrun. The Highway Department budget is also in good shape due to the availability of LOCIP, the Municipal Projects Grant and Town Aid Road funds being applied to the road improvement budget.

DISCUSSION: The Selectmen reviewed the FY20/21 General Government and Capital budgets based on the input from the Board of Finance requesting cost savings measures in the General Government budget and zeroing out the Capital request except for capital projects that must be performed to be compliant with State requirements. After reviewing the budget, the only significant savings that seemed feasible without reducing staff levels or sacrificing public safety was to consider requesting that the town employees voluntarily forgo their normal raise this year. The employees who were due to receive step increases would still receive those, but the 2.5% increase would be eliminated. This was a very preliminary discussion and the sense is that the Town employees should not be asked to do this unless the school staff also volunteered to take the same cut. This was done in 2008/2009 when the financial situation was also quite bad. Don Stein will talk with the staff and will reach out to the Superintendent on this subject. He will also discuss it with the Board of Finance at their next meeting.

Relative to capital, the reduction, while not desirable, can be handled for the proposed 1-year delay in projects.

DISCUSSION: Don Stein informed the Selectmen that he has still been unable to finalize the arrangements with Granby and Hartland to share Animal Control costs due to the other issues that are affecting all of the towns due to the Coronavirus. He is still moving forward to share the two towns' ACO and to rent a space in the Granby animal control shelter, but the cooperative agreement and the arrangements for vehicles and hours still remain to be finalized.

DISCUSSION: Don Stein informed the Selectmen of the additional measures that had been implemented in Town Hall, including closing town hall to the residents. Most of the offices are being staffed by personnel working from home, although there is some time being spent in Town Hall for those tasks that can't be done out of the office and most of the transactions can be done over the phone or email. The Town is still trying to do everything it can to reach out to the residents in need of help and there is a group of volunteers willing to run errands, buy groceries or pick up prescriptions for those who are housebound for any legitimate reason. There is a webpage on the Town website which is being updated regularly with the most up-to-date information.

The Selectmen also discussed the ground rules for the use of the Cookie Jar Fund to provide financial assistance to those in need, especially those who have been impacted by the current economic situation. When this fund was first established, the maximum contribution was set at \$250 and on a one-time basis. The Selectmen and Debbie Brydon agreed that the amount should be increased to at least \$500 and that the requirements could be somewhat flexible depending on the individual or family situation. The fund currently has about \$30,000 in it and there is also a number of \$100 Stop & Shop gift cards that could be given out immediately if the need arises.

DISCUSSION: The Selectmen reviewed Executive Order 7S regarding Property Tax Deferral, which specifies that the Town must select one or both of two options: a "Deferment Program", which moves the due date of the tax payment deadline from 1 month to 3 months. Therefore the deadline for this July's property taxes to be paid without penalty would be October 1, 2020 rather than August 3, 2020. The other program is a "Low Interest Rate Program" that provides a reduced interest rate of 3% per annum vs. the normal 18% per annum for a 3-month period from the due date of the taxes. In addition to the penalty for overdue taxes that were due on July 1, this also applies to taxes that are delinquent on March 10, 2020, as long as they are paid by July 1. Both of these programs only apply to those who are substantially impacted by the current pandemic and does not apply to those folks whose taxes are escrowed.

After discussing these two programs, the Selectmen agreed that it would probably be better to only adopt the Deferment Program, not the Low Interest Rate Program. The Deferment would benefit taxpayers by giving them additional time to pay their taxes and does not create an administrative nightmare for the town. They will vote on the selected program at their next meeting after the Board of Finance has the opportunity to consider these options.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:24 PM on a motion by Ray Pech, seconded by Nick Lukiwsky.

Respectfully submitted,

Donald S. Stein
First Selectman

The next meeting of the Board of Selectmen will be a Special Meeting to be held on Wednesday, April 22 at 7:00PM. The regular meeting of April 28 will be canceled.