



TOWN OF BLANDFORD
Select Board

Blandford Town Hall
1 Russell Stage Road, Suite 1
Blandford, MA 01008

**SELECT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
6:00 pm**

September 30, 2024

Meeting held in the Select Board Chamber, Town Hall

In attendance: C. Letendre, Chair-Absent; T. Cousineau, Member; J. Allen, Member; C. Ferrera, Town Administrator

1. EXAMINATION OF RECORDS OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

a) *Examination of the Select Board Meeting Minutes of June 24, 2024*

MOTION: T. Cousineau made a motion to approve the Select Board Meeting Minutes of June 24, 2024, as written.

J. Allen Seconded

All in Favor

2. *AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION / PUBLIC COMMENT

2. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Highway Department – Rene Senecal

Nye Brook Road: The culvert is done. The guardrails need to be completed at which time a request from Fair Share monies for that project will be submitted.

Clear Old Chester Road: The Highway crew have been working on this. Once completed, it will be completely passable for emergency vehicles or normal road usage.

Beech Hill Bridge: Senecal reported having a meeting with the engineers on this project. Senecal is looking for an explanation as to what has actually been done because their billing is pretty vague. They seem to be getting a paid well but there are not a lot of answers. Senecal notified the company that no more bills will be paid until somebody starts explaining what has been done.

Line Painting: This project will start soon and will be done on major paved roads in Blandford. The Highway crew will also paint lines at the Town Hall parking lot.

F350 Body: Senecal reminded the Board he gave them an estimate on replacing the truck bed with a flatbed. Senecal has purchased the flatbed, and it came in at the exact amount that he quoted.

Inventory: Senecal is reporting that there should be a stock of inventory blades, etc. for the winter, however, it has been depleted and not replaced. Senecal stated these items should have been replaced out of the FY24 budget and will now take a large bite out of the FY25 budget and budgets going forward. He stated he will need to meet with the Finance Committee to transfer money into this account and establish a proper inventory.

Maintenance Costs: Senecal reported to the Board that there have been too many outsourced maintenance costs in the past and he has ended that. More of this work will be done in-house.

Town Administrator – Cristina Ferrera

Social Media Policy: Ferrera presented the Social Media Policy to Town Counsel and was told these policies require careful review due to the number of current issues and the civil rights it may prevent. Legal is reviewing these policies and we should expect the recommendations next week.

State Animal Inspector: Ferrera reported the Animal Inspector, Jessica Carrington, was asked to check on the animals on Nye Brook Road. Ferrera reported she has tried to contact Carrington to talk about the problem with these animals, but she has not returned Ferrera’s call.

Nye Brook Road Trash Removal: A letter was sent to the resident of this property by certified mail which they received.

4. ACTION ITEMS

a) Approve Warrant #07 Payroll for payment

MOTION: T. Cousineau made a motion to TABLE Warrant #07 Payroll until the next Select Board meeting.

J. Allen Seconded

All in Favor

b) Approve Warrant #08 Select Board AP for Payment

MOTION: T. Cousineau made a motion to approve Warrant #08 Select Board AP for payment

J. Allen Seconded

All in Favor

c) Approve Warrant #08 Water AP

MOTION: T. Cousineau made a motion to approve Warrant #08 Water Department AP for payment

J. Allen Seconded

All in Favor

d) Approve Warrant #08 Refund

MOTION: T. Cousineau made a motion to approve Warrant #08 Refunds for payment

J. Allen Seconded

All in Favor

5. NEW BUSINESS

a) Superintendent Kristen Smidy, Gateway Regional School

Superintendent Smidy joined the Board to update the Town on the progress at Gateway Regional School District.

Bar Grant Foundation: Smidy reported working with the Bar Foundation again this year. The Foundation gave the district \$100,000 last year to do some good work around figuring out what really engages students and what are the areas of need we have for the district.

-One area where we have decided to focus is connecting learning to students’ real life and making sure they understand what they are learning.

-Another area is having students persevere through problem solving, maybe fail and try again. Then come out on top! We want to continue developing this grit in students.

Early Childhood Program: When this program started, there were 12 students; it has grown to 28 students.

Welding Program: Smidy reported Gateway's Welding Program is maxed out! They are looking at the possible of adding another staff member to help this program continue to grow.

Wood Shop: The Wood Shop program is also expanding with a new full-time teacher that was hired. This program has been expanded to the middle school and is going well so far.

Early Childhood Expansion Grant: The Pre-Kindergarten program for the last year was 4 days per week. With this expansion grant, the full-day program will now be offered 5 days per week. Next year, the district is supposed to get more money in that grant so hopefully, the half-day program will then be 5 days per week.

International Students: Smidy reported 45 International Students will be coming to Gateway from Germany. They will be here for two weeks in mid-October. This is through our band program. We are hosting these students from Germany, and they will be included in our classes and will be involved in after-school band activities and will culminate into a big-band concert. These students will be staying at the homes of the local Gateway band members. The students will enjoy apple picking and maybe learning a bit of German along the way.

After School Grant: The after-school grant is \$210,000 a year for 5 years. After the end-of-year report was done this year they found they were not meeting the participation requirements. But upon further inspection, they are posed in a way that is very inequitable. The requirement is that 40 students need to be enrolled in all 400 hours of programming. There are just not enough students in classes at Gateway to make this happen. All of the larger areas in Massachusetts are receiving more equitable grants. Smidy then met with Senator Anne Gobi and Senator Velis. Senator Paul Mark was supposed to come, and he did not, and Senator Boldyga did not respond at all. This grant if set up more favorably for Western MA would offer transportation and much more and our small towns should not be penalized. These grants should be based on population. As the Director of Rural Affairs, this is what Senator Gobi has been fighting for. Upon further investigation, Smidy found that *many* of the smaller communities in Western MA lost this grant putting all these students at a disadvantage and students should not have to pay the price for this inequity.

Cell Phone Policy: The current policy for the middle school is their phones are expected to be off and away. The High School is allowed to have their cell phones with them. The policy in place is working so far but it is being closely watched.

b) *Review Social Media Policy*

See Town Administrator Report above.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:40 pm

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION

None

Submitted by Joann Martin
Administrative Assistant to the Select Board

Absent

Cara Letendre, Chair

T. Cousineau, Member

J. Allen, Member