

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES – November 22, 2021

7:00 p.m. - Chairman's Introduction to Remote Meeting

Chairman Perreault stated that this Open Meeting of the Board of Selectmen was being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of June 16, 2021, an Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency and that all members of the Board of Selectmen are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely.

Chairman Perreault noted that the Order allows public bodies to meet entirely remotely so long as reasonable public access is afforded so that the public can follow along with the deliberations of the meeting. He added that ensuring public access does not ensure public participation unless such participation is required by law. Chairman Perreault noted that this meeting will allow for Public Comment only under the Public Comment portion of the agenda. He indicated the various ways that the public may view or participate in this meeting as listed on the posted agenda.

Chairman Perreault confirmed that the following members and persons anticipated on the agenda were remotely present and could be heard.

Board of Selectmen

Jason Perreault, Chair
Leslie Rutan
T. Scott Rogers
Julianne Hirsh
Kristen Wixted

Others

John Coderre, Town Administrator
Rebecca Meekins, Assistant Town Administrator
William Lyver, Police Chief
Scott Charpentier, DPW Director
Jason Little, Finance Director

Meeting Business Ground Rules

Chairman Perreault covered the ground rules for effective and clear conduct of the business. He asked members of the Board to mute their phone or computer when not speaking and to speak clearly and in a way that helps generate accurate meeting minutes. He will go through the items on the agenda. Following presentations, Board members will be offered an opportunity to speak, followed by staff members answering any questions, if necessary. Those responding will be asked to wait until the floor is yielded to them. Members were asked if they wish to respond to the comments of others, to do so through the Chair, taking care to identify themselves.

Any votes taken this evening will be done by roll call to ensure that the records of the vote are clear and accurate to the members attending the meeting remotely.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – NOVEMBER 8, 2021 MEETING

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to approve the November 8, 2021 meeting minutes; Selectman Rutan seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	"aye"	Rutan	"aye"
Hirsh	"abstain"	Perreault	"aye"
Rogers	"aye"		

7:00 p.m. - PUBLIC HEARING WITH BOARD OF ASSESSORS

For the purpose of discussing the valuation of each class of property; the minimum residential factor and the allocation of the tax burden among the four classes of real property: residential, open space, commercial and industrial, and of personal property.

Mr. Coderre made the presentation along-side a power point presentation, which included information and options for the Board of Selectmen to determine whether there shall be a single or split tax rate for the various classes of property for FY2022.

In summary, following an extensive review of the market activity for the FY2022 Revaluation Certification, the total taxable value for the Town has increased from \$3.17 billion to approximately \$3.38 billion, or 6.6%. This analysis was based on valid sales activity during calendar year 2020 for single family homes and condominiums. Market adjustments resulted in overall single-family home values increasing by 7.8%, while condominiums increased by 5.0%. In addition, commercial properties decreased by -0.3% and industrial properties increased by 11.0%.

In response to questions by members of the Board, Mr. Coderre explained why it's so important to have a diversified economic base to be able to handle this year's large fluctuation in the personal, commercial and industrial properties. He provided an update on the Westborough State Hospital property, which in reality, the 300,000 acres of land in Northborough is essentially conservation land.

Principal Assessor Julie Brownlee, Finance Director Jason Little and Board of Assessors members Bruce Morgan and Christopher Reidy were remotely present. Ms. Brownlee presented the various tax rate scenarios. Should the Board of Selectmen decide to continue with a single tax rate, the FY2022 rate would decrease from \$17.12 in FY2021 to \$16.49 for FY2022. The levy amount to be raised by taxation would be \$55,729,216, an increase of \$1,481,470, or 2.7%. This year \$61.5 million was certified in "new growth" value, which results in approximately \$1,053,633 in new tax dollars. The average single-family tax bill would increase by \$295 from \$7,900 in FY2021 to \$8,195 for FY2022. It was noted that the Town's overall valuation continues to increase and the Town's tax base remains stable and diversified and that part of the Town's ongoing economic success can be attributed to the fair and equitable tax structure for local businesses. Ms. Brownlee added that the Board of Assessors unanimously recommended that the Board of Selectmen continue with the single tax rate

In response to questions by members of the Board, Mr. Coderre and Ms. Brownlee explained the effect that a split tax rate would have on being able to attract new businesses into the community and retaining those already located in Town. Mr. Coderre stated that a split tax rate would be the least preferred way to help residents and small business owners who are tenants and not landowners. Ms. Brownlee reviewed how properties are assessed each year. Mr. Coderre added that the Town's long-term strategy for economic development has been able to attract and retain a diverse tax base, which helps to subsidize or balance out the residential impacts.

Chairman Perreault referred to a letter from Corridor 9/495 Regional Chamber of Commerce President Karen Chapman strongly supporting the continuation of a single tax classification. The letter included a list of residents and business owners who also expressed their support of a single

tax classification. Ms. Chapman was remotely present and spoke to the many reasons included in her letter to support the continuation of a single tax classification. In summary, under its current single tax structure, Northborough has prospered through the development and growth of business which has led to new jobs and tax revenue for the Town. If a split tax classification was to be adopted, this would result in increased costs to local businesses. She added that due to the pandemic, area business owners are under unprecedented stress and the last thing they need is to have an increase in expenses.

Chairman Perreault stated that this is a public hearing and noted that those who wish to speak will be admitted to the meeting as an attendee and will be asked to provide their full name and address for the record. Public comment will be limited to 3 minutes per person.

Dick Swee of 230 Brewer Street asked if any of the Covid-19 related funds will have any effect on determining the tax rate? Mr. Coderre responded that it will not have an immediate effect for FY2022, but it will have some impact through the upcoming budget process for FY2023, at which time residents will have the opportunity to provide input.

John Wixted of 2 Stirrup Brook Lane asked if properties are re-assessed at the time they are sold? Ms. Brownlee responded that commercial and industrial properties are not straight real estate sales. They are valued by the income approach to value rather than the real estate value, which is a bit more complicated. Mr. Wixted asked that as industrial properties continue to rise in value that the Town consider using some of its excess levy capacity to hire additional staff to enhance services to the residents in Town.

Karena Hansen of 6 Buckhill Road shared her concern that that if industrial properties like those at 300 Bartlett Street are not assessed only by real estate but by income as well, what stops these companies from manipulating that process? She added that she agrees with the single tax classification and wants to be sure that all classes of property are treated fairly. Ms. Brownlee responded by further explaining the process in which commercial and industrial properties are assessed versus residential properties.

Nick Orlov is not a resident of Northborough, but owns commercial property at 309 Main Street. He stated that from a leasing standpoint, those communities that have split tax rates tend to have more difficulty finding and retaining business tenants. He added that a split tax rate would have a significant negative impact on small commercial property owners who would be impacted the most.

Lisa Maselli of 13 Maple Street stated that she keeps hearing about being fair and equitable, but asked who is speaking up for the residents who represent 75% of the tax base? Residents are being told no to requests for sidewalks and she thinks it's time for the residents to also have representation.

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to close the Public Hearing with the Board of Assessors for the purpose of discussing the valuation of each class of property; the minimum residential factor and the allocation of the tax burden among the four classes of real property: residential, open space, commercial and industrial, and of personal property; Selectman Rutan seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

Selectman Rogers moved the Board vote to maintain a uniform tax rate for all classes of property at a factor of one; to oppose the implementation of a residential exemption; and to oppose the implementation of a small commercial exemption; Selectman Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

**8:50 p.m. - SUZY CIESLICA – COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
TIM KAELIN – DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMMITTEE**

- Presentation on 2021 Tree Lighting Event and Request to close Blake Street.
- Discussion regarding a Menorah Display at the Blake Street Tree Lighting.

Community Affairs Committee (CAC) Chair Suzy Cieslica was remotely present to announce the details of the “Light Up Northborough” event that will be held on Saturday, December 4th at 4:30pm at the Neil Ellsworth tree on Blake Street. She noted that DPW Director Scott Charpentier and Police Chief Lyver are aware of the Blake Street closing and have no concerns. Details about this event can be found on the CAC Facebook Page or at www.northboroughcac.weebly.com.

Ms. Cieslica also introduced the first Northboro Snowman Hunt that will begin on November 28th and will lead up to the “Light Up Northborough” event on December 4th. Details about this event can be found at www.northboroughguide.com/snowmanhunt.

Selectman Rutan thanked Ms. Cieslica, the CAC and all the volunteers for their efforts in providing these community events.

Selectman Wixted moved the Board vote to close Blake Street on Saturday, December 4, 2021 from 3:30pm to 6:30pm for the tree lighting ceremony; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

Ms. Cieslica reviewed how the discussion of including a Menorah at the Tree Lighting Ceremony came about at the initial request of resident Mitch Cohen back before the Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Committee was created.

D&I Committee Chair Tim Kaelin informed the Board that CAC representatives attended the November 4th D&I Committee meeting to discuss including a Menorah at the Tree Lighting event to represent residents who celebrate Hanukkah. He indicated that the D&I Committee's formal recommendations will include a future multicultural holiday celebration, as well as a formal policy surrounding the use of the Town Common. He noted that due to the timing of Hanukkah this year aligning with the tree lighting event, the work that has already been done to plan this event, and in the spirit of progress over perfection, the D&I Committee is in favor of taking this first step this year to represent other holiday celebrations this season.

Board members agreed that in the spirit of progress, this is a great first step as long as everyone in the entire community understands that this is a phased approach that will lead to multicultural holiday celebrations and events that will recognize all cultures and ethnic groups in the community. Thanks and appreciation was extended to Ms. Cieslica and Mr. Kaelin, along with the other members of the CAC and D&I Committees for their efforts.

Selectman Wixted moved the Board vote to approve the placement of a Menorah near the Neil Ellsworth tree on Blake Street, subject to coordination approval with the Public Works Department; Selectman Rutan seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	"aye"	Rutan	"aye"
Hirsh	"aye"	Perreault	"aye"
Rogers	"aye"		

Selectman Wixted volunteered to speak on behalf of the Board at the "Light Up Northborough" event.

REPORTS

Kristen Wixted

- Noted that the Scouting for Food program was a big success. The girls Scout Troop 823 were in charge of this year's program. Boy Scout Troops 101 and 1 also participated.
- Noted that wreaths can still be ordered online during the Boy Scout Troop 101 annual wreath sale. Thanked everyone who supports this annual fundraiser.
- Attended the recent Veterans luncheon at the Senior Center. Thanked the staff for lunch and thanked the Veterans for their service.
- Announced that the Fire Department is again an official drop off site for the Toys for Tots collection program. She added that books are considered an acceptable donation.
- Thanked her fellow Board members, all members of the various Boards and Committees, the volunteers at the schools and Senior Center, as well as all other volunteers in Northborough who make our Town a nice place to live.

Julianne Hirsh

- Apologized for missing the Board's November 8th meeting. Her Mother-in-Law passed away and she was out of Town tending to family matters.
- Noted that the Historic District Commission continues their work on the Howard Street and Brigham Street cemeteries, as well as their preservation plan as part of the Master Plan.
- Noted that the Cultural Council continues to review their grant applications and is discussing a public art project in Town entitled "Go Outdoors Northborough". The project will include

the temporary installation of free standing doors that have been painted by artists with interpretations of Northborough. Those who may be interested in participating can email her through the Selectmen's page on the Town website.

- Noted that the Master Plan Implementation Committee (MPIC) continues to prioritize and plan. Their first priority is how to attract people and businesses to the downtown area.
- Noted that the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) will meet on December 2 to start reviewing their applications.
- Asked that the Board receive an update on the status of the ARPA and other related Covid-19 Relief funds, as well as any other potential funds that may be available. She would like to see the Town provide an opportunity for public input regarding these funds.
- Requested that the new Facilities Manager be invited to a future meeting.
- Extended her appreciation and thanked the Police, Fire and DPW Departments, as well as all of Town staff and the many volunteers who have contributed to making Northborough a place to call home.

T. Scott Rogers

- Attended the recent Veterans luncheon at the Senior Center. Thanked those at the Senior Center who coordinated this event and thanked the Veterans for sharing their stories.
- Attended the ribbon cutting ceremony for Brilla Coffee at 17 West Main Street.
- Noted that the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) delivered their draft report from the Road Safety Audit Walk. He reviewed the report and submitted some comments and corrections back to the CMRPC.
- Thanked Chief Lyver for his monthly report and asked the Chief to speak a little bit about the jail Diversion Program. Chief Lyver indicated that the department secured grant funding to share a licensed clinician with Southborough and Westborough that will respond with an officer to a crisis situation and offer a mental health assessment; and if needed, will get the person transferred to an appropriate facility or hospital. The intent of the program is to divert people with mental illness or substance use disorders out of the criminal justice system. This program has also increased the confidence level of police officers when dealing with persons with mental health issues. The program is funded through a grant from the Department of Mental Health with no cost to the Town.
- Noted that employment opportunities with the Town can be found on the Human Resources page on the Town website.

Leslie Rutan

- Announced that the Fire Department is again an official drop off site for the Toys for Tots collection program. Toys will be collected from November 20th through December 7th from 9am – 6pm. Any questions can be directed to Captain Rob Theve at 508-393-1537.
- Noted that the timing of the traffic lights at the intersections of Hudson Street and Route 20 and Route 135 and Route 20 seem to be off and is resulting in a backup of vehicles. Mr. Coderre responded that the usage of the pedestrian crossing lights throws off the timing of the lights and it takes a couple of cycles for them to get back in sync. Mr. Charpentier stated that the crossing walks at these intersections are busy, adding that he will be happy to reach out to MassDOT to ask them to check the timing.
- Applauded Temporary Senior Center Director Eileen Bogle, her staff and Veterans Agent Justin Sousa for their efforts in hosting the recent Veterans luncheon.

- Noted that the Scout's Scouting for Food collected a record amount of donations for the Northborough Food Pantry and the American Legion Veterans Pantry.
- Thanked those who decorated the Town Common.
- Wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Jason Perreault

- Reminded residents that Toys for Tots donations can be dropped off at the Fire Station or at the "Light up Northborough" event on December 4th. Monetary donations can be made by via a link under Town News on the Town website under the Toys for Tots publication.
- Noted that Elizabeth Bedard has resigned from the Community Affairs Committee. Thanked her for her 4 years of service. Anyone who is interested in serving on this Committee or any other Board or Committee can find vacancies listed on the Town website.
- Extended best wishes for a happy, healthy and safe Thanksgiving and asked that we all appreciate those around us.

John Coderre

- Noted that the Financial Trend Monitoring System Report meeting that was originally scheduled for December 9th will need to be rescheduled as staff needs additional time to close out Fiscal Year 2021 due to all the Federal reporting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chairman Perreault stated that the Public Comment portion of the agenda allows for the public to provide input, comments, questions, or concerns. The Board will not engage or deliberate in any detailed discussion, nor will it take action or make any commitments in real time in response to any public comment. If they are able, present Town staff may respond to any questions that can easily be answered. Those who wish to speak under Public Comment will be admitted to the meeting as an attendee and will be asked to provide their full name and address for the record. Public comment will be limited to 3 minutes per person.

Rachel Armstrong of 10 Hemlock Drive thanked Mitch Cohen, the Community Affairs Committee, the Diversity & Inclusion Committee and the Public Works Department for working collaboratively to add a Menorah to the "Light Up Northborough" event. Noted that the Bartlett Street neighborhood continues to see violations with truck traffic and asked for clarification about enforcement. Mr. Coderre responded that the draft report from the CMRPC may include additional recommendations for truck traffic mitigation. He added that Amazon has made significant progress in reducing truck traffic violations. Addressing these issues will continue to be done in a collaborative fashion with the area businesses. Ms. Armstrong extended her appreciation to everyone for their efforts in this regard.

Bill Pierce of 367 Whitney Street summarized the years of discussions regarding sidewalks by the Board of Selectmen, DPW Director, CMRPC and the Master Plan Committee. He asked why the Town is looking to fund another study on sidewalk needs rather than using the information from the previous studies and presentations. DPW Director Scott Charpentier responded that sidewalk data compilation has been going on for the last several years and included a Town-wide sidewalk inventory, which also included wheelchair ramps and curb material. An assessment of the condition of all sidewalks was performed in 2019. Every other year during the roadway assessments, adjacent infrastructure information is added to the database. Mr. Charpentier added that in 2017 all sidewalks were located. In 2019, the sidewalk conditions were assessed. Prior to

this, the Town assessed all of the guardrails and pavement markings. He indicated that the next step is to develop a sidewalk management plan to accompany the pavement management plan that will be incorporated into the Town's Capital Improvement Plan. The Town has contracted a consultant that will develop a sidewalk management plan defining the funding needs to maintain and improve the sidewalk conditions. Under the complete streets program, which the Town is now pursuing, the same consultant will complete a sidewalk prioritization plan together with a funding mechanism that will allow the Town to apply for complete street grant funding through MassDOT to help with sidewalk connectivity. In December, the Town will receive the draft sidewalk management plan, that will include three-funding scenarios for sidewalk improvements. The expectation is to bring this forward at Town Meeting with a plan for expenditures for sidewalk rehabilitation. It is a long process with a lot of culmination coming in the next two years with the sidewalk management plan and the complete streets program acceptance.

Lisa Maselli of 13 Maple Street stated that she is looking forward to the addition of the Menorah to the "Light Up Northborough" event and future multicultural celebrations and events. She offered her condolences to the Hirsh family. She noted that the Planning Board heard a presentation recently about a development project at 75 Ridge Road. During the presentation it came to light that a large clean-up of gas cans, gas tanks, propane tanks, trash and an abandoned car is necessary before any development can begin. She asked if the Board of Health and/or the Zoning Officer investigates these matters. Chairman Perreault stated that the Board will take her comments under advisement.

Suzy Cieslica of 8 Emerson Road thanked the Health, Police, Fire and DPW Departments, as well as everyone else that volunteered at the children's vaccine clinic at the Melican Middle School.

APPROVAL/EXECUTION OF PLOWING AND TREATMENT AGREEMENTS FOR PRIVATE WAYS FOR THE 2021/2022 WINTER SEASON

DPW Director Scott Charpentier stated that this is the last step in the annual process to prepare for plowing and treatment of private ways.

Selectman Hirsh moved the Board vote to approve and execute the plowing and treatment agreements for the 2020/2021 Winter Season for Harris Avenue and Maple Lane; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	"aye"	Rutan	"aye"
Hirsh	"aye"	Perreault	"aye"
Rogers	"aye"		

RECOMMENDATION FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE BOARD OF REGISTRARS

Chairman Perreault noted that the Interview Subcommittee minutes were included in the meeting packet for review by Board members of the recommendation being made this evening.

Selectman Rutan moved the Board vote to appoint Veronica Mueller to the Board of Registrars for a partial two-year term to expire on April 30, 2023 as recommended by the Interview Subcommittee; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

SET MEETING SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY – APRIL

Selectman Hirsh moved the Board vote to set the meeting schedule for January to April 2022 as follows:

January 10 & 24
February 14 & 28
March 14 & 28
April 11
April 25 – Town Meeting (may be subject to change)

Selectmen Wixted seconded the motion; the roll call was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

CONSIDER CLOSING TOWN OFFICES, DPW AND SENIOR CENTER ON DECEMBER 23 AT 12 NOON

Mr. Coderre asked that the Board consider the closing of Town Offices, DPW and the Senior Center at 12 Noon on December 23rd to allow non-essential employees additional time with their families this Holiday season.

Selectman Rutan moved the Board vote to close the Town Offices, DPW and Senior Center on Tuesday, December 24, 2019 at 12Noon to provide staff additional time with their families this holiday season with the following conditions: 1) staff who are normally scheduled to work this day shall receive their regular rate of pay; 2) in the event that essential staff are called in to work, they shall receive their regular rate of pay; and 3) staff not scheduled to work this day, including staff on scheduled vacation leave or sick leave, shall have such scheduled leave calculated on a full-day basis; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

Mr. Coderre thanked the Board for this kind gesture on behalf of the staff.

EXECUTION OF CEMETERY DEED

Selectman Wixted moved the Board vote to execute Cemetery Deed 1136; Selectman Hirsh seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

OTHER BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

Selectman Rutan moved the Board vote to adjourn; Selectman Rogers seconded the motion; the roll call vote was taken as follows:

Wixted	“aye”	Rutan	“aye”
Hirsh	“aye”	Perreault	“aye”
Rogers	“aye”		

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Diane M. Wackell
Executive Assistant to the
Board of Selectmen

Documents used during meeting:

1. November 22, 2021 Meeting Agenda
2. November 8, 2021 Meeting Minutes
3. Information packet – Tax Classification Public Hearing
4. Light Up Northborough Flyer
5. Memorandum – Menorah Display at Blake Street
6. Plowing and Treatment Agreements
7. BOS Interview Minutes – Recommendations for appointment to Boards and Committees
8. Memorandum – Meeting Schedule
9. Memorandum – Closing Town Offices, DPW and Senior Center on December 23rd
10. Cemetery Deed