

Town of Lunenburg
Select Board Meeting Minutes
Town Hall, 17 Main Street and via Zoom
Tuesday January 9, 2024

Members Present: Michael-Ray Jeffreys, Lou Franco, Tom Alonzo (Remote via Zoom), Renee Emkey

Also Present: Heather Lemieux, Town Manager (Remote via Zoom)

Absent: Caesar Nuzzolo

Public Comment Participants are listed in the minutes

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The meeting was called to order at 6:40 PM by Chair Jeffreys in open session following an executive session that began at 6:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Chair Jeffreys noted that it was being recorded and broadcast live on Lunenburg Public Access Channel, Facebook Live, and would be uploaded to the Lunenburg Access YouTube channel.

BOARD COMMENTS

Member Emkey thanked the DPW for their work during the recent double storm, noting she had no problems getting around at 5 AM. She also acknowledged National Law Enforcement Day and extended appreciation to those in law enforcement.

Member Alonzo echoed the thanks to the DPW and their Director Bill Bernard for their excellent work. He reminded people of the Water District meeting the following day at 6 PM, encouraging eligible voters to attend.

Vice Chair Franco announced the cancellation of the pancake breakfast at the Lunenburg Adult Activity Center due to weather. He provided details about upcoming Master Plan meetings on February 1st at the Adult Activity Center, with sessions from 4-6 PM and 6:30-8:30 PM. Member Franco emphasized the importance of senior participation in the surveys, noting their underrepresentation in responses so far.

Chair Jeffreys inquired about accessing the survey for those not on Facebook. Town Manager Lemieux clarified it was available on the town website, with a printable version to be added.

Chair Jeffreys announced that due to the weather, the Town Manager was participating remotely. He also noted that Selectman Nuzzolo was unable to attend due to military training.

Town Manager Lemieux stated that if weather impacted the opening of town offices and the Adult Activity Center the following day, a notice would be posted.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM OTHER BOARDS

Chair Jeffreys discussed a request from the School Committee regarding guidance on utility costs for the next fiscal year, given the upcoming expiration of the municipal aggregation for

electricity in November. Town Manager Lemieux explained that they would need to consult with their broker but expected to go out to bid in the spring, noting that predicting rates might be challenging given market conditions.

APPOINTMENTS

Ratification of the Town Manager's Appointment of Facilities Superintendent Don Gagne

Town Manager Lemieux requested the board ratify the appointment of Don Gagne as Facilities Superintendent. She provided background on Gagne's work history with the town since 2021 and his performance during interim periods. Lemieux noted that after a thorough search process, Gagne was selected for the permanent position. Board members expressed support for promoting from within and acknowledged Gagne's experience. **Chair Jeffreys moved to ratify the Town Manager's appointment of Don Gagne as Facilities Superintendent. Selectman Alonzo seconded the motion. Roll call vote: Member Alonzo, aye; Member Emkey, Aye; Vice Chair Franco, aye; Chair Jeffreys, aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0).** Town Manager Lemieux confirmed Gagne's official start date in the new role would be that week.

CURRENT BUSINESS

Response to Resident George Burden regarding complaints and request for financial audit

Chair Jeffreys introduced the topic, explaining that resident George Burden had sent numerous complaints and requests, including a request for a financial audit of the police department. Jeffreys noted he had invited Burden and his associate, Jen, to meet with the board for an official response, but the invitation was declined. A follow-up communication was sent encouraging them to attend, but it was also declined.

Jeffreys summarized the nature of Mr. Burden's complaints, which primarily related to living in a condo association and issues with neighbors, snow removal, gun use, police response, and interactions with town officials. A significant portion of these complaints are civil matters between the resident and the condo association, involving disputes related to the rights and responsibilities within that setup. Jeffreys emphasized that these issues fell outside the town's jurisdiction, particularly as they pertain to the condo's rules and regulations.

The volume of communications from Mr. Burden has been substantial, with over 500 emails in the past calendar year alone. This prompted a discussion among board members about how to efficiently handle this situation while ensuring that staff time is not unduly consumed. Board members suggested limiting the time staff spent responding to Burden's communications and referring the resident back to the board for specific matters that require more in-depth discussion. Vice Chair Franco underscored the challenge of responding to such a high volume of correspondence, reiterating that the nature of many of Burden's grievances was unclear and resulted in a significant expenditure of town resources. Member Alonzo expressed a preference for brief and direct responses from staff until Burden addressed previous questions posed by the Town Manager.

Regarding the request for a financial audit of the police department, the board unanimously agreed to deny this request, noting Chair Jeffreys' explanation that the basis for the request appeared to be unsubstantiated claims of embezzlement involving Burden's condo association and police department officials. Chair Jeffreys stressed that no evidence supported these allegations, and without probable cause, the board saw no need to pursue an audit. Town Manager Lemieux confirmed she understood the guidance to continue providing clear, succinct responses.

Class II Auto Dealer License Renewal for The Auto Barn, 53 Chase Road

Member Alonzo noted that Mr. Baker, the business owner, has been a long-standing member of the community, being involved professionally and privately with the town for many years. In support of the motion, Alonzo highlighted Mr. Baker's reputable history and contributions to the town.

Chair Jeffreys asked if there were any additional discussions regarding the renewal, emphasizing the longstanding business relationship between The Auto Barn and the town of Lunenburg, spanning approximately 30 or more years. All documents related to the renewal had been submitted, ensuring that everything was in order.

Member Alonzo moved to approve the Class II Auto Dealer License renewal for Baker Enterprises d/b/a The Auto Barn at 53 Chase Road.

Lou Franco seconded the motion. Roll call vote: Member Alonzo, aye; Member Emkey, Aye; Vice Chair Franco, aye; Chair Jeffreys, aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0).

Status Update on Town Manager Goals

This item was postponed to the following week's meeting.

Vote to open the Annual Town Meeting warrant on January 9, 2024 and close the warrant on March 18, 2024 at 4:00 PM Chair Jeffreys moved to open the Annual Town Meeting warrant on January 9, 2024, and close the warrant on March 18, 2024, at 4:00 PM. Vice Chair Franco seconded the motion. Roll call vote: Member Alonzo, aye; Member Emkey, Aye; Vice Chair Franco, aye; Chair Jeffreys, aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0).

Warrants/Action Items

An accounts payable warrant in the amount of \$1,850,331.23 was presented for approval.

Committee Reports:

School Committee: Member Emkey reported on the recent School Committee meeting, discussing the fiscal year 2025 budget challenges, including the loss of ESSER funds and increased health insurance costs. She noted that the superintendent presented a potential reduction of 28 positions across all schools and the central office, highlighting the significant impact of health insurance costs expected to rise by 8 to 10%. Member Emkey acknowledged the proactive transparency of the School Committee, which has been addressing these budget concerns since the issue became apparent, through both committee meetings and newsletters from the superintendent.

Additionally, the need for community engagement was emphasized, particularly with the anticipated staff cuts resulting from these financial constraints. The next school committee meeting was scheduled to further explore the fiscal year 2025 budget, providing an opportunity for the public to gain a detailed understanding and offer feedback.

Stormwater Task Force: Member Emkey provided an update, where Tim Wilsmer from the planning board was elected as chair. The meeting included a presentation by the DPW Director, Bill Bernard, on the current efforts and expenditure pertaining to drainage and stormwater issues. Member Emkey mentioned plans to explore the feasibility of establishing a stormwater utility,

noting that expertise from Chelmsford would be sought for insights on implementation. Monthly meetings are scheduled, with the next one set for January 18th.

Selectman Franco offered insights from the Master Plan Steering Committee meeting held on January 4th. The primary focus was on boosting responses to the new round of surveys, due by January 25th. Franco detailed the scheduling of public sessions on February 1st at the Lunenburg Adult Activity Center, noting that these meetings aim to foster broader community discussions. He highlighted the importance of participation from the senior community, which is underrepresented in survey responses despite constituting about 30% of the town's population. These meetings are open to the entire public and intended to ensure the master plan reflects a comprehensive cross-section of the community's input.

Upcoming Meeting/Events Schedule The next Select Board meeting will be on January 16th and 23rd.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Town Manager

Town Manager Lemieux thanked the DPW for their efforts during the recent storms and acknowledged National Law Enforcement Day.

Public

Dave Passios inquired about the status of the health care stabilization fund created to buffer against insurance increases. Town Manager Lemieux reported that a portion had been used for the current year's budget, with approximately \$500,000 remaining in the account.

Board

Chair Jeffreys echoed the thanks to the DPW for their excellent snow removal work, noting Lunenburg's roads were consistently well-maintained compared to surrounding communities.

Adjourn

Member Emkey moved to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chair Franco seconded the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Member Alonzo, aye; Member Emkey, Aye; Vice Chair Franco, aye; Chair Jeffreys, aye. The motion passed unanimously (4-0-0). The meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Annie Aubrey

Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

These Minutes were reviewed and approved by the Select Board on:

Tuesday January 21, 2025

Member Tom Alonzo made Motion to Approve minutes from January 9, 2024. Seconded by Member Renee Emkey. All, aye. Passed unanimously (5-0-0).