Select Board Meeting

September 2, 2020

6:08 pm meeting called to order by Neil.

Select Board members present: Mike Bedini, Ericka Oleson and Neil Oleson.

Select board members absent: None

Others present: Jim White, Christine Dobbert, Vicki Winchell, Stanley Brown, Marilyn Brown, Jason C. Green, Ron Bosley, Jeff Loholdt, David Babeau, Dwight Brown, Merritt Burdick, Donna Burdick, Wendy Burdick, Jeremy Burdick, Jesse Burdick, Brad Furlon, Dwight Brown, Rick Leclair, Colleen Hunkler, Kaylyn Hunkler, Steward Hunkler, Glenn Hynick, Charlie LaBatt, Scott Roycroft, Don Dublendorf, Mike Gleason

Ericka Oleson made a motion to approve the minutes from the 8/19/20 meeting. Neil Oleson seconded. Unanimous.

Selectmen:

* Special Permit Hearing held for Better Places Forests
  + Scott Roycroft presented to attendee’s Better Places Forests plan for property at 333 South County Road. They operate for profit conservation memorial forests where clients spread the ashes of loved ones (mixed with soil) at the base of trees in place of cemeteries. There is a 3 ½” marker placed at the base of the tree (not attached to the tree). Clients pick their own tree/location for their ashes. They chose this property for the beautiful view and the healthy forests it holds.
  + They are currently planning to partner with Mass Audubon. Although Mass Audubon is nonprofit, this property would be taxed at a commercial rate.
  + The house on the property would be remodeled into a visitor/welcome center with restroom facilities and plan to upgrade near the house for 20 parking spaces. They have no plans to add any additional structures on the property and plan to have a conservation easement on the property.
  + A soil study has shown there are no adverse impacts on forests from spreading ashes. People come for memorial ceremonies to spread the ashes, there will be no actual funerals held on site. Most usually visit about once per year after.
  + The property would be staffed during the week, open only during daylight hours and closed during the winter months. Expectations estimate approximately 5-20 people per day.
  + Low impact use on the property. The traffic analysis was done during a peak travel time. The project will be done in phases. The want to be good stewards to the land.
  + Several questions were raised by residents:
    - “How many cars per day? As tonight’s presentation is varying from the previous presentation presented to abutters” – Ans. Technical analysis 19 cars per day however based on experience in this business expectations are much lower

Select Board Meeting

September 2, 2020

* + - “Are there any other locations close by?” – Ans. There are currently none close to this area. This property was chosen specifically because it was felt to be very special and the forest is beautiful.
    - “If this is open 5 days per week, which 5?” – Ans. It would be five days that include the weekend as many families like to visit over the weekend.
    - “What is the sound zoning for the town?” -Ans. (town official answered) There is not one. Better Places Forests answered they do try to schedule services around hunting seasons.
    - “A lot of wildlife cross this road. Will there be signs to warn drivers?” -Ans. Neil said it is not a busy road, but the town could certainly put up a sign.
    - “How long have you been in business?” -Ans. They started the business in 2015 and there California property opened in 2016.
    - “If the forest is fully sold out in 20-30 years how do you maintain profit and sustainability?” -Ans. It is a very profitable business that can easily maintain itself. The costs for families range from a few thousand up to twenty thousand dollars. A trust is created that will ensure the property is maintained for years afterwards.
    - “Regarding increased traffic. If you say 8-10 visitors per day, maybe 20, which we know there will be, who will be responsible once you see the traffic increased? We do not have a local police force.” -Ans. What is stated is truly what is believed, 8-10 visitors per day. Visits are by appointment only so there will be control. However, very happy to work with the town to solve any issues that may arise. There is no negative impact expected though.
    - A question was brought up regarding the access to the trails in case a medical emergency. -Ans. They will make the trails ADA accessible. There will be a lot of forest maintenance happening which will create access roads.
    - Christine asked if the trails would be open to all or only customers? The trails will only be open to customers as they are not ready to be trail destination. The property will be staffed and gated but they could offer neighbors the opportunity to walk.
    - Merritt Burdick brought up the fact that two town residents who were unable to attend left letters expressing their concerns for the Selectmen to read. These letters were read aloud.
    - One resident commented he is a living forester and the only concern by residents seems to be change and what is going to happen to the neighborhood. He thinks this is a great project.
    - Another resident brought up the fact that if this property were sold and someone chose to develop it into several parcels it could bring even a higher volume of traffic to the neighborhood than the minimal amount Better Places Forests is estimating.

Select Board Meeting

September 2, 2020

* + Neil took an informal poll of the audience to see how many approved/disapproved of the project. There was 12 in favor, 9 not in favor and some not voting.
  + The Selectmen have decided they will take everything under advisement and make a decision at the next Selectmen’s meeting scheduled for September 16, 2020 at 6 p.m.
* Mike suggested to Christine to include an updated list of the town board members when mailing out the Special Town Meeting notice.
* Selectmen signed the Certificate of Compliance for Phase 2 for Wi-Valley to be paid.
* Mike mentioned the State Police would be performing two details this week.
* Mike has requested Christine schedule a meeting with the Building Inspector regarding the work being done at the Railroad and the need to obtain permits. Several residents have made complaints to Mike regarding the noise levels. Christine has talked to the attorney who has said the Railroad can do whatever they want on the property. Mike has asked Christine to contact the Building Inspector in any case.

Christine Dobbert, Town Administrator:

* School heating systems needs ventilation into the gym, cafeteria, and nurse’s office. The estimated cost is $116,000 to $120,000. The school has asked for the Selectmen’s approval to proceed with an Engineering Study. The costs for this will be paid out of the school’s regular budget. A Town Meeting will then need to be held to vote on the repair costs. All Selectmen agreed the school should proceed with the Engineering study.
* Broadband update: A meeting was held recently. Delays were discussed – Flooding delayed poles, now COVID. They are working at getting the rest of the infrastructure built and working out the kinks of the project. For people who ordered a higher service but not receiving it, they can lower their service however they will not receive more speed without raising their service back up. Once the system is built out and complete, service speeds should be better. They are also trying to get as many families with children installed as possible in case schools must move to remote learning.
* Christine was out last week due to Kidney stones.
* A stray dog was picked up. Christine had to take her to the emergency vet because she birthed a deceased puppy in the office. There is an adoptive family lined up for her.
* Voting went well. It was very busy.
* Christine will be taking Thursday and Friday, September 3rd and 4th off for vacation days.
* School committee has asked to use the town hall for their meetings. There are normally only a few people attending so Christine told them yes. Ericka suggested when the School has their joint union committee meetings, they check with the town first as there are more people in attendance for those than a regular Florida school committee meeting.
* Stephanie Pare has asked Christine for permission to use the Town Hall for one on one work with students for testing. Selectmen approved of this as long as the parents are ok with it.

Select Board Meeting

September 2, 2020

Jim White, Highway Department Supervisor:

* Jim has been looking into the purchase of a new loader and has found one he would like to buy. By going through the military purchasing program it will save the town approximately $15,000. All highway department employees have tried it out and everyone agrees it is a nice machine. It is a good investment and others who have owned this brand have had no complaints. Neil mentioned it will need to go to Special Town Meeting for purchasing. Christine will arrange the Special Town Meeting.
* Working on blacktopping River Road.
* 9/14/20 Some inmates from Berkshire Correctional will be weed wacking River Road.
* Brush hogging roadsides.
* Taking a personal day on Thursday, September 3, 2020 to work on renewing his CDL and Hydraulic license.
* Eric received his Hydraulic license.
* Baystate will be starting online information for CDL.
* Senior Center boiler is being cleaned by West Oil on Friday, 9/4/20 and then the Fire Department and Town Garage on Wednesday, 9/9/20.

Mike Gleason, Fire Department Chief:

* The Fire Department will be doing a live burn at Charlie Briggs house on Moores Road. They have not yet set a date. Mike Bedini expressed concern about the heat of the fire and some wires in the vicinity. Mike Gleason did not feel it would be an issue.
* Mike Gleason will be out on vacation next week.
* Mike Gleason will talk with Suzy Oleson at the Senior Center to arrange the installation of the Fire Departments new washing machine that will be used to wash their turnout gear.

7:36 pm Ericka made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike seconded. Unanimous.