

Minutes of the Brimfield Board of Assessors Meeting held February 16, 2021 (AMENDED)

Location: The Board of Assessors met pursuant to Governor Baker's Order to Suspend Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, Sec.18, and the Governor's Order imposing strict limitation on people gathering in one place, this meeting of the Town of Brimfield Board of Assessors was conducted via remote participation at +1(623)600-3773 Access Code 625935

Meeting called to order via teleconference at 3:06 P.M. by Robert Sullivan, Chair
Roll Call: Present Cynthia Powers-Present Host: Cynthia Poirier, Deputy Assessor

- .17 Meeting Minutes from the February 02, 2021 Board of Assessors Meeting.
Motion made by Cynthia Powers to accept and sign the Minutes as presented. Second by Robert Sullivan. All in favor by roll call vote: Cynthia Powers- I, Robert Sullivan -I Carolyn Haley- Abstained due to absence at that meeting.
- .18 Department Payroll and Bills Motion made by Carolyn Haley to accept and sign the Payroll and Bills. Second by Cynthia Powers.
All in favor by roll call vote: Cynthia Powers- I, Robert Sullivan -I Carolyn Haley-I

Old Business:

The Board to revisit discussion on creating a Crumbling Foundation Policy.
Carolyn Haley made a motion to accept the proposed policy on crumbling foundations.
Cynthia Powers seconded the Motion. Robert Sullivan called for discussion.
Cynthia Powers asked the Board to consider discussion and then table a final vote until she had an opportunity to consider the discussion questions and finalize her review of the policy being proposed.
Robert Sullivan discussed the portion of the policy that would depreciate the properties with this issue and wanted to confirm with the Deputy Assessor that the depreciation was building specific.
Ms. Poirier confirmed that depreciation is only applied to improvements and never the land.
Mr. Sullivan remarked that the policy showed diligence on the behalf of the assessors and added that changes can be incorporated and updated as needed in the future.
Ms. Haley had no additional comments and was in favor of the policy as written.
Ms. Powers was in agreement the policy was excellent but proposed the motion be tabled until the next meeting.
Ms. Haley amended her motion to approve and asked the motion be substituted to be tabled until the next meeting. Ms. Powers seconded.
All in favor by roll call vote: Cynthia Powers- I, Robert Sullivan -I Carolyn Haley-I

FY2022 Assessors Department Budget

Robert Sullivan attended the recent Finance Committee Meeting and gave the Board a synopsis of what was discussed. Mr. Sullivan explained that his visit was intended to speak to the subjects of stipend increase and balance to the Deputy Assessor's salary in line with expanded duties over the years.
Mr. Sullivan did not present all the data on the positions because he wanted to gather information on more communities like Brimfield, his presence at the meeting was to place the Finance Committee on notice that the Board of Assessors will be submitting a budget that reflects increases.

Mr. Sullivan did want to share his dismay of the events of the meeting and was shocked by the presence of former member of the finance committee now serving on another board seemingly acting in the capacity of a finance committee member.

It was the understanding of Mr. Sullivan that it was a law or by-law that any member of the finance committee could not hold any other paid position in the Town.

When asked Ms. Haley thought Mr. Sullivan was correct that it was the practice, if not a formal policy or by-law. Mr. Sullivan was concerned that many of his questions were answered by Board of Selectmen Liaison Michael Doyle not the Finance Committee, questioning a conflict of procedure as a member of the appointing authority of the Finance Committee.

Ms. Haley asked what kind of questions he was interfering with.

Mr. Sullivan responded stating Mr. Doyle responded to all of his questions as if he were the member of the finance committee. Mr. Sullivan pointed to the need for something to be done surrounding this conflict and allow the Board of Assessors, as in independent elected Board, to mediate salary benchmarks and stipend in the same manner as other elected Boards.

Cynthia Powers asked Mr. Sullivan what the responses were from Michael Doyle.

Mr. Sullivan said that the responses from Michael Doyle were nonspecific, going on to say the work the Board performed didn't justify the 2% increases that were not included in the past three years. Mr. Sullivan told the Board he responded to the statement made by Michael Doyle by explaining the qualification the Board of Assessors members and staff must meet both educational requirements of 40+ hour course with examination and commit to Department of Revenue continuing education to qualify as Assessors. A quorum of qualified Assessors is needed for submission of the tax recap for the community to set the tax rate and any assessor not meeting those requirements is disqualified.

Mr. Sullivan asked Michael Doyle in response, if when comparing to other Boards was that a factor that was taken into account.

Mr. Sullivan felt more thoughtful responses were made by the Finance Committee to that question. Mr. Sullivan went on to explain the improvements made in the Assessors department over the past 10 years and what has evolved within the department, the department as a whole is now serving the town at a high degree of efficiency and professionalism. Mr. Sullivan also shared that the improvements were recognized at the state level as well within the Department of Revenue.

Mr. Sullivan invited comments from the Deputy Assessor.

Cynthia Poirier, Deputy Assessor, responded by going back to the initial posting in 2011 for the sudden vacancy in the Assessors department and the conversation with the Board she had when her volunteering time after the tornado was nearing its end and was offered the position by the Board of Assessors.

Ms. Poirier agreed with Mr. Sullivan's conversation with the Finance Committee in that Assessing is not something one falls into by election or appointment alone, it is a profession.

As Deputy the duties include additional commitment to work toward a balance on the Boards targets for the community in ensuring those goals are met to best serve the taxpayers.

Ms. Poirier revisited the initial job posting and after having delved into the position has since been required to perform many of the expanded duties, many duties that fall under the rolls and responsibilities that were discovered to not previously have been executed along with added responsibilities imposed by the Department of Revenue.

Ms. Poirier agreed with the fact that compensation in commiserate with the duties have not been visited with any input from the assessor's department in over the past so many years. As explained by Mr. Sullivan if there were a sudden vacancy for whatever reason the Assessors would be hard-pressed in finding a suitable replacement at the current compensation structure.

Mr. Sullivan asked to gain a sense from the other members, he proposed seeking clarification on the procedure each independent Board is following when presenting to finance committee.

As Mr. Sullivan understands the procedure, each line item to be considered within the budget should be considered by the Finance Committee solely within each Boards budget request and ultimately be given the opportunity go to Town Meeting with it, with or without recommendation of Finance Committee.

Mr. Sullivan has not known of any changes that point to the Selectmen being involved with Finance Committee, who itself is an independent Board that studies and understands the budget along with its setting process which ends with the final proposed budget going before the legislative body of the Town. Mr. Sullivan is very concerning this process is not being honored or somehow undenounced to him has changed.

In response for input Cynthia Powers said she also understood the Board of Selectmen were not part of playing any role in finance committee meetings or any other independent Boards budget setting process.

Mr. Sullivan then felt he was correct in that no laws had changed surrounding the procedure. Cynthia Powers asked Carolyn Haley if she could address the confusion.

Carolyn Haley agreed the process has always carried out in the manner Mr. Sullivan understands and Boards do submit directly to the Finance Committee and the Finance Committee makes recommendations after discussion and review.

Ms. Haley will try to get clarification about the involvement of Michael Doyle at the Board of Selectmen meeting this evening if the agenda allows.

Ms. Haley stated she also understands it's correct that it's up to the Town Meeting vote and if anyone has questions then they put a hold on the line item to have those questions and concerns discussed.

Cynthia Powers felt it important that the Finance Committee be made aware of the increase in duties of the position of Deputy Assessor as a Department Head, the lack of any clerical support staff and the hourly amount that is being considered.

Robert Sullivan hopes to be seen at an upcoming meeting in March with the Finance Committee. Carolyn Haley will try and obtain clarification as to what an allowable legal procedure is.

Cynthia Powers offered to attend the Finance Committee Meeting.

Robert Sullivan thought it would be a good gesture for the entire Board to attend the Finance Committee meeting and invited the Board to watch the live stream of the meeting he attended to address the questions of the Finance Committee.

Ms. Powers will move forward and watch the meeting to get more facts and have explanations available on the need of just compensation.

Cynthia Poirier will send the budget proposal with line items completed for review to Mr. Sullivan but wanted to clarify that the Board is seeking to catch up for the years the 2% increase was overlooked; resulting in FY22 Budget to be at a 6% for stipend increase totaling \$533.00.

The Board did want the budget to reflect the increase for stipend included at 6%.

Ms. Poirier offered to share some studies she had recently concluded in her capacity as Board of Assessor Chair in Holland for the Finance Board to consider.

The Town of Holland will be facing the retirement of its Principal/Deputy Assessor and the Board has benchmarked the position in hopes to have funds in place to attract a suitable candidate.

Ms. Poirier will share those salary study results for comparison.

Mr. Sullivan asked all the Board members and Deputy Assessor if they would be interested in attending the next Finance Committee meeting?

Cynthia Powers as indicated earlier was a yes.

Carolyn Haley did not feel her presence was necessary, she supports the actions of the Chair.

Cynthia Poirier was amenable to be available to answer questions.

Cynthia Powers wants to examine the other communities' duties as well as department total line item for all staff salaries when considering the comparisons.

Ms. Powers felt strongly that Brimfield's ability to manage the entire department with one staff member is a benefit to the Town in itself and just compensation for all the duties that encompasses is warranted.

Robert Sullivan would like to make simple comparisons west of 495 sector and not have a lot of extraitalian. Cynthia Poirier agreed and asked if the Board had viewed the recently conducted UMass study, although it is somewhat inconclusive it was an excellent launching point for the Holland Study.

Mr. Sullivan will revisit that study and would like to obtain the recent Holland Study.

Ms. Poirier will be available to address any issues of the complexity when the salaries are compared, In Holland Ms. Poirier looked at both current positions, total department staff salary and also postings for positions to see where the profession is going due to the shortage of qualified assessors.

In closing Ms. Poirier thought it was a good opportunity to have the members and staff present due to the fact that the benchmark that had been done independently by the finance committee was an older study that it may not have taken into consideration the expanded duties of the Deputy Assessor position and was perhaps based on the posting and description for the clerical position, this could all be a misunderstanding of the position used for comparison.

Ms. Haley reminded the Board to be sure and post a meeting if they were going to join at the same time. Ms. Poirier will post the meeting once the time is confirmed by Robert Sullivan.

Permit Pro was not discussed at this meeting and will be revisited at a future meeting.

Robert Sullivan asked the members if they had any further business to discuss, having None, a motion to adjourn was made by Cynthia Powers. Second by Robert Sullivan.
All in favor by roll call vote: Carolyn Haley -I Cynthia Powers- I, Robert Sullivan -I
Adjourned at 3:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

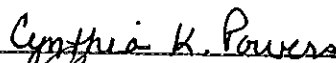



Cynthia S. Poirier

Deputy Assessor

Date: 03/02/2021

BOARD OF ASSESSORS



w/ Amended.