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MINUTES
SELECT BOARD
HARWICH TOWN HALL
732 MAIN STREET, HARWICH MA
MONDAY, JULY 21, 2025
5:00 P.M. EXECUTIVE SESSION
6:00 P.M. - REGULAR MEETING

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING: Chair Donald Howell, Vice Chair Peter Piekarski, Clerk Mark Kelleher, Member Jeffrey Handler & Member Anita Doucette

ALSO PARTICIPATING: Assistant Town Administrator Meggan Eldredge & Executive Assistant Jennifer Clarke

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Howell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Mr. Kelleher moved that the Select Board enter into Executive Session to discuss the items as outlined below, 2nd by Mr. Handler. The vote was 4-0-0 with Mr. Howell, Mr. Handler, Mr. Kelleher & Ms. Doucette all voting aye by roll call

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. Pursuant to MGL c. 30A §21(a)(7) to comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements, the Open Meeting Law, MGL c. 30A §§ 22(f), (g) to review, approve and or discuss the possible release of executive session meeting minutes dated May 12, 2025, June 16, 2025, June 23, 2025, June 30, 2025 & July 14, 2025
B. Pursuant to MGL c.30A section 21 (a)(3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining for all town unions and non-union personnel and or contract negotiations with non-union personnel and the Chair has determined that open session would have a detrimental effect on the town's bargaining position
C. Pursuant to G.L. c. 30A, sec. 21(a)(2) to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with non-union personnel and to conduct contract negotiations with non-union personnel: Acting Town Administrator

Mr. Howell reported that the board approved but did not release all of the executive minutes. The board did also approve a pay adjustment for the Assistant Town Administrator who is now the Acting Town Administrator. The adjustment is a negotiated equitable change in her pay to reflect the extra responsibility that she has taken on. Any other contract negotiations are on going and cannot be divulged.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Howell invited everyone to join in the Pledge of Allegiance.

STAFF COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Eldredge reviewed the committee vacancy list dated July 15, 2025 that was provided in the packet. Citizens interest forms can be found at www.harwich-ma.gov or in the Town Administration Office.

Mr. Kelleher asked if this number of vacancies greater than normal. Ms. Eldredge responded that is not but what is out of the ordinary is the Conservation Commission having 2 full and 2 alternate positions vacant as well as the 3 alternate vacancies on the Zoning Board of Appeals. The town would like to fill these positions so there are no quorum issues.

Mr. Kelleher asked the town has ever had a volunteer appreciation day. Mr. Howell responded that the town has started looking into that.

Mr. Howell said that as many towns do, Harwich relies heavily on its volunteers. He pointed out that even the regulatory bodies do not require a person to have a special degree or training and that training can be given once on a committee. All the town is looking for is a board or committee members honest judgement.

WEEKLY BRIEFING

Ms. Eldredge gave the Phase 3 sewer extension update, and a two week look ahead, highlighting the areas of work. Information is available on the Town website.

Mr. Howell announced that the public will see reoccurring items under correspondence in the packet each week. This is to show that the board is keeping focused on their key objectives and staying on their timeline.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

No public comments/announcements were heard.

PRESENTATIONS

A. Presentation of the Community Action Plan by Crescendo Consulting

Health Director Carrie Schoener was present along with research manager Nicole Hallas from Crescendo Consulting who was present remotely. Ms. Hallas has been working with the Harwich Health Department and other local partners to come up with this community action plan. The plan was created because residents are facing real challenges that affect their health and wellbeing. The Health Department wanted to identify steps that the town and county can take to make a difference. This plan offers realistic actions that were given as input from town staff, regional departments and community groups. There were surveys, interviews and working group meetings held with various department representatives. The focus was on what is already happening and what is possible Ms. Hallas talked about making the plan work with high level strategies for success and to leverage what is already working. Immediate action priorities could include public health education, substance use and opioid outreach, food insecurity support, mental health, access to healthcare and disease prevention measures. Transformational initiatives include housing, childcare, jobs, costs of living, transportation and activities for youth. Many of these matters are connected and progress made in one area can help others.

Next steps are that the final report will be shared publicly. Leadership for items can be prioritized based on readiness, with some action items being ready now and others needing time and support.

Mr. Kelleher thanked Ms. Schoener for coordinating this effort and asked what the first couple of immediate needs would be. Ms. Schoener responded that it would be cataloging our resources and getting them all in one place where people can easily find them. When people are in crisis, they want to be able to know where to turn. The Health Department has an intern from the Department of Public Health who is working on creating an opioid resource guide. Helping to support food insecurity by supporting the peoples garden and the people's fridge program is something that the Health Department is diligently working on and is coming together nicely.

Mr. Kelleher asked what the Smart Dart Access is. Ms. Schoener responded that it is a bus service that is offered by the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority.

Mr. Kelleher inquired about the vaccine clinics in schools. Ms. Schoener responded that children can get their vaccines outside of school, but that vaccines can also be brought into the schools if needed. There may be new students in the district who are unsure where to turn to in the community. The vaccines would be administered by the Visiting Nurse Association or the Barnstable County nurses.

Mr. Piekarski would like to see it streamlined where information can be found and accessible so that people know what resources are available. He noted that he is happy to hear that Harwich offers several of the items that are identified in the action plan.

Mr. Kelleher asked if there is cost sharing between towns currently. Ms. Schoener responded that there is a recovery coach through Outer Cape Health that is shared between communities and Harwich pays 1/3 of the cost. She would like to explore other funding opportunities with community sharing. Mr. Kelleher agreed that we should be looking at combining and sharing services.

Mr. Handler asked how the participation in the survey was. Ms. Schoener responded that they did not have as many respondents as they would have liked, maybe 30 in the Town of Harwich and just over 200 respondents all together. Mr. Handler said that his concern is that participation in surveys is notoriously shy for a variety of reasons. He feels that the mental health crisis is the most widely underserved part of our healthcare system. Mr. Handler would like to try to find a way to increase the number of participants on the surveys to get a more robust picture of what is happening in town. He would like to work with the Health Department to see if we can get a larger pool of candidates to participate in surveys. Ms. Schoener agreed that she would love more participation. She added that they are planning a community forum regarding opioid use to be held in the fall.

Mr. Howell said that we will need to have a focus of what is sustainable within our own funding abilities. Ms. Schoener agreed and added that outside funding will eventually taper off. Mr. Howell added that the Cape has a lousy support system for minor and adolescent mental health issues. The opioid use of seniors is driven in a different way that with kids. Ms. Schoener agreed and said that they are exploring other avenues for tackling some of these items.

Mr. Howell appreciated the effort that everyone put into this plan.

Mr. Piekarski commented that there was a big inquiry into communities that were not spending their opioid funds. He asked where Harwich is with the funds received and funds expended. Ms. Schoener responded that over the last couple of years, Harwich has received close to $300,000 and have spent about $80,000 as a rough number. The way that the funds are distributed does not make them easy to spend because it is unknown when the funds are coming in or for how much. Ms. Schoener responded that they are trying to be frugal with the funds that they have.

CONSENT AGENDA

A. Vote to appoint Election Workers from names submitted by the Harwich Democratic and Republican Town Committees

Mr. Kelleher moved to appoint the Election Workers from names as submitted by the Harwich Democratic and Republican Town Committees, 2nd by Mr. Handler and approved 5-0-0.

B. Approve the Select Board Meeting Minutes from July 14, 2025

Mr. Kelleher moved to approve the Select Board Meeting Minutes from July 14, 2025, as printed, 2nd by Mr. Handler and approved 5-0-0.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Vote to approve a special permit application for a one-day entertainment and one-day liquor license (all alcohol) for Cape Cod Commercial Fisherman's Alliance for an event to be held on August 2, 2025, from 5:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. at 100 Oak Street

Mr. Kelleher moved to approve a special permit application for a one-day entertainment and one-day liquor license (all alcohol) for Cape Cod Commercial Fisherman's Alliance for an event to be held on August 2, 2025, from 5:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. at 100 Oak Street, 2nd by Mr. Handler and approved 5-0-0.

B. Vote to approve a new Common Victualler's License Application for Bagel Hound, Inc. d/b/a Bagel Hound, 297 Route 28

Mr. Kelleher moved to approve a new Common Victualler's License Application for Bagel Hound, Inc. d/b/a Bagel Hound, 297 Route 28, 2nd by Mr. Handler and approved 5-0-0.

C. Discussion and possible vote on Town Administrator Screening Committee

Mr. Howell feels that we will likely need the Town Administrator Screening Committee regardless of who the contract for recruitments services is awarded to. The board needs to discuss what the committee will look like, including how it gets populated. Mr. Howell's preference is that it would be a 5-member committee, with each Select Board member having a pick for a committee member.

Ms. Doucette said that she would like to have at least one appointee from every member of the Select Board on the committee.

Mr. Kelleher commented that all the Select Board members could have similar choices and suggested that there be categories of people to choose from as committee members. If the Select Board members individually choose a person, you might not get the diversity that you are looking for.

Mr. Howell said that the committee doesn't have to be topped out at 5. That it could be 7 or 9 but it should be an odd number.

Mr. Handler said that he thinks that having each Select Board member choose a committee member works for him. Then possibly the board could deliberate on 2 more people that they all think would be a good fit for the committee. Getting above 7 members could be cumbersome. Mr. Handler feels that the Select Board represents a good cross section of what Harwich is about.

Mr. Howell asked to for the Select Board members to think about this for additional discussion next week.

Ms. Eldredge reminded the board of the presentation that was made last week by Groux White and that part of their proposal was to guide the Select Board in choosing a selection committee, creating a charge and advertising who should be on the committee. The board does have time to put this committee together. Mr. Howell noted that it is a policy decision of the board and that he is trying to figure out how they will arrive at populating the committee as opposed to just coming up with 9 names and then pairing it down.

Mr. Piekarski said that when he came into tonight's meeting, he was leaning towards a 5-member committee with each Select Board member having a selection but is now not sure that the goal would be accomplished through the 5. He would be happy to continue the discussion on if the board wants to increase the committee membership to 7 but is also not sold on sending it to 7 people. If it ends up being the will of the board, then he will agree to it. The other takeaway from the presentation was that the Select Board would choose the Chair of the selection committee. Mr. Piekarski's other preference is that when names are brought forward, that they are not the names of people that we see volunteer on every board and committee in town. There should be diversity on the selection committee and people who see things differently. He added that he is not excluding existing volunteers, but that the board needs to potentially find others that can add value.

D. Discussion and possible vote on Brooks Academy Museum Designer Selection Committee

Mr. Howell thanked Ms. Eldredge for putting this information together. Ms. Eldredge said that in accordance with M.G.L. C. 7C, a request for proposals for design work will be issued for the Brooks Academy Museum Improvements Design. Proposals must be submitted by interested architects or engineers by the deadline of August 20, 2025. A qualifications based evaluation of proposals is required by the General Law and a Designer Selection Committee must be appointed by the Select Board. The committee will be charged with evaluating the qualifications of the proposer and providing a recommendation to the Select Board to award a contract for services. This is not a review of the design plans, it is a review of the qualifications, references and approach to the project. Each member would use a standard designer selection scorecard to evaluate each proposal.

Ms. Eldredge said that in conjunction with the Facilities Maintenance Manager, she is recommending a 5-member selection committee consisting of herself, Sean Libby, Facilities Maintenance Manager, Duncan Berry, Chair of the Planning Board, Lynne Zalesak, Member of the Brooks Academy Museum and a representative of the Owners Project Management Team (RGB Architects).

Ms. Zalesak was present remotely and said that any thing the Select Board needs her to do, she will be there.

Mr. Piekarski asked what would happen if Mr. Berry was not available to serve on the committee. Ms. Eldredge responded that a new request would have to be made for a different member, but that the board could vote an alternate tonight as well. Mr. Howell feels that Mr. Berry will be available.

Mr. Handler moved to approve the Brooks Academy Museum Design Selection Committee as presented in the packet, 2nd by Mr. Kelleher and approved 5-0-0.

E. Discussion about sewer easements and possible fall town meeting

Mr. Howell said that he has concerns and that to do what we promised at Town Meeting, the money has to be available and construction contracts signed by June 30th. There is an issue that easements will need to be granted, with some being temporary and one permanent. Town

Meeting will need to approve these easements. The board would either need to commit to a fall Town Meeting or take a gamble for a May Town Meeting and hope that everything can be put together in 5 weeks.

Ms. Eldredge confirmed that there will be a need for several temporary easements and one permanent easement in the Great Sand Lakes area for sewering. The engineer has identified the easements and is working with the Department of Public Works to identify map and parcels and owners. We know that we can get all the paperwork in line and be ready to go once Town Meeting approves the easements, knowing that we can still put things out to bid with ad alternates. If for some reason the one permanent easement is not approved, then 3 parcels on Lakeside Terrace would not be sewered. The engineer has advised staff that the believe that they can get this done in weeks following a Town Meeting. While it would be great to have a fall Town Meeting, it would not be detrimental to the project to wait until the spring.

Mr. Howell said that should something quirky happen with a fall Town Meeting, we would still have the May Town Meeting to fall back on. He recognized that the fall Town Meeting would have to be done in late October and that this has not been run by the Town Clerk yet either.

Mr. Piekarski said that if there are other matters that can happen at a fall Town Meeting, then he would be all for it. If the town is looking for one permanent easement and a few temporary ones, he does not see the need for a fall Town Meeting. Mr. Howell said that no other items for a fall Town Meeting are contemplated at this time, but that a decision would need to be concluded sometime in the last week of August.

F. Discussion and possible vote regarding Veteran's Agent

Mr. Piekarski said that he had heard a rumor that our Veteran's Agent was retiring.

Greg Quilty, Director of Veteran's Services was present and stated that technically, he is Harwich's agent. He is the agent in each town which is what is required in each district. There is a new Veteran's Agent coming on board starting September 1st. In the meantime, he has been in Harwich for 4 days out of the last 4 weeks, along with another member from Veteran's Services. Mr. Quilty reviewed all of the services that the Veteran's Agent provides and noted there will be no disruption in benefits during this transitional period.

Mr. Piekarski said that he wanted to make sure that Harwich had coverage. Additionally, he asked what the process is if there is an individual who would be interested in working for Veteran's Services. Mr. Quilty responded that vacancies are advertised in the Cape Cod Times and on Indeed, as well as word of mouth.

Mr. Quilty said that their Hyannis office is open 5 days a week.

Mr. Howell asked to express the thanks from the Select Board to Shawney Carroll for her work.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Vote to accept and authorize the Select Board to sign the Monomoy Regional School Committee letter

Mr. Howell said that the urgent need is that the portion of the school budget takes up a large portion of tax receipts.

Mr. Piekarski said that he has no issue with the letter as presented in the packet. He believes that the school board is where this belongs right now because they can open the agreement at whatever time they see fit. The important piece is that they can do it and will help Harwich and Chatham know where the elected officials stand on this matter. If the school committee chooses not to open the agreement, then we can look at other options, such as bringing it before Town Meeting as a non-binding question. The focus of opening the agreement should be to look at the funding formula and method of assessing costs within the district.

Chair of the Monomoy Regional School Committee Meredith Henderson was present. It was stated that the committee is having a kick-off session on Thursday.

Ms. Henderson said that while she cannot speak for the whole committee or provide a lot of insight at this time, she as Chair was to bring this to light. The Harwich Select Board and the school committee need to be transparent about the agreement. Everyone needs to be able to understand what the regional agreement is, how it came to be and what the assessment formulas are. The first thing that the committee will do at their workshop is dig into the regional agreement and understand how the towns came together, looking at the formula funding as well as the census and enrollment, to help all committee members be on the same page. While she is not speaking for the full committee, Ms. Henderson said that she feels most members agree that this conversation needs to happen in Harwich as well as Chatham.

Mr. Howell said that the biggest point that we need to make is that Harwich is not saying that this isn't fair. Within the context of our town budget, we are at about 90% of our levy limit. It starts with Harwich, but since we are the overwhelmingly majority of the funding source, it will have an impact. We need to make sure that this is sustainable. Ms. Henderson responded that the changes that were made in 2022 did help the situation and thinks that the conversation needs to continue.

Mr. Howell feels that the letter would be a good starting point, and that Harwich is looking for an open and honest discussion.

Mr. Kelleher commented that the place for discussion on the agreement should be with the town Select Boards. This is primarily a financial goal rather than educational and he thinks that it would be better under the purview of the boards. He did bring up the topic of an ad-hoc committee which could bring expertise to get everyone through this process. Ms. Henderson agreed that ultimately, this is the job of the Select Board.

Mr. Piekarski feels that we have the right people in place and is not sure that we need to go out and bring in experts when we have the experts that do this every day. He knows that the discussion needs to happen or there will be issues down the road. The first step is to have the agreement opened and have an open and honest discussion between each community. Mr. Howell added that there is a lot of ground that can be covered aside from looking at the funding formula.

Mr. Handler agreed that there needs to be an acknowledgement that the agreement has been reopened. He wants to make sure that there is an overarching theme that we are not losing the importance of education for the students while working through this process. Mr. Handler feels that adding an ad-hoc committee would confuse things and agreed that the right people are already in place. Information should be given back and forth and real time and the only possible way for a best outcome is for communication to happen.

From what is she hearing across the board, Ms. Doucette agreed that the first step is to send the letter and grow from there.

Mr. Piekarski moved to approve and authorize the Select Board to sign the Monomoy Regional School Committee letter as presented in the packet, 2nd by Mr. Kelleher and approved 5-0-0.

B. Discussion and possible vote relating to Finance Director

Mr. Howell reported that the board is no longer engaged in conversations with the previous candidate and that the necessity exists for the board to go back out to fill the Finance Director position. Ms. Eldredge and Mr. Howell have been talking about putting together a request for proposals.

Mr. Piekarski noted that the Finance Director role is so critical to where we are going that it needs to be made a priority, and we need to find the right candidate. He would entertain soliciting a search firm to find a school of candidates to fill this role. Mr. Howell asked if that was done for the last search. Ms. Eldredge responded that it was not because it was less than $10,000. If less than $10,000, we can use best management practices. The Collins Center would not require a contract no matter the price.

Mr. Howell said that he believes that Groux White would have the ability to do this work.

Mr. Piekarski added that he would be happy to reduce the scope and work to see what can be done. Ms. Eldredge responded that she would need to have the job description and salary range. Aside from that, the whole recruitment package is ready.

Mr. Kelleher asked if this could be grouped in with Groux White and see if he could take it on. Ms. Eldredge responded that it would be a separate contract, and she would have to solicit a quote from him and others.

Mr. Handler commented that in discussions with other candidates, a certain part of the job description kept coming up. He is not sure if there needs to be a discussion at the Select Board level regarding remote work. He would not want to send the same description out that was sent before.

Mr. Howell said that the Select Board could start having conversations at their next meting about developing a remote work policy.

Mr. Piekarski moved to direct the Acting Town Administrator to solicit search consultants to secure a Finance Director for the Town of Harwich using best management practices with 30b, 2nd by Ms. Doucette and approved 5-0-0.

CONTRACTS

A. Discussion and vote to award contract to Groux White for Executive Recruitment Services in the amount of $12,450.00

Ms. Eldredge reviewed the contract as outlined in the packet.

Mr. Piekarski said that he has no problems with the contract, however, based on conversations last week and this week, he would like to bring this back in a meeting or 2 so the Select Board can discuss the particulars. He does not want to start the clock and feel pressure to make decisions if things are not clear. Ms. Eldredge pointed out that the proposal says that firm will work in consultation with the Harwich Select Board. She added that she could reach out to Groux White tomorrow to ask about timing and while she does not think it will change the price, it would push the timeline out a couple of weeks.

Mr. Howell agreed to bring this topic back next week.

B. Discussion and vote to approve the 2025 Community Preservation Act Agreement with Harwich Conservation Trust for the Cape Cod Rail Trail Land Preservation Project in the amount of $500,000.00

Ms. Eldrege reviewed the contract as provided in the packet.

Mr. Piekarski moved to approve the 2025 Community Preservation Act Agreement with Harwich Conservation Trust for the Cape Cod Rail Trail Land Preservation Project in the amount of $500,000.00, 2nd by Mr. Kelleher and approved 5-0-0.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Ms. Eldredge reported that she has signed the FY26 contract with the Visiting Nurses Association for an amount not to exceed $8000. The cost of the contract has increased from FY25 from $4000 to $8000. This increase was based on the six-month invoice balance of $5,801 on February 1, 2025. The annual contract provides for services such as maternal and child health visits, communicable disease surveillance and wellness clinics to provide immunizations. The Health Department staff utilizes the services of the VNA to augment public health programming.

SELECT BOARD MEMBER REPORT

Mr. Handler requested an update on the Walther Road stairs as well as an update from Dan Pelletier and how he is being utilized. Mr. Handler also asked for the Affordable Housing Trust discussion to be put back on the agenda.

Mr. Kelleher reported an article in the Cape Cod Times where there was a mention of incentive payments to property owners who rent their properties to year-round residents, that it unlocks existing homes for local needs.

Mr. Piekarski commented that when the Police Chief and Fire Chief were before the board to talk about the July 4th events, there was discussion about a debrief following the weekend. He wondered if there was a plan to debrief with the department head's and if not, could one happen. Mr. Howell responded that he has had the conversation with Ms. Eldredge about having the DPW come forward and work with the Police and Fire Departments for some of the big weekend events.

Mr. Howell said that he and Mr. Handler attended the Cape Verdean festival and that he appreciated everyone for being there.

CORRESPONDENCE

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Piekarski moved to adjourn the meeting of the Select Board at 8:29 p.m., 2nd by Mr. Handler and approved 5-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Clarke
Executive Assistant