

Board of Selectmen Meeting
Grange Hall
August 6, 2014
Regular Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: M. Walter; E. Lyman; E. Malavasi

Also Present: K. Barrows; E. Blaschik; L. Branscombe; R. Casner; D. Chesson; T. Comer; S. Costimeris; W. Cross; D. Denette; T. Dickinson; D. Ganley; W. Ganley; D. Guggenheim; G. Guggenheim; M. Hoover; P. Hoover; J. LaCombe; T. Gelston; P. Lacy; N. Mackinnon; K. Nickerson; E. Odell; W. Peckham; P. Simmons; P. Stricker; L. Stuhlman; G. Thader; L. Treat-Perry; P. Tripputi; S. Wheeler; L. Zemienieski; M. Ziobron

1. First Selectman Walter called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. Approval of Agenda: Motion made by Mr. Walter, seconded by Mr. Malavasi, to approve the agenda as written. Unanimous aye.

Mr. Walter noted that he believed many citizens in the audience were attending to discuss the Center for Community Agriculture and stated that he would allow public comment during the discussion of that agenda item. He requested that, given the large number of people in attendance, individuals limit their comments to a brief statement and not speak for more than 2 to 3 minutes.

3. Approval of Minutes: Special Meeting of July 1, 2014 and Special Meeting of July 28, 2014.

Motion made by Mr. Walter, seconded by Mr. Lyman, to approve the Special Meeting Minutes of July 1, 2014 as written. Unanimous aye.

Motion made by Mr. Walter, seconded by Mr. Malavasi, to approve the Special Meeting Minutes of July 28, 2014 as written. Unanimous aye.

4. Correspondence:
 - A. 2014 STEAP Grant Notification: Mr. Walter called the Selectmen's attention to a copy of a letter in their meeting packets from the State of Connecticut Office of Policy & Management, dated August 5, 2014, advising that the Town's application for a STEAP grant had not been selected for funding this year. Mr. Walter advised that the Town had applied for the STEAP grant for an expansion to Company #1 Firehouse.
5. First Selectmen's Report: Mr. Walter stated that he had no items, other than those on the agenda, to report on.
6. Citizen's Concerns: In response to a question from Ms. Stricker, Mr. Walter advised that the paving work at the Grange Hall/Town Hall site was valued at approximately \$60,000.00. He

agreed to provide Ms. Stricker with additional information regarding paving costs and what accounts they were charged to.

7. Unfinished Business

- A. Tax and Business Incentive Program Application: There was no update on this agenda item.
- B. Blight Ordinance Discussion: There was no update on this agenda item.
- C. Scoville Landing Emergency Right of Way: There was no update on this agenda item.
- D. A.P. Gates Road/Warner Road Drainage Discussion: There was no update on this agenda item.
- E. Center for Community Agriculture Petition with Public Discussion: Mr. Walter advised that several members of the Center for Community Agriculture (CCA) Advisory Committee, Mr. Mansfield, Mr. Ventres, and Mr. Mackinnon, were not able to attend tonight's meeting. He then reviewed several points in Attorney Poliner's letter, dated August 1, 2014, regarding his review of the CCA project and the petition filed with the Town Clerk requesting a Town Meeting on the project. Atty. Poliner's letter stated that, based on the facts, "*... it would appear that the June 19, 2013 Town Meeting has made a definitive policy decision that the town should go forward to create the Center under the direction of the First Selectman, other town officials, employees and designees of the selectman*". Mr. Walter noted that Atty. Poliner's letter further states:

"Because the petition seeks to involve the Town Meeting with administration of the project, specifically the development of the business plan for the commercial kitchen over which the selectmen have authority, and, since the petition requires adoption of the business plan by the Agriculture Commission, which has no specific authority with respect to approval of official acts of the town, the petition does not appear to be for a legitimate and proper purpose and the Board of Selectmen have in their discretion and authority to warn or not warn the special Town Meeting."

Mr. Walter stated that Atty. Poliner's concluding summary in his August 1st letter is that:

"The petition is defective because it involves the Town Meeting in the drafting of the business plan and seeks to require acts that are outside of the authority of the Town Meeting. The drafting of the business plan is not a basic policy decision. It is an administrative work properly within the scope of the authority of the selectmen and other town officials and employees."

Mr. Walter stated that he will, however, suspend the project until the questions of the petition are addressed and he will schedule a number of informational meetings to respond to citizens' concerns and to vet the project. Mr. Walter stated that, in hindsight,

greater communication about the project may have helped dispel some of the misinformation and concern about the project but noted that the project had been mentioned in many issues of the Events magazine that were mailed to all households and that discussions regarding the project had taken place at numerous public Town Board and Commission meetings.

Mr. Lyman discussed the country's shift to a desire for locally grown foods and noted that the commercial kitchen and educational components of the CCA have the potential to foster new agricultural based businesses in town and, as a result, create jobs.

Mr. Malavasi stated that he supports the CCA project for the same reasons that Mr. Lyman mentioned but also because he feels that the development of new agri-businesses in Town will off-set East Haddam's dependence on residential taxes. He advised that he feels it is a good investment of Town funds and that he expects the CCA will be self-sufficient after a few years of operation, based on conversations he had with the other Selectmen during this year's budget process. Mr. Malavasi noted that the plans for the project are evolving but that the center will not be a large facility and preliminary renderings of it resemble a barn-like structure.

Mr. Walter recognized the following individuals:

- Mr. Odell who advised that he was Chairperson of EDC when the Town first conceived the plan for a community agriculture center and brought it to EDC's attention. He stated that he fully supports the project and does not believe that there has been anything "nefarious" in the Selectmen's actions regarding the project.
- Ms. Barrows who read a letter she and Mr. Barrows sent to Meagan Occhiogrosso, Sr. Policy and Communications Aide in the Office of Policy and Management, stating that they "*oppose the construction of a commercial processing kitchen, a/k/a 'Center for Community Agriculture'*" and outlining their concerns about locating the CCA on open space and their feelings that there was a lack of communication regarding the project.
- Mr. Ganley read portions of a letter he received from Mr. Harris regarding the Town's plans to use a portion of the Harris property for an agriculture center.
- Ms. Stricker raised several questions. Ms. Wheeler advised she would review the tapes of the meeting and create a list of all of the questions raised at the meeting regarding the CCA.
- Mr. Cross who stated he is concerned that the Harris' wishes that the property retain its pastoral nature are not being followed.
- Ms. Dickinson stated that the Town already has commercial kitchens at the Senior Center and the Middle School and she does not see the need for a third one. She noted that Senior Center kitchen was supposed to be used during emergencies and

that she had not seen that happen. Mr. Malavasi stated that he was one of the Town's emergency volunteers and advised that during hurricane Irene the volunteers were fed from the meals prepared at the Senior Center. Ms. Dickinson also expressed her concern that pesticides may have contaminated the soil on the Harris property and asked if it had been tested.

- Mr. Thader who stated that he feels the neighbors around the proposed CCA site have been misled and that there has been no public communication regarding the project. Mr. Lyman expressed his frustration that so few citizens attend public Town meetings where such information is discussed and stated that he would welcome any suggestions on how to encourage more attendance at Town meetings.
- Ms. Stuhlman advised that she had contacted Mr. Wait who manages the Greenfield, MA processing center. She stated that Mr. Wait informed her that he had not seen the business plan for East Haddam's project. She stated that the people of East Haddam want to vote on this project. She further stated that she has questions about how the CCA was approved as a STEAP project and how many paid employees will be hired for CCA.

In response to a question raised by Ms. Stuhlman, Mr. Odell advised that Mr. Simmons was interviewed by the EDC Commissioners and hired as the Town's Economic Development Coordinator while Mr. Odell was EDC's Chairman. He stated that Mr. Simmons had been very transparent about his previous employment with the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and that, in fact, that experience was viewed as an advantage in his favor. He noted that the EDC Commissioners and Mr. Simmons agreed that there should be a period of time when he could not interface with his former State associates.

- Ms. Palmer asked how a food processing center qualified as a municipal function and not a commercial function and requested a copy of the list of individuals who have expressed interest in using the facility.
- Mr. Jeff Savitsky stated that he is the coordinator for the Town's Farmers Market and he had surveyed the vendors over the last two months. He advised that 90% of the vendors use their home kitchens to make their products and all of them expressed interest in using a commercial kitchen. He noted that he had surveyed 35-40 vendors on this topic.
- Ms. Treat-Perry inquired about the connection between the CCA and the schools. Mr. Walter advised that he had asked the Ag Commission to reach out to the schools, however, they have not yet reported back to him. He also confirmed that, at this time, no funding has been set aside to implement a CCA educational component for the Town schools.
- Ms. Costomiris stated she likes the idea of the CCA but is concerned about liability for the Town and asked what kind of security would be set up.

- Ms. Guggenheim asked if any other site was considered for the CCA.
- Mr. Hoover asked if the Selectmen would vote at tonight's meeting on its response to the petition. Mr. Walter stated that they would.
- Mr. Gelston asked several questions about future CCA informational meetings and, in response, Mr. Walter stated that he would heavily publicize the dates of the meetings, secure a space that can accommodate all the citizens that would like to attend the meetings, and the content of the meetings would be to provide additional information on the project and respond to the questions that were raised at tonight's meeting.
- Ms. Lacone requested a clarification of "employees" in the context of the CCA.
- Mr. Simmons, who advised that East Haddam's tax base is heavily dependent on residential taxes. He noted that the town's commercial and industrial taxes represent approximately 8% of its Grand List which is about half of what it is in surrounding towns. He stated that it is his job to support economic development in East Haddam but that the lack of proximity to major highways and the stated goals of the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development limit the types of industries that can be encouraged to develop here. He advised that agriculture is a growth business in Connecticut and it fits well with residents' desires to retain the rural nature of the Town and the Plan of Conservation & Development's endorsement of agricultural businesses as acceptable economic growth. Mr. Cross stated that he did not see how the CCA would help the Town's tax base.

Mr. Walter closed the floor to public comment and stated he would try to address all the questions that were raised at tonight's meeting at the informational meetings he sets up. The Selectmen had no further discussion on this agenda item.

Motion made by Mr. Walter, seconded by Mr. Lyman, to deny the petition to warn a Special Town Meeting regarding the Center for Community Agriculture. Unanimous aye.

8. New Business

- A. Volunteer of the Month (June): Mr. Walter called the Selectmen's attention to a copy of an email in their meeting packets from Brad Parker, dated August 4, 2014, nominating Jim Ventres, Sr. as Volunteer of the Month. Mr. Parker's email stated, in part, "*[Mr. Ventres] spent many years as a Little League volunteer, coach and officer. He was a driving force in forming the local American Legion baseball program and continues to be involved. He has also served for decades with the American Legion Post in town.*"

Motion made by Mr. Walter, seconded by Mr. Lyman, to name James Ventres, Sr. as Volunteer of the Month for June 2014. Unanimous aye.

B. Tax Refunds: There were no tax refunds for consideration at this time.

9. Public Comment: There was no additional public comment.

10. Selectmen's Discussion: There was no additional Selectmen's discussion.

11. Adjournment: There being no additional regular business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Walter, seconded by Mr. Malavasi, to adjourn the meeting at 9:06 p.m. Unanimous aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Emmett Lyman, Secretary

Recorded