

MINUTES
SELECT BOARD
TOWN OF PETERBOROUGH
Monday, March 16, 2020 – 5:00 PM
1 Grove Street, Peterborough, New Hampshire

Present: Tyler Ward, Karen Hatcher, Bill Taylor

Also Present: Rodney Bartlett, Nicole MacStay, Chief Ed Walker, Chief Scott Guinard, Alison Kreutz

Chair Ward opened the meeting at 5:05 PM.

Chief Ed Walker – COVID-19 Update

Chief Walker recognized this is a “rapidly changing situation.” Last week President Trump declared a National Emergency, and Governor Sununu declared a State of Emergency. The Town has opened EOC (Emergency Operation Center) on a limited basis to work on planning and coordination of needed measures. Expenses incurred after March 12th are considered covered for reimbursement under the State of Emergency Declaration. The Finance Department has established a COVID-19 specific code to apply to those expenditures to help keep track.

Report on Focus Areas

Town Services

Chief Walker: “Everything was normal until it wasn’t.”

Though the Library is now closed, limited services still offered (they are still lending via curbside item pickup, and are offering programs online). Wi-fi is still available in the library parking lot.

Chair Ward announced that those watching the meeting on Facebook Live can ask questions in real time.

Recreation has postponed interior activities. At the moment, outdoor activities are still permitted. Spring programs are on hold.

American Red Cross will hold a Blood Drive at the Community Center on Wednesday from noon to 5:00 PM. The Red Cross has been struggling to collect donations and, as considerable modifications have been made to the rules and screenings have been modified to go “above and beyond,” Administration and Chief Walker felt comfortable allowing the event.

Healthcare

Hospitals and licensed facilities required to limit guests. Monadnock Community Hospital is following suit, and certain entrances have been locked to ensure appropriate screening of individuals who enter the hospital.

A meeting with Town administration, healthcare partners, schools, and retirement communities is scheduled for this Wednesday afternoon (March 18th).

Ms. Laura Gingras (Vice President of Community Relations at MCH) added that caring for patients and maintaining the safety of the workforce are Monadnock Community Hospital’s “number one priority.” All testing is per order of a physician, so people are encouraged to call their primary care physician if they are not feeling well, rather than showing up unannounced at the hospital.

The only visitors allowed are for OB delivery patients and hospice patients, and that is limited to one healthy visitor at time. Fitness portion of the Bond Wellness Center has closed. “We are continuing to assess every day.”

Ms. Hatcher asked if PT was still open at the Bond Wellness Center. Ms. Gingras replied that it was just the fitness area that was closed, but “those decisions are being made as we speak.”

School District

Chief Walker continued that ConVal made the decision last week to close schools to 'in-person' learning. One of the resulting concerns was how to provide food to students who are on free/reduced lunch program and students who benefit from the End 68 Hours of Hunger program. The district is working on logistics of getting those meals to those students with food security issues, and has applied for a waiver so they can provide food to all students within the district, if needed. They are also working to find the most appropriate place within individual communities for food distribution. There was a food pantry that operated out for students out of SMS, which is now closed, so they are working on finding a solution to that as well.

Ms. Hatcher said, regarding the waiver Chief Walker mentioned, that a similar program was organized in Keene.

Community Service Organizations

The Peterborough Food pantry, which is regional, is focusing in on Peterborough families. There are about 40 older individuals and single adults who consistently utilize the Food Pantry. The Fire Department has agreed to partner with the Pantry to help deliver food items to those who fit in that demographic. They have been considering what to do if this goes beyond the initial 2-3 weeks, and if there is a new population who needs those services due to the impacts of COVID-19 on the economy. Chief Walker said PFR will capitalize on Food Pantry's expertise to assist with those potential challenge, and will then work to assist them. The Food Pantry is expected to come up with their decision and policy within next 24 hours.

Chair Ward asked where people can find out the most updated information. Chief Walker answered that an FAQ document was created to address common questions, and there is a page on the Town website that is dedicated to information and resources relevant to COVID-19. It includes a Google document where local restaurant and business owners can input changes to their status, hours, services, etc. to keep the public informed. As of this afternoon, the Governor has ordered all in-establishment seating at restaurants closed – they can offer take-out and delivery only. Chief Walker said there are thousands of followers between all the social media sites and email lists, so those will be used to their full advantage. A postcard with vital information will go out to all postal patrons in Peterborough. The state's 2-1-1 number now has staffing specifically to assist people with COVID-19 questions and concerns.

The Chief said that from an Administration and Emergency Management standpoint, it is important "to make sure folks have the right information so they can make the decisions that are right for them and their families." Rapidly changing information poses a challenge. Chief Walker emphasized that people should start by checking with their primary care physicians if they have concerns about their health.

Via Facebook, Amy Allen asked: How can we get other items to families out of work or seniors who should not be out and about? Chief Walker said they were in the process of figuring that out. Ms. Hatcher added the 'Peterborough Area Cares During COVID-19' Facebook group is a good resource. Chief Walker said that would be a good place to start at the moment.

Ms. Hatcher asked Ms. MacStay to speak to the Welfare Assistance offered to the Town. Ms. MacStay answered that all towns in New Hampshire are required to provide emergency assistance to people in need who qualify. There is an application process – after filling out the application they need to schedule an appointment and provide documentation that shows evidence of their need. To request an application they can contact administration via phone or email, or come in person (email is preferred, considering the current social-distancing recommendations).

Chair Ward asked if there was anything similar offered for businesses. Ms. MacStay said the Small Business Administration may offer low interest loans, but she was unsure if there will be any other programs.

A couple people asked how to get tested via Facebook. Ms. Gingras answered they should call their primary care physicians, and if they don't have one, they should call 2-1-1.

Chief Walker said, as of 4:00 PM, there are only 17 confirmed cases in New Hampshire. Statewide, more than 560 people have been tested in the last two weeks. “You should absolutely be concerned, but it is not rampant...in our region.”

Ms. Hatcher added that social distancing is “the most important thing we can do.”

On Facebook someone asked: How will people know if someone was identified as having COVID-19 in the community? Chief Walker said the individuals are notified and told to self-quarantine. There’s no list published for public view, but doctors are notified if one of their patients has tested positive through NH DHHS.

Ms. Gingras said the best thing to do is practice social distancing – stay six-feet away from people, avoid groups, and stay home if you are sick. Chief Walker added washing hands is important, and said those with blood disorders, liver and kidney disease, those undergoing chemotherapy or who have had prior chemotherapy treatments, or anything that makes someone more susceptible to communicable disease, should be very careful.

Mr. Taylor said social distancing was especially important as someone could have it and not know about, and Chief Walker agreed, and said that was the reason for the school and restaurant closures.

Another question via Facebook: Can we feel confident that town offices will remain open to provide services to residents? Chief Walker said no shut down of essential services is currently anticipated. Part of the agenda for Wednesday’s meeting is to put a Continuation of Operations plan in place.

Question via Facebook: Is there a point person or essential resource for small businesses? Ms. MacStay said Small Business Administration would be a resource, and Chief Walker added the CDC COVID page has a section dedicated to Business. Ms. MacStay said she’ll post the link to the Small Business Administration website.

Ms. Hatcher said, per the Governor’s office, more unemployment insurance will be available, and will also be available to those who are self-employed. She said it’s in all of our best interests to support “the businesses you love and want to be here.” Mr. Taylor added that many restaurants are still open for take-out.

Ms. Gingras added that MCH opened their Incident Command System opened February 26th, with a core team planning and preparing for what might happen. She said the staff knows how to handle infectious disease, and MCH is prepared to care for the community. Chief Walker added that Emergency Medical Services is also very focused on the same kind of efforts.

Mr. Taylor: “Minute to minute, anything that can be done is being done.”

Ms. Hatcher asked if Chief Guinard had anything to add. Chief Guinard said changes have been made internally, including encouraging people to use telephone or email rather than coming in person, and suspension of finger-printing. State-wide, all courts have been shut down as of this morning. Prisoner transports are a challenge, with the PD having to do that all themselves. Chief Guinard said the PD is doing everything to not compromise police services, and the will be keeping an eye on closed businesses, especially after hours. “We will be out there 24-7.”

Chair Ward asked if it was possible for people to watch the recorded meeting and ask questions. Ms. MacStay said yes, the Town’s Facebook page is continually monitored, and she invited those with questions to email Administration (administration@peterboroughnh.gov) or the Select Board (selectboard@peterboroughnh.gov), or to call the Town House. The recording of the meeting will be available indefinitely via Ustream.

The Library provided an update via Facebook: The Library will continue to offer curbside book delivery. Wi-fi will be available in the parking lot (library wi-fi password is 'guest123'). *Note: Recreation office parking lot also has free wi-fi with same password.*

Question via Facebook: Is the Town offering masks and gloves to Town employees who are in contact with the public? Chief Walker answered that at this time they were not (except in the case of ambulance services) but if it becomes an issue and an employee needs those materials to safely do their job, they will certainly be provided.

Chair Ward asked what the best course of action is for employees who handle cash and credit card transactions. Chief Walker's recommendation: "Wash your hands."

Question via Facebook: Are there any anticipated delays to the Bridge or Library projects? Ms. MacStay said there are no anticipated delays to Bridge and Library projects.

Mr. Taylor encouraged people to reach out to their neighbors and check in on them.

Ms. Hatcher said she's seen many community members reaching out to see how they can help. She added that Community Task Force meetings will not be happening in person, but there will be processes put in place to ensure progress continue.

Question via Facebook: Does MCH have a Plan B if they get overwhelmed? Ms. Gingras said Surge Planning has been done so that they can take care of more patients than they typically do, if needed.

Chair Ward asked if large businesses like Shaw's had been contacted about shortages. Chief Walker said there are supply issues, but there is no true nationwide shortage; the supply chain is intact, it's just a matter of getting it distributed.

Mr. Taylor asked that people "stop with the hoarding."

Chief Walker noted that the only thing that should be flushed down the toilet is toilet paper. Town sewer is not designed to handle wet wipes, and neither are private septic systems. "It wreaks havoc."

Chief Walker said he and Administration are meeting and talking multiple times daily and working to push information out, with guidance from the Select Board. Ms. Hatcher said the Select Board is 100% in partnership with PFR and Administration, and will make themselves available whenever needed.

Mr. Taylor said the Select Board was "glad to have the team in place that we do." Chair Ward added, "You have our trust."

Chief Walker thanked Ms. Gingras for her help and involvement. Ms. Gingras said MCH employees "are so dedicated."

Chair Ward said he was confident that the quality of the town's drinking water would not be affected. Chief Walker said yes, it is not expected that there should be any issues related to utilities. Ms. Hatcher said it comes down to personnel. Chief Walker noted the Governor's Declaration prohibits state and municipal employees from any non-essential out-of-state travel.

Finalization of Warrant/Town Meeting

Ms. MacStay said today was the last day to make changes to the warrant. The Town has a charter that allows a Deliberative Session, typically held in mid-April, and then a Ballot Session held in May, the day before the Open Session. The Charter allows the Board to determine what articles go to the ballot and which go to Open Session. Open Session of Town Meeting must have one article to address the budget, in the case of the Budget not passing at the Ballot Session, but unless there is a bond article, it is up the Select Board what goes where. With those two options in mind, Ms. MacStay prepared two warrants for the Board to decide between.

One warrant has all items up for Town Meeting consideration on the ballot (with the exception of precautionary budget article). The second one has original distribution of warrant articles with three items (Fly Pond, Roadway Maintenance, and Fire Station Design/Documents).

Ms. Hatcher said Deliberative is scheduled for April 7th. Ms. MacStay confirmed, and said one of the challenges is that much of what has been delayed or postponed has been done so right up until that time, but a decision needs to be made.

Ms. Hatcher said the whole process may be delayed. Chair Ward asked if a delay was possible under normal circumstances or if it falls under State of Emergency. Ms. MacStay said it would be due to emergency.

Ms. Hatcher asked about the time frame between deliberative and ballot sessions. Ms. MacStay said it's determined partly by statute and partly by charter: it's about 6 weeks. There has to be time to print the ballots, (which are not printed in house) between ballot session and deliberative session. We could potentially put together an online presentation and describe each warrant article and put it out ahead of time, so people could review it and decide if they wanted to do to the Deliberative Session.

Ms. Hatcher pointed out that amendments can only be done in person. Ms. MacStay confirmed.

Chair Ward asked if there was a way to do the Deliberative Session on Facebook Live. Ms. MacStay said there are some "technology hurdles" to overcome but we can figure those issues out with IT.

Ms. Hatcher asked when the last day would be to vote and have things take effect in time for July 1st. Chief Walker said June 30th would be the last day. Chair Ward said "except for elections."

Ms. Hatcher asked if we would have the ability to do absentee ballots, and Ms. MacStay said that was possible, but decisions needed to be made.

Ms. Hatcher asked Town Clerk Linda Guyette for her input. Ms. Guyette responded that the Notice of Filing starts on March 25th and runs through April 3rd, so unless that officially changes, it needs to happen within that time frame.

Ms. MacStay said it is possible to postpone Town Meeting – Jaffrey has postponed their Town Meeting as of this weekend. If it makes sense to postpone, we can, but if one thing is postponed, everything afterward would also need to be postponed.

Ms. Hatcher asked if the filing period would also move. Ms. MacStay said the filing period wouldn't necessarily have to move, as the delay in voting wouldn't impact candidates who had already filed. Ms. Guyette said even if her office had to close to the public, she could arrange appointments for people who needed to take of business in person.

Chair Ward said that if all articles could be explained in a good presentation and people could ask their questions, he was comfortable putting everything on the ballot, and encouraging absentee ballots. He said he felt more people would vote on items if they were on the ballot, versus at Open Session. Ms. Guyette agreed.

Ms. Hatcher said a downside would be that people would have to show up to propose or vote on an amendment. Chair Ward reiterated that we do have the option to postpone.

Ms. Hatcher asked for confirmation that the filing period would go forward for candidates, even if the rest of the process was postponed. Ms. MacStay confirmed.

Motion: Ms. Hatcher made a motion to move all Warrant Articles to the Ballot.

Vote: Chair Ward seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.

Select Board Minutes

3/16/2020

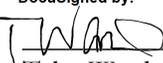
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Ms. Judy Ferstenberg of Kaufmann Drive asked that everyone in town be given access high-speed internet from Comcast, as the stay-at-home measures have increased household need for reliable access. Mr. Taylor said he had been working on that issue, and "there is progress." Ms. Hatcher added the Select Board wanted that as well.

Ms. Hatcher made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:19 PM. Mr. Taylor seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.

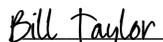
Respectfully Submitted,
Alison Kreutz, Department Assistant

PETERBOROUGH
SELECT BOARD:

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ACTION ITEM PENDING LIST

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