

SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

MEETING DATE: MONDAY, APRIL 13, 2020
8:00 A.M.

MEETING PLACE: ZOOM ONLINE MEETING

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES

8:00 a.m. Regular Session

First Selectwoman Lyons called the Regular Session of Monday, April 13, 2020 to order at 8:06 a.m.

1. Pledge of Allegiance.
First Selectwoman Lyons led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of minutes

MOVED by Selectman Murphy and seconded by Selectman Wilson to **APPROVE** the minutes of March 23, 2020, and April 1, 2020.

VOTE: the motion was approved unanimously.

3. First Selectwoman's Updates

First Selectwoman Peggy Lyons provided updates which are attached to this agenda.

4. Liaison Reports / Selectmen Comments

Bruce Wilson Local Business Taskforce, EDC

Al Goldberg Thanked the First Responders, Town staff, members of the Board of Selectmen and the First Selectwoman

Erin Duques Senior Commission & Senior Penpal program

5. Citizen comments

Maureen Lopes, of Old Farms Road asked where she could find an updated lists of need for donations. Austin Hall responded that donations are being accepted at the Senior Center; all requests for need have been met but any requests should continue to go through the Senior Center and then staff will put out these requests online. Art Sickie also gave an overview of the meals that are being provided to children in town.

6. Update on Town's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to state directives

Emergency Management Director Sam DeBurra stated that there are over 12,000 positive cases in Connecticut with 554 deaths. There are 40 confirmed cases in Madison with 6 recoveries. He thanked area restaurants that are delivering food to first responders for free and he thanked everyone in the community who has stepped up to help their fellow residents. He encouraged social distancing to help reduce the spread of the virus. Additionally, there are heavy winds expected today and they may bring damage and power outages.

Health Director Trent Joseph stated that there has been one more confirmed cases this morning bringing the Town total to 41 positive cases. He provided an overview of his outreach to positive-testing residents. He stated that he is coordinating several things for first responders including PPE donations.

Selectman Murphy questioned if gloves were mandated at grocery stores and Mr. Joseph stated that it was best practice for employees to wear gloves but they are not mandated. Delivery employees should be wearing masks and gloves as well.

Chief Drumm stated that every day and every week brings new changes; he agrees that the public has stepped up and is maintaining safe distance. The message boards have been very effective. Also, a message board will be brought downtown to broadcast information to the public about services through Youth & Family Services Department. There were a couple of issues of people congregating in town over the weekend but they were addressed. There is still one dispatcher and one officer out of work due to quarantine, but both have tested negative for the virus. Donations are coming in to the Police Department including meals to the officers and a donation of masks yesterday from Dr. Henry Lee.

First Selectwoman Lyons stated that staff was on the meeting and could answer any other questions that the board may have. Selectman Wilson asked how the accounting system update was being done; and also a tally of the costs that the Town has spent so far in response to the pandemic. Stacy Nobitz stated that the Town is running around \$71,000 dollars spent including the cleaning of Town Campus, Zoom accounts, etc. It is too premature to do anything with the reimbursement now, but Ms. Nobitz stated that she would update the Board at their meetings going forward. The cleaning costs are high and will be ongoing throughout the response to this virus, especially because ambulances must be cleaned professionally after responding to a call to mitigate the spread of the virus to our EMS employees. Selectman Wilson stated that he was sure that the funds were being appropriately spent but that receiving a running tally would be helpful for the Board.

Trent Joseph added that the Public should also know that if they have tested positive and they have not received a phone call or letter from the Health Department, they should contact the Health Department directly.

7. Update on Schools from Board of Education Superintendent Tom Scarice.

Superintendent Scarice stated that the Town was probably the first district to work with the Police Department on the “zoom bombing” issue from last week. Unfortunately it made it necessary to move all meetings from Zoom and to Google meetings. Spring vacation was supposed to be last week but since Distance Learning had just started, it didn’t seem appropriate to have a break right now. Instead, spring break will be brought to the BOE to approve for the week of May 4th. It is hard to imagine that school will be back in session after May 20th but there is always hope. Also the state is looking for ways that some type of graduation ceremony can be held for seniors.

First Selectwoman Lyons thanked Superintendent Scarice for his leadership in the Town of Madison and congratulated him on his new position with Westport. She also thanked the teachers and administrators for their hard work in overseeing distance learning. Selectman Goldberg asked what the likelihood was that schools would reopen this year and Superintendent Scarice stated that there has not been any criteria to establish the likelihood of reopening and he didn’t think it was likely since there were no metrics to grant the reopening of schools.

Selectman Murphy thanked Superintendent Scarice as well for being a champion and advocate for the children, teachers and administrators in Madison.

Selectwoman Lyons also stated that there is an Executive Order from the state to continue staff salaries for teachers, administrators, cafeteria workers, etc. and there is no way to save money on any of these costs. She stated that teachers are definitely still working, too, so we want to continue to support them. Superintendent Scarice also stated that transportation services still need to be paid as well to continue the salaries of bus drivers and to keep the fleet ready to restart. The Town has already budgeted these services and funding has already been taxed. If we tried to put the burden back onto the state, the state might come back to individual residents to cover these costs. First Selectwoman Lyons stated that it was the objective overall to maintain stability as much as possible for the residents of the state.

8. Update on Boards & Commission Meetings going forward.

Town Service Coordinator / Risk Manager Lauren Rhines presented an overview of the Board & Commission remote meeting plan which will be rolled out officially next week for Boards & Commissions to start meeting again. She gave an overview of the how this current meeting was being run through the Zoom Webinar platform; and how meetings have to adhere to requirements from the Governor’s Executive Order on remote public meetings. First Selectwoman Lyons thanked the staff team that had worked through bringing this plan to the public and commissions, including Lauren Rhines, Art Sickle, Rita Boland, Steve Fuest and Dave Anderson.

9. Discuss Tax Deferment Program and Low Interest Rate Program options set forth in Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7S.

First Selectwoman Lyons provided an side-by-side comparison of the two programs which is attached to the end of these minutes. She noted that mortgage servicers (e.g. banks) would not be granted the 90-day deferment program. She also noted that landlords were required to either provide hardship documentation to the town or to pass on a portion of the benefit to their tenants. This applies to taxes due between March 10th and July 1st. The low interest rate program provides a 90-day window for a reduction in interest charged for this time frame (3% versus 18%).

She stated that these are complicated programs and the Board needs to balance what is best for the Town and what provides the best relief for residents. Also, the Town last year received roughly 50% of tax payments by the end of July 2019. Stacy Nobitz provided an overview of the cash flow and expenses in the first quarter of the fiscal year and overall she stated that she was not concerned about the deferment program because there would be funding to cover most expenses for the first quarter based in part on the escrow tax payments from banking institutions. She stated that she had also reached out to Branford who is providing the deferment program versus the low interest rate program. Also, other area towns are heading in the same direction.

First Selectwoman Lyons stated that she was also concerned with the cash flow for the first quarter of 2020-2021 and staff had looked back at 25 years of tax collection history and there has never been a collection issue despite past economic hardships. Offering this assistance for residents to pay a few months later would be a huge benefit. The Town can effectively deliver this to residents and it will not be a detriment to the Town in general. The low interest rate program would be a bigger burden for the staff to implement but it might generate greater initial cash flow because taxpayers would be encouraged to pay their taxes on time in July. Overall, the implementation and eligibility requirements are yet to be decided but the Board today needs to only vote to move the town into one of these plans.

Selectman Wilson stated that he was in agreement that the deferral program was the more straightforward plan and was probably the better way to go. The only possible exception that he could think of was pertaining to second homes that were rented out and if they could be carved out of the requirements for landlords. The Board reviewed that also these properties would be impacted with the short term rental ban in effect by the state. Overall Board of Finance Chair Jean Fitzgerald summarized that the town is cash-strong and has the ability, in the worst-case scenario, to cover costs in the first quarter of the next fiscal year. What the Town can do to help the taxpayers should be the first priority. The Board reviewed that the risks seemed low in offering the deferral program; and First Selectwoman Lyons stated that the mechanics of the deferral program would be determined at a later date.

10. Discuss and take action to approve a Resolution to participate in either Tax Deferment Program or Low Interest Rate Program options set forth in Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7S.

MOVED by Selectman Goldberg and seconded by Selectman Wilson to **APPROVE** a Resolution to participate in the Tax Deferment Program set forth in Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7S..

VOTE: the motion was approved unanimously.

11. Citizen Comments.

None.

12. Adjournment.

There being no objections, First Selectwoman Lyons adjourned the meeting at 10:01 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Rhines
Town Services Coordinator / Risk Manager

First Selectwoman Update

- Implementation of Executive Orders
 - Budget Approval Process – Public Hearing on April 29th, Board of Finance Set Mill Rate on May 5th
 - Property Tax Relief Program – Must adopt by April 25th
 - Senior Tax Relief Programs - Executive Orders in process
 - Lodging and Short-term rental restrictions – Reviewing notification and enforcement options
 - Small business assistance programs – Local business task force
 - Other Town Meeting activities – Outstanding Special Appropriations, Island Lease
 - Boards & Commission Meetings – launching new platform



First Selectwoman Update (cont)

- Local Issues
 - Schools and non-essential businesses closed until May 20th
 - Outdoor Beach & Recreation Facilities – monitoring social distancing
 - Salt Meadow Park – closed weekends only
 - Madison Bulky Waste Facility – targeting to re-open on April 21st
 - Beach pass sales on hold until May 1st

Summary of Tax Relief Programs

Deferment Program

- 90 day deferment of any real, personal, motor vehicle taxes
- Applies to taxes due March 10th – July 1st. Last day to pay October 1st for taxes due on July 1st
- Eligible tax payers include residents, businesses, non-profits that attest to, or document, a significant economic impact by COVID-19
- OPM guidance that taxpayer must have suffered a reduction in income of at least 20%
- BOS has option of extending eligibility to all taxpayers
- Does not apply to mortgage servicers
- Landlords must document significant income decline or offer commensurate forbearance to tenants
- Does not apply to taxes already past due

Low Interest Rate Program

- Provides a “window” of 90 days from due date where taxpayers can pay a reduced rate. Does not extend due date.
- Delinquent taxes subject to a 3% rate for 90 days only (v. 18%)
- Taxes delinquent prior to March 10th subject to 3% starting April 1st
- Landlords need to offer commensurate forbearance to tenants
- Commensurate forbearance means either (a) 25% of rent over the 90 days, or (b) a deferral of one month’s rent to paid over the 90 days, or (c) something similar as determined by the tax collector
- No documentation required, but landlords subject to auditing