HALIFAX BOARD OF SELECTMEN

SELECTMEN MEETING

MONDAY, MAY 18, 2020 - 2:30 P.M.

VIA ZOOM

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Meeting came to order at 2:30 p.m. with Selectmen Troy E. Garron, Thomas Millias and Gordon C. Andrews present remotely (via phones and computers).

The following business was discussed:

Seelig said that earlier today the state has been talking about the re-opening in phases therefore everyone should start thinking about how their department is going to be staffed and how services will be provided when and if we open up to the public. The idea when we is that we makes sure we don’t make a situation worse and not be pressured into it - go with an assigned date and open the buildings up when we can ensure the safety of our residents and our employees. There is funding available to the town through the Cares Act that we can purchase supplies and equipment. He continued to say that we are not in this alone as we have been communicating with colleagues and associations we belong to and other towns and cities in the Commonwealth where we are getting guidance and training ideas to develop policies and procedures so don’t feel that you’re, that the whole burden is being dropped on you – you have colleagues here, you have colleagues elsewhere that want to work with you to provide ideas, guidance and information.

Cathy Drinan, board of Health Agent, began by saying that the Mass. Association of Health Boards today has a Zoom conference and talked about Phase 1. There is some general guidance by the State, but people have to sit down and talk about what applies to their particular office, their staff and the physical arrangements of the offices. She said her office has one door and the public is accustomed to going in, requesting records and we meet them at the table so there is a lot of close interaction there, which right now we would not be comfortable with. The current system we are doing which is staggering our work at home and at the office, meeting people at the door, email and phone calls is working well for Salter and he but it may not work in other departments. The guidance from the State is keep everything that we’ve been doing in place - rather than saying wear facial covering when you cannot achieve the six feet of social distancing they were talking about wearing a mask when you leave the house. So, let’s remember masks, hygiene and sanitizing. One of the requirements from the State is that they are asking for everyone to have in writing their plan for how they will keep safe. It could be staggering appointments, more time in between them, all those sorts of things, and they’re not asking for a re-inspection for any of these places, like Borhek Insurance, some place like that. They talked about churches, which she thinks were 40% attendance, the small offices – it was 25% attendance. If an office like Borhek Insurance only has three people, and they can stay far apart from each other they don’t need to cut back even further on that small number of employees. Each place is a little different, they do not need to present it, but if there is a complaint or a question about an establishment, they are supposed to have it ready to show someone such as herself.

Jean Gallant, Library Director, asked if the 25% office was mandatory because that would mean two people in the Library and she has seven employees.

Drinan said that sometimes they come up with this wording and they realize, oh, that’s not as clear as we thought it was so if you can shift around the distance from one another in the building then you are okay. She added that it actually says 25% of a maximum occupancy level specified so for the maximum occupancy level in the library, so probably your whole staff wouldn’t be 25% of that.

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Chief Viveiros does not think calculations have been done on some of the town buildings but said the Building Inspector, Rob Piccirilli, could do them. In terms of COVID - he said that that they still are seeing cases in town – just this weekend he believes there were four or five new cases, so it is not something that has completely gone away and we need to encourage people to do the right thing. He has talked with the Building Director, Scott Materna, about putting in sanitizing stations, making modifications to doors (Dutch doors) and putting up plexi-glass. As far as masks they have been ordered for all town employees, which will take about two weeks to come in, but we are getting a shipment of about 185 cloth masks from FEMA this week that will be distributed to the employees. They can be washed up to 15 times and re-used so that will hold us over the two-week period until we get the ones that we ordered from an outside vendor. He further said at the fire station it is difficult to maintain the 6-foot distance all the time, but we do have a policy in place where if you’re within the six feet, you have to wear a mask – that’s the Governor’s order. As far as supplies they are not immediately available, but they do have ‘Web DOC’ where you can request stuff from the State. Normally supplies are received within a day but if there is something someone needs reach out to him and he can go through Web DOC.

Gallant said on the employer guidance mandatory safety standards for work places it’s saying that the employer would provide training regarding the social distancing and hygiene protocols – it that, like for the library, is that going to come from the town the fire chief or is she expected to train her employees?

Viveiros said that he posted on the department’s Facebook page posting from the CDC website. He does not think there is going to be a big training program on this other than making sure everyone knows what is expected of them as far as maintaining the distance, handwashing and putting up appropriate signage. Seelig thinks that after having department meetings for more than two months people have heard a lot of this already but we can get the word out in various ways, mail something out with paychecks and/or department heads could go over this with their personnel. You are encouraged to ask questions and voice ideas.

Drinan suggested instead of cutting an historic door in half, what might work is a bungie cord with a sign coming down off of it explaining why it is there and tell us what you need but do not enter the office.

Seelig said that we have to be flexible in working with everybody because we are on unchartered territory and said MIIA, our insurer, may be able to send out a training brochure or something like that to make sure our employees have the information they need. The flip side of this is that residents who are coming into our buildings will need this information. Such as when the Recycling Center re-opened they sent out the rules for using the Center. Again, it is getting the information out to the residents asking them to behave a certain way in municipal buildings.

Chief Viveiros added to remind employees if they are not feeling well not to come in, we certainly do not want to encourage sick time use, but one person coming in sick can really cause a lot of problems. He also said that they (himself, Seelig, Drinan, Chief Chaves and the BOS) continue to have Emergency Management conference calls every day, so if any department head has a question, wants/needs answers to something, don’t hesitate to reach out to one of them and they can discuss it during a conference call, or we can give they can be given the conference call number and call in and discuss whatever issue they want to discuss.

Seelig said a lot of communities are setting up check lists, that are done on a daily basis where employees certify they don’t have any symptoms, been in close contact with someone who’s under quarantine whether- it will become a habit to follow for employees coming to work i.e. self-examination. He further said that some towns may do temperature checks (infrared thermometers) and others might ask if employees took their temperature before coming to work and if over a certain amount they need to stay home.

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His thoughts were that employees are given a checklist of symptoms to watch out for. Seelig then asked Chief Chaves what his officers are seeing.

Chief Chaves said that the Board of Health has appointed all full time, part time and specials as agents of the Board of Health, so they will be able to be out there and basically be the eyes and ears of the Board of Health when it comes to situations where they are needed. As far as what each individual department can do for them there really isn’t much other than maintaining the proper distancing, hand washing and staying healthy. The officers will have masks in their cruisers for someone who might not have one if they are going into a building. His department has remained open during this pandemic, there is signage outside for people, if they have a cell phone please call and don’t come into the lobby, for people who don’t have a cell phone they use the red phone in the lobby and then we have to go out and wipe it down after everybody uses it. It’s been very limited, the amount of people that actually come in to use the phone, they’re encouraged by signage outside to email or call. As far as licensing, they have not ceased issuing them, which is done by phone and then appointment only with Sgt. Benner. We instituted a bunch of different policies, one being that daily temperature reading, so basically there is a questionnaire that the guys have to read indicating that they have no symptoms, then they initial the questionnaire, then they take their own temperature, and then if they get a high reading or unusual reading they notify the supervisor right away. As Chief Viveiros mentioned if somebody is ill or not feeling well they just go home, don’t hang out and contaminate the rest of the office. As far as facial coverings many of the guys wear masks, again, because just like the Fire Department we are in tight quarters so once you leave your offices you are supposed to have your facial covering on.

Seelig understands that fining people is the last resort and as Chief Chaves pointed out that his department and other departments have masks available to try and de-escalate the situations where we might have residents refuse to wear a mask and they want to go to Walmart or they want to go to Stop & Shop or someplace else and the idea is not to generate a battle but to educate and persuade instead. Chief Chaves said that if you do have someone that comes in and doesn’t want to wear a mask, first and foremost ask them why they are not wearing a mask because it is their right to wear or not wear one but see if there is another way to deal with it - the last thing we want to do is either fine or arrest someone.

Seelig said we need to set policy of procedures for dealing with people who in fact refuse to follow the protocols that have been set up with masks and face coverings being the number one thing on there. If someone needs a building permit and refuses to wear a facial covering, they can be meet outside where they could use the picnic table to fill out paperwork as they will not be able to come in the building. He said the whole idea is accommodating everyone no matter what the situation is.

Seelig asked Materna if he heard of any ideas about that might be helpful for other departments and what the timetable is to be able to make some of the improvements that the departments want. By no means is he under the gun as he rather get it done right the first time. Materna said so far the plexiglass on order, which will be done tomorrow with a couple of exceptions and once he gets that they can start hanging. As far as the ‘Dutch Door’ ideas, those work in some places better than others. He explained that the Highway Department wants to put a ‘Dutch Door’ between the office and the hallway and they can’t because it’s a steel door jamb making it difficult to add a hinge, and it only has three hinges and one would have to be added. So, in that case they are going to cut-out the center of the door and lay a piece of plexiglass there and there will be a hole in it to pass paper through. He has not heard any other new things to do other than what has already been talked about – wiping down the doors and switches which is done every day when the staff does their morning cleaning and then of course the fogging on Tuesday nights. He suggested that when we open to the public fogging more often because it covers more than what they can wipe can down in a short time.

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Materna said that he has ordered hands-free sanitizers (on back order & does not expect them until mid-summer) because the ones we have now you pump your hand against to get the sanitizer and that really kind of defeats the purpose. As soon as he gets them in they will start setting them up. He has three on hand which he will wait to distribute until he gets the rest of them in. His original thought was to get them to the Council on Aging because they are the most susceptible but if there is another building that makes sense we can put them there and figure another route for the Council on Aging. He suggested instead of physically touching light switches – you walk in, the lights turn on, you walk out it turns off, that kind of thing. He is not sure if something like that would be covered under expenses, but that’s a whole different battle. Another thing he said was go to electric hot air hand dryers in some of the bathrooms to eliminate touching the lever on the paper towel dispenser.

Seelig asked Materna on the ‘Dutch Door’ would it be possible to take down the old doors (at town Hall), preserve them and put up new ‘Dutch Doors’ so we are not cutting the ‘historic’ doors? Materna said he could do that but thinks the problem is carving into the door jamb again a fork hinge. We could do something like cutting the top half of the door out but we left the style of the door where the hinges come out so it’s kind of like a flag with the flag at the bottom and the pole at the top. This would be labor-intensive, but certainly can do that if that is a solution. Sandy Nolan, Town Accountant, said that the doors upstairs in the Town Hall (her wing) already have four hinges.

Drinan asked if the Plexi-glass would be hanging from the ceiling or standing up on a desk and Materna said the intention for the overhead doors (Assessor, Town Clerk & Collector’s windows) would to be hang a piece of Plexi-glass from the ceiling, having it come down about ten inches from the counter and there would be an air gap around it on the sides, maybe five inches, six inches, so they can hear, talk and pass documents underneath. Call it a ‘sneeze guard’ or ‘spit guard’ – whatever you want, nothing can pass directly from person to person.

Millias asked Materna if he considered a ‘cheap-o’ storm door – the ones that come with two panels, where he could leave the top panel out and just put the bottom panel, leave the bottom panel in, that way it is only a couple of screw holes on the jamb side. Maybe the cost would be about a hundred bucks for a cheap door. Materna said not a bad idea and thinks the only downside with that they open into the hall. Millias added if he as thinking in terms of handicapped accessibility all he needs is eighteen inches of clear opening and all the doors have that much.

Andrews said that they should talk about policy too for people in Town Hall that forget to wear their masks when they leave their office and they go to a different office just to check in. what he means is that if people are coming back to work we should remind everybody if they are going to leave their area where they’ve taken their mask off they need to put it back on when they go to a different spot.

Susan Lawless, COA Director, how do you maintain that, like walking because she is in close quarters where walking down a hallway they are passing each other. She is thinking about how hard that is going to be with everyone walking pass each other when you can’t do the six feet. Her guess is that when you get up from your desk you should have it with you because you don’t know if you’re going to pass somebody. Drinan also suggested turn back-to-back for those few seconds. Nolan did not think it was a bad idea to keep your mask with you when you leave your office.

Seelig said it is going to be crucial to have the masks available on us one way or the other and said once the building opens we should set an example for the public so we are not getting ‘well, why aren’t you wearing a mask?’

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Lawless thinks that there should be blanket policies and procedures for all the Town buildings, because if a resident is required to do something at the library but then there is a different requirement at the COA it could get confusing - things need to be uniform. Seelig said once we start getting drafts of policies in, we can look for some common denominators that would apply all buildings but then add information if something more/different needs to be done for a particular building.

Gallant is thinking consistency with the policies which she thinks should come from the Board of Selectmen, such as if Town Hall is requiring the employees to take their temperature or to fill out that check list then that is something that should be consistent with what she is requiring for her employees to come back.

Andrews thinks on a policy level if we are going to tell some employees they have to have their temperature taken or report on that form, we should be asking everyone to do it. Both Gallant and Nolan agreed. Millias also agreed and said that Plympton is setting up almost like a triage where you walk in the building and somebody from the fire department is going to be taking temperatures of people walking in. Gallant was not in favor of that and he said it is a little crazy, he thinks everybody a decent person in Plympton but relying on every individual to take their own temperature in the morning – he does not it is the best approach. Drinan asked if that was for the public or employees because they closed the Town Hall. Millias said they are going to re-open for the employees starting next Tuesday, and then the following week open up for the public, but are taking it to the extreme – they are going to isolate everybody as they come into the building and one person gets to go visit any particular office at a time. He does not think we can even do that functionally; Plympton has got a better setup to be able to do that.

Chief Viveiros said at the fire station and the off-going shift meets the on-coming staff outside in the lobby, take the temperature and then go through the question list with them. He can make the thermometers available for the Town Hall and other buildings but asked if there was staff to do it because other businesses have the employees just test if they have been in contact with anyone or had symptoms within the last couple of days and do their temperature. At the station he has have an infrared thermometer and when he comes in the morning he grabs it, test himself, wipe it down and puts it back.

Steve Hayward, Highway Surveyor, said he checks each guy and has a questionnaire and if they don’t feel good they go home.

Seelig said both ways are legitimate, and he is seeing from other communities both methods have been used. One of the challenges for Town Hall is we don’t have a shift – we have people who come in here at seven and eight-thirty or even nine o’clock possibly. It can be done if the Board of Selectmen wanted to go that route, but somebody would have to be the designated temperature taker. Gallant said she is allowing employees back into the building next week so a decision should be made if they are going to do that. Seelig said they can start off with the check list and keep in mind this is all subject to change – some of it is going to be internal some is going to be directives from the State.

Seelig went on to say that if there is a situation where someone needs to go home and they don’t have sick time or they used their sick time, the Board is going to have to set up something regarding that because he does not want people to feel pressured to come to work if they are sick. Two months ago, we were encouraging people to stay home and he thinks that needs to be continued.

Lawless asked Materna if he heard of a door cut-out to open doors. Seelig knew what she meant - you use your foot to open the door instead of the grab bar or the door handle. Materna asked if she was talking about an electric door opener with a remote button somewhere and she said it is like a pedal, you step on it. Materna said he will look into it.

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Gallant said seeing as she can only have limited staff in the building she asked a staff member who short in hours is it okay for her to ask them to take their sick time or is the Town going to continue to pay them under a ‘Covid Stay-At-Home’ even though the Governor lifted the stay-at-home order. Seelig thinks there are other department who are going to be in the same situation and said since the Selectmen sign all the payroll they are going to have to make a decision about whether to differentiate between the federal laws that went into place and what we were trying to do in Halifax which is keep people on a payroll under all the circumstances. He knows the Board is not going to do anything immediately, but he can put it on their agenda for their meeting on the May 26th and present some options. He asked Gallant if she wanted to write to the Board about the set-up for her employees, the situation with some options and then the Selectmen can work out what they want to do.

Andrews asked if it is a 25% occupancy and she could have all the staff there six feet apart does she have work for everybody and she said probably not. She will have to see how curb-side pick-up goes (starting on Wednesday) – she is assuming she is not going to have a whole bunch of work. She further said that she has a staff member who has to take eleven hours of the sick time every week to make up the difference in hours because not everyone can be in the building due to social distancing.

Lawless asked if department heads will have plenty of notice of the changes as far as people that might not necessarily be working the hours that they’re getting paid for? She is asking because she has asked her staff to come back this week and one of them already asked if they should file for unemployment to make up for the hours they are not getting paid for.

Seelig said first the Board would have to make a decision to change the policy and they haven’t done that yet, but let’s say the Board made a decision to change the policy on the 26th we need to provide employees with sufficient notice whether it is a week or two weeks, that starting on such-and-such a date the Town will either continue paying people who are not able to work from home or work on-site for the number of hours they normally do, or the Board will do something else. He does not think it is fair or that the Board would say to employees that on the 26th ‘well, that’s it’. Lawless said she will send him something in writing about her specific issues.

Gallant asked Chief Viveiros who should contact who when the masks come in and he said he will send out an email asking how many each department needs, or they can send him one.

Andrews asked Dr. Jill Proulx if there was is there anything in particular that the Board of Selectmen need to work with the school on to open so the teachers can go back in and clear out the classrooms. She said right now we are encouraging them to work remotely based upon the Governor’s suggestions and if you notice, education was specifically left out of his list because most of our positions can work remotely and we are protecting the people who can’t work remotely such as the custodians who would need to go in and work or the cafeteria workers who are assembling lunches for people who are food-insecure. So, to the best of their ability what they have been doing is curb-side pick-ups for teachers to pick up things with the hope that in June if they are able to move along in this phase is to provide an opportunity for the custodians to allow students to pick up curb-side any belongings that may be in the school so that they can fully clean the building. If not they are prepared to bag and tag everything and put in a gymnasium to be picked up as soon as they are able to return to school. At the high school we have allowed students to pick up their instruments, but they have a specific time, they are met by an administrator at the curb-side and we have very limited contact to try to protect people and students. Moving forward they have asked the school nurses to start thinking about the types of protective equipment, and non-permanent protective material, like shields for example, that may be necessary, but we have not received guidance from the State yet as to what that would look like for schools if in fact we are able to return to school with some sort of hybrid model.

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She is beginning to lose hope that all students will be able to return to school in the fall in a normal fashion and are beginning to consider more what it will look like if only some students are allowed to return to school at a particular time, and that’s going to create issues for them as well. She thinks they will be looking at a hybrid model of part remote, part in person, because there certainly is no way they could afford the busing alone. They could do an on and off day – split classes in half – but also have to think about how many students they can actually fit in a room with six feet apart. So, there is a lot of things that are still unknown and that will present issue for them. We believe that the CARES Act will allow towns to provide some protective equipment and possibly help support in this effort, but they don’t know for certain what that will be in Phase Two. Right now, she believes the CARES Act is representing purchases that occur up through June.

Seelig said we will be getting our CARES money through Plymouth County, school expenses obviously related to Covid are one of the eligible expenses. We do not have an application for them yet but do have some guidelines about eligibility and what activities, supplies and equipment are eligible, and which are not. He continued to say that the idea with Plymouth County was to get an application in to the County, each community, for expenses related beginning March 1st to June 30th. Once he gets something more from the County, he will be contacting the departments and the school. Obviously a complicating factor is Silver Lake, it appears that we could help Silver Lake along with Halifax Elementary School, and we are going to try to get something more definitive from the County about that. He said even though we are not eligible for the State, just Plymouth County, he is going to see if there are separate funding pots or the school systems too so that they may be able to get a better match for their expenses to whatever aid is available.

Chief Viveiros wanted to remind everyone that there is going to be substantial amounts of grant money available. He said you have to think outside the box - he talked to Nolan about a payroll program that doesn’t require people to manually bring the payroll in and changing hands so many times. Another this was Seelig talking about e-permitting where we don’t have to have people coming into Town Hall to do permits. He thinks it is important for department heads to start thinking about different ideas that can limit the amount of face-to-face interactions that we have.

Seelig thinks face-to-face plays an important part in the relationship we have with the community but the e-permitting for provides two things: one is convenience - 24/7 someone can apply for a permit, they don’t have to wait for an office to be open and if we have another flare up this fall, we will have better systems in place to help the community.

Cesar Calouro, IT Tech, said he is going to do a full phone system implementation for all town facilities (except the Fire Department), which he hopes will be done by the end of June. The Police Department back up was all set up last week and Chief Chaves will be receiving an email from him tomorrow to schedule a date for the implementation to get the phones in, ready to go and talk about port forwarding. He has talked with Adam from Terminal, so he already figured the backing stuff up. Other departments – Highway, Water and Recycling, will receive emails from him towards the end of this week to schedule a conference call for next week to talk about how they want the phones set up.

Gallant asked about the library but Calouro was unable to hear her.

Andrews then asked him about expanding the upload and download speed of our Comcast connection at the building because when we have multiple people on Zoom at Town Hall there are issues. Andrews is not sure if a second cable modem could be added or upgrading the speed that we have.

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Calouro said that he plans on getting in touch with Comcast about that and see if they are offering some type of deal for government customers because of the circumstance maybe adding a little extra gigabit. As far as the phone people are using video conferencing – that needs a little bit more. Andrews said the reason he is asking is because it could have budget implications for next year, so the faster we can get an update on that the better. He thinks it is important that we at least more band-width, at Town Hall.

The next thing Calouro wanted to talk about is the digital signatures. He sent out an email for anyone interested in being a part of that working group to find out where the need is, if it is something that we can actually utilize. He updated everyone on the cabling project saying that it is on hold and the only facility he was able to get done was Town Hall. The plan is to go out and re-bid, once all this is over and people are able to come in the building to do work. As far as the e-permitting, next Monday he is hoping to go live with the digital plans emissions for the Regulatory Board and then Board of Health where people will be submitting their plans digitally, on line, and the departments will receive their protected plans via email. He will be working with each department individually next Monday and will test it to make sure everyone is getting emails and probably go live later that day. He will be creating another working group for the e-permitting. He said that if anyone has any forms or applications online that are pdf and want a different format to let him know and he’ll change it up.

Andrews asked on the electronic plans is a projector going to be installed in the room so that they can be viewed when they go back there and Calouro said that is the plan. He is not sure of Materna’s priorities/schedule is as he will be working with him to do the installation.

Drinan added that there are three new cases and Seelig said he believes that brings us to fifty-one. In closing he thanked everyone for joining and appreciates everyone taking time out of their day to take part in this discussion. He will be in touch about how things progress with the specific policies for departments, offices and buildings.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

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Troy E. Garron

Clerk

/pjm