

Williamsburg Board of Selectmen
March 1, 2021
9:00 a.m. via Zoom

The members of the Board of Selectmen met in a special session on Monday, March 1, 2021, by video conference call. The chair called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

Present: William Sayre, David Mathers, and Denise Banister

Also present: Representative Natalie Blais, Senator Hinds, Jon Gould (Legislative Aide to Senator Hinds), Corinne Coryat (Legislative Aide to Rep. Blais), Charlene Nardi (Town Administrator)

Senator Hinds gave an update on the legislative initiatives that he has proposed to support his rural Western Mass communities.

- The Rural Growth Bill – focus on jobs in the western part of the state
- School Transportation bill – increase the reimbursement rate for regional schools
- Student Opportunities Act – address issues for schools with low and declining enrollment
- One time funding from Federal Act fund – support Board of Heath

Representative Blais reported that she worked to get \$50,000 in a bond bill to support Emergency communication services in the hill towns. She has spoken with Bernie Forgea, retired Fire Chief from Cummington, and is working on his plan to bring communications to the surrounding towns. The next step is to get those funds released.

The Board noted their priority projects over the next several years and thanked both Senator Hinds and Representative Blais for their support.

- Public Safety
- Mountain Street
- Depot Road Culvert
- Mill River Greenway Project

Representative Blais and Senator Hinds sent a joint letter to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to urge the inclusion of Mountain Street on the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) for FY2025. Both recognize the importance of keeping it aligned with the Whately project.

The Board asked about funding support for the public safety complex. It was noted that there has been discussion about developing a state program for municipal building infrastructure similar to what is available for schools; however, many in the legislature feel that is a municipal issue not a state issue. Federal stimulus funds may become available in the fall for shovel ready projects, which puts the timing for funding our project too late.

The Board discussed the town's reliance on the regressive property tax and how the costs of running the schools, the municipality and infrastructure projects are squeezing folks and making it impossible for folks who grew up in town or are on a fixed income to stay in town. While the Board members support conservation land, they also have concerns that it cuts their revenue stream. Senator Hinds mentioned that he hears that in every community connected to State owned lands and realizes that it would be the same issue for all conservation lands. .

The Board shared Chief Wickland's concerns about the impact of the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Legislation that was passed in December 2020 and takes effect on July 1, 2021. The main concern is that part-time officers, who work full time jobs would have to use all their personal vacation time to get the required number of training hours in as required by the new legislation. The low pay rate for part-time police officers in small towns also makes it less appealing to take time away from your full-time position that generally pays a much higher rate. If many current part-time officers choose not to do the training, it will reduce the pool of qualified officers for small communities. In addition, the legislation will require towns to increase budgets to cover the payroll costs of sending officers to the training, and any costs associated with taking the required training. For these reasons, our Chief is concerned that the new legislation may have the unintended effect of eliminating small-town departments. Senator Hinds mentioned that there was discussion about a police training account to help communities. There is still a lot unknown and it is important that the communities share their feedback on possible unintended consequences. The Chief's concerns will be summarized and forwarded to Representative Blais and Senator Hinds.

There was discussion about the first Cares Act Funding which covered PPE, barriers, ventilation, and technology and the second round which will be focused on education and helping students catch up. The vaccine roll-out was mentioned and it was noted that smaller regional sites such as Northampton and Amherst were important and valuable to the western communities, less so the big vaccination sites.

Approved:

Clerk