

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2022, 7:00 P.M.
SALEM TOWN HALL, CONFERENCE ROOM 1**

PRESENT

Edward Chmielewski, Jr.
Thomas (TJ) Butcher
Ron LaBonte
Kevin Lyden
Pam Munro

ABSENT

none

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectman Chmielewski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Tuesday, October 5, 2021, Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting Minutes

M/S/C: LaBonte/Lyden, to approve the Tuesday, October 5, 2021 Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting Minutes. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 4-0-1. Voting in Favor: Selectmen LaBonte, Lyden, Munro, and Chmielewski. Voting in Opposition: None. Voting in Abstention: Selectman Butcher.

B. Tuesday, December 7, 2021 Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting Minutes

M/S/C: LaBonte/Butcher, to approve the Tuesday, December 7, 2021 Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting Minutes. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

3. CORRESPONDENCE/PUBLIC COMMENTS

Diba Khan-Bureau, 40 Hill Top Trail, a 30+ year resident and long-time member of the Planning & Zoning (PZC) and Inland Wetlands & Conservation (IWCC) Commissions, expressed her concerns regarding the behavior of the newly-appointed members to the IWCC during their most recent meeting. She felt that the Commissioners, who were untrained and unfamiliar with their previous discussions, had “very argumentative opinions” and should have considered abstaining from voting on the items. She expressed her disappointment with some of the members’ “unruly, disrespectful demeanor” and lack of “acknowledgment of the expertise of the members”. She also questioned the town’s policy regarding the allowance of guns in the Town Hall, citing a joke made by one of the newly appointed members that made some of the members and public uncomfortable. She felt it was the First Selectman’s duty to impress upon all of the board and commission members to have respect for their fellow

volunteers, regardless of their party affiliation. She expressed her deep concern for the town based upon the lack of collegiality she has been experiencing and witnessing.

The First Selectman thanked Commissioner Khan-Bureau for her service and her comments.

4. ALTERATIONS TO THE AGENDA – none

5. AGENDA:

A. COVID-19 Update (Discussion)

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the town has been busy over the recent weeks dealing with the recent uptick in COVID-19 rates and reviewed the latest reported cases and health and safety guidelines. He has been in touch with State Officials, who had promised the delivery of COVID-19 Test Kits and N95 Masks for the town's residents.

Being in the middle of the COVID-19 Update, the First Selectman denied Selectman Butcher's request to backtrack to Item 4 to propose additions to the Agenda.

While they failed to deliver the items on the scheduled day, they were surprised by a call that the town would be receiving over 200 At-Home Rapid Test Kits and Masks on New Year's Eve. These kits were delivered to the town's First Responders, Salem & Gardner Lake Volunteer Fire Companies, Ambulance crew, Emergency Services, Emergency Management, critical Town staff, Salem School, and the town's high-volume businesses, eateries, and daycare centers. The town expects to receive additional test kits and masks over the coming days for public distribution. He commended the Emergency Services & Management staff, Volunteer Fire Companies, Public Works Department, and Town Hall staff for preparing and organizing a detailed distribution plan. Additional test kits and masks have been requested from the State Officials. All updates will be posted on the Town website. He introduced and thanked Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Mike Bednarz for his continued service.

Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Bednarz added that they are awaiting the receipt of the test kits and masks before publicizing their distribution to the public. A pick-up of the remaining 270 test kits at the regional distribution site is scheduled for Thursday, January 6. He explained the distribution plan, which will take place at Town Hall/Zemko property. Residents will need to show identification as proof of residency to receive a test kit and masks. Residents will be required to show proof of residency.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the number of kits that will be received in relation to the town's population. First Selectman Chmielewski reiterated that additional test kits were requested and the guidance from the State to receive and utilize the kits only if necessary. Because the town is working in conjunction with the School, it is hoped that the town will be able to address both the families with school-aged children and the older

population. Selectman Lyden urged the public to continue practicing the recommended health & safety protocols, i.e., wear masks, practice physical distancing, and receive a vaccination(s), citing that 70% of the individuals that have been hospitalized are those who have not been vaccinated. In response to Selectman Butcher, the town is also in the process of investigating the possibility of purchasing additional test kits for the residents. Selectman LaBonte warned that the so-called Point of Care Tests are nasal tests while the Omicron variant resides in the throat. PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) tests are the best tool of diagnosis for the virus and this particular variant. He warned against having too much faith in the rapid tests as they sometimes provide false positives and false negatives. First Selectman Chmielewski commended and expressed his appreciation to Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Bednarz and the Selectmen for their comments, concerns, and support. He, likewise, expressed his appreciation to Representative Cheeseman and Salem School District Superintendent Brian Hendrickson for their ongoing support and guidance.

B. State Representative Holly Cheeseman Update (Discussion)

Representative Cheeseman, a Niantic resident who represents the 37th District, stated the need for everyone to support each other and urged the public to pick up a kit only if necessary. She stated that approximately 675,000 kits are also scheduled to be delivered to the schools for distribution. Much of the legislative sessions have been dealing with the ongoing pandemic. Luckily, the State currently has a \$911 billion surplus this fiscal year, largely due to the receipt of \$800 billion from the Federal Government. The State's estimates, finals, and income tax payments continue to be robust and will be utilized to pay down the State's pension debt. Their priorities include addressing and funding mental health issues, especially among the elementary to college/university-aged youth. The Connecticut Children's Medical Center, which assesses all admitted children for suicidal ideation, estimates that approximately 25% of the State's youth have expressed suicidal thoughts or tendencies, up from 3-4%, as a result of the virus. In addition, the State is experiencing a record number of substance abuse deaths and domestic violence cases. Other items on the legislative agenda include mobile crisis units; tax reforms, including the reduction of the State sales tax from 6.35% to 5.99%; restoration of the \$500.00 property tax credit; fully funding the fringe benefits for the RST Program, and; revisiting the legalization of marijuana. She also expects the legislators to concentrate on the best way to recover from the pandemic, helping businesses, investing additional funds in the Unemployment Trust Fund, supporting families for childcare and schooling, providing incentives for youth to remain in the State once they obtain their degrees, and investing in the State's residents.

She thanked the Selectmen for their hard work and efforts to support their residents. She looks forward to a positive future resulting from working together, following best practices, and being considerate to one another.

The Selectmen thanked Representative Cheeseman for attending the meeting and providing an update.

C. Salem Superintendent of Schools Brian Hendrickson (Discussion)

Superintendent Hendrickson introduced himself and echoed the previous comments, agreeing that teamwork and collaboration will help them get through the pandemic. He commended the community, pointing to its high compliance rate from the parents and Salem School staff. Their priority is to provide a stable environment for their children and staff by maintaining in-person schooling. Information is available online and via social media, including a live timetable of COVID-19 positive cases. Erring on the side of caution, he added that any positive Point of Care test is considered a confirmed case. He, again, commended the community, which has been very welcoming and has worked together to help ensure the health and safety of the children and colleagues. In response to First Selectman Chmielewski, Superintendent Hendrickson confirmed that any staff member experiencing symptoms is required to take a Point of Care test; those who test positive are required to utilize their sick days for the quarantine period.

D. Resolution Supporting Participation in the Sustainable CT Municipal Certification Program (Discussion & Action)

M/S/C: Lyden/Munro, to support the Town of Salem's participation in the Sustainable CT Municipal Certification Program and to authorize and direct First Selectman Ed Chmielewski to execute and deliver any and all documents on behalf of the Board of Selectmen. Discussion: Selectman Lyden stated that a number of the eligible project examples have been completed, including an outdoor community concert, beautification programs, buy local campaign, solar panels to power public spaces, energy efficiency improvements, community gardens, developing and maintaining public trails or trail systems, and composting initiatives. Selectwoman Munro reported that she has sent an e-mail to Sustainable CT inquiring about the percentage of projects that do not receive funding and whether reimbursements or upfront funding is available. Discussion ensued regarding the funding and the program's concept and benefits. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

E. Tax Collector Refunds

M/S/C: LaBonte/Butcher, to direct the Town Treasurer to issue refunds, recommended and certified by the Tax Collector, as presented, to the Board of Selectmen in the amount of \$1,717.25 (one thousand seven hundred seventeen dollars and twenty-five cents) on the 4th day of January 2022. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

6. REPORTS:

A. FIRST SELECTMAN

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that, since taking office, he has met with the leadership of several boards and commissions and the Superintendent of Schools – all of whom he looks forward to supporting and working with. The new video system in the main conference room at Town Hall, which includes a camera that may be rotated so that the audience may view the presentation board, is in the process of being finalized. The system was funded by the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Funds.

He expressed the town's appreciation and support of the volunteers and Recreation Commission for all of their hard work and efforts in constructing the new Disc Golf Course. He is looking forward to meeting and working with the lead volunteers to complete the necessary maintenance and safety upgrades in time for the Recreation Commission's planned Grand Opening in May. To help in this effort, he has committed the help of the First Selectman's office, Town Hall staff, and Public Works Department. Selectwoman Munro agreed with the importance of maintaining the safety of the public. In response to Selectman Butcher regarding the insurance company's concerns, the First Selectman stated that he is still in the process of gathering the information and hopes to update the Board during their next meeting. Selectman Lyden stated that there has been a dedicated group of volunteers who worked on the Course and, while liability is never avoidable, there are some modifications, including additional signage and rules, that must be made to help ensure the safety of the public.

B. EMERGENCY SERVICES / PUBLIC SAFETY

Resident State Troopers – First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the Resident State Troopers received and handled approximately 220 Calls for Service in December 2021. Noteworthy activities include the Troop K Toy Drive, issuance of several gift cards to families-in-need, and attendance at the town's Safety Committee meeting and an Active Shooter Training event in Colchester. A Car Seat Training Inspection event will be held at the Salem Volunteer Fire Company in February. Trooper Kevin Crosby has been accepted to the 2022 D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) Program at the CT State Police Academy and is in the process of researching the possibility of attending the McGruff Gun Safety Program. The Troopers have also been processing numerous gun permit applications. Due to the current social media climate, the Trooper(s) have also been present at the School during the pick-up and drop-off of children. Additionally, as a result of the recent TikTok threat, Trooper Crosby voluntarily adjusted his schedule to attend the School and provide and ensure the safety of the town's children. Both the Troopers and Firefighters have been actively engaging with the community and have been receiving very positive feedback from the School, administration, teachers, parents, and residents, alike. Selectman Lyden commended both the past and present Resident State Troopers who continue to be committed to the town and its residents. First Selectman Chmielewski

added that CT State Police Lt. Erik Trotter, who was recently appointed to the town's Emergency Management Agency, is now serving Troop K in Colchester.

Emergency Services – Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Manager Bednarz reported that, in conjunction with the Recreation Department, they are planning to offer CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) Classes in the near future. It is estimated that over 700 Calls for Service were received in 2021. In addition to the continuing conversations with the Gardner Lake and Salem Volunteer Fire Company Chiefs, a Brig Training Meeting with the Training Officers of both Fire Companies was held and a Joint Training Plan for 2022 has been developed. He commended GLVFCO Deputy Chief Joe Danao and SVFCO Deputy Chief James Rybak as well as part-time Firefighter Peter Lynch for all of their efforts. The Firefighters have also been busy with a few fires over the last month. He expressed his respect to the First Responders who are continuing to deal with the added difficulties and challenges brought on by the ongoing pandemic; he also cherishes the volunteers and their undying commitment to their job and the community. He also hopes to organize events that are open to the public in the near future.

Emergency Management – He is looking forward to working with the staff and newly-appointed members of the Agency, who were sworn in during their last meeting. Their varied professional backgrounds will be an asset to the Agency as they begin working on enhancing their communications and updating the town's Emergency Operations Plans. He is continuing to learn about the town's operations and processes and has been busy completing the training necessary to maintain his proficiency and update himself in the many subjects related to the position to create an efficient and effective office. He commended the team, which was comprised of multiple town agencies, to work together to devise the distribution plan for the COVID-19 Test Kits & Masks.

Selectman Lyden provided a brief background of Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Manager Bednarz, a career Firefighter and Fire Marshal for another municipality, who is in the process of earning an M.A. in Emergency Management. Along with the First Selectman, he has been working with both Fire Companies and providing positive leadership to the career and volunteer staff. In response to Selectman Butcher, First Selectman Chmielewski stated that they will investigate the staggering of the terms for the Agency members, per the Town Charter.

C. BOARD OF FINANCE

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the Board of Finance has received the town's various departments' Capital requests and will begin reviewing them during their next meeting. The town's FY2020/21 Audit has been posted on the town website and hard copies will be distributed to the Selectmen.

D. BOARD OF EDUCATION (BOE)

Selectwoman Munro reported that, due to the holiday, the BOE will be meeting next Monday, January 13.

E. PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the Commission is continuing to actively discuss and work on updating the town's Plan of Conservation and Development.

F. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION (EDC)

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that Commissioner Steven Shelley was appointed as the Chairman and Commissioner Carl Fontneau was appointed as the Vice-Chairman. The Commission will be meeting immediately following the Board's meeting this evening.

G. LIBRARY

Selectman LaBonte reported that the Board held their election of officers and approved their 2022 Regular Meeting dates. Challenges have included internet connectivity and HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) issues. The Friends of the Library are discussing the possibility of more actively pursuing the receipt of cash donations in addition to the book sales.

H. MILITARY LIAISON

Selectman Chmielewski reported that Selectman LaBonte and himself continue to reach out to the town's Veterans. He is planning to attend the next VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) meeting.

7. ADJOURNMENT

M/S/C: LaBonte/Munro, to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m. Discussion: Selectman Butcher reiterated his request to add items to the agenda. Voice vote, 5-1. Voting in Favor: Selectmen LaBonte, Lyden, Munro, and Chmielewski. Voting in Opposition: Selectman Butcher. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Agnes T. Miyuki, Recording Secretary for the Town of Salem