

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 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, January 4, Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting Minutes

M/S/C: Lyden/LaBonte, to approve the Tuesday, January 4, 2022 Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting Minutes. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

3. CORRESPONDENCE/PUBLIC COMMENTS

A. Memo from Registrar of Voters' Butts and Burr, dated January 27, 2022

First Selectman Chmielewski recited the memo from the Registrar of Voters' Betsy B. Butts and Doris Burr requesting an increase in their base salary by \$500.00 per Registrar.

The item will be reviewed as they review the FY2022/23 Budget. The Selectmen agreed that their request was reasonable given the time and energy the Registrar of Voters' dedicate to their job.

4. ALTERATIONS TO THE AGENDA – *none*

5. AGENDA:

A. COVID-19 Update (Discussion)

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the COVID-19 positivity rate has hovered over 22% over the past two months, resulting in a very challenging period as they aimed to keep the School, Public Works, Library, and Town Hall open. He commended Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Mike Bednarz and the Gardner Lake and Salem Volunteer Fire Companies, Public Works, Emergency

Management, Emergency Services, and Town Hall staff in organizing a successful operations plan for the mass distribution of the COVID-19 Test Kits and N95 Masks to the town's residents.

Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Bednarz reported that the current COVID-19 positivity rate in the State is approximately 8%. The town distributed all of the 270 COVID-19 Rapid Test Kits received by the State on January 8. Learning from the experiences of neighboring towns, they were able to organize a very successful distribution plan. He expressed his appreciation to the Town of Hebron who lent their LED road sign, which was used to notify passing drivers of the distribution, and the Fire Company, who lent their UTV/ATV, allowing them to travel along the distribution route. Both pieces of equipment proved very useful. Additional test kits that were later received being distributed to the First Responders, first-line employees, Salem School, and the town's vulnerable populations, including the seniors and disabled.

First Selectman Chmielewski added that the town received over 200 At-Home Rapid Test Kits and Masks on New Year's Eve that 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. Based on their experience, a late Capital request for an ATV to be shared between the Public Works and Emergency Services/Management Departments was submitted to the Board of Finance. They also hope to purchase a mobile LED road sign in the near future for major announcements or to inform the public regarding road closures. A Capital request for equipment that would allow them to communicate with the various entities in town in real-time during emergencies was also submitted to the Board of Finance. Selectman Butcher commended them on a great job. Selectwoman Munro added that test kits can now be ordered online, relieving some of the pressure.

B. Opioid Settlement Update (Discussion)

The town registered as one of the State's 169 cities and towns that will be receiving a share of the \$300 million landmark settlement. The funds will be utilized for programs designed to help fight the opioid epidemic. The settlement is part of the \$26 billion multi-state agreement with opioid distributors/manufacturers. The exact amount and timing of the payment are unknown at this time.

In response to Selectman Butcher who questioned whether the funds might be utilized for Narcan[®] supplies for the Fire Companies, Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Bednarz stated that Narcan[®] is, relatively, inexpensive and the Fire Companies currently have adequate supplies. They

are hoping to acquire additional equipment, including AEDs (Automated External Defibrillator). While the scope of the town's opioid issues is unknown, Selectman Lyden stated that it is an issue in every community and the town has experienced opioid-related deaths.

C. Blizzard Storm Bobby Update (Discussion)

Due to the anticipated high winds, heavy snow totals, and subzero windchill temperatures, a State of Emergency for Blizzard Storm Bobby was issued. A pre-operational meeting, led by Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Bednarz, was held. He remained in contact with all of the various town entities, including the Superintendent of Schools, Fire Companies, Public Works, Volunteer Fire Companies, and Transfer Station. Both the Salem Free Public Library and Transfer Station were closed on Saturday and the Transfer Station opened at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday. He commended the team and reported that the town did not experience any power outages or significant issues.

Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Director Bednarz reported that the EOC (Emergency Operation Center) and Emergency Management were activated. All of the departments worked well together. The EOC monitors all of the agencies, including Public Works and Volunteer Fire Companies, and maintains constant communication with the State. The town's two career EMT/Firefighters were also called in for the duration of the storm. In addition, a designated Eversource representative maintained communication with the town throughout the storm. He reiterated that no power outages, trees down, roads closed, etc. were reported in the Town of Salem. The storm provided the town with winds measuring 18-25 mph, with wind gusts measuring up to 21 mph and a high of 28° and a low of 11°. The town received approximately 18" of snow with approximately 4' snowdrifts. He expressed his appreciation to the public for staying off the roads and keeping safe. Minor road issues were experienced due to the plowing of the snow. Due to the dead zones for radio communication and cell reception, they are continuing to investigate possible ways to enhance their communications.

Selectman Butcher commended the Public Works crew for clearing the roads in an efficient and timely manner. Selectman Lyden also commended the team on their handling of the storm. He added that the Public Works crew worked overnight to deal with the storm. Having declared a State of Emergency, the expenses the town incurred as a result of the storm might qualify for a 75% FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) reimbursement. First Selectman Chmielewski expressed his appreciation to former First Selectman and Selectman Lyden for his invaluable guidance and support. He also appreciated having a designated Eversource representative who regularly checked in with the town during the storm. He also stated

the importance of preparing for such events by the cutting down of trees by the Public Works and Eversource crews, avoiding any possible power outages, trees down, and road blockages.

D. Appointments to the Recreation Commission (Action)

M/S/C: LaBonte/Munro, to appoint Joshua Rehrig, Alexandra Marsh, and Jocelyn Glidewell to the Recreation Commission with a term to expire on February 1, 2027. Discussion: Mr. Rehrig currently works as a Project Manager for Groton Utilities; Ms. Marsh, who was recommended by Selectman Butcher, currently works for the Connecticut Judicial Branch and was recently appointed to the Economic Development Commission, and; Ms. Glidewell is a member of the Salem School PTO. Other interested candidates will be considered for future openings. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

E. School/Town Technology Infrastructure Assessment/Survey Update (Discussion)

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that he has reached out to the Superintendent of Schools Brian Hendrickson and BOE (Board of Education) Chairman Sean Reith regarding the Board of Finance's request for a Technology Infrastructure Assessment. BOE Liaison Selectwoman Munro has also reached out to the BOE, BOE Chairman Reith, and Board of Finance BOE Liaisons. The town is committed to working together with the BOE to conduct the requested assessment. BOE Liaison Selectwoman Munro reported that, while the BOE was aware of the request and the allocation of funds for the assessment, they were unclear as to their task.

Selectman Lyden provided a brief background of the Board of Finance's request for the assessment and explained that an engineer was hired to conduct a thorough analysis of the Library's HVAC (heating, venting, and air conditioning) system. Three bids were received based on the assessment. The lowest bid was over \$100,000.00 less than the previous service provider's estimate to repair the issues. Based on the School's struggles with its technology plan, it was suggested that an assessment may prove helpful in creating a more solid and consistent financial plan. As such, \$20,000.00 was allocated in the Capital Plan budget to conduct an assessment/analysis. He disagreed that the Board of Selectman was tasked with the same, stating that the funds were allocated for the School to conduct an assessment.

Selectman Butcher agreed with the Board of Finance's request for an assessment/analysis. Selectwoman Munro stated that the BOE expressed concerns during their last meeting regarding the need for the switches and other technology items that were related to the security of their system. She also felt that it might be more cost-effective to obtain the assessments and price estimates from three to four companies,

rather than expending \$20,000.00 for an independent analysis. In contrast, Selectman Butcher felt that it would be more beneficial to invest the funds in an independent analysis by an individual/ company who would be unrelated to the project.

First Selectman Chmielewski will meet and work with the Superintendent, BOE Chairman, and Liaisons to institute a plan.

F. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds (Discussion)

The Board of Selectmen recently appointed several members, including the Chairpersons of various boards, commissions, and the community, to the ARPA Committee. Approximately \$600,000.00 was received and an additional \$600,000.00 is expected to be received this year. Because the rules are constantly changing, a meeting with the Committee members has not yet been held. First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the town has reached out to the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) who is offering an ARPA Coordinator to help towns maneuver through the ever-changing rules and to ensure the correct allocation of funds. The funds to pay for the ARPA Coordinator may derive from their ARPA Funds. Former First Selectman and Selectman Lyden added that, to date, funds have been expended for the audio/visual system in the main Conference Room and the Uncas Health District. The initial reporting to the Federal Government is due in April 2022 and the funds must be expended by 2024. Once the proposed allocation of funds is approved by the ARPA Committee, the items will be referred to the Board of Selectmen, who may call a Town Meeting; a referendum would not be required. Selectman LaBonte agreed with the importance of strategically timing their decisions to ensure that they can adequately justify their allocations.

G. Salem Project Approval Process Guide (Discussion)

First Selectman Chmielewski stated that, due to some evident confusion, a Salem Project Approval Form was created with the input of the relevant parties. The form includes initial approval for the concept by the First Selectman and approvals from various town entities, including the zoning, wetlands, health, finance, and building departments. The form is a work in progress and may be amended, as necessary. Selectmen Butcher and Lyden felt that the form would prove useful and compared it to the Capital Plan Request Form that was instituted during his tenure as the Board of Finance Chairman. It is hoped that the form will mitigate such issues as was raised by the Disc Golf Course. Any input the Selectmen have regarding the form would be appreciated.

H. Salem Disc Golf Park Safety Issues Update (Discussion)

Due to safety issues that were brought to his attention, First Chmielewski reported that, in consultation with the former First Selectman, Public Works Director, CIRMA

(Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency), Emergency Services Director, and others, the Disc Golf Course was temporarily closed. All of the parties expressed their support for the Course and agreed that, in the interest of safety, the course should be temporarily closed while the issues are being addressed. He expressed his understanding of the disappointment of the Recreation Commission and his willingness to move forward with the project.

Recreation Commissioner Art Bergman, who was invited to speak, expressed the Commission's dismay with the lack of consultation and knowledge regarding the issues. He felt that it was the Commission's role and responsibility to maintain the course and that any changes or adjustments that are made to the Course should be presented to the Commission. He stated the Commission's wish to be part of the solution and work with the town to resolve the issues.

Selectman Lyden reported that the First Selectman has met with the Disc Golf Course Designers to discuss the issues. He also stated that he signed a letter supporting the Course, which was originally presented as a Course that would reside nearly entirely in the woods. The finished product has invaded the park area. The Pavilion was created for the residents to enjoy and for the hosting of public events and activities; any additions introduced to the park must work in harmony with its original intent.

First Selectman Chmielewski stated that, as soon as he learned of the issues, he met with the Recreation Commission Chairman who, he felt, was argumentative and uncooperative and has since refused to meet with him. Traditionally, the Chairpersons of each of the boards/commissions meet with the First Selectman to discuss any issues. Additionally, he understands that the Commission is disappointed that the Public Works Director and/or Foreman have been and will be unable to attend their meetings. As such, he has offered for the Chairman or a Recreation Liaison to meet with the Foreman during his work hours to discuss their needs, projects, etc. He has also offered the finances and necessary staffing to work with the Commission to resolve the Disc Golf Course issues. He has also spoken with Boy Scout Leader Lori Morrow regarding the possibility of engaging an Eagle Scout to create the trail markings. He expressed the difficulties he has experienced in working with the Recreation Commission without the Chairman's cooperation.

Selectman Butcher recommended that either the Recreation Commission Chairman or representative meet with the First Selectman. He supported the form, which provides the order of operations, and expressed his support for and appreciation of the Commission. He felt that the issues arose as a result of the Commission falling out of the order of operations. He expressed his support of the Disc Golf Course and offered to help them with any questions they might have.

First Selectman Chmielewski expressed his appreciation to Commissioner Bergman for attending their meeting and speaking, adding that it is about the town, not himself nor the Commission, and reiterated his support for the Disc Golf Course. Commissioner Bergman stated that Chairman Maziarz was unable to attend this evening's meeting due to a family engagement. Chairperson Munro expressed caution in utilizing volunteers to remedy the issues. First Selectman Chmielewski agreed, adding that they might consider hiring a consultant to lead the volunteers. Commissioner Bergman agreed. In closing, First Selectman Chmielewski reiterated his appreciation to Commissioner Bergman, adding that his presence is meaningful as he strives to work together and arrive at a solution that is beneficial to all. He commended the Commission and its programs and wished to appoint Commissioner Bergman as the Recreation Commission's Disc Golf Course Liaison to the Board of Selectman.

I. Tax Collector Refunds

M/S/C: LaBonte/Lyden, 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 \$1,538.55 (one thousand five hundred thirty-eight dollars and fifty-five cents) on this 1st day of February 2022. Discussion: None. Voice vote, 5-0, all in favor.

6. REPORTS:

A. FIRST SELECTMAN

First Selectman Chmielewski stated that his report has been included throughout the meeting. He reiterated his commendation and appreciation to the Town Hall staff and the Emergency Services/Emergency Management department for their hard work during the recent blizzard.

B. SALEM RESIDENT STATE TROOPER UPDATE

Resident State Trooper Kevin Crosby was accepted into the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) Program. He commended both Resident State Troopers Crosby and Ben Duffy for their hard work and community policing efforts.

C. EMERGENCY SERVICES

Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Manager Bednarz reported that Everbridge Notification Program pamphlets were distributed with the test kits and masks during the January 6 distribution event. As a result, 61 individuals signed up to receive Everbridge notifications, which sends out texts, emails, phone calls regarding any community-related announcements. A total of 341 individuals have registered for the program. The information is in the process of being updated and will be further promoted.

A notice from Eversource regarding the possibility of select power grids being shut down for extended periods of time in an effort to conserve their fuel resources and to avoid system overloads. Due to Salem's dependency on power, it is highly vulnerable to the resulting brown- or black-outs. He stated the importance of informing and educating the public, especially those who move into town from big cities who might not be aware of the need to prepare for major storms and the possibility of experiencing prolonged power outages.

In an effort to enhance and improve their real-time communications capabilities, a Capital Item request for universal Smartboards was submitted to the Board of Finance for consideration.

He also announced that an additional Eagle Scout member has expressed an interest in establishing a universal and systematic trail marking system. The system would allow the hiker to convey their exact location to emergency responders.

D. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Per QV (Quinebaug Valley) Emergency Communications Dispatching Service, approximately 650 total Emergency Calls for Service were received. The number excludes any service calls that were received by the individual Fire Companies. Out of the 650 total calls, 434 were received on the weekdays and 216 on the weekends. Over 70 Calls for Service were received for each of the months of December and January alone. He is continuing to work on the Call Study and further breakdown the numbers.

The recent tragic deaths of children and families in New York City and Philadelphia have brought to light the need to inform the public regarding the importance of having working smoke detectors in their living spaces. The batteries in smoke detectors should be replaced every six months. They are hoping to have the Fire Companies return to the School to present fire safety tips on Fire Prevention Day. In most cases, these situations are avoidable through education and knowledge. Any questions or concerns may be directed to him.

Emergency Services Administrator/Emergency Management Manager Bednarz was commended for his hard work and efforts.

E. BOARD OF FINANCE

First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the Board of Finance has reviewed, discussed, and voted on the town's FY2022/23 Capital Plan and will begin reviewing the departments' proposed FY2022/23 budget requests.

D. BOARD OF EDUCATION (BOE)

Selectwoman Munro stated that the items have been reported upon during the course of the meeting.

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)

Based on a report provided by EDC Chairman Steven Shelley, First Selectman Chmielewski reported that the Salem Business and Services Directory has been distributed. The EDC welcomed their new Commissioners and continues to conduct community outreach to the town's businesses and bring in more businesses. Their future plans include increasing their social media presence, conducting personal outreach, creating a Home Business Survey, updating the Business and Services Directory, creating a welcome package, and organizing a training session with the Women's Development Council.

G. LIBRARY

Selectman LaBonte reported that the Board held a lively discussion on their FY2022/23 proposed budget request. They also continued their discussions regarding the HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning) system, which continues to be challenging. The Friends of the Library are continuing to accept book donations for their annual book sales in an attempt to return to a sense of normalcy. He commended the Library for its efforts in engaging in community services by offering and distributing packages and items during the holiday season for families to enjoy.

H. MILITARY LIAISON

Selectman Chmielewski reported that Selectman LaBonte and himself continue to reach out to the town's Veterans and provide aid, as necessary

7. ADJOURNMENT

**M/S/C: Butcher/LaBonte, to adjourn the meeting at 9:03 p.m. Discussion: None.
Voice vote, 5-0. Meeting adjourned.**

Respectfully Submitted by:

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