The Meeting of the Board of Selectmen held on Monday, March 16, 2020 began at 5:30 p.m. in the Selectmen's Conference Room at Town Hall.

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Members Present: Derek DeBarge, Chairman, Antonio Goncalves, Manuel Silva and William Rosenblum

Absent: Carmina Fernandes

First Order of Business: The Pledge of Allegiance

5:30 p.m. Kim Batista – Town Clerk – Possible postponement of the Town Election on March 23, 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay, our meeting tonight is to discuss the possible postponement of the Town Election on March 23, 2020. Our Board is to vote that the March 23, 2020 annual Town Election be postponed due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency. A new date is to be determined by a vote of the Board of Selectmen and to have Town Counsel seek an order from the court and seek through the order any other conditions related to this election deemed appropriate by the Town Clerk.

Ms. Villano: So, I didn't know if you would like to hear the reasons why?

Mr. DeBarge: Absolutely.

Ms. Batista: I have concerns about my election workers and also voters coming in and infecting workers or themselves you know. I feel it should be postponed at a later date just for the safety and wellbeing of everyone involved. I think it would also be low voter turnout. People are not going to want to vote or they know they can always absentee vote if they feel they can't make it there but it's a little short notice to let them know that.

Mr. DeBarge: I think they are absolute valid points.

Mr. Rosenblum: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DeBarge: Mr. Rosenblum.

Mr. Rosenblum: And that was the one thing I was thinking about most of all was the pollsters because a majority of the people working in the election, in the polling places are seniors.

Ms. Batista: Right.

Mr. Rosenblum: So, with the age and with anyone being in contact with anyone that's elderly or has any kind of sickness.

Ms. Batista: And they might not want to work either.

Mr. Rosenblum: Correct. I mean I had thrown around the idea thinking about this as do we put in the one polling spot at the back gym of the high school and then in one door, out the other door, but as everything escalates at this point I would agree that we would have to do something like this.

Ms. Batista: Yes, I mean even if I did do that, I would have to send a letter to every registered voter letting them know. I couldn't just change the polling location, that's not an easy thing.

Mr. Rosenblum: Right.

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Debarge: Mr. Goncalves.

Mr. Goncalves: Just to the point, I think at this point we are going to send a letter out to everybody anyhow advising them they we are not going to have an election. So, do we are we in a position of postponement. In other words, you would have to send a letter out to everyone saying that we would have one centralized location?

Ms. Batista: Um, I don't know if I would have to send out a letter to every registered voter. We have 14,000 registered voters so.

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Mr. Goncalves: Do we know how other communities are handling this?

Ms. Batista: How they are doing it, I believe you know there getting the word out on Facebook, not Facebook but their local paper. They could put it in the Republican. On the news.

Mr. Goncalves: Like a legal notice of some kind.

Ms. Batista: Yes.

Mr. DeBarge: This will be, once we vote should we vote to approve the postponement, it would be part of a robo-call and then the word would get out through that and website, every way that we have possible.

Ms. Batista: And I think a lot of people understand and a lot of people have been expecting it anyway.

Mr. DeBarge: Yes, I have personally gotten questions about it so yes, I, Ms. Batista I completely agree that people expect it, people have been asking about it.

Ms. Batista: I mean they are worried for their lives too you know.

Mr. DeBarge: I think it is the most prudent decision for us to make at this juncture.

Mr. Goncalves: In deciding or thinking about when we would actually have the election, there is probably a lot of warrant items that are time sensitive.

Ms. Batista: Right, well especially last day to register to vote would be 20 days before the election.

Mr. Silva: Right.

Ms. Batista: That will change, it was March 3rd but because the date is now changed, everything changes.

Mr. Silva: Right, that was my question Mr. Chairman was what happens to all of these dates including people to take out papers for if we go far enough are, they still able to take out papers or is that...

Ms. Batista: Umm, I think that would, that ended when, I would check on that when that ended.

Mr. Silva: Yes, I think there is a date deadline where you have up until...

Ms. Batista: Right, so many days before.

Mr. Silva: Okay.

Mr. Goncalves: So, in the process of whatever warrant articles are in place do any of them, will any of them require new hearings? In other words where Finance might have met on something there was time...

Ms. Villano: If I might, Mr. Goncalves you are talking about two different things.

Mr. Silva: There is no warrant.

Ms. Villano: You are talking the Town Meeting is May 11th.

Mr. Goncalves: Okay, any of the questions. For instance, we have just the track question and that's it.

Ms. Villano: That's the ballot question. Everything else is the warrant.

Mr. Goncalves: Oh yeah, you're right.

Ms. Batista: So, to answer your question about the nomination papers, it is already past the deadline. Even if you have it say May 4th, the deadline is already gone by.

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Ms. Villano: And if I might Mr. Chairman, you have to have the election before the end of the fiscal year. So, it has to be done before June 30th, which means you have to have a date before that to vote.

Mr. Silva: So, how do you come up with a date that works?

Ms. Batista: I thought of May 18th but now maybe May 4th might be a better date, that would be before....

Mr. Silva: The other question I have for you, can we do it on a Saturday?

Ms. Batista: It is not in our bylaws to do it on a Saturday but we are changing....

Mr. Silva: I think we should look at doing elections on a Saturday because 1.) I think you will get more people coming out....

Ms. Batista: I don't think so.

Mr. Silva: I think, I mean it's tough.

Ms. Batista: I know a lot of communities that have it on a Saturday and they don't get more people. If anything, they get a little bit less. But, but, I can give you...

Mr. Silva: You might be right but it just seems a little more able for people to get out there. You know people leave at like 8:00 in the morning and don't back until evening. So, I don't know. Maybe.

Mr. Rosenblum: My wife can't do the 10 – 8 the window on the March 23rd one. It's 10-8, right?

Ms. Batista: Yes.

Mr. Rosenblum: She is unable to do it unless she does absentee.

Ms. Batista: That's why they have absentee ballots, yes.

Mr. Debarge: Yes. So, May 4th, May 18th were two of the dates you were looking at?

Ms. Batista: Yes.

Mr. Debarge: Town Meeting is?

Mr. Rosenblum: May 11th.

Mr. Goncalves: 11th. Is five/six weeks really going to make that big of a difference?

Mr. Rosenblum: Should we make the first motion or do we make two?

Ms. Villano: You don't necessarily, if I might Mr. Chairman, you don't necessarily have to pick the date today. It can be a further....

Mr. DeBarge: No, we don't.

Ms. Villano: In fact, the paper that I handed Mr. DeBarge is actually is what the vote, how the vote should read per Town Counsel. I spoke with her beforehand. So, whoever reads the motion it says that a new date can be picked and voted on later.

Mr. DeBarge: Yeah, I think we can give Mrs. Batista some time to...

Mr. Rosenblum: Yeah.

Mr. DeBarge: To ascertain which would be the best date in conjunction with Town Meeting or the best date for her and the wardens.

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Ms. Batista: Right, to see if the wardens are available.

Mr. DeBarge: Obviously this whole pandemic is a fluid issue so we don't even know what the immediate future holds. So, we just need to see how the next you know couple of weeks play out. Most importantly, in my opinion, is that we postpone the election from Monday and see what the next couple of weeks, see how it plays out.

Mr. Rosenblum: Is that the motion? No, okay.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to postpone the March 23, 2020 annual Town election due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency the new date to be determined by a vote of the Board of Selectmen and to have Town Counsel seek an order from the Court and seek through the order any other conditions related to this election deemed appropriate by the Town Clerk. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Ms. Batista: I do want to say that anybody who is concerned about their absentee ballots that we have already received; they are still going to be valid.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay.

Ms. Batista: Thank you.

Mr. Silva: Early voting as well.

Ms. Batista: Well they could have done early voting too.

Mr. Goncalves: Will that be extended?

Ms. Batista: Well they don't really have early voting for Town Election but if it comes to where it is still a problem with voting at least we will have more time to let people know they could early vote by mail not in person. Okay.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay. Thank you very much.

Ms. Batista: Thank you.

Board to discuss closing Town Hall to the public

Mr. DeBarge: So, as well all know we have a sign up on the doors now. This is to move forward to close the Town Hall completely to the public beginning from our vote. Do we have any discussion on that?

Mr. Goncalves: Mr. Chairman, I, in light of everything going on I think it is a great idea. I think, you know, we make sure that all and we are going to talk about this, I think most of the people, the nursing can be a big problem or a big point where people are used to coming in. I know Cheryl discussed that today in the conference call as far as some of those services but for the safety of everybody in general, especially our employees here at Town Hall, I think it is a great idea. Again, as long as we keep everybody informed, we have a lot of avenues between the website and cable and Facebook to let people know how they can get a hold of somebody or get the same thing accomplished without having to come in here and put everybody at risk.

Mr. Silva: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DeBarge: Mr. Silva.

Mr. Silva: I agree with closing the Town Hall; however, I would like to see by appointment. Have somebody call in if they absolutely need to get in here. Marriage licenses are an issue. Too bad she left, the Clerk once a marriage license is recorded, she has a certain amount of time to get them out and people have a certain amount of time to have it done. There are other deadlines that are also issues unless we get directives. I know in my profession I have deadlines coming up that have to be met. If your application is not in by that date you are, now mind you we are probably going to be extended hopefully the legislation does it. At this point, it hasn't been extended so if you absolutely need to get your paperwork in, you should be able to somehow get it in here by appointment or email or whatever.

Ms. Villano: In reference, if I might Mr. Chairman, in reference to your position, Joe has already explained and posted on the website that he would like people to email in. So again, I don't disagree with 'by appointment only', your right, there are certain things that probably require someone coming into the building but if I might just explain a little bit more, this morning we decided to lock all of the doors except the back door to just kind of get a flow of people just coming in and I was totally surprised by the amount of people that filtered through this Town Hall on a daily basis.

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Mr. Silva: Yes, a lot of people came in today.

Ms. Villano: There is 20 people every ½ hour at least coming in through those doors.

Mr. DeBarge: And packing into the elevator.

Ms. Villano: So, the problem is now is we are having families coming in, they're not just isolated one person here and there. There is a lot of people that are starting to come in and for both the safety of the public and safety of the employees yes it should be closed but for those isolated cases certainly 'by appointment only', which the Veterans agent as an example, already started implementing that a couple of days ago that he was doing it only by appointment so that he wasn't having walk-ins where two or three people were waiting. So, I certainly think that we can accommodate by appointment.

Mr. Silva: Yeah, by appointment for certain circumstances you know.

Mr. Villano: Yes.

Mr. DeBarge: And we are going to be staffed anyways so it's not going to be an issue.

Ms. Villano: Right.

Mr. DeBarge: Okay.

Moved by Mr. Rosenblum, seconded by Mr. Silva to close the Town Hall to public access but also at the same time if need be, to 'by appointment' that people can come into Town Hall to the respected Departments. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Board to discuss essential personnel staffing

Mr. DeBarge: So, we have discussed different other towns, surrounding towns and their staffing of municipal buildings, Town Halls and with the closing of our Town Hall to the public we anticipate as we just discussed people still needing to conduct business but also the possibility of influx of phone calls, emails and the need to continue to staff our offices. Some discussion has been made as to whether or not we need to fully staff or cut some of the staffing that's why we put this on the agenda for tonight.

Mr. Silva: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DeBarge: Mr. Silva.

Mr. Silva: I agree with you, I think as far as staffing the essential personnel, most of the people that are essential probably realize who they are you know Police, Fire and the essentials. As far as the other people I think we should be allowing them to use their sick time and vacations, whatever time that they have if they would like to stay out but we are still doing business, we are still going to be doing whatever it is we need. I think this Department, every Department probably has some projects and whatnot that need to be done. We can catch up on all that, you know whether you are straightening out the office or whatever. So, at this time I think that's the best route to go with.

Ms. Villano: And, if I might Mr. Chairman, one of the thoughts we were going with was, all staff would report to duty for the next 3 or 4 days towards the end of week so that week can evaluate and then make a determination possibly next week. Depending on how long the Town Hall has to remain closed. I know that several Town Halls have made it that they are closed for the next 3 weeks and I don't believe that the decision has been made or even talked about a length of time, just that it is, I think we need to reevaluate it.

Mr. DeBarge: Right.

Mr. Silva: I think to do it in the next 3 weeks I mean does that mean now suddenly let's say miracles happen and what you do now you are closed for 3 weeks or you got to call them back in. People you know are going to be scheduling stuff, where they should not be going anywhere but they are still going to be scheduling stuff.

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Mr. Debarge: Right. That's why we decided tentatively or until further notice rather then a specific time frame. And some offices have 4 members on staff, some offices have 2 members on staff so it's a little difficult to decide you let 2 go, 1 go.

Mr. Goncalves: And Mr. Chairman, I'm not really sure the work load is going to change just because the doors are closed. I would imagine whatever work has to be done, the people that are working in here do work beyond the 20 people that might come in through the back door. I can only relate back to my office, I mean we have to do what we have to do in there and whether I am closed at the front or I'm not, the wheel keeps turning. It really is the same amount of work just getting done in a different way.

Mr. Silva: More emails that's for sure.

Mr. Goncalves: And phone calls.

Mr. Silva: Which sometimes emails take longer than public, back and forth, back and forth.

Mr. DeBarge: Well the catch-up part is prudent as well.

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to keep the personnel work force as it is other than obviously the essential personnel is absolutely required and to keep the work force continuing until further notice as we see issues arising. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Closing Comments:

Mr. Goncalves stressed that everyone take this pandemic seriously and to please be careful.

Moved by Mr. Silva, seconded by Mr. Goncalves to adjourn this meeting at 5:52 p.m., not return to open session. Vote 4-0. All in favor.

Ludlow Board of Selectmen

All related documents can be viewed at the Board of Selectmen's Office during regular business hours.