

TOWN OF HOLLISTON

SELECT BOARD

February 5, 2024
7:00PM

Town Hall
703 Washington Street

Present: John Cronin, Chair; Tina Hein, Vice Chair; Ben Sparrell, Clerk;

Also Present: Travis Ahern, Town Administrator; Sean Reese, DPW Director; Andrea Vargas, 12 Curve Street; Barbara Fritts-Worby, 83 Rolling Meadow; and Natasha Marcuard, 30 Noel Drive.

At 7:00pm J. Cronin called the meeting to order.

DISCUSSION OF FLAG POLICY, PER CITIZEN REQUEST:

J. Cronin stated that on January 22, 2024 the Select Board voted to adopt a Flag Policy, prior to which there had been discussion during two previous Select Board meetings on the subject. Several members of the community have since come forward and requested that further discussion regarding the Flag Policy be considered.

Andres Vargas, 12 Curve Street, presented five points to be addressed. First being, Government Speech should be tied to the Towns Strategic Plan. Secondly, not limiting the use of only one pole for all other types of flags. Thirdly, establish a calendar for which flags can be flown. Fourthly, have the Town purchase the flags, then they become property of the Town. Lastly, change the current application form, which limits the location to fly an alternative flag at Blair Square with seven possible locations throughout Town with an option to make them reoccurring annual events, if Flags are owned by the Town then they will become a form of Government Speech.

Natasha Marcuard, 30 Noel Drive, stated that she would like more flexibility and inclusion incorporated into the Flag Policy. The policy also stripped away the opportunity for flags to be flown at other Town owned properties such as Town Hall and the Library. She cited the Pride Flag which has been flown at the Town Hall during the month of June the past several years visibly sending a message to marginalized members of our community.

Lori Markoff, 280 Marked Tree Drive, noted that she has followed the discussions regarding the Flag Policy via zoom and found it interesting when Town Counsel explained that a way for the Town to protect itself is to authorize the flying of flags that represent Government Speech. She referenced the Towns Strategic Plan and noted that one of the goals is to embrace our differences by supporting internal and external diversity, equity and inclusive initiative, creating an inclusive community and that the flags the Town allows to be flown can make a statement particularly those flown at Town Hall.

Robert Principe, 203 Turner Road, voiced his appreciation for all the effort being made regarding the Flag Policy and the references being made to the Towns Strategic Plan. This is about creating and building an inclusive culture within the Town of Holliston.

Mary Greendale, 198 Highland Street, asked about the process in which requests to fly other flags deemed non-Government Speech, and imagines it may be a difficult process to determine which flags may be flown. M. Greendale also stated that she personally prefers not to have multiple flags flown at Town Hall.

Angela Page, 617 Washington Street read from a signed Citizens Petition, consisting of 159 signatures to re-open public commentary and participation in developing the Town of Holliston's Flagg Policy at the February 5, 2024 meeting (see attached) Exhibit A with a proposed alternate.

Barbara Fitz-Worby, 83 Rolling Meadow, thanked all for the opportunity to continue the discussion. She also noted that there are actually 176 signatures on the Citizens Petition. B. Fitz-Worby suggested that all Government Speech should be about respect and support using the Towns Strategic Plan as a guideline, which highlights support for groups which have historically be excluded and even criminalized just for existing. B. Fitz-Worby added that the flying of the Pride Flag is personal for her and she read from a memo her eleven year old daughter wrote "Pride is a noun, but it's also an adjective, when you feel pride your feel happy inside."

Nathan Detering, 83 Winthrop Street, stated that he appreciates the complexity of creating such a policy (Flag) and shared that as the Senior Minister at the Unitarian Universalist Area Church in Sherborn he has been told by parishioners and others that the flying of the Pride Flag at Town Hall has made them feel embraced and included, that is makes a difference.

Chinmaya Gogineni, 425 Underwood Street, phoned in from overseas, noting that he felt this issue was very important and wanted to make the effort to voice his support. Now is the time for the Holliston to demonstrate to Massachusetts and the world that we are an inclusive community.

J. Cronin pointed out that when discussing the Flag Policy the Select Board reviewed Flag Policies adopted by various other communities in Massachusetts. He noted that those Towns all had drafted different policies. He also stated that any changes suggested, such as amendments to the current Flag Policy will needed to be reviewed by Town Counsel.

Tracey McSherry, 109 Hemlock, stated that the above referenced Exhibit A specifically speaks to the fact that a singular location, Blair Square, for all alternate flags is not preferred.

J. Cronin stated that there will not be a vote this evening and that the subject will be revisited in late February or early March 2024. When asked if a draft including suggested revisions be posted prior to the next meeting as several of the residents voiced their concern that they were unaware of the policy being on the agenda and voted at the January 22, 2024 meeting, he replied most likely not, but they could look into the possibility.

B. Sparrell stated that he voted for the Flag Policy due to the fact that he does not want to see flags with negative symbols flown. He also noted that the feedback and comments made this evening are valuable and welcomes the dialogue. B. Sparrell suggested that residents subscribe to the link to obtain the Select Board meeting agendas.

T. Hein stated that she applaud all for sharing their comments this evening and found it very

meaningful. She also noted that she hears that location matters and what might be the process to discern Government Speech and incorporate the goals of the Strategic Plan. T. Hein inquired if there might be a civic organization such as Diverse Holliston that is collaborating regarding the Flag Policy as it could be helpful to assist the Select Board in understanding their specific goals.

J. Cronin stated that there is a public process which the Select Board adheres to, and regarding the Flag Policy it was openly discussed in several meetings and there was no public feedback during those meetings which may have caused the Select Board to delay a vote at the January 22, 2024 meeting. In response several residents noted that they didn't have time to digest the information presented during the meetings and also that the graphics were very hard to see. Robert Principe, 203 Turner Road, stated that this evening's meeting is an open and honest dialogue and he appreciates the Board's willingness to continue the discussion. He added that there is a need for more citizens to get involved.

J. Cronin stated that this Select Board is committed to diversity and is not in any way retreating. He appreciates all comments and the overall excellent feedback and once the Board gets through the Budget Process and has had Town Counsel review suggested changes to the Flag Policy it will be back on an agenda in the near future.

FY25 WATER RATE HEARING:

At 8:19pm B. Sparrell read the Notice of Hearing to open the FY25 Water Rate Hearing,

B. Sparrell made a motion to open the FY25 Water Rate Hearing. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

Sean Reese, DPW Director gave a brief overview pertaining to the proposed increase of the water rate change requested for FY25. This is to cover the anticipated debt service, of which last year reserves from Retained Earnings were applied. T. Ahern noted that a portion of the debt is a result of the renovation on Well #5. There should be a decline in the rate by FY27.

At 8:29pm B. Sparrell made a motion to close the Public Hearing for the FY25 Water Rate Hearing. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the Water Rate Structure as proposed for the FY25 Water Rate with a 3% increase on all 4 tiers, from \$7.50 to \$8.00. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

WARRANT:

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the Weekly Warrant in the amount of \$1,054,572.37. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

COMMENTS FROM THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR:

T. Ahern stated that the DPW would like to use existing funds to resurface a portion of Washington Street from Locust Street to Curve Street. Due to the volume of traffic they suggest doing the work at night. J. Cronin suggested putting the request on the website to obtain feedback from the public.

T. Ahern shared an update of the various projects throughout Town. There is a link on the Town's website, which includes the timeline on the Norfolk Street paving and sidewalk project.

The Garden Club may plan an Arbor Day Celebration as part of the 300th Anniversary with Celebrate Holliston this year. More information will be provided in the near future. There will be an all-day FY25 Budget Meeting on Saturday February 17, 2024 in the Select Board Meeting Room. The schedule will be posted on the Town's website.

BOARD BUSINESS:

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve and sign the citations as presented for the Lions' Club Melvin Jones Award, names of which will not be available until the evening of the presentation. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of December 18, 2023 as written. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

B. Sparrell made a motion to authorize the use of the Rail Trail right of way pertaining to the license agreement as presented between the Town of Holliston and Creative Plaything located at 91-95 Washington Street for the calendar year 2024. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

OTHER BUSINESS:

T. Hein stated that Fiskes General has Holliston 300th Anniversary wear available for sale. T. Ahern noted that the Candy Cottage has Holliston Pottery for sale as well.

J. Cronin stated that the FY25 Budget meeting will be held on Saturday, February 17, 2024.

J. Cronin noted that Papers are available at the Town Clerks Office for those interested in running for elected office. He also noted that there will be an ARPA meeting on Thursday February 8, 2024.

T. Ahern will schedule a Select Board Executive Session to discuss the possibility of purchasing 799 Washington Street within the next several weeks.

At 8:50ppm B. Sparrell made a motion to adjourn. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

Respectfully submitted;

Margaret Driscoll

Approved __03-05-24

