

TOWN OF HOLLISTON

SELECT BOARD

March 4, 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; Andre Vargas, Audrey Kinlock, Barbara Fritts-Worby, Karen Apuzzo Langton, Amy Belger, Robert Principe, Natasha Marcuard, Town Residents.

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

DELIBERATION OF REQUESTED CHANGES TO TOWN FLAG POLICY:

J. Cronin noted that a vote was taken on January 22, 2024 to adopt a Flag Policy after which, per citizen's request a discussion regarding the Flag Policy took place at the February 5, 2024 Select Board Meeting. The Select Board is returning to deliberate, after Town Counsel review of the suggested changes to the Policy.

B. Sparrell stated that he understands location is the biggest issue. He is sensitive to that, however he would like to take a holistic approach and create a uniform policy that will set a baseline. Blair Square is a site of celebration and congregation. B. Sparrell does support the Flag Policy as it stands and applauds all who have come forward to contribute their feedback.

T. Hein stated that in her opinion the Flag Policy has accomplished what was intended, Government Flags, (US, State, Town, POW, MIA) to be flown at Town Hall and the Library while all others, deemed non-government flown at Blair Square. She recognizes that others feel differently. T. Hein also noted that this is an evolving process and the policy may be amended in the future.

J. Cronin stated that he has enjoyed the "give and take" with many citizens since the February 5, 2024 meeting. J. Cronin noted that the 2024 Flag Flying Schedule will be online and that the Town will purchase the Pride Flag that is scheduled to fly during the month of June 2024.

Audrey Kinlock, 35 Exchange stated that she is "shocked that the flag pole at Town Hall has been restricted to Government Speech that the Pride Flag is being banned." A. Kinlock continued to ask, is she not welcome in this Town, and questioned her safety and that of her family. Flying the Pride Flag at Blair Square feels like segregation.

Andre Vargas, 12 Curve Street, stated that he feels the Flag Flying Schedule, which was brought to the Select Board via his suggestion is the only item that was considered by the Select Board and no other suggestions have been taken. "There is not an ounce of courage in this Flag Policy". A. Vargas inquired as to why Town Counsel was not present to defend the policy that was written to protect the Town out of fear. A. Vargas asked where those who opposed the flying of the Pride Flag at Town Hall were this evening to explain their views. A. Vargas thanked

the Select Board for bringing the topic back for discussion.

Angela Page, 617 Washington Street stated that the Town Hall and Library are more visible and reach more people than Blair Square and therefore a more desirable location to fly the Pride Flag. It's a way to show the world what we the Holliston Community believe in. A. Page added that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are included in the Town's Strategic Plan.

Robert Principe, 203 Turner Road, noted that he greatly appreciates the work of the Select Board and asked that they consider the Mission Statement regarding the Town wide Strategic Plan. R. Principe continued to add "This requires change, lead not look to please people, stop risk aversion, lead". Flying the Pride Flag at Town Hall demonstrates that Holliston stands for equity and inclusion.

Christine Smith, 46 Front Street, noted her disappointment that the Flag Policy continues to limit the flag flying (Pride Flag) to Blair Square, as it does not hold the same meaning as it does at Town Hall. Its important to show community diversity, the current Flag Policy does not do this. She would like to see it flown at the Town Hall and the Library.

Amy Belger, 2125 Washington Street, noted that the current Flag Policy does not reflect the value of the Community as outlined in the Strategic Plan. Blair Square is not the epicenter of Town life, not equal to Town Hall for its visibility. "We have the choice to do better and we should".

Natasha Marcuard, 30 Noel Drive, noted that the simplest version would be to remove limitations, eliminate the need for revisions. N. Marcuard added that as a result of the Shurleff vs. Boston case the city of Boston did provide a location at City Hall to fly other flags.

Tracy McSherry, 109 Hemlock Drive, noted that although she agrees that Blair Square is a great place to fly a celebratory flag that there are many groups that have been targeted and it may not feel celebratory as much as necessary.

Amy Belger, 2125 Washington Street, added that it feels as if the Town is regressing by removing the Pride Flag from Town Hall, placing the Town on the wrong side of history. Also she noted the decision being made here in Holliston cannot be compared with the case in Boston. It is apples and oranges. A. Belger stated that it is "good to have the conversation".

Peter Rosen, 65 Winter Street, expressed his concern that if the Pride Flag is not flown at Town Buildings such as the Library it will be obvious and therefore there may be individuals that will feel unwelcomed here in Town.

Christina Smith, 46 Front Street, read a prepared memo, and noted that hearing that there are people who do not feel safe and do not belong is upsetting. It is our job as a community to listen to them.

Dr. Liz Theiler, 17 Norland Street, stated that this is an important and wonderful discussion, this is what the Town of Holliston is all about. Dr. Theiler suggested extending the 2 minute limit per speaker during meetings.

Laurie Markoff, 280 Marked Tree, has been moved by many of those whom have spoken this evening and noted that it can be very intimidating to speak at public meetings. She is

concerned that the 170 plus individuals who signed the petition are not being heard, we as a Town can do better.

J. Cronin thanked all for their input so far this evening and added that although the Select Board may not agree with everyone's comments they are indeed listening.

Laurie Markoff, 280 Marked Tree, would like the Select Board to consider the consequences of the decision being made.

Karen Apuzzo Langton, 100 Woodland Street, stated that there is a difference between an emotional response and a policy response. There is value being displayed if a flag is flown at Town Hall vs. at Blair Square. Not flying the Pride Flag at Town Hall this year feels like Pride Month is being canceled. Is there a possibility of the Town adopting the Pride Flag as a "Town Flag."

Barbara Fritts-Worby, 83 Rolling Meadow, acknowledged that points being made this evening are excellent. B. Fritts-Worby noted that there is a need to understand what it is like to be fighting to be seen, to have rights taken away. There is an opportunity here to be an ally, the Select Board has the power to make a change and asked the Board members what they hear when people they do not feel safe.

J. Cronin stated that he agrees that the flag is an important symbol. He also feels the Holliston Community is welcoming/embracing to all.

T. Hein asked that during the other 11 months of the year that if there are concerns from the community to please bring them forward. There are many ways to create safety, which can be addressed by the various departments throughout Town.

B. Sparrell is saddened to hear that there are members of the community who feel that we are creating a space where people feel unsafe. The Board is tasked with creating a non-emotional policy, a policy that contains everything, beyond the Pride Flag, inclusion of other groups as well.

Barbara Fritts-Worby, 83 Rolling Meadow, noted that not everyone knows what it is like to not feel safe and that it appears that people are not fully listening, and asked that the Select Board members not assume they know how it feels.

Robert Principe, 203 Turner Road, stated that he has no clue as to what it is like to be targeted on a daily basis, but it is time to pay forward, time to lead, make choices, we have work to do.

Audrey Kinloch, 35 Exchange Street, feels that the Select Board is ignoring what is being said and wanted to know why the Pride Flag is being banned from the Town Hall.

J. Cronin noted that the Flag Policy is designed to address the Shurloff vs. Boston case. The policy will keep Public Speech on Public Space, (non-government at Blair Square).

Tracey McSherry, 109 Hemlock, noted that Blair Square vs. Town Hall feels separate, not equal. By following this Flag Policy we are going to be on the wrong side of history.

Andres Vargas, 12 Curve Street, asked to hear from those with opposing views, could the Board share any correspondence received.

Each Select Board member responded by noting their reluctance to give specifics based on the

Conversations or correspondence without the permission of those individuals. J. Cronin stated that the Board is trying to meet the citizens halfway. B. Sparrell, hearing different points of view and understanding the importance of the Pride Flag supports the creation of a universal policy. T. Hein has received various feedback indicating the issue as gone too far, not far enough or it is just right. She sees a way in the future to amend the Flag Policy.

Cathy Cummins, 65 Winter Street, expressed her disappointment, feels that the Town is sending a negative message and pointed out that inclusion is a named goal in the Town wide Strategic Plan and feels the vote to approve the presented Flag Policy is contradictory.

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the updated Flag Policy, as presented amending the January 22, 2024 version to include the creation of an annual calendar starting with the current year, 2024. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the annual calendar for the calendar year 2024 in conjunction with the Flag Policy, as amended on March 4, 2024, as presented. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

B. Sparrell made a motion to request that the Town Administrator purchase a Pride Flag, per the Town's Flag Policy Calendar for 2024. T. Hein second. After a conscious of the participants it was determined that the Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride Flag be purchased. Vote 3-0.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Barbara Fritts-Worby 83 Rolling Meadow thanked the Select Board for obtaining input on the type of Pride Flag the Town will purchase and expressed her disappointment in feeling that many at the meeting did not feel their voices heard regarding the Flag Policy as presented. In response to a question T. Ahern stated that the Pride Flag will not hang from the Town Hall windows as it had in the years 2020-2023. However it will be flown at Blair Square.

WARRANTS:

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the Weekly Warrant in the amount of \$552,014.58. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

FY2025 TOWN ADMINISTRATOR RECOMMENDED BUDGET:

T. Ahern noted that it has been a difficult year, which was anticipated. This year's overall deficient is \$3 million vs. last years \$50,000. T. Ahern presented the summary of the recommended cuts. Looking to the future due to the fact that overall growth is slowing down rapidly within Town there may be an operational override in the future, as prop 2 ½ may not keep up with inflation. As of the last School Committee meeting the Schools Budget came in a just under \$3 million, Keefe Tech enrollment \$295,000, which is separate. T. Ahern recommended taking Capital Set Aside down to the minimum of \$1.65 for previously approved borrowing within the levy. Representatives from the Slate Legislators will be attending the April 1, 2024 meeting with an update on the Government Budget.

The Warrant for the May 2024 Town Meeting will close on March 11, 2024. T. Ahern will provide a full list of Capital Requests at the next Select Board meeting on March 11, 2024.

T. Ahern presented the Financial Policy pertaining to the OPEB/Pension. The Select Board had previously noted their recommendation to reduce the contribution from \$1.5 million to \$1.25 million. After which a vote by the Finance Committee was taken, 4-3, to amend the amount.

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the Financial Policies, as amended by the Finance Committee, with the following amendment: changing the aggregate OPEB/Pension Stabilization Fund contributions to a minimum of \$1 million and a maximum of \$1.25 million, as presented.

T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

COMMENTS FROM THE TOWN ADMINISTRATOR:

T. Ahern stated that there will be a legislative update at the Select Boards April 1, 2024 meeting with the Finance Committee in attendance as well.

BOARD BUSINESS:

B. Sparrell made a motion to authorize the Town Clerk to amend the ballot for the May 2024 local election to include an additional seat on the Board of Health, previously held by Joshua Mann, for the duration of the seat available. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

B. Sparrell made a motion to approve the Meeting Minutes of January 17, 22, and 29 2024 as written. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

OTHER BUSINESS:

T. Ahern explained that the State Legislation has sent a request to amend language which is related to the recent legislation H3998 for Firefighter Mark Dellicker.

B. Sparrell made a motion to move to strike, within the House Bill 3998, the words “no deductions shall be made” by inserting the following words: “Mark Dellicker is mentally and physically capable of performing the duties of such position. The Select Board of the Town of Holliston may require Mark Dellicker to be examined by an impartial physician to determine such capability. No deduction shall be made.” T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

At 9:35pm B. Sparrell made a motion to adjourn. T. Hein second. Vote 3-0.

Respectfully submitted;

Margaret Driscoll

Approved__04/16/24

