



CALL TO ORDER:

A quorum being duly present, Town Council President Shawn George called the meeting of the Bridgewater Town Council to order at 7:00pm, on January 19, 2021 via Zoom©.

PRESENT:

Council members present via Zoom© were, Timothy Fitzgibbons, Peter Colombotos (arriving at 7:50 p.m.), Francis Sousa, Matthew Rushton, Shawn George, William Wood, Fred Chase, Aisha Losche and Dennis Gallagher. Town Manager Michael Dutton and Town Attorney Jason Rawlins were also present.

ABSENT: *No Councilors were absent.*

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

MOMENT OF SILENCE

A moment of silence was held for all who have passed.

President George announced: Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor’s March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Bridgewater Town Council will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. There will be no in person attendance permitted. Citizens who wish to tune in to the meeting may do so via Facebook Live.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- January 5, 2021

Motion: Councilor Fitzgibbons made a motion to approve which was duly seconded.

Discussion: None

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Fitzgibbons – YEA; Colombotos – NOT PRESENT; Sousa – YEA; Rushton – YEA; George – YEA; Wood – YEA; Chase – YEA; Losche – YEA; Gallagher - YEA. The motion passed 8-0.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE PRESIDENT – None

PROCLAMATIONS - None

Motion: Councilor Fitzgibbons made a motion to take agenda item J: (Discussions) out of order which was duly seconded.

Discussion: None

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Gallagher – YEA; Losche – YEA; Chase – YEA; Wood – YEA; George – YEA; Rushton – YEA; Sousa – YEA; Colombotos – NOT PRESENT; Fitzgibbons - YEA. The motion passed 8-0.

DISCUSSIONS – (Taken out of order)

- **Joint Meeting with Town Manager, Finance Committee and School Committee Chair (or Designee)**

Finance Committee Chair, Nate Schofield opened the Finance Committee meeting at 7:09 p.m.

Seeing a quorum present, School Committee Chair, Michael Dolan called the School Committee to order at 7:10 p.m.

Superintendent, Derek Swenson spoke in detail about the Student Success Plan Budget for the school district which includes four pillars. The budget presented to the subcommittee is a needs-based budget. Mr. Swenson outlined a need for a total of 12 new positions in the district (two in Bridgewater, one in Raynham and eight servicing district-wide) and detailed each. Mr. Dolan outlined the school budget timeline as Budget Subcommittee meetings to be held on 2/11, 3/9, 3/17, 4/13 and 5/11. The budget will be presented to the committee on 1/27. The public hearing will be held 3/10 and a vote to adapt on 3/24. Hoping the Town’s vote the budget sometime in May.



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Councilors thanked members of the school district for their dedication during the pandemic, several asking questions of the School District. Councilor Fitzgibbons asked what the increase would be if nothing new was added. Mrs. Macedo responded it would be a 3.7% increase. At Councilor Rushton's request, Mr. Swenson spoke about the proactive approach of seeking CARES Act reimbursement. Councilor Fitzgibbons asked if Special Education is mandated by the state and if it's fully funded by the state. Mr. Swenson responded, it is mandated, but it is not fully funded.

Finance Committee member, Suzi Robinson asked several questions of the Superintendent. Mr. Swenson explained which positions were new and generally how the district may prioritize.

President George requested a little more in-depth information about the assessments for the town (not including debt service), so people understand it.

Seeing no additional questions from Finance Committee members, President George asked Town Manager Dutton for his input.

Mr. Dutton spoke about the Federal Government funding for expenses incurred because of COVID, the revenue outlook noting property taxes are relatively stable, however we are very concerned about local receipts. State Aid is also a concern at this point. In FY22 we are budgeting for a reduction in State Aid. Mr. Dutton reminded all that in the current year we voted to take \$1.6MM from Stabilization to avoid service cuts this year and are anticipating taking another \$1.6 MM from stabilization again. Mr. Dutton then briefly outlined the Town's priorities, noting the DPW and Building Maintenance. He also spoke about the need for the Budget Resolution as a guide to building the budget and outlined the plan to present the capital plan and operating budget together, however the capital plan will not be voted until free cash is certified.

Rachel King made a motion to close the School Committee meeting, which was duly seconded. A roll Call vote was taken and the motion to close the meeting passed unanimously. The School Committee meeting adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

Chris Blunt made a motion to close the Finance Committee meeting, which was duly seconded. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously. The Finance Committee meeting adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

**Return to regular order of business (Citizens Open Forum)*

CITIZENS OPEN FORUM

President George read the rules of conduct and reminded any citizens wishing to speak to state their name and address for the record and noted the three-minute time limit.

- Pat Neary, 225 Lakeside Drive: Ms. Neary spoke against the upcoming marijuana issue stating she does not feel the issue belongs on ballot and cited numerous reasons for her opinion.
- Wendi LaCivita, Beach Street: Thanked all who attended the joint meeting for coming together to work together to do what's right for our town.
- Jennifer Smith, Boxwood Lane: Ms. Smith strongly opposes the order which puts a question on the ballot. Ms. Sullivan spoke about several reasons why she is in opposition and made several suggestions on items she feels the council should be focusing on.
- Taylor Sullivan, Norlen Park: Ms. Sullivan expressed frustration with Councilor Wood's order as she feels it has been made perfectly clear the town does not want recreational marijuana. Ms. Sullivan outlined many reasons why she feels recreational marijuana shouldn't be allowed.
- Janet Hanson, 665 Pleasant Street: Mrs. Hanson agrees with Ms. Sullivan's comments stating she doesn't understand why Mr. Wood seems to be the only one pushing this issue. Mrs. Hanson spoke against the marijuana ballot item.

APPOINTMENTS

- Finance Committee – Nathan Schofield (Re-Appointment)



Motion: Councilor Wood made a motion to approve which was duly seconded.

Discussion: Mr. Wood spoke on behalf of Mr. Schofield’s re-appointment.

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Fitzgibbons – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Sousa – YEA; Rushton – YEA; George – YEA; Wood – YEA; Chase – YEA; Losche – YEA; Gallagher - YEA. The motion passed 9-0.

- Historical Commission – Matthew Casey

Motion: Councilor Rushton made a motion to approve which was duly seconded.

Discussion: None

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Gallagher – YEA; Losche – YEA; Chase – YEA; Wood – YEA; George – YEA; Rushton – YEA; Sousa – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Fitzgibbons - YEA. The motion passed 9-0.

HEARINGS - None

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS

- Petition P-2021-002: Annual Renewal - Common Victualler’s - (no alcohol)

Motion: Councilor Chase made a motion to approve which was duly seconded.

Discussion: At Councilor Colombotos’ request, Mr. Dutton confirmed Jay’s Flying Pizza is outside the business district, however they are grandfathered.

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Fitzgibbons – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Sousa – YEA; Rushton – YEA; George – YEA; Wood – YEA; Chase – YEA; Losche – YEA; Gallagher - YEA. The motion passed 9-0.

- Petition P-2021-003: New Common Victualler's License - J & K Restaurant, dba King Garden, 220 Winter Street

Motion: Councilor Fitzgibbons made a motion to approve which was duly seconded.

Discussion: Mr. Dutton briefly explained this was due to a transfer in ownership.

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Gallagher – YEA; Losche – YEA; Chase – YEA; Wood – YEA; George – YEA; Rushton – YEA; Sousa – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Fitzgibbons - YEA. The motion passed 9-0.

PRESENTATIONS - None

TOWN MANAGER’S REPORT

Mr. Dutton reported on information about various activities happening around town and highlighted meetings and events. Items of note included:

- Mitchell School Update (Standing Item)

Contracts been signed with Bacon Construction. They are in the process of doing some neighbor outreach. We budgeted for the construction phase for a little over \$63MM bids came in around \$5.1MM. The next Building Committee meeting is 2/8. Once all the numbers are in we’ll put the tax calculator back up on the website. More information can be found at www.bridgewaterproject.com. At Councilor Colombotos’ request, Mr. Dutton elaborated on the alternate items which were added in. At Councilor Fitzgibbons request, Mr. Dutton elaborated on the potential interest rate (in the low 2’s) and spoke about the bonding the school district will be doing.

- COVID-19 Update

We continue to hover around 100 cases in the community however the DOC numbers continue to escalate. BSU has a handful of cases. We have seen a number of staff infections and a number of staff quarantines. The High School will be moving to all remote learning for the next week. Mr. Dutton spoke about the “English Strain” of COVID and explained; we are starting a vaccination clinic for our public safety officials. It’s being done in partnership with Raynham and BSU. He then spoke about the different phases noting we are waiting for DPH guidance on rolling out phase II and III vaccinations. In response to Councilor questions, Mr. Dutton explained; right now, the vaccination site is a two-day initiative for public safety by appointment. BSU is looking to continue in some form through phase II and III. We are prepared to use the Senior Center if needed. Mr. Dutton noted; the Health Agent and Senior Center Director have been collecting a list from callers looking to get on the vaccination list.



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- **FY2022 Budget (Standing Item)**
We are budgeting for a 15% reduction in State Aid and are virtually certain we'll need to pull from Stabilization, but it will not be done without a plan to replace it. In this operational budget we will be focusing on DPW, Building Maintenance and Collective Bargaining. Councilor Fitzgibbons asked what the expected same store cost year over year is for the Town and the percentage of increase in State Aid over past several years.
Councilor Gallagher asked if the Governor level funds State Aid, you'll rely on that money coming to the Town, correct? Mr. Dutton responded, that was correct. He has heard nothing of when the Governor will finalize the budget. Mr. Gallagher followed up asking when some of the numbers will be available so we can begin meeting. Mr. Dutton responded, something should be available next week.
- **Central Square Design and Traffic Design**
Mr. Dutton will bring forward a Capital Order for appropriation. Mr. Sulmonte is working on something now. He may have something for the second meeting in February. Regarding the Opportunity Zone, Mr. Dutton has suggested holding a Charrette, which is a way to gather a lot of public input. The CED Director has someone lined up who can spearhead that effort and we can begin in early Spring. Councilor Wood asked why this process is not part of Comprehensive Master Planning being taken into consideration now, why a separate study needs to be done? Mr. Dutton explained he wouldn't refer to it as a study group. It's really a grass roots community effort. The Master Plan process is dictated by statute and has sections.
- **Items for Next Meeting – *No items were put forward at this time.***

DISCUSSIONS (*Continued*):

- **District 5 Vacancy – *Councilor George***
President George doesn't believe a discussion is necessary as the Town Attorney has already provided clarification.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS - *None*

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION - *None*

OLD BUSINESS - *None*

NEW BUSINESS

- **Order O-FY21-029: Place an Advisory Question on the April 24, 2021 Town Election Ballot (*Councilor Wood*)**
Councilor Wood explained, this is for a non-binding question which does not change zoning or anything. It will simply get the opinion of the citizens. It doesn't mean if the answer is "yes" or "no" we have to do anything. He feels this is a non-threatening way for citizens to express their opinions.
A discussion took place briefly as Councilor Wood answered Mr. Sousa's question about home delivery of marijuana products.

Attorney Rawlins advised the conversation should be kept to where the measure will be referred and any potential amendments to be considered.

Councilor Gallagher would like to see it referred to Rules & Procedures. He noted after reading MGL it seems there should be a citizens petition. Additionally, Mr. Gallagher is not in support of the order as written because it's only limited to the current medical marijuana. If we're putting the question before the voters it shouldn't be limited to one business. Attorney Rawlins addressed Mr. Gallagher's question about a citizens Petition, which is an option, but doesn't preclude other initiatives.

Motion: Councilor Gallagher made a motion to refer to Rules & Procedures Committee which was duly seconded.

Discussion: Councilor Gallagher explained; there's time for a committee to consider the order and amendments.

Motion: Councilor Wood made a motion to amend the main motion to include having the order come back at the Council's next meeting which was duly seconded.



Discussion (on amendment): Discussion followed as Councilors considered other means to have the item included for certain at the next meeting. Mr. Wood was agreeable to having the Council President add the item to the next agenda.

No vote taken as the motion was withdrawn.

Discussion (continued on main motion to refer): Councilor Rushton spoke in detail about his opposition to the order moving forward at all citing his time on the Marijuana Ad Hoc Committee and his career in law enforcement and asked his fellow councilors to vote “no” on this order. Councilor Chase feels the voters should have an opportunity to have a say; especially as vote was very close in 2016. Mr. Wood noted; in general, he is against referring to committee.

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Fitzgibbons – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Sousa – YEA; Rushton – NO; George – YEA; Wood – NO; Chase – YEA; Losche – YEA; Gallagher - YEA. The motion passed 7-2.

Motion: Councilor Wood made a motion to bring the measure back for a second reading on 2/2/21 which was duly seconded.

Discussion: Mr. Wood explained he simply wants to ensure this order comes back for a vote on 2/2/21.

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Gallagher – NO; Losche – NO; Chase – YEA; Wood – YEA; George – NO; Rushton – NO; Sousa – NO; Colombotos – YEA; Fitzgibbons - NO. The motion failed 3-6.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

President George reminded all that the time limit was three minutes and requested comments were kept respectful.

- Janet Hanson: If it’s allowed to be on the ballot as a poll, she feels strongly that the question has to be worded very carefully. Mrs. Hanson feels the question on the order is too vague.
- Lauren Webb, Union Street: Ms. Webb questions the language on the order. She questions whether it’s an accurate method of polling given the typical low voter turnout and demographics.
- Suzie Robinson, Holly Lane: Ms. Robinson noted she is speaking as a private citizen and echoed previous comments. She urged the Council to have further conversations about studies (on recreational marijuana) out there.
- Dr. Carlton Hunt: Dr. Hunt was unable to comment as he was having audio issues.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Councilor Gallagher: Mr. Gallagher noted it was a great meeting tonight with lots of good discussion
- Councilor Losche: We just spent a lot of time discussing something that’s a hypothetical. We still don’t have goals for the Town Manager, or how we’re going to fix the DPW. There are more urgent items than this ballot poll.
- Councilor Chase: No Comments.
- Councilor Wood: Referenced Councilor Rushton, stating his (Mr. Rushton’s) opinion must be what it is; because of his public safety role. If the question were allowed to go to the ballot he could express whatever his opinion would be. Mr. Wood spoke about marijuana, votes by legislators and the past vote count on the question of marijuana.
- Councilor Rushton: Thanked the Town Manager, and health staff for helping to coordinate the vaccination clinic.
- Councilor Sousa: Echoed Councilor Gallagher’s comments.
- Councilor Colombotos: Nothing
- Councilor Fitzgibbons: Thanked President George for another good Zoom meeting. Thanked Mr. Dolan for chairing his committee in the joint meeting and his service. Thanked Mr. Gelfi for remaining and representing Raynham at the meeting.
- Councilor George: Thanked School Committee and Finance Committee. If there are any additional questions for the committees feel free to go directly to the committee. Thanked all involved in discussions today. Appreciated people coming prepared and following the rules.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – *No Executive Session was held.*



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ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Councilor Sousa made a motion to adjourn which was duly seconded.

A roll call vote was taken with results recorded as follows:

Fitzgibbons – YEA; Colombotos – YEA; Sousa – YEA; Rushton – YEA; George – YEA; Wood – YEA; Chase – YEA; Losche – NOT PRESENT; Gallagher - YEA. The motion passed 8-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Minutes submitted by: Ann Holmberg

In accordance with the applicable provisions of the Town of Bridgewater Home Rule Charter and Town Council Rules and Procedures, the Town Council assembled voted, at their meeting on Tuesday, February 2, 2021, to approve the aforementioned minutes, as submitted by a roll call vote (9-0).

A TRUE COPY ATTEST:

Ann M. Holmberg
Town Council Clerk