

**TOWN OF WALPOLE
STAFF MEETING
SEPTEMBER 17, 2020**

Selectboard Present: Peggy Pschirrer (Chair); Cheryl Mayberry; Steven Dalessio

Staff Present: Sarah Downing (Manager of Administration); Richard Kreissle (Administrator of Finance); Michael Paquette (Chief Police Department); Ben Hoy (Recycling Director); Michael Rau (Road Agent/Highway Department); Helen Dalbeck (Hooper Institute Executive Director); Kraig Harlow (Recreation Director)

Excused: Sandra Smith (Town Clerk/Tax Collector)

CALL TO ORDER: Mrs. Pschirrer called this Staff Meeting to order at 5:03 PM in the Walpole Town Hall and announced it is so good to see everyone. She listened to the State Epidemiologist today. We are not having a surge at any time. The State is now averaging 3,000 COVID tests a day and sometimes as high as 5,000-to-6,000. We are still having cases. Now that students are back in the schools, it accounts for some of the cases but no surge. The Selectboard is going to send a notice to everyone that the flu season is knocking at the door. She is going to urge everyone, including people who say they never have the flu, to have a flu shot. If have the Town's HealthTrust medical coverage, the flu shot will be paid for. Most health plans will pay for it. Getting the flu shot will not insure that you will not get sick. However, it lessens the severity if you do get it. It will protect you, your family and friends just as the masks are doing. People may be confused between COVID-19 and the flu that may occur. Please get a flu shot. She had one on September 3rd at Walgreens and it was painless.

Mrs. Pschirrer has also been reading articles recently about Americans not taking vacations. Europeans take as much as a month off. This year it is time for all of us to think about taking time off; use your vacation time and take a break from stress at work. We are dealing with an unusual time. Take time to visit family and friends, take a day trip, just sit in your back yard or even sleep late. The Selectboard knows you all work hard; time off is for your health. The Selectboard has had requests about carrying-over vacation time and they will look through them.

Mrs. Pschirrer has copies of their reports but she wants them to all exchange information on what they are going to be doing in the next three (3) months; the last quarter of the year. What projects do they want to accomplish. Looking at their budgets what will they want to encumber into 2021. She thanked the department managers for the 2021 budgets they turned in. The Selectboard spent most of last Monday talking about the proposed budgets. They will do that again in December when each department manager will be invited to come in to talk with them. They had a good return on the spring tax warrant. But they have no idea of what lies ahead. They do not yet know what taxes will be for the school district, the Fire Department and the county as they all factor into the calculations. Mrs. Pschirrer thanked them for the work they have already done. Start to think about what warrant articles might be pertinent for their department.

Recycling Center: Mr. Ben Hoy submitted the following written report for this September meeting.

- 20% increase in attendance at recycling center from last year. Many out of state plates.
- New security camera system through Countryside alarms to be installed soon.
- Walpole bag sales up. Received first \$9,900.00 check from Shaws. They did not run out of bags! They delivered \$9,900.00 the day after receiving the check. Previous deliveries always were \$7,128.00 and they previously always ran out of bags.

- Bellows Falls is having issues at their transfer station. We are seeing more VT plates as well as an influx of DC/New York people. Many snowbirds could be staying in NH through winter because of COVID-19 (Florida issues).
- Reuse center volunteers will be stocking shelves all day Thursday, October 1st from 8-4. We will assess when we can open the Reuse Center on this day. Reuse Center open year round with the assistance of volunteers. New propane heater to be installed by Houghton Electric before winter.
- All donations must be brought in through Recycling Center / Not the Reuse Center and weighed by a recycling employee. We are not charging for donations, just keeping track of weight.
- Roughly 25% of all donations end up in the dumpster, which costs the town of Walpole .05 cents per pound to dispose of. We have a weekly \$275 trucking cost and currently pay \$80/ton to dispose of trash;
- The Reuse Center has always donated all of its money to the Fall Mtn Foodshelf. They have a separate lock box. Going forward, he would like to split the donation money between the Fall Mountain Foodshelf and a charity specific for Walpole residents.
- In the past Michael Neerie brought donations to the food shelf in a locked cash box. We discussed sending the locked cash box with office assistant Shaena Hakey to Rich Kreissle during our transmittal exchange.

Mr. Hoy reported the Recycling Center has been very busy. They are looking forward to bringing the public into the new Reuse Center. There will be an official Grand Opening on Saturday, October 10th with COVID-19 restrictions. Mr. Hoy responded to a question from Mrs. Pschirrer about a book shelf in the Reuse Center by the Friends of the Library. Friends of the Library are stocking the book shelf today in the gable end. Mrs. Pschirrer asked how the Friends of the Library will collect their money from their books. There will be a separate lock box for them. Mr. Hoy wanted to talk about the best way to transport the money in the lock box; it used to go directly to the Fall Mtn Foodshelf. They are proposing that the lock box go directly to the Town Hall with the transmittal.

Mr. Dalessio wanted to recognize Mr. Ben Hoy for all his work that he put in well beyond his job description on the Reuse Center building. The building came out great.

Highway Department: Mr. Mike Rau had submitted the following written report.

This past month at highway they have been finishing up road projects with painting of lines on Main Street in Walpole and paving Maple Street in North Walpole. They have been utilizing the Police Department's presence for safety on some of these projects, which has proved to be very helpful. Thank you! They have also begun to prepare for the colder months by cleaning up the shop yard as well as making repairs to trucks and equipment. Construction has begun on expanding on their storage building. This building will store their back up truck, mowing equipment, and various other seasonal equipment. The building gives them the ability to keep their equipment on the shop grounds for quick and easy access, opposed to keeping it in various buildings throughout town.

Mr. Rau advised they are nearing the end of their big projects for the season and getting ready for winter. They have one more project on North Road. For the next few months they will prepare for winter. The customary date to be ready for snow is October 15th. This is their inspection month for all the trucks and equipment. They try to have everything ready ahead of time. In the next couple of weeks they will start to work on the dirt roads; grade and gravel them. Ditching work is also done. After the new building has been constructed they will begin to talk about not needing the High Street building. Mrs. Pschirrer mentioned someone expressed an interest in buying that building. Maple Street in North Walpole is finished; it took all summer but it came out great. The residents on the street and Mr. Rau are real happy with it. He received a letter from Shirley Capron on Pearl Street who is very happy with the work that

was done. Mr. Dalessio asked about the status of their new trucks. Mr. Rau explained the truck they ordered over a year ago might finally arrive soon. He hopes to see the new “1-Ton” in maybe January 2021. It used to be if you ordered a new truck, you would probably see it in a year. Now with everything slowing/shutting down, it is hard to predict. The company is backing everything 100%. There are no extra costs.

Recreation Department: Mr. Kraig Harlow submitted the following written report dated 9/17/2020:

Pool:

- The pool officially closed on August 28th and they are closed until next season.
- Highway department dropped off the pool cover on August 31st.
- They are currently looking into a quote to repair the holes in the pool cover.

Soccer:

- The soccer season began September 8th.
- Teams were made of Drewsville, Walpole, and North Walpole residents-only.
- They had 64 kids sign-up from grades PK to 8th and it generated a little over \$1150 dollars for the program.
- Their teams were sponsored by local businesses this season and the fee was the cost of t-shirts from Grizzly Graphix. Sponsorships ranged from \$75-\$88.50 per team.
- Teams practice once a week and play a scrimmage against each other every Saturday for the next six weeks at North Walpole School.
- Games and practices are staggered start to flow down the amount of contact parents and players have with one another.
- Middle School practices are being held at Walpole Elementary School on Friday nights.
- They will reevaluate the season in 3 weeks to make sure there are no COVID-19 cases. If they start seeing the presence of COVID-19 cases, the season will be reduced to 2 practices a week or a cancellation of the entire season.
- Every coach has received the COVID-19 guidelines which included a bottle of hand sanitizer, a daily sign-in sheet for contact tracing, and a list of the program guidelines.
- Parents were asked to sign a COVID-19 waiver on the first day of practice.
- Thank you to Fall Mountain for allowing us to continue to use the soccer fields.

North Walpole Park:

- Diane is looking into alternative ways to make the fall get together happy by asking families and business to make scarecrows and bring them to the park on the morning of October 3rd. People will come and go so there will not be a large gathering.

Tennis:

- We’re still looking into quotes to get the courts repaired.

Community Events:

- Due to COVID-19 they haven’t had the ability to schedule any community events.
- If circumstances change in the near future, they plan on hosting events.

Selectboard Office: Mrs. Downing submitted a written report dated September 17, 2020:

Town Hall Update:

- In order to meet ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) access requirements for the upcoming Nov. 3rd elections, a quote for a rental ramp will be reviewed at the 9/17/2020 Selectboard Meeting. The ramp will be for the Westminster Street entrance to the Town Hall. This area will become an alternative voting area for those that cannot or decline to wear masks within the main voting area.

- The dry fire suppression system in the Town Hall had code violations that were corrected in the past two weeks. However, during the repairs it came to light there is a pressurization issue that now needs to be remedied.
- Much thanks to Brad Nash who worked on Labor Day weekend to clean and then assist the Moderator with the set-up for the Sept. 8th State Primary Election.
- Several annual Town Hall events held during the last 3 months of the year are cancelling their reservations due to COVID-19 concerns.

Water and Sewer:

- Thirty-day reminder notices posted on Friday, Sept. 4th. The notices did prompt additional payments.
- Sixty-day notices will post in early October.
- There are currently no water restrictions for users due to the abnormally dry weather conditions. Both wells are meeting the needs of the Town per Mark Houghton, the Water & Sewer Director.

Human Resources:

- Due to the COVID-19 situation, the yearly in-person Employee Appreciation Dinner is being changed to a Dropped-Off Appreciation Lunch for employees. A survey of the best day to have the lunch, a Tuesday or Thursday, will be brought forth during Staff Meeting.
- Each year, a Harassment Awareness training is scheduled for all Town employees. Since in-person trainings are no longer occurring, the Selectboard is requiring that all department managers complete a Primex hosted online training course (see handout) by the end of the calendar year. Primex is developing a 60-minute online course on the same subject for employees.

Liability and Health Insurances:

- A property liability claim for tree damage to the roof of the Hooper Institute has been processed with a claim payment being posted this week. Additionally, “depreciation held” compensation for damage to the prior Reuse Center is in process. This would be a second payment related the Reuse Center claim.
- In early October, HealthTrust will confirm how much surplus monies will be returned to the Town and the 2021 health care rates. Due to COVID-19, the number of health insurance claims dropped significantly which created the surplus of funds.

Mrs. Pschirrer mentioned we do not yet know if the HealthTrust will take our surplus off their next year’s bill or if they will issue checks. The Selectboard will let the employees know how the HealthTrust votes and how it will impact the Town in 2021. Mrs. Downing will give employees an opportunity to tell her what they want for lunch. Mrs. Pschirrer pointed out that the Workplace Harassment Prevention notice is for managers and supervisors. It is important we all do it.

Hooper Institute: Mrs. Dalbeck submitted the following written director’s report dated September 16, 2020:

Next three months: Raise more funds via grants for programs and Institute support: Remove the maintenance items from budget that were approved by Board and Trustees; Host wreath making as community outreach, with pre-orders in November; Marketing, outreach and participation in FOHI sponsored The Hooper 90, virtual 5K run/hike; Finalize budget for 2021 with board and trustees; Continue excellent school programming in the time of COVID.

Summer Programs: The High School program is wrapped up with an August article in The Clarion. Thank you notes were sent to all mentors and businesses. Total cost for wages was \$6,105.

School Programs: Becky and I began teaching on Monday, 9/14. The classes are smaller and the schedule is fuller due to hybrid teaching. Getting students outside into the gardens, fields and forests is more important now than ever. The produce from the WES gardens is going into the Fall Mt kitchen with a coordinated pick-up while supplies last. Fall crops are potatoes, Brussel sprouts and yes, more basil and lots of flowers...until frost. Becky Whipple and she are on an Outdoor Education Committee for Walpole Area Schools.

Events: The Live Owl program with Eyes on Owls rescheduled for October 31 has been postponed until May, 2021.

Outreach and Marketing: Facebook, school based email, The Clarion and Walpolean, Friends of Hooper Institute.

Facility: Sugar maple tree nearly all removed. Main building roof repairs are scheduled for early winter as well as full shed roof replacement. Both are being done by Tim Smith, Long's Roofing. A renovated alarm system with some new bells and whistles will be installed this fall by Countryside Alarm. This project is approved but not yet scheduled. Brush hog and field mowing is scheduled for October. She is also in conversation with Kevin Healey to tackle some odd jobs such as taking apart the street sign for a new coat of paint and rotten ladder repair in our crawl space.

Administration: Budget for 2021 in process.

FOHI: The Hooper 90 www.runreg.com Virtual 5K race/walk/hike available to all.

Walpole Community Garden: This year, there are 44 raised beds in the garden with 18 members. We will have a community garden clean-up later in October.

Respectfully submitted and thanks to all for your support and dedication to the Hooper Institute; Helen Dalbeck.

Mr. Dalessio congratulated Mrs. Helen Dalbeck on her first year as the Executive Director of the Hooper Institute. Mrs. Pschirrer noted it has been a challenge especially when you first step in and there is a COVID pandemic. She handled it well.

Walpole Library: Mrs. Pschirrer announced there is a new Library Director, Jane Malmberg. She is married to the new Minister at the Walpole Congregational Church. Mrs. Malmberg is a very experienced librarian with management experience. Her first day of work is Monday, September 21st.

The Library sent in a report for August 2020 that was done by Julie Rios and Christine Burchstead. The library continues to be open regular hours with full access. Masks are required and patrons must sanitize their hands prior to entering the library. Curbside pickup is still available to those patrons who do not feel comfortable coming into the library. The North Walpole Branch remains closed. Books are quarantined for 4 days before being returned to the shelves.

Please join us in welcoming Jane Malmberg as the new Library Director in Walpole. Jane was selected from a competitive pool of candidates to lead the library. Jane's first day will be September 21st. Jane comes to Walpole with over a dozen years of leadership in libraries in Massachusetts and Illinois. She

has a track record of developing and implementing innovative programs and services. Her collaborative and thoughtful approach will serve her well in her role here in Walpole.

The Interlibrary Loan Program started up again 9/15. The state requires that books be quarantined a full 72 hours so the process will take longer but patrons are very excited. This is a much used program.

The library continues to partner with Distant Hill Nature Trail on a Story Walk. Pages of a book are laminated and placed along the trail to read. Each page includes a silly transition from one page to the next (ex. Jump like a frog, sing a song, walk backwards). This program is very successful and we will continue with a new story every month for the foreseeable future.

The library does not have any current in-library programs due to COVID-19 but we are having Wiggle Time, Morning and Evening Story Times outside. This has been a big hit. Families bring a blanket and they stay on that “island”.

August 2020 Statistics:

Hours open: 156

Guests: 687

Book circulation: 1,247

Children’s program attendance: 92 children, 62 adults

Adult programs: 0 (due to COVID-19 restrictions)

Digital resource use (ex. Overdrive, Hoopla) continues to be high.

Town Clerk – Tax Collector – Report for September 17, 2020.

Mrs. Pschirrer announced that Mrs. Sandra Smith, Town Clerk – Tax Collector, will be retiring the first week of January 2021. She has worked for the Town of Walpole since 1982. She is not present at this meeting as she is on vacation.

They have been very busy scheduling appointments for auto registrations and answering questions regarding the upcoming Elections. The phone never seems to stop.

They have collected \$34,402.94 in property taxes. Motor vehicles brought in \$47,175.00.

They have been so busy with absentee ballots for the Election that she failed to call two people that gave us checks for motor vehicle registrations that failed to clear. She likes to stay on top of this. Years ago, the customer would call us and be very sorry that a check failed to clear. Now they call the customer! They expect one check today.

Krystyna Marcom came in and helped with the absentee ballots. A BIG thank you to Krystyna!

Meghan did a great job with the Election work! She loves that. They mailed out 297 absentee Primary ballots and have received 354 absentee requests for the General Election. They expect more requests right up to Election time!

Finance Office: Mr. Richard Kreissle presented the following report.

He talked about getting reimbursed for town expenditures related to COVID-19 via the CARES Act. The most recent submission was due on September 15th. This submission was about \$24,000. The bulk of which was comprised of radios to make the Town Hall an alternate emergency operation center. These radios comprised about \$20,000 of this \$24,000. The next submission date is October 15th. We are going

to be submitting for, among other things, filters for the Town Hall, Police, Library and Fire Departments (Mark Houghton is handling this) and audio-visual equipment to better facilitate planning and zoning Zoom meetings. Mr. Dalessio is handling the details on this cost. October 15th is the last date for which they can submit for reimbursements. After this date, the State wants us to project our expenditures to December 30, 2020.

Mr. Kreissle is also watching for a second federal stimulus package coming from Congress, but they seem to be deadlocked on getting a bill passed.

Mr. Dalessio suggested Mr. Kreissle circulate to the other department managers guidance as to what kind of items can be submitted for reimbursement. Anytime anyone has a question about an expenditure qualifying for reimbursement can call Mr. Kreissle and he will be happy to assist.

Mr. Kreissle continues to work on the budget, wrap-up 2020 and continue to prepare for 2021. He thanked everyone for their understanding. He urged them to take care and, most of all, stay safe.

Police Department: Police Chief Michael Paquette submitted a Walpole Police Department report. Total calls for Service from August 16, 2020 through September 15, 2020, were 372: Criminal Investigations – 66; Public Safety – 161; and Motor Vehicle – 145. Last month there were 91 more calls for service. The numbers always fluctuate. They are still responding to all their calls. For the most part it is basic business but they have been working on some big investigations. About two weeks ago the Grand Jury started again. Cases that go back eight +/-months are now being heard. There will be an increase in officers going before the court in the next few months. Doing all this court time will be tough; it is so time consuming. Some cases may be done on-line. In terms of equipment; their radios are in and being programmed this week. It will be great as they will be able to communicate with Vermont. Their new vests will be coming in soon. Some of their current vests are getting ready to expire. They thought about putting the expired vests in the cruisers to be used as back-up but they also thought about donating the vests to law enforcement officers who do not have any (example: small towns in the mid-West).

In The Next Three Months: It has been difficult to find new training. They are going on-line. A few classes are now opening up in Massachusetts. Chief Paquette will be looking for staff soon. Mrs. Pschirrer pointed out that officer Devon Prince will be leaving on October 4, 2020. Chief Paquette is aware of a few officers who might be interested in working in Walpole. We wish Officer Prince well in his new position in Hinsdale. They hope to have the new ventilation system in soon.

They will be getting the winter tires put on the cruisers soon. One cruiser has a recall that needs to be taken care of. Mr. Rau thanked the Police Department for all their help on some Highway projects.

ADJOURNMENT: Mrs. Pschirrer thanked everybody. The Selectboard is very grateful for all their hard work and expertise. Mrs. Pschirrer adjourned this Staff meeting at 6:05 PM.
Respectfully submitted, Regina Borden, Recording Secretary


Peggy L. Pschirrer, Chair


Cheryl Mayberry


Steven Dalessio

(Note: These are unapproved Minutes. Corrections will be found in the Minutes of the September 24, 2020, Selectboard meeting.)