



## Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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### Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

#### Select Board

Date: 2023-10-24

Time: 7:00 PM

Building: Reading Town Hall

Location: Select Board Meeting Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Business

Version: Final

#### Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Jackie McCarthy, Mark Dockser, Chris Haley, Karen Herrick, Carlo Bacci via Zoom

#### **Members - Not Present:**

#### **Others Present:**

Town Manager Fidel Maltez, Executive Assistant Caitlin Nocella, Erin Calvo Bacci, Marilyn Shapleigh, Will Finch, MaryEllen O'Neill, John Lippitt, Vanessa Alvarado, Jamie Bradley, Tom O'Connor, John Douglas, Victor Santaniello, Laura Gemme, Michael McSweeney

**Minutes Respectfully Submitted By:** Executive Assistant Caitlin Nocella

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#### **Topics of Discussion:**

*This meeting was held in person and remote via Zoom.*

Chair McCarthy called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

#### Public Comment

Erin Calvo-Bacci noted she is a small business owner and nothing is back to normal for businesses. If anything, things are more challenging than ever and she urges the board not to split the tax rate further.

Marilyn Shapleigh wanted to board to keep the seniors in mind when deciding the tax rate. The growing population of seniors would like to age in place.

Will Finch noted there is vandalism on the Mill Street bridge that no one is doing anything about. He feels it is a structural issue that needs to be addressed ASAP. He would also like the board to split the tax rate further and give the residents a break.

Mary Ellen O'Neill noted she supports a split tax rate and speaking on behalf of herself and her husband asked for increasing fairness to residents; anything to be done to move the needle a little bit for the residents is appreciated.

John Lippitt also feels it is time to even the playing field when it comes to the tax rate. He advocated for all property tax bills to increase by the same percentage. He is hoping to see at least a 1.2 split rate vote tonight.

Vanessa Alvarado noted her taxes as a resident have increased 15% while businesses in Reading are paying less. She supports a 1.3 split rate.

Jamie Bradley of the Reading/North Reading Chamber of Commerce noted that things are not back to normal for businesses. He would like the board to not increase the split further.

Tom O'Connor, a small business owner in town, asked the board not to increase the split further.

John Douglas, also a small business owner, also asked the board not to increase the split any further.

#### Laision Reports

Haley noted the Charter Review Committee met and set up the structure of their future meetings. They will be meeting again on the 30<sup>th</sup>. He also gave a shout-out to DPW who helped clean up the courtyard over the weekend at Coolidge Middle School. He also noted downtown trick or treat was another great success.

Herrick noted she attended a MMA webinar on communication. The Killam School Building Committee will be meeting on Monday, the 30<sup>th</sup> to review the submissions for designer services. She also mentioned the large turnout for downtown trick or treating. She attended the Library Event to meet the new DEI Director. She explained the next steps for the Selection of the Killam School Designer including the review of the submittals and participation by District during the MSBA decision process on 11/7 and 11/21.

Bacci noted CPDC met and discussed McDonalds and their proposed renovations. SWEC received one RFI from EDGE Sports.

Dockser noted ReCalc met and talked about their next steps. They plan to do a questionnaire with comparable communities and what they have done with their senior centers.

Commissioners of Trust Funds met, and he noted they are down a member, so they are looking for a volunteer to fill that position.

McCarthy thanked Public Safety for their work over the busy weekend they unfortunately had. She met with Dr. Milachewski and asked about the literacy program that ARPA funded. It was noted that program has been rolled out to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade and will be rolled out to 1<sup>st</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> soon. Tomorrow night there will be a financial and economic combine forum at the Library at 7pm.

#### Town Manager Report

Maltez noted that Town Hall hosted Killam second-graders earlier today. They brought along a petition with them to clean up the woods area next to the Killam School. He let the board know some exciting news about recent grants we received. He especially called out the \$2.6 million dollar grant we received from the State that will heavily subsidize our work on Haven Street.

#### Introduction of New Director of Equity

Postponed until their next meeting on November 7<sup>th</sup>.

#### Tax Classification

Town Assessor Victor Santaniello gave the board a presentation on setting the tax rate which the board does annually. The presentation can be found in the Select Board packet on the town website.

Herrick and Haley inquired further about the Small Commercial Exemption which the town has never granted before. Santaniello explained that there are so many requirements a business would have to meet to be qualified for this exemption that it would not benefit many, if any at all, businesses in town.

The board discussed where they would like to see the rate this year. Herrick and Dockser feel the rate needs to be split further and give the residents a break. Haley and Bacci were on the other side feeling the board needs to keep the split where it is because most of the businesses in town are small businesses that are still struggling from COVID. McCarthy noted she understands the board hasn't moved the rate in four years but she would like to preserve the commercial base.

**Herrick moved to close the hearing establishing the FY24 tax rate. The motion was seconded by Dockser and approved with a unanimous roll call vote.**

**Herrick moved to adopt a residential factor of .989925 (1.15) for Fiscal Year 2024. The motion was seconded by Dockser and failed with the following roll call vote: Bacci -no; Haley -no; McCarthy -no; Dockser - yes; Herrick -yes.**

**Herrick moved to adopt a residential factor of .993284 (1.1) for Fiscal Year 2024. The motion was seconded by McCarthy and passed with the following roll call vote:**

**Bacci -yes; Haley -yes; McCarthy -yes; Dockser - no; Herrick -no.**

**Herrick moved that the Select Board not grant an open space discount for Fiscal Year 2024. The motion was seconded by Dockser and approved with a unanimous roll call vote.**

**Herrick moved that the Select Board not adopt a residential exemption for Fiscal Year 2024. The motion was seconded by Dockser and approved with a unanimous roll call vote.**

**Herrick moved that the Select Board not grant a small commercial exemption for Fiscal Year 2024. The motion was seconded by Dockser and approved with a unanimous roll call vote.**

#### 2024 Elections Discussion

Town Clerk Laura Gemme was before the board asking if they would like to combine the local election with the State Primary in March 2024. If the board does want to combine them, they would need to take a vote on it. If they do not take a vote, the elections would stay two separate events.

Gemme laid out some facts of combining vs. not combining the elections. Combining them does NOT save the town a lot of money. Combining them does however, usually increase the turnout for the local ballot. Combining them does come with some concerns as people tend to return both ballots in the same envelope which results in their vote being rejected. She noted election staff does NOT like combining them because it causes confusion for the voter with two ballots and it is hard to find enough staff to cover a double election.

The board will discuss and potentially vote at their next meeting.

#### Vote to Appoint a Board of Registrars Member

A Board of Registrars member recently resigned and the board must vote to fill the vacancy. The person put forth for the position is Michael McSweeney who was present at the meeting.

**Herrick moved to appoint Michael McSweeney to the Board of Registrars with a term expiring June 30, 2024. The motion was seconded by Dockser and approved with a unanimous roll call vote.**

Town Manager Search Committee Discussion

It was noted that Bernie Lynch was the low bidder again on the RFQ. He was the one who helped in the last search for a new Town Manager.

The board discussed what they feel the makeup should be of the committee. The board looked at the structure of the committee during the last process. McCarthy, Dockser and Bacci all noted they would like to be on it.

The board will discuss and vote at their next meeting.

Future Agendas

The board discussed future agenda items.

Minutes

**Herrick moved to approve the meeting minutes from October 10<sup>th</sup> as written. The motion was seconded by Dockser and approved with a unanimous roll call vote.**

**Dockser moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:49 PM. The motion was seconded by Herrick and approved with a unanimous roll call vote.**