

**TOWN OF DEERFIELD
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
January 25, 2021
MINUTES**

Call to Order

5:30 pm – Chairman Robertson called the meeting to order

Present: Andrew Robertson, Chairman; Richard Pitman, Vice Chairman, Fred McGarry, Alden Dill, and Cynthia McHugh, Selectmen.

Chairman Robertson: We have one item on our agenda this evening and this is in regard to the Governor's Executive Order that he made on Friday and basically, Executive Order 83 gives us the ability to move back the deliberative sessions and the town voting.

I talked with Dan Holdridge, the town moderator, about this and he's talked to the AG's office as well and some other folks and has a definite schedule in mind for the delay.

Essentially, he would like to move the town deliberative session or he's recommended to us to move town deliberative session to Saturday, May 1st; school deliberative session to Saturday, May 8th with voting on Tuesday, June 8th.

The primary reason for enacting the delay would be to allow more people to get vaccinated, to hopefully see COVID-19 virus numbers drop a bit and also to allow more people to participate in the deliberative session.

I don't know about the rest of the Board but I have heard from a number of people, particularly older people that typically attend the deliberative session that have stated that they would not attend this year (couldn't hear).

I think that another factor here is that we have an unheated building that we are planning on using for deliberative sessions in January and February and with voting during cold weather as well, a combination of COVID-19, the elements, that sort of thing, it makes sense to me that we would delay as outlined in Dan's perspective schedule but I would open the floor to the Board to see how the rest of the Board feels.

Vice Chairman Pitman: Andy, does it have to be that late? Does it have to wait until June to vote, we can't just set it for a month?

Chairman Robertson: That, I am not entirely certain. These were the dates that Dan came up with after some discussion, I believe, with the AG's office as to recommended dates.

Vice Chairman Pitman: I had three calls today from people that were just asking to just leave it where it is and just run with it.

Selectman Dill: We are not going to have significant vaccinations within a month here either are we Dick? This is one of those if that is the concern, we are going to have to push back quite a way.

Vice Chairman Pitman: What happens to those people that their term expires? Is it not expiring until June?

Chairman Robertson: It does not expire until June.

The governor's executive order, all four pages of it, makes it pretty clear exactly how the whole process would unfold.

Basically, everything would remain as is until the new vote.

Selectwoman McHugh: Yes. Andy looking at the fair schedule, May 8th, there is a Sheep and Wool Festival that goes on there as well as a NH Horse and Trail.

Chairman Robertson: Right. I was aware that there were some other events. I haven't seen a final response from the president of the fair association yet. Dan and Erik Gross had sent him an email.

Having some familiarity with the NH Horse and Trail Show and the Sheep and Wool Festival, I do know that it doesn't involve the Arts and Craft building at all.

There may be some logistics with signage getting traffic there but ...

Selectman Dill: It does mean that it will rain.

Chairman Robertson: It always rains at the Sheep and Wool Festival.

Selectwoman McHugh: The amount of people, that is what is going to put a kybosh to that but in my opinion, I don't see the need to postpone it. The kids got to school every day. The deliberative session isn't going to be that long and how to do know that anything is going to change from March to the first of May and then if it doesn't change, then where do we go from May and June? Do we go to July and August?

As a community, we are very lucky to have the facilities at the fairgrounds to separate us and give us good spacing where a lot of towns probably don't have that opportunity.

Chairman Robertson: Well, I don't think that we could delay beyond the May and June dates that are outlined here. There are some specific restrictions in the executive order. It's not a rolling target that you can keep bumping back.

I also think quite clearly, we are going to have thousands more people, particularly over 65, vaccinated by May and to my mind, that would be a significant change but other Board commentary?

Mr. Harrington: Andy, just to put on your radar, Kelly Roberts has her hand up when the Board is done talking.

Selectman McGarry: Do we have a recommendation from Denny?

Ms. Greig: Yes.

Chairman Robertson: Well, if we have a specific question for Denny, I would recognize Denny at this point to answer that.

Ms. Greig: I guess in terms of postponement, currently, we are expected to be about 4 degrees, 5 degrees on Saturday morning. There is no question that CDC guidance indicates that prolonged periods of time indoors with large groups of people presents a higher risk.

When we had our elections previously, we had one to four cases with a total of ten cases at the time total. We are now up to a total of 186 cases with 17 active and we are in substantial community spread so there is no question that overall, the data clearly shows that we are in a completely different phase than where we were for the previous elections and we are talking about being stationary for as long as the meeting takes.

I know we all hope that the meeting takes an hour but the fact is that we would have to rein in conversation if we wanted to cut it at an hour.

Only, last point, the drier the air, the more transmissible the virus so it's less humid in the winter months. It is going to be carried through the air more easily rather than later when the air is more humid and I will cut it off there so I don't drag you into that discussion but I guess in my mind, especially with the vaccine underway, the vaccination program underway, it's really is safer for our community to postpone and I would add that we have the variant, which is more transmissible, has been identified in Massachusetts, our next-door neighbor so that is my opinion.

Chairman Robertson: Thanks for your input, Denny.

Other Board concerns or comments?

Selectman Dill: Yes, I just wanted to make the comment that we had all discussed postponing before this executive order. It just wasn't feasible, you know. We didn't have a way to do it without Dan having to post it within 72 hours if we were going to push it back.

I think that there is a reason that the governor has provided this order. Yes, it would be nice if there was a law from the House and Senate but I think that there is a reason that the governor decided that it was time for the emergency order.

Chairman Robertson: Yes, I would agree with you.

Other comments or concerns other than the dog barking.

Hearing none, at this time, I would ask the Board and I am not sure how the Board feels but do we want to open this up for public comment prior to our decision?

Selectwoman McHugh and Selectman McGarry both stated yes and Vice Chairman Pitman asked that it was to be kept at facts. Selectman Dill stated that it has to be quick too and to the point.

Chairman Robertson: It has to be quick.

Okay, at this point, I would open the floor to public comment.

Mr. Harrington: Serita Frey has her hand up Andy.

Chairman Robertson: Okay, folks, I can't see people whose hands are up.

Mr. Harrington: Serita Fred has her hand up.

Chairman Robertson: Okay, I would recognize Serita Frey.

Ms. Frey: Thank you. Serita Frey, Saddleback Mountain Road.

I would just add a bit to what Denny said which is based on data in the Washington Post today, New Hampshire is one of only three states where there is actually, where it has actually risen last week as opposed to declined.

I am also not clear on how meeting on Saturday meets the governor's mask mandate. I don't know all the details but it is unclear to me how that mask mandate would be met under the current setup and I for one, am not comfortable being in an enclosed indoor spaces or conditions so I hope that you would consider postponing.

Chairman Robertson: Thank you Serita. Other public comments.

Barbara Mathes: I am on my phone so I can't raise my hand. Rob and I would certainly agree with what Serita just said.

We would not be comfortable attending and we feel that a lot of other people would not be and so we lose our opportunity to participate and vote and we certainly value that experience and town meetings and so we would urge postponement.

Chairman Robertson: Great. Thank you, Barbara.

I would mention for the rest of the Board, I have had 24 contacts between email, social media and phone call. I have had one person who has asked me not to delay the meeting. Everyone else has been in favor of delay.

Any other public comments?

Wes Golomb: I would just concur. I would really feel uncomfortable going under these conditions and I would appreciate it if you would postpone it.

Chairman Robertson: Thanks. Is there anyone listening that wants to speak in opposition?

Kevin Verville: Yes, so I understand the points being made and I certainly sympathize with them to a certain extent.

The fact of the matter is that there is not going to be any guarantee, in fact, there is really no indication that things will be any better in two-month than they are today.

It is a very short warrant. The material could be gone through very, very quickly.

The town is already operating in arrears, so to speak, right so we are delaying the voting on the budget that the town needs to operate and we are pushing that months and months out and I just think it is a mistake.

We are better off just to hold the meetings and get it done and move on.

It is kind of interesting as a historical note, there has been people that are suggesting that Deerfield change its dates for deliberative sessions and voting days to later in the year because that is legally allowed and we have never acted on it. We have always held fast to March as the tradition.

Not that many people show up at these meetings and I think that everybody could easily be accommodated with social distancing and masking and the meeting would run pretty quickly.

Chairman Robertson: Thank you for your input.

Mr. Harrington: Andy, Serita has her hand up again.

Chairman Robertson: Okay, Serita?

Serita Frey: Just a very quick response to Kevin which is to say is that the one big difference between March and May is that we could potentially meet outside or with windows open.

Chairman Robertson: Okay. Great. Any other new commenters?

Selectman Dill: Dan, do you want to speak on this at all.

Dan Holdridge: Unless you mean a specific question, I think that everything that you are all saying is helpful.

I mean, I am willing to do either one. I could host the meeting Saturday or we could do it as we indicated, in May.

I care about people's health. That's my priority number one and it's bigger than anything we do in here. As much as we want to get a budget through, as much as we want to do what we have been doing all these centuries, we want to do the right thing.

And the challenges with this COVID, there is a lot of things that concern me but what my main concern is, I don't want to ever, ever host a meeting where somebody left getting ill from that meeting. That would weight heavily on my mind so given the opportunity to have warmer weather and listening very closely to Denny's recommendation, the state epidemiologist, the fact that the governor did this emergency order, there is a lot of concern, genuine, honest concern for the people's health.

And, I have a very close friend (couldn't understand) health, and he was just two years younger than me and he got COVID and he just got out of the ICU about two days ago. We nearly lost him. Healthiest guy in the world. Very physically fit and everything so it can impact everybody and again, I wouldn't even suggest this unless Denny and all those experts out there suggested that we consider, again, I wanted to run Saturday. I was ready to go but I'm also very keen to listening to the honest concerns of our community and feel whatever the community decides, I am all behind it.

Chairman Robertson: Great, thank you Dan.

I think at this point, I am going to close Citizen's Comments unless the Board objects and not hearing any objections, I guess what I would look for is a motion to enact Governor Sununu's Executive Order Number 83 and move town deliberative session to May 1st; school deliberative session to Saturday, May 8th and town elections to Tuesday, June 8th.

Motion: Vice Chairman Pitman moves to move town and school deliberative sessions and town elections as stated above

Second: Selectman Dill

Discussion: Vice Chairman Pitman: Hopefully the fair dates are available, we can't really include that in the motion but that would be the only stipulation. As far as it not working, who knows, maybe in May the polls could be held at the town hall if it is a problem.

Chairman Robertson: That is possibly an option, too.

Okay, we have a motion and a second. Further discussion from the Board. Hearing none,

Vote: Yea 4, Nay 1, Abstained 0 – Motion Carries

Chairman Robertson: We have three yeas and one nay and I will vote Yea as well just for the spirit of full disclosure so we will move forward with a delay on the town deliberative session and the school deliberative session and the voting per the stipulations laid out in Executive Order Number 83 from the governor.

And, I have no other business on the agenda this evening.

Motion: Vice Chairman Pitman moves to adjourn

Second: Selectman McGarry

Discussion:

Vote: Yea 4, Nay 0, Abstained 0 – Motion Carries

It appears to be unanimous and I would thank you for your time and getting together on an unexpected meeting night. Have a good evening.

Next Meeting: Monday, February 1, 2021 at 5:30 pm

*The Minutes were transcribed and respectfully submitted by Dianne L. Kimball, Recording Secretary
Pending approval by the Board of Selectmen*