

Town of Paxton

Board of Selectmen

697 Pleasant Street, Paxton, MA 01612

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Regular Meeting Minutes

# Monday, February 26, 2024

**Meeting Location: Training Room of the Public Safety Complex**

**576 Pleasant Street, Paxton, MA 01612**

Members Present: Julia N. Pingitore, Chair

Kirk R. Huehls, Vice Chair

Carol L. Riches, Clerk

Town Administrator: Charles Blanchard, Interim Town Administrator

#### Attendees: see Attendee List

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

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**CONSENT ITEMS**

* 1. Approve the meeting minutes from the Regular Meeting held on February 12, 2024.
* 2. Approve the meeting minutes from the Executive Meeting held on February 12, 2024.
* 3. Approved the placement of the Bay Path Regional Vocational Technical High School Committee position and the Richards Memorial Library Board of Trustees position on the ballot for the next election to fill the current vacancies in accordance to MGL Chp. 41, Sec 10.
* 4.One day liquor license request from Anna Maria College at Fuller Gymnasium for Spring week college student dance on April 18, 2024, from 8pm to 12am run by Sodexo Food Service Company.
* **(JP)** Hearing no other comments, all consent items have been approved.

**UPDATE FROM TOWN COMMITEES AND BOARDS**

* **Anita Fenton** Proposed the following COA Bylaws be placed on the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting.
* **ARTICLE 1 - ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNCIL ON AGING AND BOARD**

There shall be a Council on Aging (COA) of the Town of Paxton and a COA Board as established by vote of the Annual Town Meeting of May 5, 1975, in Accordance with the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40, Section 8B.

* **ARTICLE II - PURPOSE**

The purposes of the COA Board are to:

Section 1 Evaluate, promote, and encourage services and programs for the senior population, 60 years of age and older, who live in Paxton, Massachusetts.

Section 2 Educate the community on the mission and purpose of the COA and encourage their support and participation.

Section 3 Work with the COA Director to implement existing and new programs for seniors.

* **ARTICLE III - OFFICES**

The office of the COA shall be located at the John Bauer Senior Center, 17 West Street, Paxton, Massachusetts.

* **ARTICLE IV - MEMBERSHIP**

Section 1 The COA Board shall consist of nine members who are Paxton residents. They shall be appointed by the Paxton Select Board for a term of three years. A reappointment for an additional three years may be requested by a current COA Board Member.

Section 2 The COA Board may recommend to the Select Board candidates to fill vacancies on the COA Board, including a vacancy due to the resignation of a Board member.

Section 3 Associate members are a source of future COA Board members and may be appointed at any time by the COA Board. There shall be no limit to the number of Associate members. Associate members may participate in the COA Board meetings, but they may not vote. Outgoing Board members shall be eligible to be an Associate Member.

* **ARTICLE V - VOTING RIGHTS OF BOARD MEMBERS**

All voting rights shall be vested in the members and each individual member shall be entitled to one vote. A member must be present to vote. A majority vote shall prevail.

* **ARTICLE VI - MEETINGS OF MEMBERS**

Section 1 Regular meetings of the COA Board shall occur once a month and are subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Laws.

Section 2 Special meetings of the COA Board may be called at any time by the COA Board Chair. The clerk shall notify all members of such a meeting. Special meetings are subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Laws.

Section 3 At all meetings of the COA Board, the presence of five Board members entitled to vote shall be necessary and sufficient to constitute a quorum for the transaction of any business.

Section 4 The COA Board Chair may call an Executive Session, open to only the COA Board and additional parties selected by the Board, to discuss confidential matters in accordance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Laws. It may take place before, in the middle, or at the end of a regular Board meeting.

* **ARTICLE VII - ATTENDANCE AND RESIGNATION**

Section 1 Regular attendance is expected of all COA Board members. In the event of absence of any member for three consecutive meetings, except for reasons of health or extenuating circumstances, the COA Board may request the resignation of that member.

Section 2 In the event a member wishes to resign from the COA Board, they shall notify the COA Board and the Town Clerk in writing. The COA Board shall notify the Select Board of such resignation and recommend a replacement.

* **ARTICLE VIII – OFFICERS**

Section 1 Election and Term of Office

1. The officers of the COA Board shall consist of a Chair, Vice Chair, and a Clerk.
2. Officers of the COA Board shall be elected annually at the July COA Board meeting by a majority vote of the members present and shall take office upon election. Terms of office shall be for one year.
3. Election of officers to fill vacancies may take place at any regular or special COA Board meeting and shall be for the period of the unexpired term.

Section 2 Chair

1. The Chair shall preside over all meetings of the COA Board.
2. During the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair or Clerk will, in that order, exercise the function of the Chair.
3. In consultation with the COA Director, the Chair shall prepare an agenda for each monthly meeting.
4. The Chair or appointee shall post the agenda with the Town Clerk as required by Massachusetts General Laws.

Section 3 Vice Chair

1. The Vice Chair shall assist the Chair in their duties and shall perform the duties of the Chair in their absence.

Section 4 Clerk

1. The Clerk shall record all meeting minutes and submit them for approval at the following meeting.
2. In the absence of the Clerk, the Chair may appoint a Board member as Clerk for said meeting.

* **ARTICLE IX - COA DIRECTOR**

1. The COA Director reports to the Paxton Town Administrator.
2. The COA Board is an advisory board to the COA Director. As such, the Board and its individual members shall refrain from interfering in the day-to-day operation of the COA.
3. The Director is responsible for operating the COA and its programs and services for the seniors in the Town of Paxton.
4. The Director recommends individuals for staff positions and coordinates volunteers.
5. The Director is required to attend all monthly COA Board meetings.
6. In order to discuss confidential matters, the Director may request that the COA Chair call an Executive Session, according to Article VI, Section 4 of this bylaw.
7. The Director shall submit to the COA Board at monthly meetings a report of its finances.

**ARTICLE X – AMENDMENTS**

The COA Board may propose amendments to this Bylaw to the Select Board for possible inclusion on a Town warrant.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Discussion for potential override for FY25 budget.**

* **(JP)** It has become abundantly clear, as our projected budget numbers are closing in on accuracy, that this will be a pivotal year for the budget in the town of Paxton. We are currently looking at a larger deficit than I have seen in my tenure on the board, and I have seen quite a few difficult budget years. As a town, we have, for many years now, found ways to address our deficits through some equilibrium between cuts and one-time revenues. In the process, we have become dependent on utilizing not only all our free cash but also using more revenue from ambulance receipts to balance the budget. These are revenues that are not guaranteed. The best practice is to use one-time revenues only for one-time expenses - or to be put away in stabilization and capital. We have been trying to avoid a substantial override for longer than I have been on the board. The last overrides passed were in 2018 and were small - $100k for the operating budget and $300k for Wachusett budget. At that time, we recommended only enough to meet that need for that year. We have been doing the equivalent of living paycheck to paycheck, and not putting away for our future. Through the yeoman’s work of the Finance Committee and the Selectboard over the years, we have managed within our means, hoping that things would eventually improve. Unfortunately, it has become clearer over the years that we were only delaying the inevitable as we saw insurance rate hikes with Obama care, the economic impacts of COVID and a state formula for school budgets which does the town of Paxton no favors. To shed a little light on what we are seeing this year, we currently have a deficit between $600-700k, which is likely to grow as we continue to analyze the numbers as they come in. Currently, even if we reduce the budget to only those items, we have little or no control over (essentially schools, insurance, benefits, retirement, contracts, utilities), level funding all other items, we are still looking at a very large deficit. In order to balance this budget, cuts to departments would be substantial and would have a devastating effect on the level of services provided to our residents. We would be looking at a much different town in terms of services offered, particularly from larger departments which include public safety and the DPW, which would have to shoulder a larger portion of the burden. As I mentioned, we are still awaiting some budget numbers. As for schools, we have projected a 5% increase in the Wachusett school budget, and we should know in a few days what that number actually is. However, I believe 5% is likely to be a rather conservative estimation. For reference, a 6% increase adds an additional $75k to the deficit. It is my understanding that Baypath’s assessment came in roughly 20% higher than last year. We will have more details on this when we meet with them shortly. In my opinion, we have no choice this year but to recommend a sizable override. It is was recommended by our interim TA, Charlie Blanchard, and I agree, given what we are seeing , that we should look to pass an override that will not just sustain us for this year, and put us in substantially similar positions next year, and the year after, but one that will serve as a budget correction and end our reliance on one time revenues so that we can plan for and stabilize our future as a town. I am forever grateful to Charlie who came in as an interim as such a key moment for us and with his experience both in other towns and with Paxton, was able to provide some real clarity on this issue. This is still a very fluid subject without finalized numbers, but we know enough to realize that this year, we are not going to be able to find enough one-time revenue along with budget cuts to make ends meet. Based on analysis to date, it is clear that cuts of the magnitude that would be necessary this year would reduce the services that the Town provides to a level that would be unacceptable for the community, and that an override is necessary.
* **(KH)** I think that we have all seen this coming for a while. It’s tough when you live in a small town that does not have a lot of commercial revenue. I am seeing in the last year and half to two years good progress in promoting business in town so in the interim it is what it is.
* **(CR)** I agree your statement was spot on. We need to decide if we are going to meet this year’s short fall or enough that we do not have to use free cash. We need to get the information out there because if we do not get an override, we are going to have to make cuts that we have never seen before.
* **(KH)** I do think we need to go for more than a short-term band aid.
* **(JP)** Anytime you talk about taxes going up its scary especially for people that are on fixed incomes, and I would be remis if I did not acknowledge that, because that is scary.
* **Mark Love** Its good we are on the same page. We cannot cut our way to a balanced budget. Our financial policies call for a 10-year plan and we have postponed that for two years now. We need to do something substantial. CIPC met recently and there is a half million dollars of critical asks, so we need to balance how much the taxpayer is willing to pick up.
* **(JP)** The departments were asked to put forward conservative budgets and as far as I can tell that is what they have done.
* **Mark Love** Last year we went to the stabilization fund to balance the budget which we cannot do again this year.

**Correspondence**

* **(JP)** I have an email chain between Mark and myself that is quite lengthy so I will not read it aloud. Mark has asked that they be attached to the agenda and make them public record.

**Town Administrator update**

# The library gutters are currently being worked on.

# Meet this week with all Department Heads for catch up.

* Continue working on earmarks and grants.
* Continue working on Procurement projects.

**ADJOURN**

* **Motion (KH) seconded (CR) to leave the regular meeting and entered into Executive Session at 7:28pm and we will return to the regular meeting for the purpose of adjourning. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes.**
* **Returned to Regular Session at 7:53pm**
* **Adjourned Meeting at 7:53pm, Unanimous all-in favor. (KH) yes, (CR) yes, (JP) yes**
* **The next meeting is scheduled for March 11, 2024, 6:00pm.**

**Documents from the Meeting filed in BOS office:**

Agenda

Attendance list

Town Administrators update

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Graf-Parsons, Executive Assistant