

APPROVED

BOARD OF SELECTMEN / SEWER COMMISSIONERS MEETING

Wednesday September 12, 2018 – 6:00 PM – Richmond Town Hall – 1529 State Road

PRESENT: Mr. Neal Pilson, Chair; Mr. Roger Manzolini; Mr. Alan Hanson; Mr. Mark Pruhenski, Town Administrator

ABSENT:

GUEST: Ms. Laura Brennan, BRPC; Mr. Peter Beckwith, Highway Superintendent; Ms. Hayley Sumner, Berkshire Horse Works; Ms. Patti Spector, Josh Billings Runaground, Mr. Tom Grizey

Mr. Pilson called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Mr. Pilson opened the proceedings with item #2 in respect of Ms. Laura Brennan's time. Ms. Brennan serves as Richmond's Marketing Director and provided an update for the Board. Ms. Brennan provided packets to the Board, the cover sheet of which was a summary of the projects worked on since 2017 – at an average of 2-1/2 hours per week.

The new Richmond Website, which was largely constructed by the time Ms. Brennan came on board. She has been working with the website, spending some time making updates to it, correcting some issues that were found and finding ways to make it more user-friendly and efficient. The intent is to make the website as accessible to residents, new residents and visitors as possible and Ms. Brennan outlined some of the ways she has attempted to accomplish that end.

During August of this year, a User Survey was conducted, and some of the raw data from that survey was included in the packets. By and large the response to the website, according to the survey, was overwhelmingly positive. Users reported being pleased with the new structure and find it easy to use, informative and that there is a high level of trust in the information being presented. Seventy-Nine percent of the users responded that the website meets their needs either extremely well or very well, which is an excellent start. Further review of the comments received from the survey will help to make future improvements as any website is an ongoing effort and that will continue to be a major part of the work Ms. Brennan will be doing for Richmond.

The website is a launching point of inspiration for other projects, including the e-newsletter. Ms. Brennan provided a sample of the version of the e-newsletter that launched in July, which is in alignment with the look and feel of the new website. The new e-newsletter was reconstructed and made about 50% shorter, which has helped readability. In relation to the

number of people who are opening it and then how many of those are actually clicking on something within the newsletter to get to the website, the click-through rate has gone up by 16%. Mr. Pilson noted that there are 700 subscribers to the e-newsletter and Ms. Brennan added that she had been surprised at the outset to find that the majority of those subscribers are residents and more than half of them open the newsletter on a regular basis, which for a government organ is a very high rate.

Mr. Manzolini asked if Ms. Brennan was aware of the contest available for municipal websites. Mr. Pruhenski advised Ms. Brennan that the Town plans to submit its website to that contest either this year or next. Ms. Brennan agreed that the website is an excellent candidate for that kind of event. Mr. Pruhenski will work with Ms. Brennan on making arrangements to enter the website.

In addition to the website and the e-newsletter, who now appear to be paired in terms of the color scheme and design elements, there are a few other projects in the works. Ms. Brennan went on to describe a tri-fold brochure that had been redone about a year ago and had an inventory of about 1,200 of them in storage. Ms. Brennan contacted Berkshire Brochure Display, the company that distributes advertising literature to hotels, restaurants, theatres, etc. to arrange for those brochures to be distributed. The good news is that Berkshire Brochure Display advised Richmond that they had run out of brochures, which indicates an interest in Richmond. The timing of that distribution was designed to reach people who potential might become second home-owners or who already were.

A small part of the brochures was held aside for a final project, which Ms. Brennan described as a direct-mail campaign aimed at realtors and corporate recruiters throughout all of Berkshire County. It was sent to 150 realtors and 25 corporate recruiters who are talking to people about moving here. The packets contained a copy of the Richmond brochure, an information sheet on the Richmond Consolidated School that contained contact information for some Parent Ambassadors, a very powerful addition for people who are considering moving to the Berkshires and overwhelmed with comparison information on school districts. Being able to provide direct contact information for parents with children at the Richmond Consolidated School was a great opportunity. The information included also made the recipients aware of some shifts that have occurred in School Choice availability as more of the slots are being taken by residents of the Town. Inside the larger packet, a smaller packet was included that contained a USB Thumb Drive that included digital copies of a welcome letter from Mr. Pruhenski, the school paper, the Richmond brochure and the video of Richmond that was created. The theme was "Unlocking Richmond" and the packet was "Your Key to a Better Place in the Berkshires." That Thumb Drive is now in the hands of nearly 200 people who are selling the Berkshires all the time.

Mr. Pilson noted that several brokers have remarked that this packet is a very effective marketing tool that will help to get young families to move here. Ms. Brennan said that the mailing was followed up with an invitation via email to join our e-newsletter distribution list.

The Open Rate of that email was excellent and resulted in between 10 and 20 new people sign up to receive the e-newsletter, which reinforces the message about Richmond.

Moving on to Next Steps, Ms. Brennan spoke about plans for the remainder of fiscal year 2019. The intent is to augment the direct marketing efforts that are underway with public relations. Ms. Brennan and Mr. Pruhenski had discussed some opportunities that will be coming up in the future, such as hosting the Josh Billings RunAground, which provided a great deal of free press of how Richmond stepped up and rescued an important community event and an illustration of the way the community pulls together to help a neighbor in need. There will be follow up with some human interest stories arising out of that event, there will be opportunities for stories in relation to the development of the new Richmond Library and it is hoped that the local media will do profiles of some Richmond residents, both multiple-generation residents and newcomers.

Work will continue on the website, including some technical changes that will bring the Richmond website up higher in search results, further refinements to the e-newsletter that will further increase the engagement level for that publication.

Mr. Manzolini asked if Ms. Brennan had a plan to address some questions that had come up from the website survey. Ms. Brennan responded that several of the issues that were raised during the survey have already been addressed and those issues will continue to be addressed. Mr. Manzolini noted that his concern is that the website not contain any items of personal interest and that information placed in one page of the website need not be repeated in other pages. Ms. Brennan agreed that the website must be maintained as a municipal site and should be reserved for municipal business. The e-newsletter is the place to post items of interest and events coming up. That will eventually be included in a Policy Statement.

Ms. Brennan addressed Mr. Manzolini's second concern by advising him that in the migration of content from the old website to the new one, there were places where information was duplicated that did not need to be. Information placed in one page of a website can be linked to several other places, which means there is only one place that needs correction if an error is found. That issue had already been noted and has been worked on since the beginning. In fact, certain documents that are located in the library of documents, are being linked to from pertinent pages, rather than repeating them on those pages.

Mr. Pilson thanked Ms. Brennan for what he noted was an extraordinary job in bringing his vision of marketing Richmond to fruition.

Josh Billings Runaground – Request for Events in Richmond on 9-16-18: Ms. Patti Spector, representative for the Josh Billings Runaground, presented a special event permit application to the Board and the hand-out for participants that contains specific information for each contestant about the race and about Richmond. Those packets will be distributed on Saturday, the day before the race.

Mr. Peter Beckwith, Highway Superintendent asked Ms. Spector to please warn the bicyclists of the intersection turning onto Summit Road that is narrow and curved on both sides and that there's an island and a telephone pole there. Ms. Spector responded that there has been a video on the website and on the FaceBook page of the bike ride, including that turn. Mr. Pilson noted that Summit Road will be closed both ways (at State Road and at Swamp Road) five minutes before the bikers arrive. There was further discussion of the bike route and what plans were in place to maintain the safety of the contestants and vehicular traffic at all points along the route. Mr. Beckwith added that he has created a number of warning signs to indicate which roads will be closed and when, that will be posted tomorrow to provide an early warning to motorists. Mr. Pruhenski advised that the same kind of information has been posted on the FaceBook page and on the website, with the detailed sheet received from Ms. Spector and a notice is included in the e-newsletter.

Mr. Pilson offered suggestions about parking. He noted that the key problem will be Swamp Road between Summit and Boys Club Road. Cars should not be allowed to park on that road. Therefore, for that short stretch on Swamp, there should be No Parking signs. Mr. Pilson thought that people might be allowed to park on Osceola or Yokun, both of which are relatively low traffic roads. Bartlett's can arrange their front and back parking lots as they see fit. Mr. Beckwith offered the opinion that parking on Osceola is not a good idea as there is a ditch on either side of the road, which is narrow to begin with. Mr. Pilson clarified that he was not suggesting announcing that parking would be allowed on Osceola and Yokun, only that there would not be any No Parking signs on those roads. Mr. Hanson had a question about whether East Road should be reduced to a one-way street. Mr. Pilson responded that East Road will not be regulated as there will not be bikers on that road, only runners, who tend to spread out much more than bikers do. There was a discussion of how best to deal with East Road.

Mr. Manzolini moved to approve the special permit application. The motion was seconded and carried by unanimous approval.

Lenox Road/Lenox Branch Road Intersection Discussion: Mr. Peter Beckwith, Highway Superintendent provided an update for the Board. He had the engineer come out, as discussed at the previous meeting and obtained a proposal from him to do a study of the two intersections in question. Mr. Beckwith was in favor of the proposal, which he requested the Board sign. He also noted that he is able to cover the cost of that fee from his department budget. Mr. Manzolini moved to approve the proposal, which was seconded by Mr. Hanson and adopted by unanimous vote. Mr. Pilson signed the proposal.

Solar Speed Signs in Richmond Consolidated School Zone – Update: Mr. Pilson noted that he had attended a School Committee meeting last night at which a number of people commented on having noticed a reduction in the speed of cars going past the school when the signs are flashing. It was noted that the signs are now correctly yellow, rather than white, thanks to Mr. Beckwith.

Town Barn Discussion Continued: Mr. Beckwith reminded the Board that they were scheduled to discuss the various options for dealing with the structure outlined at the last meeting and decide at this meeting how to proceed. Mr. Pilson requested a summary of those options from Mr. Pruhenski who outlined them as follows: 1. Replacement of the existing wooden structure with a metal sided building similar to the one erected across the street years back. 2. Mr. Ted Andrews addressed the Board several times, requesting that the wooden building be restored. The Board met with Mr. Jack Sobin, a pole barn construction expert, at the site and received an estimate from him of the cost to provide construction drawings in the \$3,000 to \$4,000 range including \$100 per hour travel time expenses.

The Board will make a decision at this time whether there is any interest in pursuing the first third of that building or dismantle the first third of that building, demolish the remaining portion of the building and replace it with a metal-sided building.

Mr. Manzolini suggested that the Board compromise by removing the existing structure but, instead of replacing it with a metal-sided building, replace it with a barnboard sided building. In other words, a pole barn with board and batten siding. Mr. Pilson asked Mr. Beckwith if that would create a building that would provide the Highway Department with 100% utility. Mr. Beckwith responded that, if there are no changes to the dimensions of the original plans, simply changing from metal siding to wooden siding, the functionality should remain the same. Mr. Pilson said that, since the functionality of the building will not be impacted by a simple cosmetic change from metal siding to wooden siding, he was in favor of the compromise. Mr. Hanson was also in agreement with that compromise. There was a discussion of the monetary impact of moving to board and batten siding. Mr. Manzolini felt that the cost should be very close to the original estimate. Mr. Pruhenski asked for a vote from the Board to accept that change. Mr. Manzolini moved that the Board agree to replace the existing structure as originally planned, with the current footprint, but to replace the proposed metal siding with barnboard and batten siding. The motion was seconded by Mr. Alan Hanson and adopted by unanimous vote.

Mr. Pruhenski asked the Board for one more decision on this issue and that was whether, once the existing structure is demolished, do they wish to keep it or offer it to someone. Mr. Hanson felt the Town should attempt to sell the timber frame structure, which some people would see as a valuable item. Mr. Manzolini proposed that the barn as it stands be offered to anyone who wants to come in and remove it, they may do so at no charge. Offering it as surplus would allow the Town to get it dismantled free of charge. Mr. Pruhenski will arrange for that offer to be made public and will bring to the Board any responses he receives.

East Road Update – Driveway and Culvert Issues: Mr. Pilson asked Mr. Beckwith for an update on that situation as he was aware that Mr. Beckwith's crew had been at the site recently. Mr. Pilson said that he had noted that, as a result of the recent heavy rains, in front of #751, the water was not coming from the culvert, which was open. The water that was eroding the road was coming down the driveway, curling around the mailbox and digging a 4-foot canyon into East Road, which the Highway crew filled in. Mr. Beckwith added that the crew members felt

they could effect an adjustment to the situation and while they were filling in the road, made a minor adjustment to try to stop the water before it got to the road. Mr. Pilson said that he mentioned that because he is aware that four of the properties on East Road have received letters from the Town Administrator concerning needed repairs to their driveways and there appears to have been some work done. Mr. Beckwith acknowledged that some work has been done and in one case the contractor consulted with Mr. Beckwith as to what was needed and then proceeded to make those changes.

Neal Pilson