A regular meeting of the Sharon BOS was held via Zoom on April 14, 2020 at 3:00PM. Present were the three Selectmen; approximately 25 residents; Representative Horn, State Officials Jon Harris, Kate McEvoy, Barbara Cass and Mairead Painter; reporters Hawken and Epstein; Channel 6; and the secretary.

First Selectman Colley called the meeting to order at 3:05.

Mr. Flanagan made a motion to adopt the agenda as presented, seconded by Mr. Jones, with all in favor.

There were no public comments on the agenda items but those present can ask to speak when we get to any particular item.

A correction needed to be made in the 3/10/20 minutes – 5th paragraph, change “was” to “as”. Mr. Jones made a motion to approve these minutes as amended and the minutes of 3/12/20 as written, seconded by Mr. Flanagan, with all in favor.

Three proposals were received for the Sharon Beach tree work: tree removal, stump grinding and pruning (Perotti Tree Surgeons LLC, Sharon Lawn & Landscape, LLC and Quinion Lawn and Landscaping Services). A memo was received from Land Use Administrator Casey addressing the required application to the Inland Wetlands Commission submitted April 9, 2020. As the application has not been acted upon, she respectfully requested that the contractor who is awarded the job contacts her office as to how to proceed PRIOR to beginning any work which was required to be completed by May 15, 2020 per the proposal specifications. A memo was also received from Donna Christensen, Chairman of the Parks & Recreation Committee, commenting that the proposal from Perotti Tree Surgeons LLC seems like the best choice. Parks & Recreation had anticipated to use funds in the current budget for this project but it was commented that if the pruning, due to the timing of the work to be done, may come out of the 20/21 budget. Perotti Tree Surgeons proposal does not include the filling and reseeding of the work area but as the contractor who did the regrading needs to come back, it is assumed that this would be addressed at that point. Mr. Flanagan made a motion to accept the proposal of Perotti Tree Surgeons, LLC for the lump sum of $9,100.00 for the tree work to be done at the Town Beach, seconded by Mr. Jones, with all in favor.

The Board discussed the Governor’s Executive Order 7S Section 6 that pertains to either a tax deferment or low interest rate program. This Order requires each town to choose one or both of the proposed temporary tax relief programs. The program would only include April 2020 and the July 2020 tax bill payments – the April payment would be extended to July 1, 2020 and the July payment extended to October 1, 2020. The Board did receive a recommendation from the Tax Collector to choose the Deferment Program as she believes it would be more helpful to people who are experiencing recent difficulties. The taxpayer would apply for the deferment and would be given an interest free grace period. Any portion of the tax still unpaid at the end of the grace period would be then subject to the usual interest rate of 18 per cent per year. As the deferment program would have no additional cost and allow residents to defer payments, Mr. Flanagan made a motion that the BOS approves going with the Deferment Program, seconded by Mr. Jones, with all in favor.

The Board discussed a conversation that started with the Board of Finance – possibility of creating a separate fund to assist non-profits and businesses during this COVID-19 situation. Mr. Jones offered that: he feels this is premature as there are other avenues out there for assistance at this time; he
doesn’t like the idea of using taxpayer funds to benefit private businesses; and as things evolve, this idea is worth revisiting at a future date = table this issue for now. Mr. Flanagan shared Mr. Jones concerns and also offered that this is worth revisiting when there is more clarity – where would the funds come from and when AND who would administer this. This topic is on hold and now the idea will be out there to the community.

Community Update:

The budget process was reviewed “In Lieu of a Public Hearing”. The budgets are on the Town Website and copies are available upon request. Residents have until April 28, 2020 to give questions/comments to a specified email address on the Website or submitted in writing. The Board of Finance will then have a meeting on May 5, 2020 to publicly address the questions/comments. That night they will make the final decision on the proposed budget by approving and recommending a budget and a mil rate to the Board of Selectmen to then adopt/approve. This would be done at the May 12, 2020 Board of Selectmen’s meeting.

Next there was a presentation by various officials concerning COVID-19 and the Governor’s directive to use the Sharon Health Care Center as a COVID recovery facility:

Jonathan Harris – Senior Advisor to the Governor – the medical surge plan to use Sharon Health Care Center were not developed quickly and was done by various individuals with areas of specialties taking into consideration the health, safety and welfare of the Center’s residents. As hospital beds will be needed for those in need of critical medical care, the plan is for when individuals have recovered and are in need of monitoring and/or lower medical care, they would be discharged from the hospital to the Center to finish their monitoring.

Barbara Cass – State Department of Health – reiterated the medical surge plan (COVID response plan) in using the Health Care as a COVID Recovery Facility. The various steps were explained as well as moving Sharon residents who are negative to another nursing facility then back to their original facility once all are negative. This is a step down from the hospital but still being positive. All this complies with the State Public Health Code etc. The use of a closed nursing home in Torrington was mentioned but this facility is NOT the alternate to Sharon Health Care.

Mairead Painter – Long Term Care Ombudsman – her concern is making sure what is needed for the residents as well as the care givers. She has made and will continue to make the State aware of everyone’s concerns. Their concern is to be sure the residents are placed in an “as normal atmosphere” as possible with the same level of care.

Kate McEvoy – Department of Medicaid Administration – she explained how the Medicaid and Medicare funding will be handled. All the current obligations will continue.

The audience was advised to address any questions to Jonathan Harris.

With nothing further, Mr. Jones made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Flanagan, with all in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 4:24

Respectfully submitted,

Tina Pitcher, Town Secretary

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