

MINUTES
SHARON SELECT BOARD
November 14, 2023

The meeting of the Sharon Select Board was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chair Kiana Pierre-Louis remotely via Zoom. Select Board members Emily Smith-Lee and Hanna Switekowski were in attendance as were Town Administrator Frederic E. Turkington, Jr. and Assistant Town Administrator, Lauren Barnes.

Public comment period

There were no comments therefore Ms. Pierre-Louis moved on with the meeting.

Security update – Police Chief Steve Coffey

Chief Coffey provided an update on the safety and security measures being taken in Sharon considering current world affairs. He explained that there is currently no direct or specific threat to places of worship, residences, and other community personnel in Sharon. He mentioned that the Sharon Police Department has been actively involved in federal and state communication channels, attending Zoom calls, webinars, and information sharing networks to stay updated on safety and security matters. The department has also been in contact with agencies like the Joint Terrorism Task Force, Mass Fusion Center, and Homeland Security.

Chief Coffey also mentioned an upcoming training seminar called the Interfaith Summit, which is hosted by the FBI, Boston, Mass State Police, and CJP (Combined Jewish Philanthropies). The seminar aims to provide training and resources for faith leaders, community members, and law enforcement. He encouraged anyone interested to contact him for more information.

The police department consistently patrols houses of worship and has increased those patrols since October 7th. The department has also been attending various events and holidays. Additionally, a safety and security meeting was held on October 24th at the Public Safety Building, attended by clergy leaders, administrative staff, board members, and security personnel from different houses of worship. The meeting covered topics such as police response to different situations, physical security concerns, and protocols for dealing with emergencies.

The police department encourages houses of worship to have written policies in place for evacuations, sheltering in place, active shooter incidents, and crisis situations. Templates and guidance for these policies can be found on the Department of Homeland Security website. The discussion also touched on online training options for active shooter events, such as the ALICE or CRAZE programs.

The Chief emphasized the importance of timely communication from the community about upcoming events and holiday services. He advised using the Houses of Worship Special Events form on the town website to notify the police department about these events. In addition, police details for large events through direct contact.

He highlighted the community's role in reporting suspicious activity, stating that community members are the department's "extra set of eyes." He stressed the importance of the "see something, say something" mindset and provided contact information for emergencies (911) and general concerns or reports (Sharon Dispatch at 781-784-1588). Anonymous reporting is also available through a fillable form on the town website.

Lastly, the Chief acknowledged the community's gratitude for the department's efforts and partnerships. He expressed his willingness to receive feedback or suggestions for improvement and encouraged community members to reach out to him directly. The conversation concluded with the Select Board expressing their gratitude for the department's work and support.

Tax Classification Hearing – Jeffery Funk, Administrative Assessor

MOTION: To open the public hearing at 7:15 pm.

(Smith-Lee – Switekowski)

Smith-Lee: AYE

Switekowski: AYE

Pierre-Louis: AYE

3-0 **PASSES**

Mr. Funk advised that shifting the Tax Burden involves the Select Board voting to either maintain a single tax rate with a factor of 1.00 or adopting a split tax rate with a lower residential factor, thereby increasing taxes for Mixed-Use, Commercial and Industrial Properties and for taxpayers required to pay a Personal Property tax. Due to the very small percentage of CIP classes within the Town of Sharon, a Split Tax Rate could be detrimental to the businesses in Town since most are smaller business owners.

It is the recommendation of the Board of Assessors that the Select Board opt to maintain a residential factor of 1.00 for fiscal year 2024.

Only 16 of the 351 communities in Massachusetts currently have adopted the Residential Exemption and they tend to be communities with many apartment buildings (Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, and Chelsea) or many second homes (Barnstable, Tisbury and Nantucket). If adopted, the Residential Exemption would shift the tax burden within the Residential Class from domiciled to non-domiciled taxpayers. This exemption reduces, by the adopted percentage, which may be between 10-20% of the average assessed value of all residential parcels, the taxable valuation of each residential parcel that is a taxpayers' principal residence. The residential exemption does not reduce the residential share of the tax levy for the fiscal year. Rather, the total tax reduction is offset by an increase in the residential tax rate, which shifts the taxes not paid by eligible homeowners to residential properties not occupied by the owner. Thus, the Town will raise the full amount of the tax levy despite the higher tax break to eligible homeowners.

This option shifts more of the residential burden to non-domiciled taxpayers. A possible downside of this shift is that those living in rental housing (with non-domiciled owners) are likely to have lower incomes than those who qualify to purchase homes. In addition, if the taxes increase for those landlords, it is likely that the increase will be passed along to the tenants.

If adopted, it would benefit most owners whose principal residence is in Sharon. It would not benefit owners of vacant residential land, owners of apartments or landlords that do not occupy a unit within the property, owners of second homes in Sharon, those who own mixed-use or investment properties who do not occupy a residential unit in the property, and those who own higher valued principal residences. An increase in tax rate could offset the amount of an exemption.

It is the recommendation of the Board of Assessors that the Select Board opt not to adopt a residential exemption for fiscal year 2024.

Only 14 of the 351 communities in Massachusetts currently have adopted the Small Commercial Exemption. If adopted, the Small Commercial Exemption would shift the burden so that qualified Commercial and Chapter Land properties could receive the benefit, but the burden would be shifted to the other Commercial and all Industrial Properties. The exemption allows for up to a 10% reduction in value of qualifying properties.

As determined by statute, to be eligible for the small commercial exemption, properties must have an assessed value of less than one million dollars and be occupied by a business which has been certified by the Department of Employment & Training as having no more than an average of ten employees in the previous year.

It is the recommendation of the Board of Assessors that the Select Board opt not to adopt a small commercial exemption for fiscal year 2024.

MOTION: To close the public hearing.
(Smith-Lee – Switekowski)

Smith-Lee: AYE
Switekowski: AYE
Pierre-Louis: AYE
3-0 **PASSES**

MOTION: To make no changes to the existing tax classification or rate.
(Smith-Lee – Switekowski)

Smith-Lee: AYE
Switekowski: AYE
Pierre-Louis: AYE
3-0 **PASSES**

Post issuance compliance report

In February 2020, the Town had issued \$97.8 million in long term municipal general obligation bonds at an effective rate of 1.76% to fund \$85 million for the New High School; \$5 million for the New Library; and \$5.8 for other Town's General Fund and Water department projects. Details are attached.

As a part of the 'post-issuance' compliance, the Town is required to monitor 'Arbitrage Rebate' and 'Yield Restriction.'

The Arbitrage Rebate relates to the 'municipal' entities having excess investment earnings over the bond yield (profit) on a cumulative basis from the inception of the issue from a tax-exempt bond. In other words, the municipal entities should not profit (arbitrage) from the low-cost tax-exempt municipal bonds. Any excess profit/arbitrage will cause a liability to the IRS.

The Yield Restriction relates to the timely use of borrowed funds. Generally speaking, it starts after a temporary period, three years for construction proceeds, and during the temporary period an issuer can earn a yield on their investments in excess of the bond yield. However, the investments are still subject to the rebate rules during the temporary period. It is expected that:

- i. 85% of the borrowed project proceeds will be spent within three years after the issuance;
- ii. The issuer will contract for at least five percent of the project proceeds within six months after the date of issuance; and
- iii. The issuer (municipality) will proceed with due diligence to complete the project.

Please see the attached Post Issuance Compliance Guidance for further details.

The Town had retained Hilltop Securities Asset Management to perform a post compliance analysis on the issued debt. Their analysis indicates a liability of \$40,232, payable to IRS in April 2025. The Town would continue to monitor the post-issuance compliance on a regular basis for the next few years, till there is no residual liability. Copies of their summary and detailed reports are attached for your information.

MOTION: To accept the Hilltop Securities Asset Management Post Issuance Compliance Report as discussed.
(Switekowski– Smith-Lee)

Smith-Lee: AYE
Switekowski: AYE
Pierre-Louis: AYE
3-0 **PASSES**

Board and Committee interviews – Board of Registrars

Ms. Switekowski recused herself from this discussion and will abstain from any votes.

Ms. Pierre-Louis first recognized that although Justin Loeper was scheduled to interview, it has been determined that he is ineligible to serve in this role due to his voter registration status being unenrolled. To qualify to serve on the Board of Registrars of Voters, candidates must be registered with either the Republican or Democratic party for two years preceding appointment. Ms. Pierre-Louis welcomed Ann Marie Sargent and explained that the Board asks a standard set of questions of each candidate:

Please tell us about your personal background, education, employment, things you like to do for fun, etc. and how/if it relates to the committee for which you seek appointment.

Why are you interested in appointment to the particular committee? What goals do you have for your service?

(If applicable) We often have more interested citizens who step forward to serve. If not chosen for the particular committee to which you have applied, would you consider a different assignment?

How can we ensure the work of your committee reflects the breadth of thought that reflects Sharon's diverse community?

Ms. Sargent explained that she grew up in Avon and was actively involved in community activities and sports. Her hobbies include running, theater, and attending music concerts. She has two successful and talented children who work in the commercial construction, real estate and legal fields.

Ms. Sargent expressed a keen interest in being involved in politics and believes strongly in the need for change in the direction the country is heading. She is particularly interested in ensuring fair elections and advocate for in-person voting and voter identification rather than voting by mail. She is motivated to contribute her time and skills to make a difference and be part of the community.

When asked about ensuring the diversity of thought on the Board of Registrars, Ann Marie relayed that she believes in working together and contributing skills to help others regardless of their background. She emphasized the importance of a healthier system for future generations and expressed her respect, understanding, and compassion for differences.

In response to a follow-up question about voter participation challenges, Ms. Sargent admits they she is unaware of any specific situation in Sharon but believes there should be stricter voting processes nationwide. She expressed her support for paper ballots and emphasized the importance of people showing up to vote. She further mentioned her desire to contribute her time to ensure fair elections, although acknowledging that she has no knowledge of any voter fraud in Sharon.

The Board thanked Ms. Sargent for her time this evening and advised that Board's policy is to make appointments at the next consecutive meeting following an interview.

Board and Committee interviews

Ms. Pierre-Louis explained that the Board asks a standard set of questions for each candidate:

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Geila Aronson of the Commission on Disabilities, Peg Arguimbau and Keevin Geller of the Conservation Commission, and Chuck Levine and Deepak Shahane of the Technology & Telecommunications Advisory Committee have expressed an interest in appointment to another term in their respective roles when their terms expire at the end of this year. Each candidate was given the opportunity to respond to the Board's standard questions and explain about the work they do in the community in their role.

Consent calendar

1. Review and approve consent calendar
 - I. Vote to approve the following minutes
 - a. October 24, 2023 – open session
 - II. Vote to approve the following banner request/requests:
 - a. Sharon Youth Lacrosse spring registration, December 4-11, 2023, in 1st position
 - b. Sharon Youth Lacrosse spring registration, December 18-26, 2023, in 2nd position
 - III. Vote to approve the following one-day liquor license requests:
 - a. Castle Island Brewing, 11 events at Ward's Berry Farm between November 24 and December 24
 - IV. Vote to approve use of the Town Hall parking lot on Sunday, May 19 from 10 am to 6 pm for the Sharon Recreation Department Chalk Art Festival with the possibility of hosting food trucks as part of the event
 - V. Vote to approve the request from Chabad Sharon to hold a menorah lighting at Sharon Town Hall on December 10 and display a menorah in Sharon center during Chanukah from December 7 through December 14, 2023
 - VI. Vote to increase the retiree cost share of Managed Blue for Seniors from 10 to 20 percent effective January 1, 2024
 - VII. Vote to accept Atherton Lane and Weyman Lane as public ways for all purposes for which public ways are used in the Town of Sharon and any drainage, access, utility and/or other easements related thereto and as laid out and generally shown on a plan of land entitled "Quail Ridge, A Cluster Subdivision in Sharon, Mass.", dated March 10, 1989, prepared by Norwood Engineering Co., Inc. and recorded with the Norfolk County Registry of Deeds as Plan 806 of 1989, and on file with the Town Clerk

Ms. Switekowski asked about the cost share of the Managed Blue for Seniors. Mr. Turkington advised that the present cost share is 10% employee paid. The cost share of the alternative plan is 30% employee paid. Thus, the Managed Blue plan will be increase incrementally over five years for parity.

MOTION: To approve the consent calendar.
(Smith-Lee – Switekowski)

Switekowski: AYE
Smith-Lee: AYE

Report of the Town Administrator

Mr. Turkington provided the following update.

Update on work of task force supporting migrant families. A leadership team consisting of Assistant Supt. of Schools Meg Dussault, Public Health Administrator Leandra Mclean, Fire Chief Mike Madden, Assistant Town Administrator Lauren Barnes and me has worked with a number of community faith leaders and community organizers to provide essential, unmet needs for the 16 families placed by the state at the EconoLodge. We have held Zoom meetings to coordinator collections of items ranging from diapers to hygiene products to coats and warm clothing to books and craft supplies. We have established a donation fund to provide laundry services and purchase specialty items for infants and toddlers. A webpage has been set up on the Town website to provide updates to the community about emerging needs and opportunities to participate in welcoming these new residents. We await confirmation whether the 96 rooms at the Best Western will be utilized as of December 16 given the Governor's soft cap on sheltering additional families beyond 7,500 statewide. If so, the collection efforts may expand depending on whether the state hires a social services agency to support the caseload.

Special Town Meeting preparation. The Warrant has been sent to the printer and is expected for postal delivery on November 16 and 17. A logistics meeting will be held with the Moderator on November 14 at 11:00 a.m. The FinComm open Warrant hearing will be held on Monday, November 27 at 7:00 p.m. in the Select Board Meeting Room. STM is Thursday, November 30 at 7:00 p.m. at Sharon HS auditorium.

Status of vacancies being recruited. We have hired Alyssa Orifice to fill the role of employee benefits specialist effective November 20. Two new firefighters were hired – Joseph Wright (son of retired Chief Jim Wright transferring from Canton FD) and Patrick Leaver (currently a New Bedford paramedic who will need to enroll in the fire academy).

Review of personnel by-law by Personnel Board. The Board met on October 11 to finalize comments and questions for labor counsel before holding a meeting on October 26 to complete that portion of the review. They met again on November 7 to prepare for a meeting with the Select Board in early December to discuss the governance issues within the by-law in hopes of reaching consensus on any changes to appointment of members, scope of oversight, etc. We expect to have the updated by-law ready for insertion in the 2024 ATM Warrant in January.

Select Board Correspondence/Announcements

We received / exchanged approximately 27 pieces of correspondence between Friday, October 20 and 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, November 9. Topics included:

- Notices and invitations including: updates on placement of 16 migrant families at EconoLodge; invitations to Sustainable Sharon Coalition program on water on November 21, interfaith Thanksgiving service on November 19; and library tour on November 17 Cultural Council newsletter; resignation from Emunah Homa from Library Reuse Committee and declination of reappointment from Teri Rawding from Transportation Advisory Board;
- Emails related to water filtration project;
- Email from Police Chief recognizing work of Officers Greenfield and Simon;
- Email from library project representative reporting on status of the building project;
- Emails regarding blue ribbons in support of hostages taken in Gaza;
- Email and response to concern of potential conflict of interest by planning consultant Tom Houston; and,
- Emails (6) exchange between resident and town engineer regarding impacts of South Main Street intersection improvements and mitigation requests;

Topics not reasonably anticipated within 48 hours in advance of the meeting

None.

Adjourn

MOTION: To adjourn at 8:44 pm
(Smith-Lee – Switlekowski)

Switlekowski: AYE

Smith-Lee: AYE

Pierre-Louis: AYE

3-0 **PASSES**

List of Documents

- Hearing materials
- Request memo of November 8
- Application
- Letter of interest
- Board and Committee applications (5)
- Minutes
- Banner request
- One-day liquor license applications (11)
- Request memo of October 31
- Request letter of October 30
- Correspondence of November 13, 2023
- Retiree rate chart for calendar year 2024
- Notice
- Town Administrator's report