

**Minutes
Town of Skowhegan
Special Selectmen's Meeting
8:00 A.M.
Tuesday, June 15, 2021
Municipal Building – Council Room**

****This meeting can also be viewed from the Town of Skowhegan's Facebook page****

Board of Selectmen:

Betty Austin
Harold Bigelow
Charles Robbins
Todd Smith
Paul York

Town Manager:

Christine Almand

Executive Secretary:

Cara L. Mason

Call Selectmen's Meeting to order.

1. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Organizational Meeting:

1. Appoint a Chairman/Finance Officer for the Board of Selectmen.

Betty Austin nominated Paul York.

Todd Smith nominated Betty Austin.

Paul York = Vote: 2/3

Betty Austin = Vote: 3/2

2. Appoint a Vice Chairman/Deputy Finance Officer for the Board of Selectmen.

Paul York nominated Todd Smith.

Vote: 5/0

Public Hearing:

1. Public Hearing: Discussion and decision to approve the Victualer License for:

Howco Foods, Inc. d/b/a Ken's Restaurant
411 Madison Avenue

Betty Austin opened the Public Hearing at 8:06 a.m.

Betty Austin closed the Public Hearing at 8:06 a.m.

A motion was made by Paul York and seconded by Charles Robbins to approve the Victualer License for Howco Foods, Inc. d/b/a Ken's Restaurant.

Vote: 5/0

2. Public Hearing: Discussion and decision to approve the Application for On-Premises Malt, Wine License for:

Howco Foods, Inc. d/b/a Ken's Restaurant
411 Madison Avenue

Betty Austin opened the Public Hearing at 8:07 a.m.

Betty Austin closed the Public Hearing at 8:07 a.m.

A motion was made by Todd Smith and seconded by Paul York to approve the Application for On-Premises Malt, Wine License for Howco Foods, Inc. d/b/a Ken's Restaurant.

Vote: 5/0

Regular Agenda:

1. Discussion and decision to approve the amended property description in the Option and Park Relocation Agreement and authorize Christine Almand to initial the changes.

A motion was made by Charles Robbins and seconded by Todd Smith to approve the amended property description in the Option and Park Relocation Agreement and authorize Christine Almand to initial the changes.

Christine Almand said that the attorney's discovered that the property description only included one of the two deeds. There were multiple public discussions where we talked about the entire property going to the school. There was discussion regarding the back ballfield remaining for public use, but as part for school property, as well as the train system.

Vote: 5/0

3. Discussion regarding COVID-19 precautions.

Todd Smith said he took pictures of the TV screen this morning. 24 new cases in our state and 55.68% final dose vaccination rate. That contradicts the data put out by the Governor. Those numbers are 64.9% are fully vaccinated in our state. The civil emergency ends June 30th. The guidelines by the CDC have not changed since the May 25th meeting. It is time that we do away with the mask mandate and let people live their lives.

Paul York said that we should be more pro-active than reactive. People are getting tired of all of this, and he gets it. Because people are getting tired of the masks, we are just going to throw all of this away. Then if we have a major issue, we will be reactive again. We are not asking a lot. We are just trying to protect our employees. It's going to be pretty hard to operate if all of a sudden, a bunch of people are out. We don't have control of what they do outside of here, but we do have some control when they are here.

Harold Bigelow said that national statistics, not what the media spits out...in the states that are wide open, there is no pandemic. It's normal...economies booming...nobody dying like flies. It's just a plandemic. Look at the statistics, not what the media is spitting out. It's a civil right. If you want to wear a mask, if you don't feel safe out there, wear a mask. He is almost 70, he feels completely safe. He will never get that vaccine. If you read the fine print, that is the last thing you want to do...especially if you are older.

Charles Robbins said that whether an employee is wearing a mask or not...if they come in contact, they still have to quarantine. Masks should be recommended, not required. There should be no proof of vaccination required.

Betty Austin said that she is over 70 and has had her vaccinations. We do have some employees with underlying health conditions. She said that the more precautions we take, the better. She is going to another meeting in a little while and they are going to require masks. There are other towns that require the same thing. She doesn't feel that it is ridiculous to ask for what we are asking.

Todd Smith said that there are 24 cases in our entire state, that is hardly an outbreak. He said it is time to move on. If you want to wear a mask, wear one. Nobody will tell you that you can't.

Gail Pelotte said that she respects everyone's opinion. She hopes they respect hers. She has worn a mask almost every day since this whole thing started. There were days there were only three people in the whole building. November Elections she wore a mask for 18 hours. She does it to protect herself, her family, her elderly parents. She is fully vaccinated, but she still wears her mask. We need to be 75% vaccinated for herd immunity. We have vaccinated and unvaccinated people working side by side. The people who were vaccinated, when there was an exposure, got to stay here and work. The people that haven't been vaccinated have to go home and quarantine. The vaccinated people are the ones answering the phones and doing the work. People want to know why we aren't able to wait on them. It was great that we were able to get rid of the door monitor. People want to take their vacations. She can't do the job that she was elected to do, if she is on the front line. She is not going to take her mask off.

Harold Bigelow said that if one person becomes infected at the school, it affects everyone. Nobody has died of the flu in the last year. It is all COVID. It's got everybody running scared. There was a guy in his kayak all alone on the pond with a mask on. He is fine with that. To take your thought and impose it on everybody else...they are fining businesses and threatening to close them down, because people in the kitchen are not wearing masks. He asks them what their name is, so he can tell everyone that they want to shut this place down. This is America. Wear a mask or a snorkel...whatever you want. We've got to get the job done. Look at the statistics and the places that have opened up. The fear factor has gone paranoid in this.

Todd Smith said that the Governor's Order states that the mask mandate for indoor pre-k schools and childcare will also end.

A motion was made by Todd Smith and seconded by Charles Robbins to do away with the COVID Precautions that were approved at the May 25, 2021 meeting.

Cara Mason read aloud comments from Facebook.

Christine Almand said that she had spoken to Denise LeBlanc about the policies at the Recreation Department. She would like to see the masks restrictions through June 30th.

An amended motion was made by Todd Smith and seconded by Charles Robbins to do away with the COVID Precautions that were approved at the May 25, 2021 meeting, and to continue masks for children participating Recreation Department programs through June 30th.

Vote: 3/2 (Paul York and Betty Austin opposed)

4. Other Business

Jason Gayne said that the Selectmen voted no on AT&T at the last meeting. He will bring it up again next Tuesday. They set up at T&B's on Friday. He received a lot of back-lash from people asking why they are on the outskirts of town. Why can't the town be business friendly and put them someplace better. We had asked for them to be downtown at the Selectmen's Meeting. He has not submitted another paper, because according to the Morning Sentinel it wasn't the right form. He is asking that we do a 30-day...he would like to see them open up, do a pop-up in a parking spot by the Chamber. Let them attract some business, so they can end up in a storefront as a community member and paying business.

Paul York asked why he doesn't put them inside the information booth.

Jason Gayne said he doesn't have enough room.

Paul York said they obviously found a spot. He doesn't understand why...if they want to come into town...he is all for it...rent space like everybody else does. He doesn't think it is fair to the businesses that we have in town, that have skin in the game, and have proven themselves...they rent space. They are not setting up downtown for free. He doesn't understand that.

Todd Smith said he would like to try to grow this and to attract more of these pop-up businesses. If that wasn't the appropriate application, then we should create an application and come up with a policy or an ordinance and a fee structure that goes with the use of our parking spots specifically for these types of business opportunities. Anybody could utilize these spots, especially on the weekends. It is not a full lot. We can generate a small amount of income and encourage businesses to come in and give that a shot. We could be missing an opportunity for increased businesses in this town.

Betty Austin said that she has not heard the same thing that Jason Gayne has heard. Having some time and having more people talk with the Selectmen before they vote on anything would be a good idea.

Christine Almand said that depending on the number of days, they may also have to meet some Code requirements. She told Jason Gayne he should talk to the Code Enforcement Officer regarding that. Depending on what they intend to set up, a certain number of days will mean it isn't considered a temporary structure.

Jason Gayne said it is a vehicle and opening the back. Their full business operates out of their jeep.

Charles Robbins said that we welcomed Food Truck Fridays for two months.

Paul York said that we did that because of COVID. The fairs had shut down. We allowed it because we wanted them to be able to make a little bit of money. This is not the case here. They want to set up in our parking lot for free to build up a clientele. Every business that starts in town, doesn't have a clientele until they start operating. They have to build their clientele. We are going to start doing this, with nothing in place. Then our parking lot is going to look like a flea market. Then the businesses will be complaining that we have no parking downtown.

Recording Time: 27:55

They are not paying anything, and it is going to take away from our businesses downtown. Once again we will be reactive. Once you start, it opens it up for everybody.

Betty Austin reminded the people watching this to contact their Selectmen. Let them know how you feel.

Charles Robbins said he would like to talk to Code Enforcement on Tuesday.

Todd Smith said that if we can bring that type of atmosphere to town, he feels it would increase sales for the downtown businesses. It works pretty well for the Farmers' Market on Saturday. We could be prepared for it to happen if we had something in place.

Harold Bigelow said that he thinks Paul is right. You could get carried away with this and it could rob downtown. The Grainery takes up a lot of space with the Farmers' Market and everything. If it was limited and regulated who was in there...have some rules and regulations.

Todd Smith asked what the status is of a special election to fill Betty's vacated seat.

Christine Almand said that the plan is to put that on the agenda for the next regular meeting.

Todd Smith asked about COVID pay. How do we pay people that are out in quarantine? He has heard some different things. We paid some people to be home and then didn't pay some people to be home. We should look at some consistency. He doesn't know if the quarantine now goes away with the Governor's new order. If we are asking somebody to quarantine, we need to be consistent in how they are being paid versus them using their sick time. If we are telling them that they can't come to work, we should step up and pay them.

Paul York said as a taxpayer. We just decreased the precautions, but now you are going to put upon the taxpayers...that if people are not taking precautions...it is out there, whether you agree with it or not...now we are going to pay are employees because they have to quarantine. The taxpayers have to pay for that? He doesn't think that is right. We have always taken care of our employees, and we will continue to where we can. The policy that we have in place is fair and consistent. If you are out sick with whatever, are we going to pay then for that. No. They are going to use their sick time.

Todd Smith said in that case we are not sending them home. From what he understands we have been paying them and now we are not.

Paul York said that those rules changed, so we changed ours as well.

Todd Smith said we didn't do that with the masks. We made our own rules.

Christine Almand said that she has tried to deal with things on a case-by-case basis, while applying the laws that are in place as well as being consistent with past practice. There was a law last year, where if employees were out due to COVID, whether it was an exposure or a positive test, we had to pay them and did not charge them sick time. That law changed effective January 1, 2021. After January 1st, if there was an exposure and they had to quarantine, they had to use their sick time. The only time that, that didn't happen was when we had an exposure in an office where three people were sent home. One was positive and the other two were exposed to that positive case and were not vaccinated. The two that were sent home were paid. The positive case used sick time. Just like any illness...first, if you are unable to perform your job...and second, to protect your coworkers. That could be anything. She believes that COVID, just like any other illness the employee should be charged sick time. She paid the other two employees consistent with how we deal with other situations. If she sends you home, for a storm or something like that, we pay. She believes that she has applied the laws and past practice consistently. She had conversations with Paul and Todd about this. We did have one employee test positive and was vaccinated. Paul York suggested that maybe we should pay that employee because that employee had taken all precautions in order to not disrupt the workplace. She is not opposed to that. However, she believes that employees that are catching COVID, regardless of how they got it, should be using their sick time.

Todd Smith said that what he would like to see employees paid without using sick time if they are sent home to quarantine. From what he understands this was being done until recently.

Christine Almand told Todd to come see her for clarification. This is how she has applied our policy.

Gail Pelotte said that she received a request for inspection of ballots. This will be taking place on Monday. After that inspection, we may have a recount.

5. Sign Documents

The Selectmen signed documents.

Adjourn Selectmen's Meeting.

Approved and signed on July 13, 2021.

A True Copy Attest: _____
Cara L. Mason, Executive Secretary