

## **BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING**

**January 19, 2023 – 6:00 PM**

**Saugus Town Hall Conference/Motion approved to remove to the upstairs  
auditorium**

**This meeting was being recorded**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Anthony Cogliano. Also present Vice Chair Debra Panetta, Selectman Corinne Riley, Selectman Michael Serino, and Selectman Jeffrey Cicolini. Also present Town Manager Scott Crabtree.

Chairman: “We originally scheduled this meeting here but chose to move it upstairs.” Selectman Cicolini made the Motion to adjourn to the upstairs auditorium. Chair seconds, all in favor – Motion passes 5-0. A sign stating ‘Meeting has been moved to the upstairs auditorium’ was posted on the first-floor door.

All present at the meeting in the auditorium.

Open Evaluation: Statement from Town Manager Scott Crabtree. “The Annual Review is to define a limited number of goals which are reasonably attainable. Planning is important to produce achievement and will meet annually.

Budget: When I came in almost 11 years ago, the Essex Street Fire Station was closed as was the library for lack of funding. I came in with the bond rating of \$200,000 in stabilization and savings, and contracts not settled for years. Department heads had no raises in nine years and there was unrest.

Today, we are in the process of building a third fire station, and a new Voke school. Our bond rating is a double A plus with \$14M in different stabilizations and I placed 3M into the schools. Looking at the infrastructure, we invested in a multimillion-dollar project in the Sewer Pumping Station. We were under the ACO order and completed the work required. We have moved on to other subsections and continue to upgrade. Installed solar systems, a Charm Center, upgraded parks and playgrounds, and manpower in public safety.

It is important to move the Town forward, to come together and develop a Master Plan for the schools and do renovations in the Belmonte Middle School and Hurd Avenue School as well.

There were no layoffs or reductions in services during the Pandemic. Together we updated the CIP that passed through Town Meeting, and with financial support to continue the 5 Year CIP Plan that was updated. I am very proud of the fact that we were able to balance the budget this year. We used other funds during the Pandemic and other funds for stabilizing the budget.

This year, Special Town Meeting rescinded the vote to use \$1.5M in the American Rescue Act and those funds will be put back to be used while we have a balanced budget. We are back on track without any financial issues.

We created a targeted Stabilization Fund for students, parents, and teachers as a Recovery Act, for those who need support in moving through the Pandemic period and there should be a plan coming forward to upgrade our standards.

Big ticket items: New third fire station. A ladder truck and pumper truck are already established and approved by Town Meeting and I ordered the equipment with a two-year wait, but, thankfully, funds were locked in.

We need to come together to get a sense of direction as to where we want to go next. A new fire station location needs to be determined and we need to seek budget funds for staffing. Cost estimates for a new building could be \$30M. We need a Feasibility Study and designs to identify the best location. We need support from the community. We need a Feasibility Study which would range from \$200,000 - \$500,000. We need to identify a location with enough land for ladder trucks. This would require an Article for Town Meeting.”

Chairman Cogliano asked about the property at Target on Lynn Fells Parkway as a potential location. Mr. Crabtree stated there has been several meetings and a lease needs clarification. We need something more northern. In the southbound side for access to North Saugus. Curley property could be viable. We need someone to help us look for the land.

Selectman Cicolini asked for proposals of the costs to do a Feasibility Study to learn the expense as the Target, Curley or other spots to expedite the process. Selectman Cicolini stated: “We need to get a proposed best location, the acquisition cost, construction costs and impact on the taxes then put it out there to the public for an override.”

The town manager suggested to start a study and then to gradually get support from the community.

Selectman Riley asked if all of this was already completed, put together at Town Meeting and was told it was a needs assessment question. The town manager stated this issue has been going on for 30 years and he wants something put on an agenda. There was a question if money was coming in at the time.

The town manager stated that this is something that needs to be supported by the public. A lot of issues need to be analyzed. We will have to support this and let the public decide if they want to invest in this project. Selectman Cicolini suggested that we present the argument to the public what they do not have to pay instead of what they need to pay. The high school project saved almost \$7M with this process.

The town manager emphasized the fact that we need to put something together and he asked for direction. Selectman Cicolini stated that we need to all be together on this message. Town manager asked if he should move forward, and the Board supported his request with the first step being the location.

Selectman Serino inquired if that property would need to be taken by eminent domain and Mr. Crabtree stated yes.

Vice Chair Panetta asked if an Article could be placed on the spring town meeting warrant; the town manager agreed and to have it go out to the residents to vote on - a debt override one vote for the building, and a separate one for operations and manpower going forward. There would be two questions on the Warrant. We need the feasibility study first along with drawings; that is a start.

Vice Chair Panetta asked about the Oaklandvale School as some think it would be a suitable location but was told it could not be used for a fire station. The town manger explained because it would not reach the north Saugus area.

The town manager brought up the water and sewer project. "A study has been done about the replacement program that would help build confidence with the water meters as well. There will be a lot of complaints as there will be two different systems. Training people will be necessary.

Arbor money is allowable to reduce fees. Study stated three people are needed to be hired – one was hired recently and is in training. We need to fill one more position. A request has gone out for a project manager to oversee the project specializing in meter replacement."

Selectman Serino asked about hiring inside but was told no one seems to be interested. Employees will have the opportunity. Total \$6M project which is scaled down.

Vice Chair Panetta asked about the Consent Order and where are we now in updating the substation? The manager said we have plenty of sewer capacity and there is special funding to be able to take advantage of for a lower interest rate.

Selectman Serino asked for an update on the main line going to Lynn. The town manager stated that there is an opportunity to have quality control make sure our meters are correct. We received bills after the fact and then we had to correct them. There are three phases; the first completed. There were three pumps running at the same time and with problems; all systems had to shut down. The main line is the third phase and is better than before. We are responsible for changing the line going to Lynn which will be very expensive.

The town manager stated the good news is Town Meeting voted the \$330M for the new Voke School but now the interest rate is high and could be \$1.5 to \$2M. He stated he wanted the money to be borrowed up front but was voted not to do it. "We need to look at a debt exclusion, an assessment for capital, and to look for legal standing of a 30-year cost assessment according to student population."

The town manager requested paperwork from the Voke for the change in enrollment that was once over 200 students, and it is now down to 140-150. He believes something changed but could not get the formula.

Town Manager: “We should have more access to the school, it is a Saugus School. We need to keep the conversation going, a special target assessment for the Voke \$500,000 in target stabilization was supported by Town Meeting and a second Article for \$500,000 for targeted stabilization. There is a 30-year commitment. It is a worry for me as it is coming and will affect our financial stability.”

Selectman Serino suggested going forward with a debt exclusion for a vote before we do anything else. The town manager stated that an estimate could be presented. Selectman Cicolini wondered if the Voke project has a current estimate available. Town Manager Crabtree stated they cannot go above the \$330M unless they get another vote. “There are lots of projects in the state that had to go back out for funding. We have to go out for support even though we do not have full information.”

Town Manager fiber optics update: “Comcast ran fiber optics that will help with the immediate issues. It is a large project and needs to be upgraded. \$1.5M estimate. We applied for federal funds of \$1M through CDS 911. Saugus Center needs upgrading with a \$1.5M estimate. Applied for federal funding and awarded \$1M for public safety enhancement – Federal funding request submitted with the help of Senators Markey and Warren. Another award was \$2.3M for a total of \$3.3M for the year. We will be going out for the design services, and specs together and we will retain someone to oversee the project as the process is very complicated.”

Selectman Serino asked if it would be paid by a grant and was told it would be. Selectman Riley asked if Comcast is going through to the police department and was told it has improved but no report as yet and not sure if it is completely operational at this time.

Town Manager Crabtree stated the Clifftondale revitalization project is on high priority. Several grant requests have been applied for. Businesses were awarded funds. Articles were prepared to support the purchase of the North Shore Loan Center at 481 – 483 Lincoln Avenue for \$775,000. With a lot of public support there will be many options available.

The town manager prepared an Article for Town Meeting in support of the purchase of 42 Jackson Street at \$825,000. The recent federal grant of \$2.3M for the revitalization of Clifftondale will support the parking and demolition issues to name a few also supported by Senators Markey and Warren, along with our state delegation. “We need more input to look at all options and learn what would be the next step.”

Selectman Cicolini suggested a two-tier parking lot with an entrance, and exit. “Once we get an anchor – it will generate expansion.” The town manager is working with Aggregate Electric Good Energy for reduction in costs.

Selectman Riley thanked the town manager for his report and for the conservative fiscal approach and also the Capital Improvement Plan that was just updated: “Communication with residents and developers is still lacking. Communication is very important. The town Website is

still outdated and needs improvement. Economic development on Route One needs to be addressed along with zoning, and tax incentives.”

The town manager stated he could definitely improve and make sure to get information out and will set parameters. “I hope to get someone in the help with communication as the Website also needs improvement.”

Selectman Cicolini agreed with Selectman Riley regarding the improvement of communication and would like a social media (our website) position be filled and will be responsible for town wide distribution of local news to the public.

Selectman Cicolini: “We have to adapt to the technology of today. By all means including Cable TV. We need to adapt to the younger generation’s way of receiving information.” Selectman Cicolini also requested quarterly update meetings to be scheduled with the selectmen and town manager. This meeting counts as one, the next one after the budget is done, then late summer, and the last one a week before the November election for status dates.

Selectman Cicolini stated that hiring practices have improved for the better. The town manager said he is using a recruitment firm; it costs a lot more money but will continue to use it. He also asked if the manager would continue with his Manager’s Corner Program three or four times a year with the support of this Board as he believes it is great for the residents.

Selectman Cicolini stated he thinks the manager has made great strides and believes he will continue to do so. “It takes more work to maintain stability than to it does to get to stability. The chairman and I would like certain issues to move along at a quicker pace.”

Vice Chair Panetta offered kudos for all the grants obtained by the town manager. “The pumping station - a lot of work that was done on your own. Also, a Double A Plus rating even with Covid. The new high school, the new plan for education, parking and playgrounds, taxes kept low all because of your efforts. Our finances are in great shape because of you. You make yourself available to town meetings to answer questions they may have. It is very important to talk about the Capital Improvement Plan and have it updated to know where we stand and what more has to be done, along with the Master Plan as well and get this information out to the public. We need further discussion on the status of our vacant schools. It was amazing that you were able to secure two locations for the Clifftondale Revitalization Project and it was huge to get \$3.3M for the Clifftondale project.

I do agree with other Board members; communication is important. I was going to say just about everything Selectman Cicolini stated verbatim. I think hiring a public relations person would be a way to let the citizens know about the good things that are being done. Information could be put out; the Website updated. Communication is key to getting out the good things that are taken place. I would like if there was a significant new hire and to inform the selectmen instead of

learning about it on social media. I believe you are doing a very good job and continue in what you are doing.”

Selectman Michael Serino: “In 2012, when Mr. Crabtree was the town manager, we had to go to meet with the State Auditor at the State House, as the town was heading for receivership, to use the State’s bond rating – that is how bad we were. We were looking at trash fees, debt exclusions, and overrides. Employees never had any contract raises in nine years. We were in tough shape, but we have come a long way. I do go along with the Board regarding public communication – but not with the Board. The town manager needs to get out to the public more often. The town manager is doing a really good job in town. “

Chairman Cogliano: “There is no question the town manager is doing a good job. The town was in rough shape when he started here, and I appreciate that. Some issues that frustrate me, some issues that we go over at board meetings; one example is the revoking of liquor licenses. Some that are not being utilized for years. Saugus was once a thriving place for restaurants. In looking at Market Place in Lynnfield, their success is in restaurants not just retail stores. Angela’s, the 99 Restaurant, Out of Asia, Rosaria’s, The Long Horn, Sully C’s. We need to revoke those licenses. So many of our restaurants are all gone. We may need outside counsel to help the Board and all hearings would be public.

The town manager agreed with the chairman. “It is in the hands of the selectmen to revoke. If you want help, he stated he will get more involved, and I am happy to assist. I just need direction, so we are all on the same page.”

Chairman Cogliano: “There will be no new businesses if there are no liquor licenses and explained that letters were sent letter out last November to the license holders stating that they either sell their license or return it to the town within the next six months. Vice Chair Panetta recommended the Board engage the services of an attorney in dealing with the pocket license issues.

Economic Development Committee: Chairman Cogliano asked if they are still meeting to which the town manager stated they were not. He explained: “When we changed the zoning, one complaint was there was no development happening as the Planning Board had no authority. Every developer had to wait for a Town Meeting or Special Town Meeting to come with a proposal for 50 people. Developers invested in plans, designs and manpower but some would disagree, a year would go by and, in the end, the proposal was denied. We need development to survive. What I did was a compromise with some of the Town Meeting Members because they were losing some of their authority. I can put that committee back together.”

Chairman Cogliano stated that he thought there was confusion if developers were required to meet with a committee that is inactive. The town manager explained that they do not have to meet with that committee and thought there was confusion in the By-Laws. Some members of that committee lost interest and there were developers that did not want to meet, chose to bypass

that committee and went right to the Planning Board and also questioned the legality of having to first go to the Economic Development Committee. That step is not in the By-Laws. There is a DCR pre-application meeting with all department heads to review plans and assist and is very helpful by the time they present their proposals prior to meeting with the Planning Board.”

Chairman Cogliano asked about the meeting schedule. “Do they meet often or at the call of the developer? The town manager stated it was generally at the call of the developer in coordination with the Planning Board. The town manager agreed that the process can improve. Sometimes the process is bypassed. “I would like to hire a consultant to set up a process to track the approvals and I will work on that. We are also trying to hire another engineer and consultant.”

Online permitting: Town Manager Crabtree stated someone has to understand and deal with the system. Someone needs to set up the process and he said he was committed to do so. Reports need to be set up first.

Chairman Cogliano: “We need to set up meetings with neighbors dealing with our vacant schools. The Host Community Agreement with Wheelabrator has been frustrating. It took over nine months to get the committee together. I know they are coming again to our Board soon and I hope it moves forward. The town manager has the authority to vet it at the end before it is signed by you and I hope there is some serious due diligence. I want to keep this process moving.”

The town manager stated the RFI will go out next week regarding the Cannabis proposal and it was approved on November 6, 2022. The town manager stated the process would go through as to who qualifies, then it would go to the Selectmen for a Special Permit. No one knew at the time, what the process involved.

Chairman Cogliano: “I think the town manager and I have worked well together. Last week he called and asked if I would schedule the issue of signing the paperwork to purchase the Jackson Street property on an agenda and then to go into executive session to discuss your back pay issue. Town Counsel Vasapoli told me the next day the issue of back pay issue should have been done in regular session and if I have known that I would not have scheduled the executive session in the first place. While we are still in open session, I would like to deal with that now as the town manager earned the raise increase.”

Selectman Cicolini said the pay raise was cut down from what the original contract offered. “We have the authority to consider additional compensation. The decision was made 5-0 to award a 4% Raise.” Selectman Cogliano thought a public vote was in order.

Vice Chair Panetta asked if the Chair wanted to go into executive session but he declined. Vice Chair Panetta then offered a Motion to go into executive session. Selectman Cicolini seconded the Motion to go into executive session; all in favor – Motion passes 3-2. Those going into

executive session: Chair Anthony Cogliano, Selectman Corinne Riley, Selectmen Michael Serino, Jeffrey Cicolini and Vice Chair Debra Panetta, along with Town Manager Scott Crabtree for the purpose of town manager contract negotiations with non-union personnel and then to come back out in open session. Selectman Cicolini seconded the Motion. Roll Call Vote: Anthony Cogliano NO; Selectman Cicolini YES; Selectman Riley NO; Selectman Serino YES; Vice Chair Panetta YES. Vote 3-2: Selectmen to go into executive session.

The Chair announced the Board is now back to open session. Selectman Cicolini offered a Motion to extend the current contract of Town Manager Scott Crabtree until August 24, 2027, with the current conditions to be carried forward. Chair seconds the Motion. Roll Call Vote: Selectman Serino YES; Selectman Riley YES; Selectman Cicolini YES; Vice Chair Panetta Yes; Chairman Cogliano YES. Motion passes 5-0.

Town Manager Crabtree thanked the Board and stated his appreciation for their confidence in him and agreed to work hard to improve in the issues that were brought forward. "I do not take this position for granted. I appreciate this job and I appreciate the support of this Board. Thank you." Selectman Cicolini offered the Motion to adjourn, Chair seconded, all in favor – Motion to adjourn passes 5-0 at 8:19 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Janice K. Jarosz, Temp Clerk