

Stoneham Select Board
Open Meeting
Tuesday, January 7, 2025
6:30 p.m.

Open Session

Members Present: Raymie Parker – Chair, Timothy Waitkevitch – Vice Chair, Heidi Bilbo – Clerk, David Pignone, George Seibold

Also Present: Town Administrator Dennis Sheehan

Document List: Notice of Site Plan Hearing for 44 Montvale Avenue; Department Review for 44 Montvale Avenue; Application materials for site plan review for 44 Montvale Avenue; Email from Connie Pascale dated 12/14/24; Minutes dated 12/17/24; Email from James O’Connor dated 1/2/25; Application materials for Special One Day licenses for 3/8/25 and 5/17/25 from Zoo New England; Public Building and Property Naming Policy drafts; Email from Raymie Parker dated 12/4/24 re: Building Naming Policy.

Agenda Item 1: Call to Order: Parker called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with a unanimous vote.

Agenda Item 2: Pledge of Allegiance

Agenda Item 3: Swearing in of Police Officers Police Chief James O’Connor spoke briefly about Police Officers Christopher Smith and Kevin Henriquez and thanked them for putting others before themselves. Town Clerk Maria Sagarino swore in Officers Smith and Henriquez.

Bilbo moved to take a 5 minute recess. Pignone seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Agenda Item 4: Citizens’ Comments Lisa Mashburn of 43 West Street stated that offering choices on the ballot relative to the override could create a competitive situation between departments and that the Town should opt for an overall override figure. She also stated that when offering options the lowest number should be a figure that at least level funds the departments and puts them where they need to be.

Kyla Malladi, 12 Lawndale Road, stated that general education cuts will leave students and staff overwhelmed and under-supported.

Carter Waite, 2 Columbus Avenue, stated that he invested in this Town and community for the neighborhoods and schools. He stated that it is not an option to let special education be underfunded and that public services must also be sufficiently funded. He stated that an override is the only option at this point. He would like the Town to look into parking meters, ticketing more on Franklin Street, and paid lots.

Amanda Tsapatseris, 3 Danby Road, stated that the residents must decide what type of Town we live in. She stated that this is not a case of mismanagement, rather it is a case of the Town outgrowing a system that was put in place decades ago. She stated that the Town has never passed an override and it is time to do so.

Jill Blagstaff, 23 Maple Street, stated that she is concerned for the school, the teachers, departments, and community. She stated that cuts will be devastating. She stated that the Town needs to be forward thinking with a long-term plan for growth.

Elise Wulff, Crystal Drive, stated that we need a 21st century education system that supports students, caregivers, and staff.

Corrine Dalton, Lynn Fellsway, stated that she is concerned with the pressure that new apartments will put on fire, police, and DPW.

Agenda Item 5: Site Plan Review – 44 Montvale Avenue Waitkevitch read the notice of hearing for the 44 Montvale Avenue site plan review. Sheehan stated that this matter is before the Select Board for an extension as the original site plan expired in September. Building owner Joseph Hart stated that all departments have completed sign offs and he is waiting on the Building Commissioner to complete her final inspection. Seibold moved to extend the site plan to 12/31/25. Waitkevitch seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Agenda Item 6: May Town Meeting Waitkevitch moved to hold town meeting on 5/5/25 at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium at town hall. Bilbo seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Waitkevitch moved to open the warrant for town meeting on 2/3/25. Seibold seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Waitkevitch moved to close the warrant for town meeting on 3/3/25 at 4:00 p.m. Pignone seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Agenda Item 7: Appointment to SMAHT Seibold moved to appoint Connie Pascal to the Stoneham Municipal Affordable Housing Trust. Bilbo seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Agenda Item 8: Approve Minutes Seibold moved to approve the minutes of 12/17/24. Waitkevitch seconded the motion. Voted 3-2-0 with Pignone and Bilbo abstaining.

Bilbo moved to enter into Liquor Licensing Authority to return to the Select Board. Pignone seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken.

Voting in favor:

Raymie Parker
Timothy Waitkevitch
Heidi Bilbo
David Pignone
George Seibold

Motion Passes (5-0)

Agenda Item 9: Zoo New England – Special One Day License Kirby Berranger appeared for Zoo New England stating that the events scheduled for 3/8/25 and 5/17/25 are 21+ and no one will be allowed to purchase tickets to the events that is not 21. She stated that there will be security officers and a state detail at the events. Bilbo moved to approve the special one day licenses for 3/8/25 and 5/17/25. Waitkevitch seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken.

Voting in favor:

Raymie Parker
Timothy Waitkevitch
Heidi Bilbo
David Pignone
George Seibold

Motion Passes (5-0)

Waitkevitch moved to exit Liquor Licensing Authority and return to the Select Board, Pignone seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken.

Voting in favor:

Raymie Parker
Timothy Waitkevitch
Heidi Bilbo
David Pignone
George Seibold

Motion Passes (5-0)

Agenda Item 10: Bylaw Review Committee Update Erin Wortman, Director of Planning and Community Development, was present to give a brief summary of the progress that has been made by the Bylaw Review Committee. She stated that ARPA funding secured Fisher and Associates to assist with the process of updating the code that had not been re-codified since 1985. She stated that they are working toward Town Meeting approval for October 2025, and will require a 2/3 vote.

Parker stated that she is a big proponent of the process because it has been 40 years since recodification. Waitkevitch stated that October 2025, seems like the appropriate date because the committee is trying to create an understandable and useful document.

Pignone asked how the update will help the Town. Wortman stated that a lot of growth has to do with density. Stoneham has a very small commercial corridor, but even finding ways to create small pockets of growth can increase revenue. She stated that updating the code is just one part

of a menu that will increase revenue. Sheehan stated that there is a balance between increasing commercial property and maintaining neighborhood that were intentionally laid out. Wortman stated that the code needs to be modernized, understandable, and better organized with charts. She stated that businesses call and ask her where they can open and if there is a comprehensive chart, they will know immediately.

Seibold stated that people ask about uses. Wortman stated that the definitions have been amended and some have been added. Seibold stated that he has received complaints about empty storefronts. Wortman stated that the process can be lengthy and difficult with many boards to go before. She stated that it is a process problem. Sheehan stated that we live with the legacy of past decisions. The Town was built around green space and single family homes. The Town rejected hotels and Home Depot. He stated that this is an opportunity to drive the bus on zoning.

Agenda Item 11: Budget Overview Chief O'Connor presented his budget recommendations for FY26 stating that he would like to receive funding for 2 unfilled positions, 1 deputy police chief, and 1 overnight dispatcher, a citizen police academy, accelerated accreditation, body armor, 2 vehicles, a police motorcycle, cruiser repairs, and an evidence room audit. Parker asked what the ideal staffing number is and O'Connor stated that 50 is ideal, 44 is really what is needed.

Waitkevitch stated that he wants to get the number right and just get there with the override. Seibold stated that he would not want to see the high performers burnt out. Bilbo stated that every department should answer the question: How do we get unfunded things done? She stated that she believes it will demonstrate higher need than we expect.

Fire Chief Matt Grafton presented his budget recommendations for FY26 stating that he would like to receive funding for a deputy chief, to promote 4 lieutenants, and to add 4 fire fighters. Parker asked about ideal staffing. Grafton stated that he would like 16/shift and no shift should run below 10. Waitkevitch stated that he would like to know the cost of ideal staffing. Matt stated that 50 fire fighters is the ideal number.

Brett Gonsalves, Director of DPW, presented his recommendations for the FY26 budget stating that we should be near 52 staff members, replace aging equipment including a loader, a dump truck, and leak detection equipment. He also stated that the trash contract is up in 1.5 years.

Waitkevitch stated that the staffing level is at the point now that it is a structural issue and that we really don't know what is needed to run the DPW teams for the Town.

Agenda Item 12: Override Discussion Parker stated that she does not understand how the Town has not passed an override. She stated that inflation, COVID, supply chain issues, contractual obligations have created an unsustainable situation. She stated that the Town is looking at everything, but ultimately it is up to the residents to decide. She stated that it looks like the override vote will take place at the same time as the town election, 4/1/25. Pignone stated that the Town has to get the override in place and that it is a town-wide issue.

Bilbo asked Sheehan about the timeline stating that it is imperative to get this done now and not have to come back in a few years. Waitkevitch stated that we have to keep on the path to the override and do some long-term planning. He stated if we want to remain a bedroom community then the resident will bear the burden – but it is up to the residents how they want the Town to look. Seibold stated that it is not mismanagement that is driving costs, it is inflation. He stated that he wants to make sure that safety does not become an issue and that when it comes to the final number, we have to make sure we do it correctly.

Pignone stated that we have to either change who we are as a community or pass an override every 10 years so that we can keep up with the cost of running a town.

Ryan Foreman, 12 Linden Road, stated that he moved to Stoneham because of the culture of the Town and that this vote has the potential to bring the Town together or divide us. He stated that he would like the Board to present the Town with a number that will not change the fundamental nature of the Town.

Troy Lau, 27 Newcomb Road, asked for nuggets of optimism. Tim Scarpa stated that simplicity of need is important to present. Martha Buckley stated that she is encouraged that all the Boards are united and working together.

Nick Starvra, 8 Ellen Road, asked about the revenue side of the issue. Sheehan stated that 80% of revenue is produced by property taxes and the remainder if 20% is composed of commercial taxes, state aid, and local receipts.

Agenda Item 13: Building Naming Rights Policy – Discussion Seibold moved to table this discussion until next meeting. Bilbo seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Agenda Item 14: Town Administrator’s Report Sheehan stated that all ARPA funds were obligated by 12/31/24.

Agenda Item 15: Non-Deliberative Announcements and Scheduling Parker stated that tree pick up is this week, Stoneham was 300 years old on 12/25-25/24; and that there is a Tri-Board meeting on 1/14/25.

Agenda Item 16: Adjourn Pignone moved to adjourn and return to the tri-board meeting. Bilbo seconded the motion. Voted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Dava Feltch Kilbride, Office Manager