

BOARD OF CIVIL AUTHORITY
Organizational Meeting – February 1, 2021

(This Public Meeting was held remotely via Microsoft Teams with electronic participation)

MINUTES (Draft)

Meeting Called to Order at 6:10pm

Members Present *(by roll call)*: Roy Black; Sue Buckholz; Kevin Christie; Pat Cook; Bonnie Fields; F.X. Flinn; Don Foster; Nancy Howe; Gabrielle Lucke (joined ~45 mins. after meeting started after Agenda item #6); Mike Morris; Gayle Ottmann; Nancy Russell; Linda Trombley; Rebecca White; and, Lisa O'Neil, Town Clerk. **Absent**: Barbara Reed.

The Clerk verified she had received Oaths of Office from all Board of Civil Authority members. The next order of business was to elect officers. The Clerk asked if there were any nominations. Mike Morris nominated Sue Buckholz for Chair and Nancy Howe for Vice Chair. F.X. Flinn seconded the motion. There were no further nominations or further discussion on the motion. The vote on the motion was taken by roll call of members present. *In favor: Roy Black; Sue Buckholz; Kevin Christie; Pat Cook; Bonnie Fields; F.X. Flinn; Don Foster; Nancy Howe; Mike Morris; Gayle Ottmann; Nancy Russell; Linda Trombley; Rebecca White. Opposed: None.*

Sue Buckholz conducted the balance of the meeting. Sue asked Lisa to speak to item #3 regarding JP Handbook. Lisa asked all BCA members to review the Handbook. Mike Morris what the process is to become a Notary and is the JP required to publicize they offer Notary services. Lisa explained applying to be a Notary is handled through the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation(OPR)/Secretary of State's Office. Sue stated OPR maintains a list of Notaries which is available publicly. Lisa asked all members to notify her if they wish to be on the list of JP's willing to officiate marriages; and, to provide her with the best phone and e-mail contact for BCA communication.

At the request of the Chair, the Clerk outlined the activities surrounding the upcoming Annual Town & School District Meeting to include: assistance with ballot folding for distribution of Early/Absentee Ballots (dates & times to be set once ballots received from the printer); a team to help with Testing the Voting Tabulators (date & time to be established once memory cards are received from LHS); Pre-Election set-up at the gymnasium the afternoon of Monday, March 1, 2021; and, Election Day to include early morning assistance to get ballots and tabulators to the polling place and set up and shifts throughout election day including counting; and, clean-up & return of ballots/ tabulators to Town Hall).

The Clerk stated during the past few years the BCA has held two Abatement Hearings annually; one in March and one in September (although in March, 2020 the BCA did not hold an Abatement Hearing due to the uncertainty about properly conducting meetings during the pandemic). The Clerk has received eight (8) applications for the March meeting thus far. Some members suggested a daytime meeting, others preferred evening. Kevin Christie suggested the Clerk send a Doodle Poll to determine the best date/time. The Clerk reminded the BCA, for Board of Abatement proceedings, a majority of total membership constitutes a quorum therefore, attendance is important.

An overview of the purpose and process of the Biennial Checklist Challenge/Purge review was discussed. The purpose of Biennial Checklist Review by the BCA is to identify voters who may no longer be eligible to vote in Hartford. The Clerk outlined the conditions under which a voter can be purged from the

checklist: including: 1) Written Authorization from Voter; 2). Out-of-State notification voter has registered in another jurisdiction; 3). Death Notice; 4) Batch Purge after voter has been sent a Challenge Letter AND has not since voted in TWO General Election Cycles. In 2019, each member of the BCA received an electronic copy of the checklist to review and identify any voters they believe had moved or was deceased. The Clerk recently received a public information request from a Town resident requesting information from the 2019 Checklist Review proceedings. The request was likely prompted by the Clerk stating publicly the Clerk's office received approximately 2500 Ballots as returned mail from the statewide ballot mailing for the November 2020 election. The individual suggested if the BCA had been thorough in the Biennial review, this would not have occurred. The Clerk will be providing the information as requested within the timeline prescribed by Statute. F.X. indicated in 2013, 2015 & 2017 the BCA did challenge voters for not voting for some period of time rather than basing challenges upon individual BCA members' personal knowledge that a voter should be purged or challenged due to death of voter or voter moving out of town. He commented the checklist number impacts voter-backed petitions which often require signatures equaling a percentage of registered voters. Nancy Howe questioned whether lack of participation was enough to trigger sending a challenge letter. She would like more information. Several members indicated they would like more information in advance of the 2021 Biennial Checklist Review proceedings. The Clerk recently reviewed the process followed in 2019 with Will Senning at the Secretary of State's Office; they mentioned an Ohio Court case objecting to the process of challenging a voter due to non-participation. Lisa would contact SOS again for further guidance.

Nancy Howe moved to Authorize the Town Clerk to regularly maintain the checklist by issuing Challenge Letters to Voters on the Checklist based upon information obtained from: 1). Property Transfer Tax Returns; 2). Returned Mail; 3). Word of Mouth, Newspaper Articles or, other public information indicating a party has moved from Hartford and, 4). Conduct a Batch Purge for voters who were challenged, have not voted or, responded to the challenge letter after TWO GENERAL ELECTIONS per 17 V.S.A. 2150(d)(5). The motion was seconded by Kevin Christie. The vote was taken by roll call. *In favor: Roy Black; Sue Buckholz; Kevin Christie; Pat Cook; Bonnie Fields; F.X. Flinn; Don Foster; Nancy Howe; Mike Morris; Gayle Ottmann; Nancy Russell; Linda Trombley; Rebecca White. Opposed: None.*

Lisa offered a brief review of the Tax Appeal timeline and process. The BCA timeline is predicated on the Tax Grievance process through the Assessor's Office. Once the Assessors meet their statutory requirements to hold Grievance Hearings and issue decisions, the clock starts ticking for the BCA to hold Tax Appeal hearings (timeframe is dictated by statute).

Other topics discussed: Gayle asked how the Town Meeting Cycle of Events will be handled this year. Lisa explained both the Budget/Candidates Night on Monday, February 22nd and the Town Meeting Day on Saturday, February 27th will be held remotely this year due to the pandemic. Each Warning, posted on the website and in the required locations in Town, contains the links and methods residents can "attend/participate". The Town will be doing a public messaging campaign to spread the word (Listerve; social media, Valley News, etc.).

Mike Morris moved to adjourn; Rebecca White seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting Adjourned at 7:30pm.

Submitted by Lisa O'Neil, Town Clerk February 4, 2021

