

Jonathan Anderson, Chair person
David Hall, Vice Chair
Jesse Limanek, Clerk
Jeffrey Bannon
Normand Champigny



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James A. Smith, Town Manager

Town of Sutton
Select Board

Meeting Minutes
Minutes Accepted and filed with the Town Clerk 5/7/2024 with a roll call vote of 5-0

6:00 p.m. – April 23, 2024

Roll Call vote taken:

Members in Attendance in person:

Chairperson Jonathan Anderson, Vice Chair David Hall, Clerk Jesse Limanek, Select members Jeffrey Bannon & Normand Champigny all present in person.

Also attending in person: Town Manager James Smith, Town Accountant Tim Harrison & Deb Jacques, secretary

Public Forum –

Matt Rearwin 80 Eight Lots Road is present to say if the Sutton School Budget is an issue that cannot be resolved by Town Meeting the Town will have to reject the entire budget. The Town of Douglas offers the ability to accept the whole budget entirely or individual budget. He is available for discussion if anyone would like to explore.

Vice Chair Hall motions to accept as presented the April 9, 2024 Select Board meeting minutes Select Person Bannon seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote

Arbor Day Proclamation read into record

Public Hearing- Depot St. Layout Alteration- read into record by Select person Limanek. Town Manager Smith states this is the final step before it goes to Town Meeting. The Planning Board met on April 22nd and voted to accept the proposed layout that will now go to Town Meeting for approval. Vice Chair Hall says if anyone would like to see additional information on this to watch the previous Select Board Meeting as well as the Planning Board meeting where it has been discussed. Hearing no issues Select person Limanek motions to close the public hearing, Select person Bannon seconds passed 5-0. Select person Limanek motions that the Select Board vote to alter the layout of a portion of Depot Street as a public way, to include within said layout the parcels of land shown as "Parcel-E-1", "Parcel S-E-2", "Parcel S-E-3", and "Parcel S-E-4" on a plan entitled "Layout Alteration Plan Depot Street Sutton, Massachusetts," dated April 5, 2024, and prepared by Green International Affiliates, Inc. Select person Bannon seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote.

Special 1-day Wine & Malt requests (16)- Vaillancourt Folk Art 9 Main Street- present is Gary & Luke Vaillancourt. Luke says it is also a big 40th anniversary for their business this year as well as the events that lead up to Christmas. Vice Chair Hall offers congratulations on the 40 years and says these events are a win win for the town. Select person Limanek says Christmas and Vaillancourts go together- they offer a special time for all to enjoy. Jesse asks if there will be TIP certified bartenders at these events- Luke replies yes. Select person Bannon says these are Sutton traditions – Jeff is glad these events are successful year after year. Select person Champigny says thank you for 40 years – these events draw people to visit beautiful Manchaug- Vaillancourt is a worldly name. Chairperson Anderson says he has watched them grow throughout the years creating events that have become tradition. Jonathan has no concerns with this request. Select person Bannon motions to approve 16-one day special licenses to serve Wine/Malt at Vaillancourt Folk Art (outside of the licensed \$15 off site Wine/Malt license) located at 9 Main Street for various events including the Christmas Season gatherings -TIP Certified Bar Tender on site for these events, Select person Limanek seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote.

Brickstone Kitchen – 4 Worc-Prov. Tpk- outdoor Entertainment license: present is Justin Bonner- Town Manager Smith states this is a repeat of last year's request for outdoor entertainment on Thursdays 5:30-7:30 and Sundays 3pm to 5pm beginning April 28th, 2024. Vice Chair Hall is anxious for the outdoor seating area to open- Brickstone is another business that is part of the community- their ability to respond during COVID was impressive. Dave asks about the event on April 28th for a vendor pouring samples- this does fall

under their outside license and Justin confirms staff is all TIP certified and will be there to assist. Select person Limanek is glad Brickstone came back with this request- their business is successful- Jesse has no concerns in regulating the alcohol, they have a successful record but how will the vendor's samples be regulated- Justin replies they are providing the 1 ounce and less than 1 ounce cups to be used. Select person Bannon was impressed with the innovations they used during COVID and has no issues- he asks if the vendors samples are under the existing license- Debbie replies yes. Select person Champigny says this is a very good business and is happy with the expanded area. Chairperson Anderson has no issues. Select person Champigny motions to approve the request from Brickstone Kitchen located at 4 Worc. Prov. Tpk for an outdoor music entertainment license on Thursdays 5:30pm-7:30 pm and Sundays 3pm-5pm with weather permitting beginning April 28th and running through summer and mid fall Select person Bannon seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote.

4th of July Parade event-present is April Brown- April thanks both previous businesses as they are contributors to the event. This year the parade will be Saturday June 29th at 10am. The parade will form on Uxbridge Road and the common and march to the ELC school. The road will be closed for about an hour depending on the time it takes for the parade to get to the area. This year's parade theme will be old time Americana with stars and stripes as the decorations. At the ELC there will be many events & vendors. If there is interest in reading about more events or volunteering please go to www.thesuttonfourth.org. There is additional information as well as different forms. The event at the ELC will go to around 4pm. Currently there are no fireworks planned but they may look into at the end of the year- possible after the Chain of Lights. The MC will be Ken Stuart and the Grand Marshall will be chosen Wed April 24th. Parking will be available at the schools as well as St. Marks but cars have to be gone at St Marks due to Mass at 4pm. There will also be a 1st aid area. Vice Chair Hall says thank you for keeping the town up to date with these events. Dave likes every other year event as it lets the group breathe a little. Dave asks if the Police details will be needed- April replies maybe for the Putnam Hill/Boston Road area but that should be it. Select person Limanek thanks April and says great narrative of the event- Jesse is excited for this event. Select person Bannon questions if there will be enough room at the school for all that is planned- April replies yes- Jeff likes that it is on a Saturday this year. Select person Champigny says there is a lot of effort that goes into this - this is what makes Sutton unique- it gives Sutton the quintessential Yankee feel. Chairperson Anderson acknowledges all the work April and her group put in to this- this is why Jonathan lives in a small rural town like Sutton- these events and the community that is involved is worth living here.

Sign final Spring Town Meeting Warrant and Election Warrant- Town Manager Smith says there was a last minute withdrawal of the 2 citizen's petitions (#19 & 20) which were for large solar arrays in a residential area. The petitioner went to each person that signed the original petition and had them re-sign requesting it be removed. The question is before the Board to either remove or pass over at Town Meeting. If it stays on the warrant and receives a negative action at town meeting the original petitions cannot come back before the town for 2 years- if the petitioner modifies the petition it can be on the warrant in the fall. Vice Chair Hall asks if there is any sense as to why it was removed- Town Manager Smith said it was clear with Planning Board and Fin Com voting to not support as well as the residence speaking out against it is not wanted. At this time Anthony Shaw with Progeneration (Solar Company) is on Zoom and addresses the board and says they withdrew as they heard the legitimate concerns of town residents. This began in February and they moved to quickly- it is unfortunate that an actual presentation was never held- it has been a comedy of eras. Vice Chair Hall has no strong feelings however the Warrant is- either way if it comes back it will be addressed but he is inclined to strike it. Select person Limanek agrees to just strike the 2 warrant questions as he does not want to add confusion such as the pot question a few years ago. If it comes before the town again we will deal with it then. Select person Bannon asks if the regulations are as strong as they need to be or should we make the threshold higher. Town Manager Smith says it feels like spot zoning but it isn't- it is an overlay. Jeff is in support of striking these 2 articles from warrant. Select person Champigny agrees to strike the 2 articles from the warrant. Chairperson Anderson said there are limits to the residential areas, he also agrees both should be removed to not confuse voters. Vice Chair Hall motions to approve and sign the Spring Town Meeting Warrant and the Annual Town Election Warrant with articles 19 & 20 omitted as per discussion Select person Limanek seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote.

Request to increase Capital Stabilization Fund by 2.5%- Town Manager Smith says the goal of this fund when established was to increase funds available for capital purchases. Shaw Farm debt will be paid off in FY27. The goal is to let the Capital Stabilization fund grow to allow us to purchase larger items without going for debt exclusion overrides. After brief discussion the board all agree we are fortunate as a town to have this available – there was tremendous wisdom when this was voted on at town meeting years ago. Select person Champigny says this fund is the crown jewel of the budget process. Chairperson Anderson says this is a strategic tool and a way to maintain autonomy from the state that uses grants to entice us. Select person Limanek motions to authorize the Assessor' Office to increase the Capital Stabilization Fund by an additional 2.5% increase to the FY24 override figure of \$705,141 to \$722,770 Vice Chair Hall seconds passes 5-0 with roll call vote.

Town Manager Update:

- Manchaug Boat Ramp season pass – We have been in communication with Commonwealth of Mass- Fish & Game regarding increasing the pass fees. They are looking for information to show what is used here to maintain it.
- New Cemetery bid- bids came in from \$417,000. to \$155,000. - we are checking the submitted lowest bid to see if it meets all requirements.

- Correspondence from UGPG- We will be scheduling them to come to a meeting in May to discuss. Their letter of request was forwarded to Town Council to address some questions raised at the last meeting.

Announcements/Round Table

Select person Limanek reads the items needed for the Sutton Food Pantry- he also takes this time to offer thanks for the turnout at the Meat Raffle held Sunday to benefit the Food Pantry. In regards to the meeting held with the 2 school committee members last night at the ELC- it will be on Cable Access channel at 8pm for the next few weeks. At this time Jesse reads into record a statement that is attached to the final minutes.

Select person Bannon mentions when Wendy Mead was on the board she would end with an uplifting comment to be kind to each other- all residents no matter what their opinion need to turn the temperature down. Jeff takes this time to thank Nate and Paul for the open forum last night.

Select person Champigny last Saturday Normand attended an Eagle Scout presentation for Philip Ostrowski- - the event was well organized- Senator Fattman was also present. The goodness he has done is a slice of good news for Sutton. At this time Normand reads a statement that will be attached to final minutes.

Chairperson Anderson reads into record a Disclosure completed by Bill Wence from the Conservation Commission- this will be filed in the Town Clerks Office. Jonathan goes on to say he attended the meeting last night at the school. The Connections Conference is a club- program. He walked away from the meeting with a lot of questions. This event in town has opened up eyes of a lot of people which has now opened an important dialogue. Parents are often busy with jobs, kids, sports. We live in this community but our lives are here also- it is critical to hold these conversations- it is healthy for the community. It is not healthy to push left/right ways of thinking on our kids. The schools should be where all our kids are safe- not just certain groups. What about the rest of the children- are they safe? This Connections mission point- both sides need to be presented. Look at all the children- they are hyper focused on 1 population in school- there has been no intended meeting with answers. How is this funded- grants? The mission of the School organization needs to be answered we need clarity. There needs to be a public hearing. The culture in our school is more disturbing then the event that happened. Any child unsafe is a failure to the school.

Select person Limanek motions to adjourn, Select person Champigny seconds passes 5-0 roll call vote
8:15pm

* Mention that video from last night is in process of being up loaded. It will air on the town channel @ 8pm, and will be streamable shortly,
First off, I would like to thank Mr. Brennan and Mr. Jerome for providing parents an opportunity to come before them and share their thoughts. Such an endeavor was admirable and their willingness to stand before those in the audience and attempt to engage in a conversation commendable.

Unfortunately, after sitting in the audience and hearing all that was said, I did not see anything coming out of it that will allay the concerns expressed by the majority of the speakers. Two members, after all, do not have the authority to speak for the entire committee. Instead, I think it would have more worthwhile to schedule a special meeting before the whole committee where the only item on the agenda was a public hearing. Such an opportunity would have allowed the community to hear the opinions of each of the members (as opposed to just the two), engage with them, and hopefully, help up move closer to bringing about a resolution.

I would also like to thank the members of our community who showed up and were willing to speak. It is clear that this controversy is troubling for many people within our town. I do wonder, as was mentioned by an attendee, that if this was better advertised and more time was allowed for word to get out if the crowd would have been larger. It is my hope that those who were unable to attend will have opportunity to share their views before the school committee at their next meeting, which I believe will take place on Monday, May 6th at 7pm. I also hope that the Committee has the courage include on their agenda a public hearing. Since this occurred on their collective watch, the people should have the right to ask direct questions and receive responses from their elected officials.

As for the discussion itself, I do have a few takeaways for what was said.

As an educator with nearly 30 years of classroom experience, I am very concerned that many parents described what essentially seems like a hostile environment that has taken root in our schools. Many of the speakers alluded to clear bias that is held by many of the administrators and teachers. And that if a student holds different beliefs, that they could face ridicule from their peers and intimidation by adults.

Also, several parents mentioned that there are political matters being discussed in classes in which the discussion is not Germaine to the subject matter of the course. I believe the example used was politics regularly discussed in Spanish class.

Others mentioned the opinions of teachers are being presented as facts, and counter opinions are not tolerated, and that only ideas of the progressive left are given validation.

But by far the most shocking example was when a parent questioned whether it was proper for a ten or a eleven year old child to come home knowing what political party to which their teacher belonged. While I can't speak personally to any of my previous points, I do know this one to be true. A parent shared with me not too long ago a screenshot taken during COVID in which a school employee was wearing a Cory Booker for President tee-shirt while engaging with students and that when the matter was brought to their superior it was excused as a mere lapse in judgment.

Things have become so toxic that a capable, intelligent, and skilled true son of Sutton decided to withdraw his candidacy for School Committee.

As I said previously, I do not have children in the schools, so I have not had to experience what many of the parents who spoke last evening are struggling with. But, I do know that if these claims are true, this is not education – it's indoctrination. And every resident of this town should start asking if this is what we want to pay for?

And speaking of financials, my concerns surrounding the funding of ConCom, based on the few facts that were shared last night, have only increased. One of the most concerning statements made by Mr. Brennan was that ConCom is not reflected anywhere in the budget, which seems to imply that there is no way to audit this program. He also confirmed my suspicions that taxpayer money is used to run it and support it. So, staff members ARE using taxpayer-funded prep time to organize the conference, taxpayer-funded school equipment IS being used to support the conference, and support staff ARE required to use their taxpayer-funded shifts to provide food and custodial services for what has been defined as a private conference. And, he seemingly went further, stating that teachers are using tax-payer funded professional development hours to be active participants in this private event and that no charges for use of the tax-payer owned facilities were levied – essentially meaning that our educational space, and I would assume our blanket insurance policy as well, we given freely.... To create a safe space.... for hundreds of students... from other communities.

Now, we as a town are committed to educating our children – Sutton children. Year after year we invest heavily in our school system, this year to the tune of \$20 million dollars. The town has also bailed out the schools every year since at least 2010; \$600,000 in FY25 if I remember correctly. Plus, we are paying approximately \$2.5 million dollars over the minimum mandatory funding levels set by the state. We have built two new schools and repurposed a third since 2000, and we constantly fund 100s of 1000s in capital items through our capital stabilization fund.

How does the administration show it's thanks to the commitment of the taxpayers of Sutton? it has allowed cultural Marxism to become deeply entrenched within our school community, and it has allowed for the misappropriation, potentially rising to the level of embezzlement, of taxpayer monies for what amounts to private – not community - purposes.

- And in spite of these realities, what I said two weeks remains true today: "there is no contrition; no embarrassment; no humility for what has taken place.
- Instead, there is only condescension and aloofness, as well as disdain for those who may disagree."

Therefore, I will borrow the phrase used by one of the parents: it's time for Connections to have a "road game"

- Let another school district host it if that community will have it. Or, if the powers-that-be are unwilling to do so, the organizers should be required to rent out a nearby convention center and host it in a private – not public – setting.

For those of you who may still have questions after everything that has come to light, it is clear that there is only one course of action: the School Committee must give you an opportunity to ask your questions and make your voices heard.

- Their job is to serve you – the taxpayers.
- They need to hold a public hearing at their meeting on the 6th.
- BUT, with ONE reservation - only if those who choose to engage with the committee do so in a calm, respectful manner.
- This means the audience needs to keep their words to themselves while others are speaking.
- Yelling at or over people in effort to drown them out should not be tolerated by anyone – especially in a room for adults.
- We all have opinions on what has taken place and a right to express those opinions.
- But this expression must be reasonable.
- Remember, all elected officials are volunteers, freely giving their time to serve this community.
- Hostility and animosity will not bring about a meaningful outcome that is good for the entire Sutton community, rather it will only trigger resentment and a circus-like atmosphere.
- But, if we as adults share and listen to all opinions in a meaningful and passionate way, then we can figure out how to move forward – together.

As was stated before, the Town Select Board and Town Manager have no direct jurisdiction on school matters and management. The Sutton Public School system takes its direction from its administration, governed by the school committee.

However, we do have concerns as most of the town budget is allocated to the public school system.

With recent events stemming from the April 2nd School Committee meeting concerning the Connections Conference, it has become an eye opener of the internal happenings within the schools. Though there is much chatter within social media, these are not concrete answers the town of Sutton is seeking. The answers *must* come from the leadership level; both at the administrative and the elected members of the school committee.

As the residents were seeking answers and awaiting the next school committee meeting on May 6 , two school committee members took it upon themselves to hold a “ forum” to discuss the Connection Conference. Thus, this forum was not subjected to “public records” for the true concern of the residents.

Though perceived with good intentions, the optics of this forum simply added further suspicion leaving some

residents wondering “ what are they hiding”. To add, there was much confusion if this would supersede any resident who wanted to express their concern at the May 6th school committee meeting. Again, this forum had good intentions but did not meet the final objective.

Yesterday, upon School Committee Chairman Ben Gibbons’ return from vacation, I took the liberty of calling him to assure Sutton residents would have the opportunity to voice their concern, *as it is their right*, of any matter at the next school committee meeting, He assured me the residents *will* have that opportunity.

I commend Chairman Gibbons for his leadership at a time where it is critically required. He is taken on a matter at hand that is not popular and contentious. Taking this matter at hand will not make him popular for some – but he is demonstrating leadership led by his convictions – to best serve the residents.

As I always stated, taking the bull by the horns and taking on tough issues does not make you popular. But it demonstrates leadership, and currently, these convictions are led by serving our children – the students at the Sutton School system.

As mentioned earlier, the April 2nd School Committee became an eye opener of the actions of the school administration.

As a Selectman, it was brought to my attention several concerns of the internal ongoing at the schools.

There are many concerns I am learning; examples are:

1 - Parents are too intimidated to reach out and confront teachers and/or school administrators to express their concerns of any ongoing at the school. Fearing retribution, their children being ostracized and labeled.

2 – Teachers also feel restricted and intimidated to express their concerns that are not aligned to the administration's policies, curriculum, and other school business. Again, fearing being ostracized, or cast and labeled as “not with it”.

We find this hypocritical - as the school has an Anti-Bullying Policy.

As I stated on record at the April 9th Select Board Meeting, “we must protect our children from any unwanted political influence or ideology, let it be from our educators or politicians – local, state, federal, teachers' unions, or globally. With such a heavy tax cost to the town residents,

the children of this town belong to their respective parent, parents, or legal guardians. *They are not wards of the state.*”

I also stated we should not let this be swept under the rug.

I meant what I said.

To add, we should be able to see the funding, expenses, and if any profits were made – and if any - where did those profits go. Sutton town residents deserve to know.

As Select Board members, we have very limited means of addressing these issues. We are now at a point in time where there is only one answer: The Parents.

If the parents are concerned, they are key, to be the voice of their child, or children to address their concerns. They should never be intimidated for any matter.

As any mother and father would do, we would go to the extreme to protect our children.

- Make certain they wear a safety helmet when riding a bike.
- Not being able to relax at a pool or beach because you are constantly keeping your eyes on your children.
- Parents would run into traffic on a highway to save their child.

However, having any *trepidations* to confront and meet with any school administrator and/or teacher is unbecoming. There should *never* be any trepidations for the best interest of your child – Be not afraid.

Likewise, with teachers that experienced or were once intimidated by expressing their concerns – Be not afraid.

Teachers are like an artist - like lawyers and doctors, they develop a practicum over the years – and are able to connect to a student's unique needs that will enable that student to remember that teacher throughout the student's life. We should never let that unique and gifted talent wither away,

To conclude, and as I stated, at this juncture it is up to the parents, and as well as teachers, to express their concerns.

Again, I would like to commend, School Committee Chairman - Ben Gibbons demonstrating his leadership to assure town residents at the May 6th school committee meeting are able to express their concerns – and have it recorded -where the fine residents of Sutton, *by right*, will do so.

Lastly, with optimism, together we will address and overcome these matters – because We Are Sutton.

Mr. Chairman - Thank you.