

March 28, 2018

The Stonington Board of Selectmen held a regular meeting on this date at the Stonington Police Department at 7:00 p.m. Present were Selectwoman Kate Rotella and Selectman John Prue. First Selectman Rob Simmons was absent. Also present were members of the public and press.

(1) Call to Order

Mr. Prue called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

(2) Pledge of Allegiance

(3) Comments from the Public

Mr. Greg Howard of 6 Marie Avenue read a statement regarding the Town Building Officials, a copy of which is attached to these minutes as Attachment "1".

(4) Approval of the Minutes

A motion was made by Mrs. Rotella, seconded by Mr. Prue and voted unanimously to approve the March 14, 2018 Board of Selectmen regular meeting minutes.

(5) Correspondence

Mr. Prue took in correspondence from Doosan Fuel Cell America.

(6) Old Business

Resolution – Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

A motion was made by Mrs. Rotella, seconded by Mr. Prue and voted unanimously to approve the Hazard Mitigation Plan Updated Resolution.

Discussion – Water Quality Task Force

Mr. Scot Deledda, Town Engineer, stated that he reached out to the existing Stormwater Task Force members to see if any of the individuals wished to continue to serve. The following individuals wished to continue and are Mr. Louis Allyn, Ms. Deborah Downie, Ms. Alisa Morrison and Mr. Donald Murphy. He added that Mr. Howard Smith did not want to continue and Mr. Bruce MacMahon had moved out of town and was not reachable.

Mr. Deledda stated that the goal would be to have a meeting of the Stormwater Task Force in April.

A motion was made by Mrs. Rotella, seconded by Mr. Prue and voted unanimously to accept the resignation of Mr. Howard Smith and Mr. Bruce MacMahon from the Stormwater Task Force.

Discussion – Abatement of Taxes

- A motion was made by Mrs. Rotella seconded by Mr. Prue and voted unanimously to approve the abatement of taxes associated with the Stonington Soccer Club at their property on Taugwonk Road in Stonington.
- A motion was made by Mrs. Rotella seconded by Mr. Prue and voted unanimously to approve the abatement of taxes associated with the Global Foundation for Ocean Exploration located in Mystic.

(7) New Business

Request from Gilbane for use of property near West Vine Street School

Mrs. Rotella stated that Gilbane is requesting to use the paved area across the street from West Vine Street School for storage of some locked connex boxes. She added that it is due to the change in the construction location and the paved parking areas being available to staff and visitors.

Mr. Prue asked if a certificate of insurance was in place. Mrs. Rotella stated that they were fully insured. A motion was made by Mr. Rotella, seconded by Mr. Prue and voted unanimously to approve the request.

(8) Comments from the Public

None

(9) Comments from the Selectmen

- Mr. Prue thanked Mr. Howard for bringing forward his and others' concerns. He added that the issue is being handled by the First Selectman's office and added that there is a process that has been initiated and must be followed. Mr. Prue continued that he believed all communications between residents and Town employees should be courteous and professional.
- Mr. Prue stated that he and Mrs. Rotella marched in the Mystic Irish Day Parade and had a lot of fun.
- Mrs. Rotella stated she was very concerned to hear some of the things that were stated and added that she doesn't want anyone to think that they cannot talk to the Board about issues. She added that she will always do her best to help in any situation.
- Mrs. Rotella stated that the parade was a lot of fun and very cold.

(10) Adjourn

There being no further business to come before this Board, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stacey Haskell".

Stacey Haskell
Recording Secretary

ATTACHMENT "1"

Good Evening, Mr. First Selectman and thank you for granting me this opportunity to speak. Thank you, Mr. Prue and Ms. Rotella, as well for your service to our town. My name is Greg Howard, I have owned my home at 6 Marie Ave since 2003. I have grown up in the Westerly-Pawcatuck area and have great care for the status and future of our community.

I would like to tell a brief story about a building; it's a true story. This building has 3 floors, the boss's office is on the third floor, and most of the employees spent most of their time on the bottom floor. For several years, the employees complained to the boss about a constant terrible smell of raw sewage on the bottom floor. One day, the smell got swirled around enough that the smell made it all the way upstairs to the boss's office. The following week, workers were in the building and replaced a 12" piece of missing vent pipe that was causing all of the odor. Mr. Simmons, last Tuesday, in your office you reminded me that it's your experience that the more we stir the, I'll call it smelly stuff, the worse it smells. You're probably right; but it's been my experience sir, that once the smell makes it to the boss's office, action is implemented. In the story I've just told you, it took enough swirling of the smelly stuff downstairs to get the stink to the boss's office, and then the problem went away. Mr. Simmons, I have tremendous respect for you, your career and accomplishments, and the job you are doing as First Selectman. But, sadly sir, there is a black cloud over at town hall.

I am here tonight to publicly make the Board of Selectmen aware that the citizens of Stonington know of the ongoing and seemingly unaddressed problem with our town's building officials. I know the three of you have seen my letter as have many in town, so in the interest of time, I won't read it here.

Mr. Simmons, I sent you this letter on March 15, and since that time have spoken with over 50 contractors, residents and business owners from Stonington. The interaction I had with the building official's office is not isolated to me by any stretch. In fact, in full disclosure, I have had exactly one, ONE, person say they've had a positive experience with one of our building officials. Two common themes were present with the people I have personally had contact with. One, is that these public servants are routinely rude, condescending, and unprofessional; the second is that they abuse their power to force their preference on projects, above and beyond the code requirements. I have also learned, Mr. Simmons, that these issues have existed for some time, and the manner in which our building officials conduct themselves is seemingly unchanged.

Any doubt that I had about this vanished in your office last Tuesday when you were gracious enough to meet with me. You and I met to discuss my complaint in your office, and at one point, you invited one of your employees from the building official's office into our meeting. When the gentleman entered, I rose from my chair and extended my hand to introduce myself. He refused to shake my hand, and stated, "maybe after the meeting." And in that moment, he told the whole story. This employee feels empowered to treat members of the public rude and unprofessionally... why else would he conduct himself in that manner in your presence In your office. Now in full disclosure to the public, you immediately spoke to him about his conduct, but his willingness to do this, exhibits his blatant disregard for courtesy and

professionalism; further, it shows that he must have some experience that this would be tolerated by you, his boss, or he just plain old doesn't care.

Many of the people that I spoke to expressed concerns over coming forward to complain. They have ongoing projects, future plans, or existing businesses in town that may be subject to retaliation from the building officials. I have pledged to these people that I would hold their identity in confidence for this reason.

There are businessmen in this town that are engaged in revitalization of old buildings, which increase revenue and make our town look nicer. They have thrown up their hands and their work has halted. This directly adversely effects economic development, citizen/town relationships, and revitalization of dilapidated areas. There are residents and business owners whose lives and wallets have been unnecessarily negatively affected by the unrestrained abuse of authority exhibited by our building official's office. Such an allegation was demonstrated in your office last Tuesday. As you'll recall, the building official readily admitted that the sheetrock and duct work verbally cited by his asst. are not enforceable. He then told me that I needed to hire an electrician to do work that was required, but then later admitted that I could do it myself. Then, he told me that a pipe in my home had a steeper pitch than was allowed, and when I questioned if "allowed" meant a code violation, he said he believed it did. Then moments later, he said that I was not required, but simply suggested to change it. At my home two days later, he confessed that it was in fact, not a code violation. I must assume that "allowed" meant by "allowed" by him, not what was addressed by the building code. In my short interaction with this office, I saw a clear picture of attempted abuse of power and conduct that can only be described as "bullying".

Mr. Simmons it is certainly a sad day in Stonington when the bar of professionalism has been reduced to bullying women to tears and refusing to shake hands with citizens. This is under your administration, sir. It is a sad day in Stonington when residents and business owners don't have the faith in our administration to address complaints about public officials without fear of retaliation. As a man yourself, who has so honorably defended our constitution, I can't imagine the fact that citizens remaining silent out of fear of government retaliation sits well with you.

Some have surmised that the motivation behind this is to force multiple additional inspections to justify paid positions. Whatever the reason behind it, its obvious that these two are incapable of changing their ways, or any motivation by your office to force our paid officials to abide by a code of conduct Stonington residents have come to expect has not worked; either way, it seems clear that there is no chance that the current building officials will ever comply with our professional standards. A change has to be made. And, I know that it's not that simple. But, I must believe that it was not simple to fight in the Vietnam War, wasn't simple to earn two bronze stars, it wasn't simple to serve America in the CIA, and I know it was simple to serve in Congress in Washington, DC. And I know, personally, that Rob Simmons is not a simple man, but rather a distinguished and accomplished man who has received such accolades as the Knowlton award for integrity, moral character, professional competence, and selflessness. We, the citizens of Stonington know you as a great leader, capable of conquering not so simple issues in the interest of Stonington and making things right. It is for this reason that we have twice elected you our leader, and we have confidence in your ability to maintain or, as in this case,

restore the highest level of professional conduct by town hall employees. We know that you, First Selectman Rob Simmons, being publicly made aware of these issues will not, and cannot allow conduct to continue that slows down revitalization, and economic development in our great town. We know that you will ensure a standard of professional conduct that makes Stonington a great place to live, work, and conduct business. And we know that you, our First Selectman, our leader, will on this issue, like so many others, ensure that you putStonington First.

Thank you.