

MINUTES OF TOWN OF BERKLEY SELECTMEN'S MEETING OF 12/22/2021

SELECTMEN IN ATTENDANCE: George F. Miller, Chairman, Dean R. Larabee, Clerk, Wendy F. Cochrane, Member

TOPIC		ACTION
	Meeting Convened at 5:36p.m. in the Moitoza – Pettey Hearing Room and via Zoom	
Open Session; representative elected to go into Open Session vs. Executive Session.	George Miller to go into open session regarding the COA and Nancy Thompson, who has elected to go public instead of entering into Executive Session. Wendy Cochrane has recused herself as a selectman because she is a member of the COA. The Open Session is in regards to an administrative hearing on Ms. Thompson. Mr. Miller requests that anyone willing to testify in the hearing to be sworn in under oath. Mr. Miller reads into the record the letter sent to Ms. Thompson dated December 1, 2021 regarding a Notice of Administrative Hearing. The letter lists the reasons for the hearing. Mr. Miller stated to Ms. Thompson he would like her to address the reasons stated in the letter. Heather Martin-Sterling swears Ms. Thompson in. Ms. Thompson states she only wants to address 2 of the allegations against her, and feels that the rest is a matter of opinion. She states that she never bullied the former COA Director, Amanda Blais, and that she considered her a friend. She also states she does not want to be accused of being the only reason Ms. Blais left her position. Mr. Miller notes that the previous COA Director, Cynthia Crimlisk, wrote a letter dated September 27, 2020 stating she also left the position because of Ms. Thompson. Ms. Thompson stated Ms. Crimlisk did not leave in September 2020; she left on December 14, 2020 to pursue her dream job, and does not take responsibility for her leaving. She then goes into discussion about the incident regarding the Newport Playhouse trip, as well as the closing of the Senior Center the day after Thanksgiving, Friday, November 26, 2021 (these incidents are listed in the Notice of Hearing letter). Mr. Miller asks Heather Martin-Sterling a question regarding information that was given about the incident involved with the closing of the Senior Center the day after Thanksgiving. Ms. Martin is sworn in by Administrative Assistant Ashley Tigano under oath to speak on behalf of the incident. Ms. Martin-Sterling stated that there was a discussion amongst the COA members about the closing, and that it was part of the November 1, 2021 newsletter, which usually goes to the printers around the 15th of the previous month. There is also a calendar on the Director's door with every scheduled event within the month and all the days the center is closed. Ms. Blais came to Ms. Martin-Sterling approximately a week before Thanksgiving with concerns people had about closing the day after Thanksgiving. Ms. Blais, according to Ms. Martin-Sterling, did not want to pick and choose what activities were going to go on that day, and Ms. Martin-Sterling backed up her decision as Director. Ms. Thompson claims she was asked to open the senior center that Friday not for herself, but for other senior citizens that wanted to come in. Mr. Miller quotes an email from Ms. Thompson stating "if Amanda quits and I get blamed, let me promise you that there will be repercussions". He asked Ms. Thompson to clarify what repercussions she is referring to, and she stated she was going to hire a lawyer. He also quotes another email from Ms. Thompson that states "if you have difficulty working with people who disagree or question, maybe you should seek a new line of work", and states that it seems like promptings to the COA Director to leave. Ms. Thompson stated that was just her opinion. She stated that she has worked with the public for many years, and knows how to manage people and mitigate disagreements. Mr. Miller stated something like that should be brought up with the council to bring to the Town Administrator to go in front of the BOS to be voted on. He states that if someone resigns, and they were felt they were pushed to do so, there could be litigation and that person could come back on the Town Hall and recover money for it. He states he tried reaching out to Ms. Blais to see if she would stay. Ms. Thompson stated Ms. Blais didn't give a 2 weeks' notice. Ms. Martin-Sterling stated she did in fact give a 2 week notice, and talked in her office at great length about it to see if there was anything she could do to make her reconsider and possibly stay. This occurred right before Thanksgiving break; Ms. Martin-Sterling told Ms. Blais to take the time to think about her decision, but ultimately her stance on leaving did not change. Ms. Thompson states she refuses to believe she harassed Ms. Blais. Mr. Miller stated Ms. Blais' subjective belief is that she was harassed and bullied. Ms. Martin-Sterling swears Joan Blake in to speak on behalf of Ms. Thompson. Ms. Blake stated she was present at the time of the argument that ensued between Ms. Thompson and Ms. Blais regarding a bus trip to the Newport Playhouse. There were some misunderstandings regarding whether or not a tip was included in the price for the bus	Larabee to remove Nancy Thompson from the COA board; Miller 2 nd ; Cochrane to abstain from the vote due to being a member of the board; voted.

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driver, and that Ms. Thompson mistakenly gave out wrong information about it. As a result, according to Ms. Blake, Ms. Blais got angry about it and told her not to talk to Ms. Thompson. Mr. Miller asked if when she said that, if she meant about scheduling conflicts. Ms. Blake stated she heard the argument between Ms. Blais and Ms. Thompson while she was having coffee in the center. She noted it didn't start with Ms. Thompson, and it was inappropriate because the door to the office was open when it took place. Ms. Blake does not see Ms. Thompson being at fault for Ms. Blais leaving.

Ms. Martin-Sterling swears Priscilla Martin in to speak on behalf of Ms. Thompson. She explains that it's ok to have disagreements between the members on the board once in a while. She states the board needs a strong director to deal with strong personalities. Mr. Miller points out Ms. Blais left due to bullying, which is different than just having a disagreement.

Ms. Martin-Sterling swears Margaret Moroff in to speak about the COA Director's resignation, as well as events leading up to it. She stated Ms. Blais did a phenomenal job as a Director and brought the senior center up to the 21st century. She noted that they're dealing with 2 different COA's; one from before there was a Director involved, and one with a Director. She stated that it can't just be run by volunteers anymore, there has to be a Director. When there was misinformation being spread regarding the Newport Playhouse trip, Ms. Moroff stated Ms. Blais was wondering why she was being questioned on it by other seniors, as she had it under control. Ms. Moroff also stated the newsletter for the senior center went out well before the 1st of the month, and anyone who had read it knew the center would be closed the Friday after Thanksgiving. She believes there was bullying from Ms. Thompson with the former COA Director, as well as Ms. Blais. She stated many seniors are uncomfortable going to the center now and that it's a toxic environment.

Ms. Martin-Sterling to swear Wendy Cochrane in via zoom regarding the hearing on Ms. Thompson and the COA board. She stated she had reviewed the email chain between the members, and pointed out how Ms. Thompson wrote that Ms. Blais had "low standards to live up to" and that her hours were questioned. Ms. Cochrane stated Ms. Blais did not take 11 days off as Ms. Thompson said she did, and she keeps track of time off requested. She also stated how many seniors are now uncomfortable going to the center because many of them received a forwarded email regarding the politics of the COA. However, she doesn't think Ms. Thompson did it intentionally. She doesn't think the conflict will be resolved if Ms. Thompson stays on the board.

Ms. Blake returns to state more on behalf of Ms. Thompson. She stated the email Ms. Cochrane was referring to was not sent from Ms. Thompson and shouldn't be held responsible for it.

Ms. Martin-Sterling swears in Elizabeth Monkowski, Treasurer for the Friends of the Berkley COA, for the letter she wrote to the BOS, in which Mr. Miller will read. The letter is dated December 6, 2021. The letter represents Ms. Blais and her exceptional work with the Berkley senior center, as well as its newsletter. Mr. Miller continues to read other letters from volunteers.

Mr. Miller reads a letter dated September 2020 from Cynthia Crimlisk, the former COA Director prior to Ms. Blais. The letter is in regard to repeated harassing and bullying from Ms. Thompson. She stated in the letter how Ms. Thompson would undermine her constantly and acted more as her boss instead of a member of the COA. Mr. Miller stated that he read the letter to point out similarities of conflicts that Ms. Thompson has had with COA Directors. Ms. Thompson noted that the issue between her and Ms. Crimlisk was resolved. Ms. Martin-Sterling swears Arlene Medeiros in to speak regarding whether or not the COA could continue with Ms. Thompson on the board. Ms. Medeiros feels it is a difficult question because Ms. Thompson will still attend the meetings and give her opinions, which she has a right to do so. She's not sure if removing Ms. Thompson from the board will resolve the issue.

Ms. Moroff stated she doesn't mind working with Ms. Thompson, but does feel that Ms. Thompson has a hard time with not being in charge.

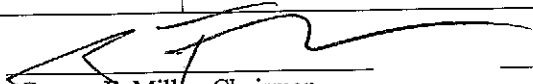
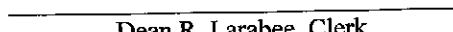
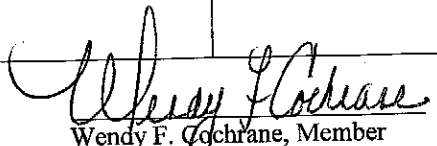
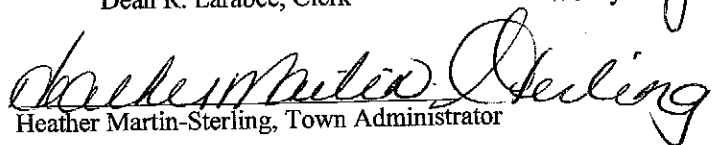
Ms. Thompson stated she is not responsible for other member's opinions of her, and that she accepts the removal from the board, but is disappointed. She expressed how much she liked Ms. Blais and wished that she would have talked about the incident regarding the closing of the day after Thanksgiving. She stated she never intended for Ms. Blais to resign.

Mr. Larabee weighs in on decision whether or not to remove Ms. Thompson from the COA board. He states it's a difficult hearing due to the fact that it's hard to find dedicated

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	volunteers to fill the board on the COA. He stated he is not certain removing Ms. Thompson from the board is appropriate and does not see it as a solution, but will follow the will of what the board wants. He feels that regarding the electronics communications policies, some discourse was not appropriate. Communications need to remain professional. Mr. Miller stated 2 of the council members are in favor of Ms. Thompson's removal from the COA board, and 1 is ambivalent. Mr. Larabee then makes a motion with the majority of the remaining council members supporting that Ms. Thompson be removed from the board of the COA.	
Meeting Mail	Board to review letter from Berkley Public Schools regarding surplus items. Board to review letter from Berkley Public Schools regarding the Berkley Public School Committee Meeting. Board to review letter from Xfinity regarding important information.	Larabee to motion to file; Miller 2 nd , voted. Larabee to motion to file; Cochrane 2 nd , voted. Larabee to motion to file; Cochrane 2 nd , voted.
New Business	Board to review and approve reinstatement of the Citizen of the Year Award.	Larabee to motion to table; Cochrane 2 nd , voted.
Appointments	Board to review the appointment of Marc Oliveira to Zoning Board of Appeals, with a term expiring on June 30, 2022. Ms. Martin-Sterling stated that the ZBA was short a member for the hearing for Ricardo Way. Mr. Oliveira stated he would be an alternate on the board so that they have a quorum. This has been cleared with the Town Council and there are no conflicts.	Larabee to motion to appoint Marc Oliveira to the ZBA as an alternate; Cochrane 2 nd , voted.
Adjournment	Mr. Larabee motioned to adjourn meeting. He announces the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 5, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.	Larabee to motion to adjourn; Cochrane 2 nd , voted.


George F. Miller, Chairman
Dean R. Larabee, Clerk
Wendy F. Cochrane, Member
Heather Martin-Sterling, Town Administrator