

# Board of Selectman Meeting of June 17, 2021

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The Easton Board of Selectmen held its second regular June meeting on June 17. We approved the minutes from our June 3 meeting. In addition, we approved the release of a road opening bond for property located at 50 Abbey Road. We approved two equipment purchases for the Department of Public Works. The department will now move forward with these purchases. We approved a driveway variance and indemnity agreement for the installation of Belgian block for property located at 35 Riverside Lane.

You can watch the [June 17 Board of Selectman meeting video here](#).

## Appointments and Resignations

The board accepted the resignation of Chris Neubert from the Pension and Employee Benefits Commission with thanks for his service. We appointed Jamie Weinstein to the Cemetery Commission to a term running until November 30, 2024. We appointed Chase Cameron to the Park and Recreation Commission for a term running until January 2, 2022. The first selectman advised the board that he appointed Karen Neisyn to an alternate seat on the Conservation Commission. The board deferred action on appointments/reappointments to the Police Commission. The board also received notice that John Harris, the long time chair of the Zoning Board of Appeals, will resign his seat effective, June 30 as he is moving out of town.

The board held a long discussion regarding the proposal for a one growing season pilot project to grow hemp on one acre of the South Park Avenue property owned by the town. The proponents of the project met with the Agriculture Commission the day before our meeting. From that meeting, a list of recommended changes and revisions to the lease proposal and the business plan were developed. The proponents will now work on preparing revised documents and get them to the first selectman for legal review.

The shared goal is to have final documents ready for approval at our next Board of Selectmen's meeting on July 1. Assuming the documents are in final, or near final, form and are acceptable to all parties and the South Park Avenue Advisory Committee final report is not inconsistent with the plan for this pilot project, the consensus of the board is to proceed with the project. This would hopefully mean the pilot project will take place this calendar year.

## Town Website and Social Media

Selectman Kristi Sogofsky raised the question of the applicability of the town policy on usage of the town website and email platform for certain unofficial purposes. Specifically, she raised the question of whether to limit such usage by town officials — and in particular, the first selectman — during campaign season. First Selectman Dave Bindelglass pointed out that he always tries to be clear in his weekly reports when he is expressing opinions as contrasted with when he is reporting basic, objective, factual information.

He pledged to redouble his scrutiny of his commentary posted on the website or disseminated through the town email, especially during campaign season. The board agreed to revisit this issue after reviewing the policies of some other towns that Selectman Sogofsky has collected. Apparently, the practice currently employed is similar to that of the first selectman in Fairfield.

A proposal for a social media policy was distributed to the members of the board for

review and will be discussed at our next meeting.

## Pride Flag

The board approved the request of resident Sara Hunsucker to fly the Pride flag in celebration of Pride month from June 25 to June 28. Although the plan was to fly the flag as we did last year, from Friday afternoon until Monday morning, Selectman Sogofsky pointed out that June 28 is the anniversary of the Stonewall Riot and thought we should consider extending the Pride flag flying well into the day on the 28th. After an extended discussion, the board voted to authorize flying the Pride flag on the Town Hall flag pole below the U.S. flag and the state of Connecticut flag from the afternoon of Friday, June 25 until the evening of Monday, June 28. The vote was two in favor (Bindelglass and Lessler) and one abstention (Sogofsky).

The board agreed to revisit our existing flag policy to consider whether to limit the flying of such flags to groups recognized in a presidential or gubernatorial proclamation or resolution or other very limited circumstances. The board will continue to investigate options for construction of a second flagpole at town hall or replacing the existing flagpole with a nautical style pole which would allow three flags to fly from a single stanchion.

## Public Comment

The board received public comment from numerous residents on a variety of topics at our beginning of meeting and end of meeting periods of public comment.

The following people spoke in favor of the hemp farm project: June Logie, Dana Benson, Pat Linaine, Rene Etah, Gale Bellas, Devon Wible, Sal Gardina, Jeff Becker, Sarah Lehberger, and John Meyer.

The following people spoke in favor of flying the Pride flag: Agnes Bebon, Pat Linaine, Rene Etah, Gale Bellas, Elliot Leonard, Helen Moy, Sarah Hunsucker, Lisa Valinsky,

Devon Wible, Hilary Desmond, Jeff Becker, Sarah Lehberger, and Susan Falzone.

The following people spoke in opposition to flying the Pride flag: Dana Benson, who referenced a petition signed by 50 people opposing flying the Pride flag which was presented to the first selectman, and Kevin Rodrigue.

The following people spoke about flying the Pride flag: Sal Giardina and Lou DePietro.

## Additional Comments

The following additional comments were made by residents on other topics: June Logie asked about the timeline for the proposed Land Use Ordinance and thanked the board for placing a proposal by Citizens for Easton (CFE) on our agenda. (Note: this item was not addressed during the meeting as no one from CFE appeared to speak on the matter. It will be placed on our next agenda.)

Jeff Becker wanted to know why the tree hung up in some wires on Bibbins Road has not been removed. He also wants to know what steps the town is taking against possible ransomware cyber-attacks. Grant Monsarrat asked about the status of the proposed revision of the Ethics Ordinance. Leslie Minasi asked that email addresses on the town website be made clickable which would be easier to use. She also asked the board to preserve the entire South Park Avenue property as open space. She reported that CFE will do its annual farm tour this year on Aug. 14.

Gale Bellas expressed dismay that local social media websites and outlets seem to be mostly too far leftwing or too far rightwing. Dwight Senior asked if the police department is taking proactive or reactive action regarding recent criminal activity in the south end of town. Devon Wible thanked the first selectman for his weekly reports to residents.

Hilary Desmond announced that on June 19 from 1 - 4 p.m. there will be a Juneteenth

celebration at Morehouse Field. State Senator Tony Hwang, State Rep. Anne Hughes and Congressman Jim Himes will attend as may one of our U.S. Senators. In addition, there will be a Pride event on June 26.

Lou DiPietro commented on the weekly emails from the First Selectman and said while he thought there was some editorializing, people should consider the source of the complaints about this practice. Sarah Lehberger said she appreciates the communications from the first selectman. John Meyer pointed out that the volume on the recordings of public meetings on Channel 79 is often too low making it hard to hear.

## Selectmen Comments

The members of the board offered comments as follows: Selectman Lessler said he supports the Pride flag raising as it enhances the notion of our country as a mosaic composed of individual unique tiles that when viewed at a distance create a bigger picture. The U.S. flag is similar in that, as a whole, it is representative of us all; but broken down, it is also a mosaic composed of one star for each state and one stripe for each of the original 13 colonies.

Putting the Pride flag up highlights some of the tiles that make up America. He said he looks forward to the Juneteenth and Pride in-person gatherings which are possible now as the pandemic danger recedes.

Selectman Sogofsky said she will be out of town on June 25 and won't be able to attend the Pride flag raising ceremony. She does not want her inability to be present to be misconstrued. She reaffirmed her view that only the U.S., state and town flags should fly on the main Town Hall flagpole.

First Selectman Bindelglass said he understands and accepts that Selectman Sogofsky cannot be at the June 25 Pride flag raising due to a prior out of town commitment.