

**BRATTLEBORO SELECTBOARD
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2014
SPECIAL MEETING – 1:00PM
STATE HOUSE AND PAVILION BUILDING, MONTPELIER
MINUTES**

Selectboard members present: David Gartenstein, Kate O'Connor, David Schoales, John Allen, and Donna Macomber.

Staff present: Interim Town Manager Patrick Moreland and Executive Secretary Jan Anderson.

Media present: Howard Weiss-Tisman representing The Reformer, Tim Johnson representing the Brattleboro Reformer, and Olga Peters representing The Commons.

Others present: Governor Peter Shumlin, Governor's Chief of Staff Elizabeth Miller, Agency of Commerce and Community Development Secretary Lawrence Miller, Speaker of the House Shap Smith, President Pro Tempore John F. Campbell, Agency of Commerce and Community Development Deputy Secretary Lucy Leriche, Department of Economic Development Commissioner Lisa Gosselin, Senator Jeanette White, Senator Peter Galbraith, Town Representative Mollie Burke, Town Representative Tristan Toleno, Town Representative Valerie Stuart, Putney Representative Michael Mrowicki, and others who did not identify themselves.

Requested topics for discussion to State officials throughout the various meetings were:

- Issues relating to regional economic hubs;
- State plans for Vermont Yankee settlement funds;
- State aid to municipalities for class 1 roads.

Chair Gartenstein called the meeting to order at 1:15pm in the cafeteria at the State House. He confirmed that the meeting was officially warned and open to public participation. Present at that time were Senator White, Senator Galbraith, Representative Toleno, Representative Burke, Representative Stuart, Interim Town Manager Moreland, and Executive Secretary Anderson, and three media representatives. Gartenstein told the legislative delegation that the Board was scheduled to meet with the Governor and various other State officials to discuss the economic situation in Brattleboro. There was general discussion between the Board, the delegation and the media. The Board recessed at 1:30pm.

NO ACTION TAKEN.

Gartenstein reconvened the meeting at 1:45pm in the Governor's office. Present at that time were Governor Shumlin, Agency of Commerce and Community Development Secretary Miller, Chief of Staff Elizabeth Miller, Representative Stuart, Moreland, Anderson, and three media representatives. Gartenstein thanked the Governor for meeting with the Board. He said that the Board asked for the meeting to discuss matters including the tax burden on Brattleboro taxpayers due to the Town being an economic hub, other regional economic development issues, distribution of anticipated Vermont Yankee settlement funds, and aid for roads. He noted that Brattleboro provided full-time police and fire operations, municipal services, roads and infrastructure for activities in Town, as well as supporting a significant amount of tax-exempt agencies, and said that the Brattleboro taxpayers were heavily burdened because revenue options were very limited particularly with the proximity to tax-free New Hampshire. He said that the Board was asking the State for possible remedies and support. O'Connor spoke about the anticipated Vermont Yankee settlement funds and asked that Brattleboro and other impacted towns be included in the decision-making process around distribution of the funds. There was much discussion by many of the participants about the economic situation of Brattleboro and similar towns, a pending bill in the House Ways and Means Committee to fund an economic study, whether the study was an appropriate way to proceed, alternatives that may be available, other assistance provided by the State, cost of education and resulting taxes, updating educational and municipal systems to meet current day scenarios, incentives for job growth, collaborating with neighboring towns, and using funds to leverage

additional funds. The Governor thanked the Board for bringing the discussion to Montpelier. The Board recessed at 2:30pm

NO ACTION TAKEN.

Gartenstein reconvened the meeting at 2:35pm in Speaker of House Shap Smith's office. Present at that time were Speaker Smith, Representative Stuart, Moreland, Anderson, and three media representatives. Gartenstein thanked the Speaker for meeting with the Board and said that they were present to discuss issues relating to regional economic hubs and legislation that had been introduced by the local legislators around that issue. He explained that Brattleboro taxpayers were supporting the necessary services, infrastructure, and other related issues around being an economic hub, as well as supporting several tax-exempt organizations, and he said that the revenue was not proportionate to the costs. He said that the Board had met with local legislators and the Governor in order to open a discussion about the situation and to discuss possible ideas and options, and that it intended to initiate dialog with surrounding towns and communities about the situation. He also discussed possible regional economic development in the Brattleboro area relative to settlement funds derived from the Vermont Yankee settlement. There was discussion by the Board and Speaker Smith including the dynamics of being a regional economic hub, a pending bill in the House Ways and Means Committee supporting a regional economic hub study, updating education funding and government structure, regionalizing governmental structure, and diversifying revenue. Speaker Smith offered support for any suggestions or recommendations brought to the legislature. The Board recessed at 2:55pm.

NO ACTION TAKEN.

Gartenstein reconvened the meeting at 3:15pm in the cafeteria at the State House. Present at that time were President Pro Tem Campbell, Representative Stuart, Putney Representative Mrowicki, Moreland, Anderson, and three media representatives. Gartenstein said that the Board had several meetings with the Governor and other statewide officials to discuss Brattleboro being a regional economic hub and related issues. He said that the Town was supporting the region as a whole and providing support and services for people who work and shop in town, and that the burden was on the Brattleboro taxpayers so the municipal taxes were higher than those of the surrounding towns. He said that the Board wanted to raise awareness on a statewide level and to discuss revenue options. Campbell discussed property tax reform, educational system reform, and health care issues and said they affected the situation. He said it would take political courage to change the systems and he encouraged continued conversation around those matters. There was discussion by the Board and Senator Campbell around the issues of being an economic hub, antiquated support formulas in current economic patterns, unfair property tax burdens, education system and support, a pending bill in the House Ways and Means Committee, moving from a manufacturing base system toward service-based systems, and other economic concerns. Campbell thanked the Board for the opportunity to meet. The Board recessed at 3:30pm.

NO ACTION TAKEN.

Gartenstein reconvened the meeting at 3:35pm in the cafeteria at the State House. Present at that time were Agency of Commerce and Community Development Deputy Secretary Leriche, Department of Economic Development Commissioner Gosselin, Representative Stuart, Putney Representative Mrowicki, Moreland, Anderson, and Weiss-Tisman. Gartenstein reiterated many of the same concerns that were voiced in earlier meetings with the Governor and other State officials. There was discussion by the Board, Leriche, Gosselin, and other participants about the issues around being the economic hub, services being provided, tax exemption for farms and other organizations, and distribution of Vermont Yankee settlement funds. It was suggested that a dialog be initiated with surrounding towns, Bennington, and other states around such issues and to discuss diverse ways to raise revenue, build coalitions and share ideas. Leriche and Gosselin thanked the Board for taking the initiative in starting dialogs and beginning outreach. The Board recessed at 4:00pm.

NO ACTION TAKEN.

The Board reconvened briefly and decided that no further business would be conducted.

MOTION BY DAVID GARTENSTEIN TO ADJOURN. MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

David Schoales, Clerk