

## **2020 AWAH ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, October 27, 2020

### **WELCOME**

The 2020 Annual Meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by AWAH President, Sigurd Nilsen, with about 50 households attending via Zoom. The reading of last year's Minutes was waived as all Minutes are posted on the Amherst Woods website.

Peggy Matthews-Nilsen, AWAH Vice President, noted that the Secretary position is open and asked for volunteers. It was noted that the primary responsibility of the AWAH Secretary is taking Minutes at the Annual Meeting and filing several documents with the State. Resident, Martha Hanner offered to take notes at this meeting, but stated she did not want to take the position as AWAH Secretary. The Secretary position remains Open.

### **PROPERTY MANAGER**

It was reported that the AWAH Property Manager, Steve Abdow, who held AWAH's only paid position for more than a decade, has moved to Eastern Massachusetts. Peggy reported that the AWAH Board decided to experiment with not having a paid Property Manager position. The Property Manager duties were greatly reduced when the Deed Restrictions expired and the Approvals process ended several years ago. The Property Manager's responsibilities included collection of dues, overseeing the landscaping contracts, and paying bills. These responsibilities have now been divided up between current AWAH Board members. Key to this transition is the online payment of Annual Dues, a new feature on the Amherst Woods website. It was noted that there will no longer be bills sent through the mail and the deadline for Annual Dues will remain December 1<sup>st</sup>. AWAH Treasurer, Kip Doble will track online payments and pay AWAH bills. AWAH Vice President, Peggy Matthews-Nilsen, will be the primary contact with oversight of AWAH's Landscaping contractor, Spring Valley Landscaping. Without a Property Manager, the oversight of contracts and bill payment, will remain a Board responsibility since this involves the expenditure of AWAH funds.

### **FINANCIAL REPORT**

AWAH Treasurer, Kip Doble using the shared screen feature on Zoom, presented last year's income and expenditures (from October 2019 through September 2020), comparing the data with the last 5 years and concluded that AWAH remains in sound financial condition. Total revenue was \$25,106, and total expenses were \$20,602. Revenue in fiscal year 2020 more than offset expenses. Kip noted that landscaping costs are the most significant expense for Amherst Woods, accounting for 2/3 of total expenditures and landscaping is important to help maintain property values. Kip also noted that without the \$5,000 annual Property Manager expenditure, that money will be available for other purposes such as enhanced landscaping and to provide an additional financial cushion. Kip reported that about 30% of homeowners have already used the new online payment feature on the Amherst Woods website to pay 2021 Annual Dues. Homeowners may request a copy of the **Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Financial Report**.

## **LANDSCAPING**

Peggy stated that a contract has been signed with the AWhA contractor, Spring Valley Landscaping, for plantings around the Wildflower Drive pump station (the last part of the Sewer Extension Project) as well as beginning to upgrade landscaping that has been deferred since 2014, when sewer construction began. Peggy noted that extensive design plans were drawn up by resident, Denise Gagnon and the Landscaping contractor. Part 1 of the contract was scheduled to be completed in Fall 2020. However, due to delays related to Covid-19 and a shortage of plants available in the Fall, Part 1 of the contract will now be implemented in Spring 2021. The remaining design plans approved by AWhA in Part 2 of the contract will be finalized during winter 2021, so that landscape work can begin promptly in Spring 2021.

A motion was made by resident, Martha Hanner, seconded by Tyll van Geel, that a **Landscape Committee** be formed to plan future landscaping for the common areas and oversee plantings done by the landscape company. A vote was taken and approved to establish a Landscape Committee. Denise Gagnon who has advised AWhA on landscaping for many years agreed to be a member of the Committee. Peggy will send a neighborhood-wide email inviting volunteers to join the Landscape Committee. If interested in joining the committee, contact Peggy.

Peggy explained that nearly all 2021 landscaping funds are allocated based on landscape design plans developed by Denise Gagnon with Spring Valley Landscaping. This means that the majority of work of the new Landscape Committee will be implementing and overseeing these design plans in 2021 and begin new design plans for landscaping in 2022.

## **HALLOWEEN**

Peggy reported that during a discussion by residents on the Amherst Woods Listserve about how to make trick-or-treating safe in light of Covid-19, a suggestion was made for contact free, pre-made treat bags. It was suggested that those who want to provide treat bags, could place them at the end of their driveway or another outside area, and if possible, light the area. Residents who do not wish to participate in Halloween should keep their outside lights off. Halloween trick-or-treating in Amherst Woods will take place during the usual hours of dusk to 8:30 pm.

## **LARKSPUR DRIVE POTHOLES**

Sig reported that for reasons unclear, the Town has now posted "Private Way" signs at the end of Larkspur Drive near Old Belchertown Road. An Amherst Woods resident informed AWhA that when the resident contacted the Town about filling potholes on that section of Larkspur Drive, the resident was told the Town would no longer fill potholes there. It was noted that this section of Larkspur Drive is owned by local builder, Ron Laverdiere. Sig and Peggy spoke with Town engineer, Jason Skeels who confirmed that the Town no longer intends to fill potholes there, though he did not say why the decision was made. Jason said the Town will continue to snowplow that section of road unless the road continues to deteriorate and poses a risk to the plows. Sig noted that a resident told him that there may be drainage issues with that section of road. However, resident Micky Marcus reported

that the drainage issues had been corrected when the Research Park area was developed. Sig also reported that Mr. Laverdiere indicated he would contact Town officials to find out why the Town made the decision to no longer fill the potholes and that Mr. Laverdiere would copy AWWHA on his correspondence with the Town. It was discussed that the Larkspur entrance to Amherst Woods is an important access road for emergency vehicles. Resident, Kate Atkinson noted this entrance is used by her clients as well as the entire neighborhood. One resident suggested contacting District 5 Councilors to see what they would advise for the neighborhood. Several attendees expressed interest in AWWHA following up further on this issue. Sig and Peggy noted they have already taken on many responsibilities in their Board roles and instead, asked for volunteers to form a Committee to follow up. Kate Atkinson volunteered to Chair the committee, tentatively named the **Larkspur Improvement Committee**. Tyll van Geel and David James volunteered as members.

## **DOG PARK**

Peggy provided a brief update on the dog park following a discussion with Town Engineer, Jason Skeels. Clearing the site has already begun with several small trees removed and temporary fencing outlining the dog enclosure areas. Once silt barriers are installed, fill and grading of the site can take place, weather permitting. The staging area on the Old (South) Landfill will provide some fill from a dirt pile left over from sewer construction. Once the dog park construction is complete, the staging area will be permanently closed. Jason noted that the contract specified a pvc-coated black chain-link fence for the dog enclosures, which will minimize fence visibility. Dog park construction, including 18 parking spaces along Old Belchertown Road, is expected to be completed in 2021.

## **LISTSERVE & WEBSITE**

Peggy reported that the Amherst Woods Listserve now has 150 members and discussions cover many topics. She encouraged residents to opt-in to become Listserve members and noted that the number of daily emails is small. Peggy reported that she adds neighbor referrals for professional services shared on the Listserve and posts them on the Resources page of the Amherst Woods website. Residents were encouraged to visit the Amherst Woods website as it is frequently updated and now contains links to Covid-19 and voting resources.

## **SIDEWALKS**

It was noted that sidewalks along Wildflower Drive and Larkspur Drive have been deteriorating for many years. Attendees agreed that many areas of the sidewalk present a tripping hazard. Peggy reminded the attendees that in 2015, AWWHA presented a Sidewalk Petition to the Town asking that the sidewalks be repaved at the same time streets were being repaved as part of the Sewer Extension Project. However, the petition was unsuccessful. Peggy and Sig asked for volunteers to attend the next TAC (Transportation Advisory Committee) meeting, to find out where Amherst Woods sidewalks are on their list of re-paving priorities. There were no volunteers. Peggy stated that the Town Engineer suggested that residents along Wildflower Drive cut back overhanging brush from sidewalks to improve safety and this improved maintenance might also make the sidewalk project more appealing to the Town.

## **STATION ROAD BRIDGE**

Sig reported that in his discussion with the Town Engineer, he learned that the Town has filed the paperwork with the State for a permanent bridge to replace the temporary bridge on Station Road. Sig noted however, that with increased demand on Town and State funds related to Covid-19, it is likely to be a number of years before there's a permanent bridge replacement.

## **AMHERST WOODS SIGNS**

The Amherst Woods sign at the Old Farm Road entrance to the neighborhood is badly rotted and needs to be removed or replaced. The newer sign at the Station Road entrance is in fairly good condition. Peggy reported that she had asked for volunteers for a sign committee at the 2019 Annual Meeting and one resident volunteered, but due to a health issue the volunteer resigned. Peggy also reported that at the request of the AWhA Board, former Property Manager, Steve Abdow sought an estimate for a replacement sign for the Old Farm entrance, but because of Covid-19, Peggy was not able to follow up with the sign company.

There was a discussion of whether entrance signs were needed with prominent street signs and most using GPS to find destinations. One resident referred to the history of the signs, citing the original intent to market the neighborhood as it was being developed, but it was pointed out that at least one of the signs had been replaced by AWhA since those original signs. One resident expressed concern that entrance signs might be perceived similarly to a "gated community" while other residents spoke in favor of continuing entrance signs. One resident, Denise Gagnon, suggested that if the Old Farm sign was removed, the area could be upgraded with new landscaping as a welcome. One resident, Tyll van Geel, suggested that the Landscape Committee could explore the issue of entrance signs.

## **BENCHES**

An anonymous Amherst Woods resident donated two black metal benches placed on the median along Wildflower Drive, near the Trillium Way circle. Several neighbors expressed gratitude for the generosity of the donation and appreciation of the benches for distanced socializing. After learning one of the benches was stolen, AWhA contacted the donor who indicated the intent to replace the bench. AWhA offered to reimburse the replacement cost. One resident, Betsy Mullins, raised the issue of the median being Town property and Peggy agreed that AWhA will need to confirm with the Town that the benches can stay in that location. Peggy also stated if the benches are to be secured it needs to be done in a way that does not interfere with mowing the area and suggested that a small stone patio might be installed under the benches to prevent grass from growing there. A resident, Eileen Marasco, offered to donate some left over Goshen stone for a patio.

Karen Garman, expressed thanks to AWhA Board members, Sig, Peggy and Kip for their hard work on behalf of all Amherst Woods residents.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:32 pm