

**Lexington Oral History Projects, Inc.**

**MINUTES OF SELECTMEN'S MEETINGS**

*Excerpts From the Official Recorded Minutes on the Subject of Memorial Day Weekend, 1971 and the Vietnam Veterans Against the War*

**Regular Selectmen's Meeting  
Wednesday, June 2, 1971, 7:30 PM**

“The Chairman said that we have had many requests today for people to come before the Board. The first three requests I got, I told them the agenda was filled and was closed but that we would think about setting up a meeting on a separate night to let everybody speak. I got the fourth call from Mrs. Davison requesting an appointment with the Board with Mr. Dingman; as a result of that call, I polled the Board regarding giving appointments for tonight and the vote was 4 to 1 to set up a meeting with the general public on Monday, June 7. There would be no preferential treatment and people would be recognized as they called in, the time being noted on each call. We will give that release to the newspaper for anyone who wants to come before the Board. I reiterate that I had three calls before Mrs. Davison and they accepted the fact pleasantly and agreed it was the sensible and fair thing to do to have the meeting this way. I called Mrs. Davison back and gave the decision of 4 to 1 to hold a special meeting and set it up that way. Today, I got a call from Mr. Dingman that he had contacted people on meeting tonight and he couldn't get in touch with all of them. We agreed that at the outset of the meeting, he would make remarks not to exceed five minutes as there would be a considerable number of people coming. I emphasize that we have been unfair to the other people by turning them down and we should keep it this way, with this one exception. What is your opinion?

Mrs. Riffin: My first choice would be to have anyone who wants to speak afterwards, to offer the hospitality of Cary Hall to those who would like to stay to talk.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, it was unanimously voted to re-convene to Cary Hall under the above-stated conditions.

The Chairman opened the meeting and said that beginning yesterday, the Selectmen received many calls from local citizens wanting to express their feelings about last week's happening. I received one call and explained to that citizen that the Board was willing to listen to anyone coming before it, but said that the Selectmen have a schedule of getting ready for Town

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Meeting and have a full agenda that would go to 1:00 a.m. and it would probably be best to set aside a separate evening and have everyone come before us to present the pros and cons. The fellow agreed and said he would call back and get on the list for Monday. I got three calls and the fourth call was from Mrs. Davison who said she was calling for Mr. Dingman and I explained the same story and she felt people would want to come before the Board. I said that rather than for me to make the decision alone to deny her request, I would poll the Board; the vote was 4 to 1 to set up a separate night to listen to whatever citizens wanted to come before the Board. I called Mrs. Davison back and she said she disagreed but could see the merit of it. Today I had a call from Mr. Dingman who said he was unable to contact people that it was scheduled for Monday night. We would schedule a meeting for next Monday from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. and set up a system for whoever calls and wants to speak before the Board. Keith Butters was the first call we got and he will be first. In my discussion with Mr. Dingman, he couldn't contact the people and we agreed that Mr. Dingman would present the position paper and explain in brief terms, not to exceed 5 minutes. I think we were all in this same hall on Saturday night and discourtesy and disrespect gained us nothing. I would ask you tonight, regardless of a personal feeling, that whoever speaks, you give them the courtesy of listening to what they have to say. I am sure Mr. Dingman is diametrically opposed to mine and I intend to give him the courtesy.

Mr. Roger Dingman: I come before you to present a statement to the Board in behalf of nearly 600 people, following the Battle Green, we endorsed: "We, the citizens of Lexington, wish to express our emphatic dissent from the Board of Selectmen's arbitrary decision to refuse the Vietnam Veterans Against the War overnight accommodation within the Town. Their evasiveness, pride, and insensitivity made inevitable the tragic yet avoidable confrontation on the Battle Green the night of May 29. Their actions have brought shame and disgrace upon us all. They have made our Town not the 'Cradle of Liberty' but simply another 'safe suburb.' We wish to express our dissent of the decision of last week. It was this refusal and the offer of Lincoln Street and the subsequent confrontation. This is the same expression of aggression which has besmirched the reputation of the Town." I accepted the condition of no more than five minutes; speaking as an individual I must dissent with his arguments and I don't think it should be postponed until next week. I don't believe that other groups or other individuals on the agenda merit Mr. Cataldo's refusal that they would have been unready or unwilling to discuss, nor an emergency which does not justify setting aside regular business of the Selectmen. I can conceive of no

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greater emergency than the violation of the right of free expression of the Vietnam Veterans Against the war and the citizens of the Town last Monday and ask fellow citizens to make the Board more responsive of and more receptive to the citizens and all Americans to regard the Battle Green as a symbol of their liberty.

The Chairman: Mr. Dingman presented a petition carrying approximately 600 names. I will keep them in the file and I want you to know there are many other petitions coming in, many letters covering all points of view, whether pro, con, moderate or what have you; if someone could take the time to read all of them, it would be an education and probably very fruitful. As I said, the Board has set aside Monday night from 7:30 to 9:30 for those who like to come and present their views; just call the office and you will be recognized as these calls come. I think this is the fairest way to be recognized, rather than putting your hand up at the meeting. The Board would ask your cooperation in agreeing with this solution. There is nothing in any one of the Board's mind that we feel you shouldn't be heard, and ask that it be done in an orderly manner. As far as I am concerned, now that the issue has gone by, we must get back and have the courtesy of one another, if not, it has gone for naught.

Question: Is there a limit of time for people to speak?

The Chairman: You can speak to your heart's content.

Question: How can we prevent one of your people from speaking all night?

The Chairman: There is no question in my mind I would stop it.

Mrs. Riffin: Moved to limit the time to 10 minutes for each one to present his view.

Mr. Bailey: Seconded the motion.

Upon motion duly made and seconded, it was voted to limit the time on Monday evening to 10 minutes for each one to present his view.

The Chairman: There was a hearing scheduled for the Historic Districts Commission here in Cary Hall but it has moved to another location, if you would like to stay and discuss the issue amongst yourselves. There are two sides of the issue here.

Question: Why not hold the open meeting here so there would be more room?

The Chairman: We have items for Executive Session and I would like to inform you we may not go back into open session until 10:30 or 11:00 o'clock; at that time, we will have further business to conduct and if anyone would like to attend, he is welcome.

The Selectmen, Town Manager and Executive Clerk left Cary Hall

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and resumed the open meeting in the Bird Room.

At 11:35 p.m., the Selectmen, Town Manager and the Executive Clerk returned to Cary Hall.

The Chairman: The Board voted to come out of Executive Session, temporarily, as we have a tremendous workload, to discuss the issue with which you are concerned.

Mrs. Riffin: I offer the motion that the lawsuit against the Veterans and others be voluntarily dismissed by the Plaintiff, the Selectmen of the Town of Lexington. There is no further need for a lawsuit and there will be no further penalties.

Mr. Bailey and Mr. Kenney seconded the motion.

The Chairman: It is my position to vote against the motion. When this injunction was first taken out, it was taken out with the possibility of avoiding a lot of trouble with townspeople and an outside group, plus the fact, or answer a lot of questions of the responsibility and authority of the Board. I think, basically, the order of the court answers these questions very clearly. The Chief Justice saw fit on Saturday to issue the restraining order. I didn't have any intention of ever proceeding with this order. We spent Saturday to convey to the Town that we had the responsibility and we came to the meeting on Saturday asking to talk with you and the clergy and there was complete disrespect and discourtesy in Lexington. Again today, I took the approach to listen to all the citizens who were concerned, to set up the mechanics to do it equitably and, again, saw discourtesy and disrespect, and upstairs at the meeting tonight there was absolute discourtesy. How can you ask us to let these people off the hook when again and again—we just can't. For you people to knowingly violate the law, once, twice, and three times, you were willing to violate the law and take the consequences. If this is what you want, this is your opportunity to tell the judge. On that basis, I will vote against the motion.

Mrs. Riffin, Mr. Kenney and Mr. Bailey voted in the affirmative.

Mr. Cataldo and Mr. Busa voted in the negative.

The motion carried, that the lawsuit against the Veterans and others be voluntarily dismissed by the plaintiff, the Selectmen of the Town of Lexington.

The Chairman: We will instruct Town Counsel to file the motion.

The Selectmen, Town Manager, and Executive Clerk left Cary Hall to resume the Executive Session in the Bird Room, at 11:45 p.m.”

[Other issues such as the crèche on the Green, sanitary landfill closing hours, a “walk for mankind” and sewer issues are discussed.]