

MINUTES

**SELECTMEN'S MEETING
TOWN HALL**

**November 6, 2023
6:30 PM**

ATTENDEES:

Select board members: Leon Rideout, Shane Beattie, Kathy Jean Lavoie

Others in Attendance: Town Manager Benjamin Gaetjens-Oleson, Charity Baker, Michael Nadeau, Department Heads, Members of the Public, Phlume Media

The meeting was called to order at 6:29 p.m. by Selectman Leon Rideout.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

DEPARTMENT HEAD UPDATES:

Water/Wastewater Supervisor Timmy Bilodeau mentioned he would like to put together a policy regarding digging in town roads after November 1st and also a policy to require contractors to put up a bond until a project is done and the town approves that the road was put back in the same if not better condition than the start of the project.

Timmy also reported they have cleaned the intake out and hopefully it will get through the winter as it is getting to the end of its life cycle.

Transfer Station Supervisor Rusty Scott reported they are getting things buttoned up for winter. They just shipped out 12 tons of tires and all the employees are working on getting their recertification hours done.

Highway Foreman Tim Brown mentioned they are ready for winter. The salt shed is full and sand is all delivered. Catch basin cleaners will be in town Wednesday to clean all the catch basins. He also mentioned the paving company is behind and it doesn't look like the paving will be done this year.

Land Use Coordinator Robin Irving reported the Resilience Planning consultants submitted the draft amendments of the zoning ordinance that will go through the series of public hearings in order to add the amendments as a warrant article at town meeting. She is going to use the zoning meeting at the end of the month as a work session to discuss the recommended amendments and would like the members of the master plan committee and select board to participate in that meeting.

The planning board meeting will be held this Wednesday to review the 600 Main Street case for compliance.

Robin also reported the EDA awarded \$750,000 for the water tank project and a public hearing is required to accept the funding so it will be on the agenda for the next select board meeting. She also mentioned along with that award the town will receive \$50,000 from the NVRC and \$200,000 from Weeks Medical for a total of \$1,000,000 and she has submitted an application to NHDES Drink and Groundwater Trust Fund for the remainder on that project. The project total is 3.3 million with the town's contribution around \$465,000.

She is working on a USDA application to finish the funding on the Summer Street bond. The town portion will be around \$560,000 which will need to be a warrant article for a bond.

She is working on the administration and demo money to Pak Solutions for 95-99 Main Street.

Kathy Jean asked if the 3rd party rate study for water/sewer that was mentioned at a previous meeting come in. Robin mentioned she worked with the University of North Carolina along with DES to have a rates analysis done last summer and there is a spreadsheet that has been supplied from the study and it can project out rates for a 10-year period. She will send Kathy Jean all the info from that study. In conjunction with the study she also had Granite State Rural Water do their standard analysis through RCAP (Rural Community Assistance Program).

APPOINTMENTS:

Sam Mayne from the Lancaster Conservation Commission was present to update the select board on their habitat restoration, flood plain restoration and erosion mitigation project at the elementary school which they identified last year and presented to the school.

They hired a consultant to make a restoration plan as a conceptual design so they could apply to the ARM Fund. They have since applied to the ARM fund and another habitat restoration fund for a total of \$167,000 in funding applications. He is hoping to submit another one for the remainder of the project costs. The plan is to cover the project with grant funds with no cost to the town.

He reviewed the details of the restoration project with the board.

Sam mentioned the ARM fund is Water Shed specific so they are applying under the Upper Connecticut water shed. He and Ben explained a bit about the ARM fund and how it works. Sam also mentioned the other grant application they submitted was the Moose Plate grant which is a \$30,000 grant focused on wildlife habitat.

Kathy Jean asked when he thought they would hear back from the ARM fund. Sam believes by the end of December.

Ben commended Sam on the work he has done on the project. He would like to get the boards authorization to apply for the Moose Plate grant and Sam would also like them to authorize him to submit an application to the Mitigation Enhancement fund for another \$100,000 however with further discussion with the board about project details it was found that the cost could be significantly more than that and he should submit the application for an amount up to \$250,000 to cover the costs.

Motion made by Kathy Jean and seconded by Shane to authorize Sam Mayne to submit an application to the Moose Plate grant fund in the amount up to \$30,000 to use for the Wetland Restoration project at the Lancaster Elementary School and authorize Town Manager Benjamin Gaetjens-Oleson to sign any and all required documents. All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion made by Kathy Jean and seconded by Shane to authorize Sam Mayne to submit an application to the Upper Connecticut Mitigation Enhancement fund in an amount up to \$250,000 and authorize Town Manager Benjamin Gaetjens-Oleson to sign any and all required documents. All in favor. Motion carried.

Jan Wipperman handed out a town budget/appropriation comparison she prepared for years 2011-2023. Attached. The presentation shows the percentage of increase in the tax rate and the operating budgets over those years. She would like the select board and budget committee to do their best to use money that already exists.

She also hopes options for health coverage will be given to keep the town's portion that is paid out the same with possibly putting more cost sharing on the employee.

She thinks that individual items that costs over a certain amount should be required to be voted on under a warrant article and not put in a line item. She also feels the warrant should explain why that item is needed.

Kathy Jean mentioned she appreciates the time and thought Jan has put into the presentation.

REVIEW OF MINUTES: October 16, 2023

Kathy Jean stated she was appointed as the alternate select board representative to the conservation commission not the rep itself which needs to be corrected in the minutes and the signature line needs to be updated to her name for future minutes. She will sign using what was provided at this time.

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy Jean to accept October 16, 2023, meeting minutes with the noted corrections. All in favor. Motion carried.

SIGN VARIOUS PAPERWORK: The board signed the MS535.

NEW BUSINESS:

Round-about – Ben mentioned the State put the landscaping in when the round-about was created and it is Town's job to maintain it. He feels the landscape is getting over grown and he is working with Leo Enos to find something that will work better. The highway department may start pulling some of it out this fall.

OLD BUSINESS:

Community Power Coalition of NH – Members of the Energy Committee were present to discuss joining the Community Power Coalition of NH as our partners in developing the Town's aggregation plan. They feel that they are the best group to work with. Lee Ann Potter, member of the Energy committee explained that CPCNH is the State run non-profit and is responsible for the whole energy aggregation program. One of the requirements is the select board needs to designate a primary and alternate point of contact for the Town and the committee voted Lee Ann as the primary and Ben as the alternate with the authority to sign.

Another requirement is to create an energy committee which the select board already did at a previous meeting. The next thing is to make two motions, one to authorize Ben the authority to enter into an agreement and the other to appoint Lee Ann as primary and Ben as the alternate point of contact.

Motion made by Kathy Jean and seconded by Shane to authorize the Town Manager to enter into the “Joint Powers Agreement” of Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire under the provisions of New Hampshire RSA 53-A for the purpose of supporting member municipalities and counties in developing and implementing electric aggregation plans, pursuant to RSA 53-E, as well as related statutory authorities. All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion made by Kathy Jean and seconded by Shane to appoint Lee Ann Potter to serve as Lancaster’s primary representative to CPCNH and Benjamin Gaetjens-Oleson to serve as an alternate representative. All in favor. Motion carried.

Kathy Jean thanked the energy committee members for all their work on this project. She also wanted to confirm that the CPCNH was a 501C4 non-profit organization.

Kathy Jean also mentioned she knows that there are no upfront costs to be a member and the costs will be repaid after the launch and asked how the costs will be determined. Lee Ann stated, from what she has read there will not be any direct costs. Any costs will be for travel reimbursement for attending meetings. Ongoing cost to the Town are reimbursable. CPC’s goal is the more towns that join the costs will go down. Lee Ann mentioned she believes right now the cost is .10 cents per Kw hour.

Kathy Jean also asked if Lee Ann was familiar with the Androscoggin Valley Group that has come together. Lee Ann knows they have applied to become a member. Kathy Jean asked if our committee has connected with that group for any information on what they have experienced.

Rob Christie mentioned they should anticipate costs in the future. There will end up being some administration costs. Those costs could be determined by what we set as a rate. Leon mentioned being part of the Coalition they are going to help us with that and choosing the provider will provide those services. Lee Ann mentioned any time she attends a meeting and there is discussion that a cost may come to the Town, she will advise Ben immediately.

Health Officer – Ben received a letter of interest from one resident and he has spoken to Kathy Jean and they feel a process should be developed to fill these positions. Kathy Jean feels it is important to be consistent. The RSA states the functions of the health officer. The board would make a recommendation to DHHS and they would be the organization to appoint the health officer to a 3-year term.

Ben is going to post the open position on Facebook and on the Town’s websites Resident Notices and have any submissions due in order to be discussed at the 1st meeting in December.

Kathy Jean drafted a two-page summary of job duties for the position which Ben will summarize a bit more when putting it out on social media and resident notices and will have the more detailed description available at the town office.

Buffalo/Stebbins Hill Road numbering revisions – The board discussed in length renaming sections of Stebbins Hill at the intersection with Buffalo Road. The biggest concern is for public safety and getting emergency responders to the residents in a timely manner. The discussions were whether or not to rename the section of Stebbins Hill that goes to the right at the intersection and then to rename the other section of road to the left of the intersection to the unmaintained part of Stebbins Hill Road with a third name. Ben suggested reaching out to all the residents that will be affected and have them come to the first meeting in December to share their feelings on the proposed changes. The board agreed.

Land Use Permit Study – Study attached along with an addendum provided by John Garrison, a member of the budget committee, showing the increase in land use permits over the last several years. John went over the results of the study.

Shane asked if there was a step program in the study to increase the fees gradually. John mentioned there was a proposed step illustrated in the study.

There was much discussion regarding the fee increases, the time it takes with issuing a permit and that it is not cost effective at the current rate schedule.

Alan Savage stated, it is admirable that they are trying to pay the wages for that position which was supposed to be paid by grants that person was applying for. Ben mentioned the expectations of the Land Use Coordinator's wages was not to be supported by grant funds. Alan stated that was how it was presented when the position was originally created many years ago.

Ben explained it is a waste of the towns money to issue a permit that costs more than they are charging. It was just as easy to say yeah it looks good, go ahead and do your project.

Rob Christie thinks the solution may be to have a clerical person to take off some of the burden so Robin can spend her time applying for grant funds. Ben stated, what Rob has mentioned will also impact the town by creating another position.

Kathy Jean pointed out the study shows that Lancaster's fees for new buildings and outbuildings were the lowest in the area.

Joanne Savage thinks the costs need to increase, but if the cost to issue a permit is \$165 why is the recommendation to increase to \$200. John Garrison explained it was an attempt to revisit cost every few years not every year.

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy Jean to increase the application fee for Land Use permits to build residential accessory structures and outbuildings less than 750 square feet (detached garage, porch, deck, shed, patio, inground pool, etc) or to do more than \$3,500 of renovations to an existing home or property (kitchen, bath, etc.) to \$45 effective January

1, 2024 and to \$75 effective January 1, 2025 and to increase the application fee for Land Use permits to build a residential structure to \$200 effective January 1, 2024. All in favor. Motion carried.

Shane asked what will be done regarding commercial permits. Kathy Jean mentioned they started with residential permits and once that was handled, they would move forward.

SELECT BOARD MEMBER REPORTS:

Shane mentioned he was tasked with talking with Jim McMahon, executor of the Brian Lee Estate, about the building the town took by tax collector's deed on Depot Street. He explained that when Brian Lee bought the property, he thought he also owned the building however, after he cleaned up one of the properties it was discovered he didn't own the building on the parcel of land. Jim McMahon informed Shane that Brian spent \$27,000 cleaning up the fire site. Shane told Jim the board will take the amount already paid to clean up the property into consideration and if the estate pays an additional \$5,000, and the board will transfer ownership to the Estate of Brian Lee.

Motion by Shane and seconded by Kathy Jean to accept \$5,000 from Jim McMahon the Executor of Brian Lee's estate for the tax deeded properties of Paul Richardson. All in favor. Motion carried.

Leon asked if we are still waiting on a PILOT agreement with Norwich Solar. Ben and Robin both confirmed that the project is dead. Ben mentioned the Energy committee is working on a process to establish PILOT agreements for commercial solar projects.

INFORMATION:

County Tax Warrant was included for the boards review

Planning Board meeting notice for November 8, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

Land Use Permits were included for the board to review.

Ben mentioned the curbside pickup contract is up at the end of the year and he has put together a Request for Proposals (RFP) that he will get out.

He also mentioned that Jason has completed the review of all the charitable properties which he has not had a chance to look through as of yet and he encourages the board members to come in and review Jason's recommendations on those.

Kathy Jean asked where Jason was at with the revaluation and Ben mentioned he spoke with Jason who thinks he may be finished by the end of the week or next week for sure.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Rob Christie wanted to confirm the revaluation process is to look at all the properties and see how the market has moved. Ben confirmed that it is a townwide revaluation and every town in the State has to go through the revaluation process every 5 years. There was some discussion how a revaluation may affect property owners tax bills.

Rob also wanted to clarify he was not criticizing what Robin does or her workload when discussing the cost of issuing permits.

Rob also reported as the Connecticut River Joint Commission representative that the commission did vote to support the Lancaster Conservation Commission bank stabilization project at the Elementary School.

Rob then reported that Joe Kenney will be at the Mount Washington Regional Airport this Thursday at 11:00 a.m. as he is flying around to all the small airports checking on the status of them. Shane asked if there is an issue at the airport and Rob mentioned it is mostly to do with some repair work that was done which resulted in a cost overrun which was approved by the engineering company and the State approved the engineering company's approval however, now the State has gone back on the approval. The engineering company is suing and they are not sure who they are suing to recover the fees and until it is all sorted out the State is holding up approval on any other repair contracts or commercial construction projects that need to be done. The Town of Whitefield's attorney is representing the airport commission in the matter.

Teri Anderson asked what the process will be to review the new assessment on their property and if there will be times scheduled to meet with the assessor. Ben mentioned if a tax payer doesn't agree with the assessment they would file an abatement/appeal application which would then be reviewed by the assessor and he will then make a determination on the information the tax payer has provided to support their appeal. It was explained there will not be any informal hearings to discuss the change in assessment, the tax payer will know what the change is when they get their bill and then they will need to follow the appeal process.

Motion made by Shane and seconded by Kathy Jean to adjourn. All in favor. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted, Board of Selectmen Date: _____

Charity M. Baker

Leon Rideout

Shane Beattie

Kathy Jean Lavoie