



BOARD OF SELECTMEN
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MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Monday, November 21, 2022 – 6:30 p.m. – Town Hall Conference Room

Members Present: Randy Bunnell, Jamie Connelly, Vaughan Morgan, Steve Smith, Richard Winsor

Staff Present: Paul Sanderson, Town Administrator

Also Present: Marge Morgan, Town Clerk/Tax Collector; Chief Tara Laurent, Police Department; Chief Ralph Cresta, Fire Department; Dennis Malloy, NH State Representative; Don Miller, Budget Committee

Chair Smith opened the Board of Selectmen meeting at 6:30 p.m. A roll call was taken, and it was announced a quorum was present and the meeting was being live-streamed and recorded.

I. APPOINTMENT

1. PDA Update: Susan Parker, Greenland/Newington PDA Representative

Susan Parker, Greenland and Newington PDA Representative, updated the Board on the latest PDA meeting held on Thursday, November 17th. The update included the following:

- Executive Air Documents approved by the PDA a year ago: Three new hangars were intended to be built as part of the right of entry; a one-year extension has been requested due to the pandemic.
- C and J Bus Lines: They would like to rent an additional three lots for six months in anticipation of increased ridership.
- Pease Greeters: The right of entry was approved and is renewed on an annual basis, beginning January 01, 2023 through December 31, 2023.
- Proposed Land Exchange: The NH Air National Guard has proposed a land exchange of a 3.2-acre parcel they own and the location of the old Air Force fire department and a 16-acre parcel abutting the north apron. A copy of the letter is on file. When asked by S. Parker 'if this was a highly strategic element within the protection of our country on the east coast', the response was 'absolutely and the ANG now possesses 12 top of the line refuelers; there is only one other place in the country that has them, and they are sitting right over here, and I don't need to explain why'.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. Monday, November 07, 2022

MOTION: R. Winsor moved to approve the minutes of Monday, November 07, 2022. Second – V. Morgan; all in favor. MOTION CARRIED

IV. OLD BUSINESS

1. Budget Reviews

Town Clerk/Tax Collector: Marge Morgan, Town Clerk/Tax Collector, addressed the Board. The budget remained basically the same as last year; any increases were minimal. Wages for the Town Clerk/Tax Collector and Deputy Town Clerk/Deputy Tax Collector were increased by 6%.

Supervisors of the Checklist: Gus Gouzoules, Supervisor of the Checklist, was unavailable. M. Morgan presented his budget. There will be one election in 2023: March Town Meeting. Supervisors of the Checklist salaries were increased to \$1,200 each. The budget has decreased due to fewer elections. A request for two new computers was included. TA Sanderson explained the current laptops are unserviceable and could not be updated or used. M. Morgan added that they are using their personal laptops. Chromebooks cannot be used because they are not compatible with the State.

TA Sanderson noted there was a substantial increase in Financial Administration. He explained the increase in the Assessing Department was due to revaluation services in 2023. The assessor increased from \$30,000 to \$92,000 to provide those services; the normal assessing contract would be \$37,000. Assessing contracts will be available at the next meeting.

M. Morgan noted that the Town will pay for the ballots for the March Town Meeting. The State pays for State and federal elections. M. Morgan updated the Board that the State took the Town's ballots from the General Election on November 08th. They will be recounted as part of the recounts that are happening throughout the State. M. Morgan has also been receiving emails relating to the election as well as people coming in and asking for information.

Police Department: Chief Laurent reviewed her budget with the Board, noting the numbers in the QuickBooks report were not accurate. Chief Laurent gave the Board an updated version of her budget. The Police Department wage increase was submitted at 7.5% as well as adjustments per position. Chief Laurent used an umbrella percentage at a minimum average of the seacoast area. Position adjustments ranged from \$0.15 to \$1.66 per position. Chief Laurent would like to be at the average of the seacoast communities. When considering the cost to the Town and being fiscally responsible, she also considered the cost of losing an officer, and explained the potential costs of hiring an officer. Chief Laurent stated that it 'saddened her that things for the Town would outweigh any of the employees'.

The position adjustments would bring every officer up to the 2022 average of each individual position plus 2%. A 10% increase was included for part-time people. Her part-time budget decreased because it is difficult to find part-time people to work.

Increases were due to inflation. Chief Laurent is not asking for new equipment or anything that is not an annual hard fee. She cut as much as she could from wherever possible. The Prosecutor line increased by \$2,000; the previous Prosecutor retired and a new one was hired.

Responding to J. Connelly, Chief Laurent stated she used 12 towns in the seacoast area as a benchmark; Portsmouth was not included. Responding to R. Bunnell's questions, Chief Laurent stated they are covering a low amount of overtime and going to single coverage to stay within the budget. The Police Department does mutual aid with surrounding towns. Dispatch is done through Rockingham Dispatch and is included in the County tax. Chief Laurent stated they received approximately \$3,400 through

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Highway Safety Grants. The Police Department received a donation through the Pattony Foundation. They also received a GOFFRE Grant as well as a grant for body cameras.

Fire Department: Chief Cresta reviewed his budget with the Board. The ambulance did not increase very much. Chief Cresta noted that he has recently taken over the Building Inspector's budget. The detail car will be used moving forward.

TA Sanderson explained that in his presentation, the existing four full-time staff are shown; Chief Cresta is requesting four additional full-time staff. TA Sanderson stated two additional full-time staff would cost a total of \$250,000 including salary and benefits. It had been suggested that two additional staff be included in the budget and two in a warrant article. Chief Cresta stated the department is losing per diem individuals because they are getting full-time jobs in other towns. Two people are needed in the station at all times. TA Sanderson noted this is the start of a long discussion at the Board as a policy matter and with the Budget Committee. The Fire Department currently has five full-time staff with the addition of the Code Enforcement/Fire Prevention Officer. In addition to gaining an additional staff member, the Fire Department is gaining revenue from the Building Department as well as conducting fire prevention efforts, which had previously been a Fire Department cost. Four additional staff would bring the total to nine. What is the appropriate level of protection needed for ambulance service and the ability to respond to emergencies within Town and on the State highway?

Responding to V. Morgan's question, Chief Cresta confirmed that he was requesting two hires and two warrant articles. Chief Cresta addressed overtime. S. Smith stated that by hiring additional staff, the overtime budget would be reduced because part-time staff would not be called back to cover a shift. R. Winsor asked TA Sanderson for better numbers on the projected impact.

R. Winsor voiced his concern about two additional staff included in the budget and two in a warrant article: he felt residents were being misled. Voters look at a warrant article for two additional Fire Department staff and think it is a one-time expense. Morally, he did not feel comfortable with that. R. Winsor clarified that he would like the four additional staff in the budget. Residents will be voting on a budget and the budget is perpetual. V. Morgan asked R. Winsor what would happen if four were budgeted and it was voted down; there would not be any additional personnel, which needed to be increased. R. Winsor stated people envision a warrant article as a one-time expense; if they were asking for something it was in perpetuity. Chief Cresta added if it was included in the budget, it would have to be thoroughly explained. J. Connelly questioned the tax impact. R. Bunnell agreed the personnel should be in the budget, adding the warrant article brought visibility. S. Smith noted Deliberative Session would be the opportunity to explain the additional personnel.

TA Sanderson stated the valuation of the Town was \$884 million. For every \$8,845 that is spent, it is \$.01 on the tax rate. Approximately \$500,000 for four additional personnel would add almost \$0.55 to the tax rate. The eventual tax rate will be set after revaluation. The remainder of the proposed budget and warrant articles is not included. TA Sanderson further explained that the Board did not want to have a proposed operating budget much greater than the default budget which might encourage people to vote against the operating budget. TA Sanderson will provide a budget to the Board including the four positions so a decision can be made prior to going to the Budget Committee. R. Winsor requested a formal explanation of why the positions are necessary: the number of calls per year, is the department short-staffed, are calls being missed, what the demand is now and how it is being met, etc.

Chief Cresta informed the Board that fire trucks require two years to be built. A fire truck will need to be considered in the 2024 budget season for delivery in 2025 or 2026. Chief Cresta hoped enough

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money would be available in the Fire & Ambulance Special Revenue Fund. The ambulance was paid for using the ARPA funds; anticipated delivery is February 2023.

General Government: TA Sanderson reviewed the General Government budget with the Board, noting there was not much difference in many of the lines. The Treasury and Bookkeeping functions were discussed in depth. The Treasurer stipend is \$7,200 per year. Responsibilities include the financial administration of \$18 million. More electronic banking services need to be used: positive pay (which is currently being used), online bill paying, ability to accept credit cards and policies for accepting credit cards, monthly online bank reconciliations, etc. The Treasurer, who has provided the Town with great service for many years, will be away for a month. He is uncomfortable doing electronic banking services. TA Sanderson thanked the Treasurer for his honesty.

TA Sanderson also mentioned the current accounting system being used by the Town and the difficulties that have been encountered. The QuickBooks expert hired by the Town has suggested the program can get to the end of 2022 and the necessary reports can be done. A new company file will be set up for 2023, starting in January. QuickBooks is not suitable for governmental fund accounting, but it will take a longer period of time to research and vet out the appropriate program. It may take a good portion of 2023. A quick estimate from the MRI subsidiary is \$40,000. TA Sanderson suggested the Town may have to invest more in a Town Treasurer who would be able to use the electronic banking services. The consensus of the Board was to authorize TA Sanderson to make inquiries into the cost. R. Bunnell suggested it may require a fuller accounting department than what there is currently.

Contracts for electricity and propane are being researched. The contract for mowing and maintenance rates needs to be validated for the upcoming season. It was noted by Board members that the contract had been extended for two years at the same rate. Insurance quotes have been received. Salary increases have not been determined by the Board. Planning and Zoning decreased: amounts paid by applicants were removed. Regional associations were based on actual quotes. Welfare continues to be handled through the City of Portsmouth. Requests for donations are on file. Highways and Streets: The Town truck is operated under 'Administration'; 'Engineering' indicates consulting services.

Winter Maintenance: TA Sanderson has met with Jim Jones. The Town is still on the 2020 contract, which was extended to the 2023 season. Green Pro certification is in process. Fuel surcharge: The Town will be charged the difference between \$2.90 (2020 price) and the current price. In 2021, snowplowing was \$460,000; to this point in 2022, he has been paid \$555,000. Salt (\$25,000) has been ordered and will be delivered by the end of the year. Based on storms, \$75,000 may be needed through the end of the year. TA Sanderson stated the total expended will be close to the budgeted amount of \$700,000 for 2022.

Summer Maintenance: An estimate of \$440,000 has been received from Altus Engineering. TA Sanderson did not know what had not been done in 2022 through the Capital Reserve Fund. Once that figure is known, funds will be encumbered for 2023.

Sanitation: Solid waste went to Covanta for the first half of 2022; that contract ended. Solid waste now goes to Turnkey in Rochester through Waste Management. Fees for hauling and tonnage will be increasing. Recycling goes to ecoMaine and is trucked by Troiano. TA Sanderson noted there would be a substantial increase; the Town's fee structure will need to be reviewed. 'Special Assessments' under 'Solid Waste' refers to the fee paid to Lamprey Regional Cooperative.

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TA Sanderson noted the numbers in the proposed budget were 'soft'. He added that based on \$0.01 on the tax rate for every \$8,845 spent, the wants and desires would be very expensive. The Board heard some compelling cases about people. TA Sanderson addressed people on the General Government side. The Town is very fortunate to have people with long years of service, very dedicated to what they do, and very capable of what they do; they work just as hard as those in the public safety world. TA Sanderson advocated for them the same way as those in the public safety world.

TA Sanderson advised Selectmen to review revenues. The amount of funding received from the State last year that provided a revenue to the Town came from federal money. It is not likely to be repeated in the upcoming year. In addition, two important taxes were cut by the last Legislature: Business Profits and Interests and Dividends. D. Malloy noted that the grant allotted to all towns last year was a one-time only.

Responding to a question from D. Malloy, TA Sanderson stated that the Highway Block Grant was approximately \$90,000; Rooms and Meals was \$500,000. He will provide D. Malloy with the correct numbers. V. Morgan commented that projected revenue would be down this year. TA Sanderson felt department heads would be advocating for people over things. If revenues were relatively flat, the Board did not want a recommended bottom line that would be so high that a significant property tax increase would be projected. The School is also trying to be as reasonable as possible. J. Connelly noted he had heard the increase was approximately 2.5%.

There was a brief discussion about wages. Based on the discussions R. Winsor has had with colleagues in the corporate world, he stated the average wage increase was 5% to 5.5%. S. Smith felt 5% was a fair place to start discussions.

2. Coakley Update

TA Sanderson, V. Morgan, and D. Malloy attended the Coakley meeting at the Bethany Church on Monday, November 14th. There was a presentation by the EPA. A fair summary was that the Deep Bedrock Study indicated there was a relatively small migration of any contaminants to the east towards Rye. It was moving to the west/northwest (down Breakfast Hill Road towards Post Road and crossing over to the golf course). There are four properties that have been impacted where a point of entry treatment is required or have been/will be provided municipal water by the City of Portsmouth. There are increased levels of runoff into Berry Brook; PFAS is more detectable. To have an impact on health, the water would have to be ingested. D. Malloy added that the EPA is still waiting on the yearly updated numbers from the Coakley Landfill Group for the Deep Bedrock Study. Coakley did the study, and it was rejected by the EPA. TA Sanderson noted that the EPA has not accepted the report as being complete and accurate.

3. Other Old Business

R. Bunnell reminded TA Sanderson about an RFP for the 2023 audit.

V. NEW BUSINESS AND ADMINISTRATIVE

1. Closing Town Hall Early – Wednesday, November 23, 2022

Several staff members have asked to leave at noon on Wednesday, November 23, 2022, and would like to close the Town Hall at that time. Leave time will be used; notices will be posted.

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MOTION: R. Bunnell moved to approve the Town Hall closing at noon on Wednesday, November 23, 2022, with the understanding that leave time will be used. Second – R. Winsor; all in favor. MOTION CARRIED

2. Other New Business

Chip Hussey, Conservation Commission, has requested the Conservation Commission enter into a contract with Grandscape Yard Maintenance to bushhog fields and trails in the amount of \$950. Funds are to be taken from the Conservation Commission warrant article.

MOTION: J. Connelly moved to authorize the Conservation Commission to enter into a contract with Grandscape Yard Maintenance in the amount of \$950 contingent on availability of funds. Funds to be taken from the Conservation Commission warrant article. Second – R. Winsor; all in favor. MOTION CARRIED

VI. CONSENT AGENDA

1. Conservation Commission Resignation/Appointment: Joseph Fedora, Conservation Commission Vice Chairman, has submitted his resignation effective November 30, 2022. Stephan Toth, recently appointed by the Selectmen as an alternate, can be appointed by the Board of Selectmen to fill that vacancy until March 2023 at which time he will need to be reappointed. The Conservation Commission will vote for a new Vice Chairman at their next meeting.
2. Petition and Pole License: Eversource and Consolidated Communications have requested and were granted a license to install and maintain underground utilities. The Board of Selectmen needs to sign the Petition and Pole License.
3. Approval of Policies: The following policies are approved annually by the Board of Selectmen: Investment, Fund Balance, and Indemnification. All are included for review.
4. Payroll Manifest: \$72,883.46
5. General Fund Manifest: Town - \$56,089.74; School - \$2,200,000 (Total - \$2,256,089.74)

MOTION: R. Winsor moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Second – J. Connelly; all in favor. MOTION CARRIED

R. Bunnell thanked J. Fedora for his service on the Conservation Commission. S. Smith thanked S. Toth for replacing J. Fedora.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: R. Winsor moved to adjourn at 8:15 p.m. Second – V. Morgan; all in favor. MOTION CARRIED

NEXT MEETING

Monday, December 05, 2022 – 6:30 p.m., Town Hall Conference Room

Submitted By – Charlotte Hussey, Administrative Assistant