



Select Board /Assessors Meeting Summary

Dec. 15, 2021

6:30 p.m.

Select Board members Present: Wes Daniel, Tom Johnston and Mitch Garnett

Others Present: Code Enforcement Officer Corey Fortin, Steve Ocean, Dave Williams

Wes Daniel called the Select Board/Assessor's meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Approve Summary of Dec. 8: Motion to approve summary by Mitch Garnett, Tom Johnston seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Sign Treasurer's Warrant dated Dec. 15, 2021:

P/R Warrants #104: \$5,672.06

A/P Vendor Warrant #105: \$4,771.39

Motion to approve by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Road Foreman Report: Written by Frank Jones Jr. and read by Wes Daniel

12/6: Called out to sand for snow and ice, sanded dirt roads twice; fuel cards did not work at State Garage or Maritime Farms; worked on P200 wing

12/7: Called out for downed trees, Frank called in Steven and David, Steven had a doctor's appointment and left at 7:30 a.m.; David and Frank put up signs in Route 220; fixed some town signs; moved trees from roadways

12/8: Greased loader and sander before plowing, only had three drivers

12/9: Frank called in Steven, David and Jason to help plow and sand, Jason left at 8 a.m.

12/10: Frank called in Steven, David and Ricky to sand for snow

12/11: Frank called in Steven and David to help sand dirt roads for ice

CEO Report: CEO Corey Fortin informed Select Board members he participated in Planning Board and Appeals board training through MMA last week. He conducted his monthly drive around town and continues to work with attorneys on outstanding violations. He stopped at a couple of places in violation but nobody was home; one location does not have a mailbox and Corey said he's not sure how to communicate regarding the violations. Tom suggested sending violation notices to the property owner of record.

Health Officer Report: None

Town Clerk/Treasurer's Report: None.

Other Agenda Items: Select Board members signed a letter to Whitney Lopez regarding her nuisance pigs that informs her the pigs will be seized. Tom Johnston made the motion, Mitchell Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

After a short discussion about mailing versus delivering the letter in person, Tom Johnston made a motion to have the letter served in person to Whitney and to have a deputy on hand when the pigs are removed. Wes Daniel seconded the motion; all in favor, motion carries.

Select Board members signed the October bank statement.

Town Attorney Peter Drum sent an email to Select Board members regarding the ongoing Welzel violation at the end of Prescott Road on Washington Pond. His email stated the Welzel's attorney hoped to meet with Select Board members, the CEO and Peter at the property. Wes said he does not feel another trip to the property is needed because the issue already has gone through the Appeals Board. CEO Corey Fortin said he agreed there is little to see. Mitch said the Welzels already have acknowledged the tree-cutting and said he thought the case was in the hands of both sides' attorneys, meaning Select Board members are beyond looking at the site. Tom said if Peter thinks it's appropriate to go to the property that Corey should go as well. Wes said he would ask Mary to check with Peter.

Dave Williams asked if anything has been done to remedy the tree-cutting. Wes said not yet. Mitch said they've agreed to replant already but the town and Welzels haven't come to an agreement on a fine. Dave asked who decides on the fees. Tom said Peter negotiates on behalf of the Board.

Wes said he talked to Maritime Energy about making regular diesel fill-ups when the new tank is installed at the Public Works garage and said the company trucks are in town on Tuesdays and Thursdays. He asked if he should have the Maritime Energy fuel cards reactivated for emergencies; the consensus was yes and Wes said he would take care of that.

Questions and Comments: Steve Ocean said Brian Daggett was at the prior evening's Planning Board meeting and it was unclear to everyone why. After reading the Select Board summary of Dec. 1, Steve said he understood a little more. According to Steve, at Planning Board, Brian told members he had an old permit issued by former CEO Bob Temple (expired) and he hoped to renew that permit approval. (Town ordinance states expired permits may not be renewed; a new permit must be submitted. Brian did submit a new permit application, which Corey denied.)

The property is in the Shoreland Zone and Brian said he talked to the state DEP and received some positive indications about his plans. Steve told Brian he could appeal Corey's denial of his new application through the town's Appeals Board. Corey, who was unable to attend the Planning Board meeting, said he's been regularly in touch with Brian via email and explained to Brian why the permit application was denied and informed Brian he had the right to appeal Corey's decision.

Steve said Brian did not reference any emails from Corey or indicate that he was aware of the Appeals Board option. Tom said he thought the project had to go to the Planning Board because it's a conversion

from seasonal to full-time residence and Corey confirmed that is the case. Steve said that conversion was not mentioned by Brian at Planning Board. Corey stated that Brian hopes to tear down the existing camp and rebuild/expand. The permit submitted by Brian was rejected based on town and state shoreland rules, Corey said, and all of that information was given to Brian. Corey noted that if Brian wishes to replace more than 50 percent of the structure's value, the new structure must be more conforming, though it will always be non-conforming because of its proximity to Washington Pond. Steve said he would look at the rules regarding conversion from seasonal to full-time and Corey said he would forward emails between himself and Brian to Steve.

Steve said a recent vacancy on the Planning Board was discussed and alternate member Erick Anderson is considering accepting the position.

Other business: None.

Motion to Adjourn by Mitch Garnett, Tom Johnston seconded; all in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

The Budget Committee meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Don Grinnell. Present were Don, Dave Williams, Wendy Carr, Kathleen Ocean, Dave Martucci, Wes Daniel, Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett and Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson.

Don noted the group would be looking at the preliminary budget and that the Budget Committee wanted to talk about various Covid-19 relief funds as well as the large permit fees for the two solar farms. He asked Select Board members to begin with extra funding received this year.

Mitch said a big unknown is Union Ambulance Service, and the numbers aren't yet available. Tom said he thinks those numbers will be available in January. Mitch said the largest driver for the ambulance budget is increased staff costs.

Tom spoke about American Rescue Plan Act funds. The town has received half of its allotment already, \$79,950, and the other half is expected to be distributed in 2022. The money can be given to employees or to start new programs in town but can't be used to offset taxes and must be Covid-related, Tom said. He suggested starting a respiratory program that could be used to purchase SCBA breathing apparatus for the Fire Department.

Kathy asked if the money could be used to offset the increased cost of ambulance service.

Tom said replacing the air packs will cost \$110,000.

Dave Williams asked about a county grant the town has applied for; Tom said he only knows what has been in the newspapers, that much of the county money is expect to go toward homelessness. Wes said

Washington put in for a minimal amount of money. Dave Williams said the final county budget meeting was the following evening but he could not attend. Tom said there is a 2.64 percent increase in the county budget. Dave Williams said he thought Washington's increase would be \$26,000. Wes pointed out that the Communications budget went down but the overall county taxes went up.

Kathy asked if the town/Fire Department already planned to replace the air packs. Tom said the department has been putting in for grants but have so far been denied because of the low number of calls per year. He said there are currently three packs that are out of service, one of which cannot be repaired. He said the packs are 20 years old and becoming obsolete. Kathy asked how many SCBA the department would like to purchase. Tom said 12 packs, masks and spare bottles. Dave Williams asked if all of the packs needed to be replaced at the same time. Tom said yes, because the designs change. Dave Williams said there is only \$75,000 available now. Tom said the town could encumber the grant until the remaining grant money is received. Wes concurred, and said Select Board members could spend the \$80,000 grant and borrow \$32,000 for air packs. When the second half of the grant money comes in, that would pay back the borrowed \$32,000.

Kathy asked how long the town has to spend the grant money. Mary said until 2026. Dave Martucci said if the air packs are doable, it should be considered. Don agreed and said the packs need to be replaced and if grant money isn't used, the town will have to figure out another way to come up with the money.

Kathy asked if there are other things that qualify. Tom said nothing in this budget. Mary said there's no specific list of qualified items/projects but she has talked with MMA and received some guidance. Mitch pointed out it's all in the wording. Kathy asked about communications. Wes said the money must be spent on a Covid-related item/project. Mary said it is not required to have a town vote on how to spend the money but she thinks it is a good idea to do so. Tom said if the air packs are funded, there will be about \$45,000 in grant money left for other projects. Don said, with his EMA hat on, the town might consider a reverse 911 calling system for better communications during widespread emergencies.

Dave Williams asked about Zoom meeting technologies. Mary said the town and library shared the cost of a Meeting Owl, which records audio and video. Tom said another project to consider is broadband internet. Dave Williams asked if that fell under the grant guidelines and Tom said it does. He said internet service, even at the Town Office, is often bad. Kathy pointed out that the WiFi speed depends on how many people are connected to it – the more people, the slower the speed.

Tom talked about the fees for the solar projects and said the fees are based on the square footage of the panels. The town has received payments of \$82,000 and \$48,000 for the projects. Tom said Select Board members have not considered where that money might be spent but that it can be used to offset taxes.

Dave Williams said it appears revenues are higher than expected. Don agreed, particularly the Homestead Exemption reimbursement. Dave Martucci said state reimbursements have gone up. Tom

said state revenue sharing also is up and he underestimated it. He said BETE is set by the assessor's agent but building permits are up and Select Board members increased the mining permit fee this year.

Tom said the new assessor's agent will be paid an hourly rate and the CEO line will increase this year. Don asked about the assessor's agent contract. Tom said Rebecca Adams is the new assessor's agent and her contract states she will be paid \$600 per eight-hour day and she will prorate the fee if she's in Washington for less than eight hours. Her contract includes 12 days per year, for a total of \$7,200. Mitch said Select Board members rounded up to \$10,000 in the budget.

Tom said revenue overages will be used as in the past.

He said the backhoe is old and the town rented an excavator as well for an additional \$8,750 last year. Tom said Select Board members are looking at the numbers to see if any new equipment purchases make sense. Wes said most of the rental money came out of the LRAP account and wasn't part of the budget process. Tom said it doesn't matter what account the money came from, just that it was spent. Don asked how many hours were put on the backhoe in 2021. Wes said the backhoe wasn't used as much because of the rented excavator; Select Board members are not looking to replace the backhoe. Tom said to purchase an excavator equivalent to the one rented, it would cost between \$80,000 and \$100,000 plus the cost of a trailer and any accessories. Don said the bucket loader was a lease-to-buy over a period of six or seven years. Tom said that is an option, but interest also is a factor. He said Select Board members will have to look at the municipal loan rate versus a commercial lease. Wes said the current bank the town uses would likely offer a good rate. Dave Williams asked about the type of accessories Tom was referring to; Tom said a ditching bucket and connection, and possibly a compatible mulcher as a future purchase. Dave Williams said those machines make the sides of the roads look awful. Wes said a mulcher would only be used for smaller branches; he pointed to what's growing back on Calderwood Road as an example.

Dave Martucci asked if the money from the solar projects could be used to purchase an excavator.

Mitch said Select Board members are considering the possibility of solar panels to offset electricity use at town buildings. He said the town may not have to pay any money upfront and potentially could offset 95 percent of its electricity usage. Tom said he never wants to see any panels on the roofs of town buildings and suggested looking into using the old dump site for an array. Don asked how many kW hours the town uses and how many panels it might take to cover usage. Tom said Select Board members have reached out to ReVision Energy and that there are other options such as purchasing solar power from one of the solar farms in town. Mary noted the streetlight bills have all gone down since the switch to LEDs. Don said that is a sensible program.

Tom said there are many ideas on how extra money can be spent, but everyone present knows to be cautious.

Don asked about the plow truck sequence. Dave Williams asked if the town currently has five trucks or six. Tom said there are five trucks. He said P500 is in a similar condition to the recently sold P400 and should be replaced in two years when the loan is paid off; there still will be two trucks on loan. Don said that's a cost of doing business. Wes said the town received \$12,500 for P400 and the money has been deposited into the Truck Reserve Account.

Tom said the rest of the budget is piece-by-piece. He pointed out 5 percent raises on payroll and that the CEO has been working at a reduced rate while he completes his certifications, which he since has done. Kathy asked if ARPA money could be used for the payroll raises, citing a 3 percent raise last year, but Wes said it can't because ARPA money can only be used for bonuses to employees. Mary also noted Town Office staff did not receive a raise last year, only Public Works did. Wes said the 5 percent isn't even keeping up; Tom said the Public Works crew all live in town and want to be here; Mitch said because of the labor market right now, any town employees could probably make more money at WalMart. Don said it does not appear to be an even 5 percent across the board but Tom explained the deputy clerk line is confusing because it had included the Registrar of Voters and that's now been taken out of that line, which jumbles the numbers.

Kathy asked about Fire Department increases – 50 percent for the chief and 100 percent for stipends. Tom said yes, that is the plan. Don said Washington is the only volunteer department left in Knox County. Tom said Fire Chief Phil Meunier will increase from \$4,000 per year to \$6,000; he said equivalent positions start at \$9,000 and higher. Tom said the department continues to gain volunteers, which is unheard of – he said he thinks it's the quality training offered. Tom said Phil recently was awarded Instructor of the Year.

Don said he feels the committee has a vision of what's out there and now will just wait for the end of the year. He asked about computer systems in the Town Office. Mary said the Public Works garage will have phone and internet installed in January, and will need a new computer. She suggested replacing one computer at the Town Office and giving the existing computer to Public Works. She said the cost of TRIO has increased and it was decided not to move to the Cloud option at this time. The office copier/fax was recently replaced at the same cost as the older model. Mary said she is not able to change the answering machine message remotely and is looking into options through Consolidated Communications that would allow Town Office staff to update the message remotely.

Don said that might be covered by ARPA funds. He said he would look into the reverse 911 system that would work with cell phones because so few people have landlines anymore.

Wes said along with phones and internet at the Public Works garage, options are being looked at for an alarm system in case of fire. Tom said it could be an internet-based system and added there are lots of things to spend money on – he said he recently talked to the vendor used to screen sand last year and the cost is expected to jump 70 percent. Wes added that there is a 5,000-yard minimum and the town typically only does 4,000 yards. Tom said culvert pricing has doubled as has steel, which continues to increase in price.

Don noted Select Board members haven't had an increase in pay for six or seven years – Wes corrected to 10 years. Kathy quipped perhaps they should get a one-time large bonus payment from ARPA funds.

Don said there was nothing more to do until the end of the year is closed out. He said there's a lot more revenue this year and one-time money.

Mary double-checked the Homestead Exemption reimbursement rate and said it was correct. As well, she said the solar farms paid \$87,533 and \$49,896 for permits. It is possible there might be a reimbursement for lost revenue for solar farms, Dave Martucci said, and Tom said assessor's agent Rebecca Adams is also looking into that. Dave Martucci said depreciation is another consideration.

The next Budget Committee meeting was set for Jan. 12 at 7 p.m.

Dave Williams and Kathy Ocean made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Wendy Carr. The Budget Committee meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Grinnell