



## Select Board /Assessors Meeting Summary

Feb. 23, 2022

6:30 p.m.

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

**Others Present:** Code Enforcement Officer Corey Fortin, residents Peg Hobbs, Kathy Ocean and Jeff Grinnell

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

**Approve Summary of Feb. 16, 2022:** Motion to approve summary by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

**Sign Treasurer's Warrants dated Feb. 24, 2022:**

P/R Warrant #16: \$4,937.49

A/P Vendor Warrant #17: \$9,651.85

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

2/14: Worked on P300, replaced U-joints and velocity joint; fixed lights on P200 and P600

2/15: Moved snow at Town Office and boat landing, sanded both as well as Grange; oil change on P600; rotated the polo flex on P600 plow

2/16: Worked on P500 after getting it started, put a new starter in

2/17: Fixed spinner again on P500, greased truck, tried to unplug culverts on Sprague Road; pressure washer stopped working

2/18: Called out for downed trees, Frank called Steven to help

2/19: Called to sand for snow, Frank called in Steven, David and Jimmy to help

**CEO Report:** CEO Corey Fortin said it has been pretty quiet, though he continues to respond to phone calls and emails. He completed his write-up for the town report; Select Board members received a spreadsheet of building and plumbing permits issued in 2021. Corey has spoken with attorney Peter Drum about ongoing violations and is awaiting advice on how to proceed with the enforcement actions.

Tom asked about several properties in town that are collecting vehicles or junk and Corey said he's still catching up from when he was out sick. Wes asked about Tim Jackson's junkyard as well and Corey said it's on his list of properties to check.

**Health Officer Report:** None

**Town Clerk/Treasurer's Report:** Deputy Clerk Stephanie Grinnell said the town received a \$50 check for a dog-at-large violation as well as a \$21,322.86 revenue share check. Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson and the Select Board members met with the auditors Tuesday and all went well. Deane will be back next week with adjustment details and Mary finally received the paperwork from RSU 40 to complete the audit.

**Other Agenda Items:** Wes said Mitch suggested sending a letter to Union Select Board members confirming Washington will sign/accept the proposed Union Ambulance budget.

Select Board members were contacted by several residents about the condition of Dorman Road. Wes said he took a ride on the road and, while its condition is poor, it is maintained the same as any other dirt road in town during this time of year. He noted Public Works will take care of problem areas as soon as they are able. Mitch clarified the problem is mud, not ice, at this time.

Wes made a motion to sign and send Jackson's Corner Store a letter regarding unpaid personal property taxes. Tom seconded; all in favor, motion carries and the letter was signed.

**Other business:** Ken Mills made a request for a refund of fees paid in 2020 to establish a gravel pit because the project stalled and the permit was not used. The property has since been purchased by Daryll Flagg, Wes said, so Daryll will be responsible for gravel pit fees going forward. Mitch said Ken did meet with the Planning Board about the pit; Corey said it was a preapplication hearing. Corey said Ken decided not to proceed with opening the pit after the Planning Board requested a full site plan. Wes made a motion to refund the \$500 fee to Ken Mills, Tom seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Corey noted that Daryll already has a pit nearby that already is permitted.

Wes made a motion to sign an agreement with the National Digital Equity Center, which is part of the plan for broadband internet. Tom asked if an upcoming Zoom meeting regarding digital equity is still required and Stephanie Grinnell said she believes it is. Tom seconded the motion; all in favor, motion carries.

Corey said he forgot to mention that the owner of Maine Audio Visual intends to sell his property and move. He said he will bring it up to the Planning Board because MAV is mid-way through the process and the property has a septic system that has never been inspected. A storage container that was in violation of setbacks on the property has been removed, Corey said, but a shed has been added. He said the little house is borderline regarding setbacks and the shed is even closer so it may have to be moved. Tom asked if the goal is to get the property into compliance and Corey said it is. Tom said a certified letter or proof of mailing should be sent outlining the requirements – if all structures are removed, the septic still needs to be in compliance before the property is sold.

Jeff said he and Tom were talking about a Lakes Association project looking to install a dock at the public boat launch. Tom said there should be signs designating it as a canoe/kayak dock. Peg said people do swim at the boat launch, though it's not an official swimming area. Jeff said the Lakes Association does not intend to disallow swimming or otherwise disturb the boat launch's current uses. Peg said erosion is a problem and perhaps stairs would help. Tom agreed some shoreland stabilization needs to be done and said if the launch is posted as "No swimming," it creates a liability issue for the town. He said he is concerned that someone might dive off a dock and get hurt. Kathy asked if a ramp might work better and Peg said the no swimming restriction would also apply. Peg said that wasn't something the Lakes Association researched or considered.

**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 7:03 p.m. by Don Grinnell. Present were Budget Committee members Don Grinnell, Peg Hobbs, Kathy Ocean, Jesse Casas, Wendy Carr and Deb Bocko; Dave Williams joined the meeting by phone. Also present were Select Board members Wes Daniel, Tom Johnston and Mitch Garnett, Town Clerk/Treasurer Mary Anderson and resident Jeff Grinnell.

Don asked Select Board members for an update on the audit outcome as well as expected revenues for 2022. Tom said the audit went very well, with only a few account adjustments. A pleasant surprise, he said, was higher than anticipated revenue sharing, resulting in about \$26,000 more than expected. Tax collection rates were up by 2 percent, for which Tom thanked Town Office staff.

Tom said Select Board members recommend using \$100,000 from the town's undesignated fund balance in addition to LRAP funds for paving.

He said a previous discussion about using ARPA funds – received in two rounds of funding, the first of which has been disbursed – to purchase air packs for the Fire Department has resulted in a different approach following a conversation with MMA, which recommended not counting the town's chickens before they're hatched. Instead, Tom said, Select Board members recommend using \$70,000 of the ARPA funding toward the air packs and that the remaining balance come from the undesignated fund balance. He noted a change in the spending rules for ARPA funding now allows recipients to offset revenue losses.

The full cost of the SCBA (air packs) totals \$120,000. Tom said if a purchase commitment is made by April, he thinks the cost would be closer to \$110,000.

Dave Williams asked about other spending from surplus. Tom said \$40,000 to offset taxes; \$140,000 in unexpended appropriations remained at the end of the year and \$100,000 will be used toward paving. That leaves money paid by two solar project developers as additional surplus, Tom said. Don asked if that means the town won't have to borrow money in the summer to make ends meet until property tax money starts coming in but Tom said that will depend on cash flow. Responding to Don, Mary said the

town borrowed \$200,000 last year but paid it back quickly. Don asked if the auditors are comfortable the town has enough operations capital; Tom said yes, though the town is on the lower end at \$533,000. Tom asked if Budget Committee members had read the summary of a meeting with Liberty Ambulance Service and pointed out there are concerns about emergency personnel. He suggested including in the warrant \$2,500 for training of interested townspeople that could be combined with available money in the Scribner Fund.

Another new item is a retirement plan for town employees. Tom said the idea began with questions from the road crew and the auditor does not recommend Maine PERS for Washington because of a high matching percentage. Instead, the Simple IRA plan would be offered to those making more than \$5,000 per year with a 3 percent match from the town. The employee could contribute as much as they wanted. For eligible town employees, it would cost about \$8,5000 per year in matching funds if all chose to participate and receive the match. Any money not spent would rollover. The issue will be listed on its own on the warrant rather than included in the budget because it's new.

Wes suggested increasing the General Assistance line to \$4,000 from \$2,000 because of rising costs. The town is reimbursed for 70 percent of GA funding and MUST provide assistance to all who qualify and apply. Kathy made a motion to recommend an increase in GA funding to \$4,000, Peg seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Don asked for a total cost for paving recommended by Select Board members. Tom said \$350,000 – raising \$100,000, asking for \$100,000 from surplus and using \$150,000 from the Roads Reserve Account.

Next, Don brought up “the elephant in the room” – funding for emergency medical services. He reminded committee members they would not recommend a service, only a budget. He asked Kathy and Peg to speak about the meeting they both attended.

Kathy said no numbers were provided by Liberty Ambulance Service and said it did not seem feasible the service could take on Washington. She said she is unsettled by the lack of input regarding Union Ambulance's budget and said she thinks the process should change. She said the Union Ambulance budget is \$117,290.

Tom said he does not agree with the numbers provided by Union Ambulance.

Peg said Liberty Ambulance service seems to be heading in the same direction for staffing as Union has proposed.

Tom said Union has offered to arrange an Advisory Committee for the ambulance service.

Kathy said the pay scale in Liberty doesn't seem it would attract more emergency personnel. Tom said there is an agreement in Waldo County not to “poach” employees from other departments with higher pay. He mentioned recent moves in neighboring towns that are reshaping the EMS map – Jefferson

recently signed a 6-month contract with Waldoboro and Somerville is served by Delta Ambulance. Jesse said he's been following the Jefferson situation and said there was a "staggering" increase; he wondered if Washington agreed to Union's \$117,000 budget if it might also jump. Even so, he said Union seems like the only viable option in the available time frame.

Don said he believes there should be an inter-local agreement for emergency services much like the one at Tri-County, which would mean Union is no longer deciding the budget on its own. He said objections from Washington resulted in a \$90,000 reduction from the original budget request and there's no more time to negotiate before town meeting.

Wes said Appleton also met with Northeast Ambulance Service, which would mean a 14-minute longer response time. He said Appleton officials are leaning toward agreeing to Union Ambulance's budget, which also increased for that town.

Deb asked how Union Ambulance became the area provider. Jeff said it's been that way for 30 years and used to be Union, Washington and part of Hope. As the former Union Rescue Chief, Jeff said it was his plan to set up inter-local agreements but he did not do so. He said the Union chief creates the budget, runs it through the EMA formula and presents it to the Budget Committee and Select Board in Union before presenting to other towns. Jeff said it's the first time he can remember this large an increase and he met with Union Ambulance Director Jesse Thompson, who told Jeff he presented three plans to the Budget Committee and Select Board, and Union officials chose the highest cost plan. Jeff offered his opinion that Liberty response times won't be as fast as predicted – after a recent snowstorm, Jeff traveled Route 220 and observed nearly bare roads in Washington that drastically changed to snow-covered at the Liberty line.

Tom said it comes down to level of service. He used Somerville as an example – that town pays no annual fees to Delta Ambulance but also does not have fast service.

Dave argued that if Washington agreed to the \$117,000 this year, the cost will never be any less. He said the town does have some bargaining power because Union Ambulance can't operate without Washington and/or Appleton.

Don said based on the increase from last year, the mil rate will go up .4, meaning \$40 for every \$100,000 in valuation.

Kathy agreed about the level of service and said at 2 a.m., you want the ambulance there in 11 minutes. She said townspeople need to understand what they're getting.

Don called for a motion. Jesse made a motion to recommend \$117,290 for Union Ambulance Service, Deb seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Jeff suggested an information meeting at some point; Tom said perhaps May would work. Kathy agreed and said it appears rural EMS providers are in crisis – if that is made clear, people might understand more about what it costs.

Kathy asked about a potential excavator purchase and Tom said Select Board members decided to hold off on purchasing one until the market stabilizes a little more because more places are keeping their used equipment longer.

Jesse made a motion to adjourn, Peg seconded; the meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Grinnell