



Select Board /Assessors Meeting Summary

Sept. 21, 2022

6:30 p.m.

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

Others Present: Axiom Technologies' Mark Ouellette and Lisa Leahy, Broadband Committee Chair Sara Bullard, Broadband Committee member Lee Shane, Town Clerk Mary Anderson

Wes Daniel called the Select Board meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with a reminder there would be a public hearing at 7 p.m.

Tom asked Mark if there was anything in the broadband contract he feels should be revisited and Mark said there is not. Tom said Select Board members would like to increase the signup fee to help offset the unexpected insurance costs. Sara suggested a \$60 fee in the hope 300 locations will sign up for the service for a total of \$18,000 (the current yearly insurance cost).

Sara read part of the contract that indicated Axiom's insurance would be sufficient, yet the town is paying because Consolidated Communications and CMP require the town to carry its own liability insurances above what MMA offers. Sara said she previously spoke with Peggy Schaeffer, who assured her Axiom would help find a way to pay for the insurance costs. Tom said his interpretation of the contract is that Axiom would provide proof of insurance, not insurance on behalf of the town. He said the blame should be on CCI and/or CMP for the unexpected cost. Sara asked if other towns working with Axiom are in the same position as Washington as far as insurance and Mark confirmed other towns are also being required to provide insurance. Insurance for this year is covered but Sara asked how soon Axiom expects to begin generating revenue toward insurance costs for next year. Mark said his expectations are laid out in the contract. He said Somerville, which received the same grant as Washington, tried submitting its CCI and CMP applications with Axiom's insurance only and those applications were rejected. Mark said while Washington will not recoup the \$18,000 cost of insurance paid this year, the increased signup fee will cover next year's insurance until revenue begins to come in. Tom calculated it would be three years' worth of interest by the time revenue is generated; Mark concurred.

Liability to the town should be limited, Mark said, because any major disaster would fall under FEMA coverage and MMA will insure the central office. He recommends self-insuring by building up a fund from broadband revenues as soon as its possible. Mark asked if those present think the contract wording is misleading; Tom said it is not misleading but there clearly was a misunderstanding about the insurance.

Lee asked if Mark feels comfortable there will be no additional unexpected costs as the project progresses. Mark responded that he never saw the initial insurance cost as a problem; he discussed with Mary a plan to cover it and it's done. He said he hopes the pole licensing (a one-time cost) process will go smoothly and be complete by November. After that, Axiom will send along grant money for pole leasing costs (an annual cost) and CCI will begin its work on poles, which could take up to eight months. Axiom's build is expected to take another four to five months. Mark said the timeline is approximately six months behind original projections. Tom clarified that means broadband won't be available until spring of 2024.

Tom made a motion to open the public hearing on General Assistance appendices at 7 p.m. No public comment. Public Hearing closed at 7:01 p.m.

Wes suggested Select Board members vote on a signup fee. Sara said while she is against the idea because not everyone can afford it, she hopes Axiom will work with residents to make installments for the \$60 fee. Mark said that is possible; he also noted the town's applications, along with a check, were sent to CCI and CMP that day. Mitch said even if 300 locations do not sign up, fees collected from those who do will help offset next year's insurance costs. Mary said she hopes higher demand for the insurance will result in lower cost in the future. Sara said 70 percent of homes/businesses in town comes to 413 houses. Mark said sharing connections on the same tax lot will be allowed. Wes made a motion to set the signup fee at \$60, Tom and Mitch both seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Tom asked Mark about a meeting scheduled with Tilson on Friday. Mark said it is part of the state funding process.

There is a section of infrastructure that will service both Washington and Somerville. Tom asked who will end up paying for it, and Mark said whichever town gets there first. Mark noted Somerville is ahead of Washington in the process so far. He also clarified that the annual pole lease fees will be paid to the town by Axiom, then the town will pay CCI and CMP because the system will be municipally owned.

Assessor's Agent Rebecca Adams presented three each abatements and supplemental property tax bills. The maps and lots affected include 04-44, 04-44-1, 02-64 and 02-64B. Wes made a motion to accept three abatements and three supplemental bills, Tom seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Approve Summary of Sept. 14, 2022: Motion to approve summary by Tom Johnston, Mitch Garnett seconded; all in favor, motion carries.

Sign Treasurer's Warrants dated Sept. 22, 2022:

P/R Warrant #79: \$5,060.04

A/P Warrants #80: \$8,518.38

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

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

9/12: Worked on chipper (wouldn't run) and started to chip brush
9/13: Chipped brush around salt shed; moved P200 sander inside to work on it
9/14: Moved winter sand and stone
9/15: Worked on P500 and P300 backup lights

CEO Report: None

Health Officer Report: None

Town Clerk/Treasurer's Report: None.

Other Agenda Items: Select Board members approved the on-premise licensing for Blueberry Fields Bed & Breakfast after noting there have been no issues with the establishment. Wes made the motion, Tom seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Wes said there is a Knox County budget meeting via Zoom set for Sept. 27 if anyone wishes to attend.

Select Board members approved the appointment of Sara Bullard to the Roads Committee and accepted, with regret, Joan Tognacci's resignation from the Cemetery Committee. Wes made motions for both, Mitch seconded both; all in favor, motions pass.

Wes made a motion to accept the GA maximums, Tom seconded; all in favor, motion passes.

Other business: None.

Questions/comments: None.

Mitch made a motion to adjourn, Tom seconded; all in favor, motion passes. Meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Stephanie Grinnell