

Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 5:30 pm

This meeting was conducted via teleconference using ZOOM and in person in Tracy Hall, in order to comply with Open Meeting Law requirements while providing remote access for attendees. Members present: Roger Arnold, Chair; Mary Layton, Vice Chair; Claudette Brochu; Marcia Calloway; Robert Gere; Rod Francis, Interim Town Manager; Miranda Harris Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

Also participating: Bonnie Munday, Fielding Essensa, Linda Cook, Cheryl Lindberg, Craig Layne, Pam Smith, Brie Swenson, Ellen Hobson, Stephanie Hamilton.

1. Approval of Agenda. Layton **moved** (2nd Calloway) to approve the agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**
2. Public Comment. No public comment was offered.
3. Update on Town Manager Search. Arnold said the SB voted to advance candidate 31 to the reference-checking stage.
4. FY23 Operating Budget: Town Clerk's Office. Bonnie Munday, Town Clerk, said her BCA budget has increased for the next year. Other budget lines under her department are pretty consistent with last year. Munday said there is a lot of uncertainty around expenses for elections, so she is having to estimate, and anticipates additional costs. Munday spoke about some of the individual lines in her proposed budget. Aside from elections expenses, the rest of Munday's budget does not have any significant changes from last year. SB members had questions for Munday about restoring land records and digitizing them, including the plan for the work.
5. FY23 Operating Budget: Administration (including Energy Committee). Francis spoke about the administration budget. /Francis said this next FY budget is largely the same as last year. Changes include: server maintenance line has increased because of our contract with CCI. We are looking to add a new line item to show the town's contribution toward the Regional Energy Coordinator (REC). Another suggested change is the proposal to add funding for town website overhaul and maintenance. Francis would like SB input on whether to make an allocation for that website work. Fielding Essensa, Finance Director, responded to SB questions about the almost doubling increase in Professional Services expense line. Essensa said this current FY's increase is mostly due to legal expenses. Over the last 2 – 3 years, we have seen increases in that budget line. SB members discussed ways to change budget lines' labels to better identify what we are paying for. One option is to break up "Professional Services" into additional categories, such as "legal services" and "studies" or "engineering". Francis said he and Essensa will come up with ideas about more specific budget lines and present those to the SB in the future. Essensa said he proposes to include the REC in the Town Administration budget. Brochu asked if we think we're getting our money's worth from the REC. Francis said there is no department that has direct-line work with the Energy Committee, so there is no obvious town department to put the REC under for budgeting. Francis said that Geoff Martin, the current REC, has been doing sustained work, including work on the town's EV charging stations and coordinating with area towns. Arnold said he thinks we can utilize the REC for more things. Brochu said she thinks the REC should be in the operating budget under Contracted Services. Calloway asked why the Energy Committee has its own budget line item. Layton said different committees have different needs, so it doesn't make sense to treat them all the same, such as allocating a set amount to every committee. Essensa said the SB Committee line was established in anticipation of possible spending needs of future committee established by the SB.

6. FY23 Operating Budget: Finance. Essensa talked about changes to his department's budget as compared to last year. One increase is to acquire software and capability to digitize the Finance Office's functions as much as possible. Arnold asked about staffing in the office. Francis said we hope to transition from a temp agency position to a full-time direct employee. Essensa said we do have in the budget allowance for hiring a befitted full-time employee and he believes we have budgeted enough to hire a properly qualified Finance Assistant. Calloway asked if NEMRC is an adequate system to suit our needs Essensa said it does do what we need tit to do, but it is based on an antiquated programming language. Essensa said the town should assume we will need to possibly transition to a different system within the next 3-5 years. Gere said it might be helpful to find out what towns in neighboring states are doing for finance software.

7. FY23 Operating Budget: Conservation Commission and Trails Subcommittee. Francis said there is a significant increase included in the draft Conservation Commission budget due in part of increased utilization of our outdoor resources, which led to higher maintenance expenses. Also, Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) has arrived locally. Craig Layne said this proposed budget is in line with prior years; last year's budget was cut nearly in half. Layne walked through an explanation of their proposed budget and their plans to spend the funds. SB members discussed the Gile Mtn parking area and possibilities for expanding it to allow for more vehicles. Brochu asked about the preference of the neighbors regarding the expanded parking. SB members agreed it is premature now to consider adding budget money for Gile Mtn. parking construction. Arnold said he would support allocating budget money to fund a study to figure out the best course of action. Brochu agreed and said we should get plenty of public input as part of any study. Francis said he will research the likely costs of a study and will bring that information back to the SB as part of the Planning Department budget. SB members agreed to discuss EAB as part of the designated funds discussion at next SB meeting.

8. FY23 Budget Operating & Capital: Lister's Office. Cheryl Lindberg said the Listers have continued to be frugal. They want to set their assistant position at 20 hours per week, which will result in an increase in that expense line. Lindberg said she's been trying to track the amount of money that's been going into their reappraisal designated fund. Lindberg said she learned today that less money has been going into the designated fund than should be and that was approved by the SB. Lindberg said if the town's CLA drops sufficiently in the next year, it may trigger the need for a town-wide reappraisal. Francis said he asked the town's contracted assessor about what would trigger the need for a reappraisal. Francis has learned that the State would notify the town if the CLA drops below a certain level and the town would have 5 years to do a reappraisal. Francis has heard from our assessor and our state district representative for these matters that COVID has affected property values throughout the state and those effects are not fully known yet. Our assessor said it is very taxing to do a reappraisal and doing a reappraisal now during the COVID-skewed market would likely prove unusually difficult. Lindberg said the listers are comfortable recommending that the town hire the firm that submitted a bid for reappraisal, but it's ultimately the SB's decision. Brochu asked if the current COVID-influenced prices are likely to calm down, resulting in a recovery/increase in the CLA. Lindberg said we don't know. Francis said it is possible that could happen; the possibility of fluctuation is an argument in favor of waiting longer to do a reappraisal. Arnold said he would like to wait and not do a reappraisal this year. Brochu agreed, as long as we don't have a court-ordered obligation to do a reappraisal every 3 years. Also she thinks we should continue to fund a minimal amount into the reappraisal fund. Essensa said the current minimal funding amount by statute is \$13,337.50. Essensa said the listers have requested \$50,000.00. Calloway said she 's in favor of allocating the \$50,000. SB members agreed to allocate \$50,000 to the reappraisal fund.

9. FY23 Budget Operating & Capital: Recreation. Brie Swenson, Recreation Director, said the Rec. Dept. has been able to keep programs as much as possible with modifications under COVID.

Swenson said she just completed a complete inventory of equipment and supplies. She is proposing a slight decrease in next FY's budget ask compared to the current FY. Swenson discussed various highlights from the recreation budget, including annual events. SB members discussed the tennis courts allocation. Swenson said we have gotten estimates on cost to replace the tennis courts, which will be at least \$275,000. The proposed FY23 allocation will help us build up the needed amount. We should keep our funding level strong so that we'll have enough money to replace the courts soon. Essensa said we're currently planning toward replacing the tennis courts in 3 years. Brochu asked if it's possible to have non-residents help pay for the courts. Swenson said we could do a fundraising campaign to contribute to the funding. Ellen Hobson said she thinks the Rec. Dept.'s offerings have been a real lifesaver. Stephanie Hamilton said she fully supports the Rec. Dept.

10. FY23 Budget Operating & Capital: Planning & Zoning. Francis said there is very little change from the current year, except he is proposing a part-time Zoning Administrator. This position would provide support for the functions of the office, allowing the Planning Director to provide more direct support to the Planning Commission and the DRB. SB members agreed with the proposed Planning budget.

11. Future Budget Agenda Items. SB members agreed to collaborate via email about setting the next meeting's agenda. Brochu said she'd like to know the balance of the undesignated fund and the balances of the designated funds.

12. Adjourn. Brochu **moved** (2nd Calloway) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:28 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on January 5, 2022

Roger Arnold, Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – December 22, 2021 – Meeting at 6:30

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