

Minutes
SELECT BOARD
Monday, April 6, 2020, 6:00 p.m.
Town Hall, 5 Academy Hill Road
To call in: 413-369-1541; PIN 1541

Select Board present: Phil Kantor; Bob Armstrong; John O'Rourke, Chair (all remotely)

Others present: (All remotely) Peggy Sloan, FRCOG; Ken Lederman, Property Owner; Chris Collins (remotely taping audio for FCAT); Janet Chayes, OSC; Priscilla Lynch, Resident; Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Lisa Turowsky, Assistant to the Town Administrator

Minutes

March 30, 2020

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to approve the minutes of March 30, 2020, seconded by Kantor, O'Rourke voted aye, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Meetings Attended by Select Board Members

Kantor attended several school meetings trying to deal with the pandemic. Armstrong attended a Frontier budget meeting with Darius Modestow looking at a capital project; also, an MMA meeting and a meeting with the four Union 38 towns. O'Rourke had an MMA personnel committee zoom conference covering the issue of how other towns are handling personnel situations.

Public Comments

Janet Chayes wanted to know what's happening with scheduling of Town Meeting. Hutcheson said he was hoping for a full discussion and vote next week.

Old Business

Vote to accept Forest Stewardship proposal

Select Board members received copies of three different quotes that were received for the Forest Stewardship project which allocates available funding for the two town forests. Hutcheson said all appeared to be responsive to the request for quotes. Sloan from FRCOG checked their references, which were all strong and positive. Longview was the low bidder and had good references. Chayes said that this is a very tight timeline, so she's concerned about there being enough time for public input and discernment of public priorities. In general she advocated for there to be equal participation early on, and felt it was important that other people participate along with the Select Board. O'Rourke said once the Select Board accepted a proposal there would be two public meetings as called for in the grant. Hutcheson said it's easy enough to invite people to Select Board meetings. Priscilla Lynch shared Chayes's concerns about it being a tight timeline. Given the COVID situation it may not be appropriate to move ahead. Sloan has requested an extension from the state but has not received a response yet. Sloan asked if the bidders would be open to alternative techniques for holding meetings given the COVID situation.

Kantor asked about public outreach and wondered if the bidders would be obligated to do what the town tells them to do. Armstrong said the forester he talked to today, who is part of the low-bid group, was very committed to the outcomes that people in town are concerned with. He didn't see the foresters as having their own agendas; they will write the forest plan that the town asks them to write. Kantor asked whether just a couple of meetings would be sufficient to ascertain the town's desires with regard to the town forests. He thought the process didn't provide a chance for meaningful input on the town's part. Hutcheson outlined the grant approval process and said it allows for continued shaping and refining of the community's approach to the stewardship plan. Chayes opined that it's up to the community to elicit participation. Lynch asked if the town is obligated to accept a stewardship plan once a bidder wins the project and completes a forest plan. Sloan said it's up to the town to decide if they agree with the plan that's been developed. Lynch also asked if town would get an assessment of how much carbon will be stored if no cutting is done. Is there a way to determine how much carbon will be lost by what's recommended by their plan? Sloan said this RFQ wasn't designed to focus on carbon storage, that might be done by another plan which

could also include private landowners. A forest stewardship plan will address carbon storage if that's a concern of the town. Chayes said Longview said they would look at carbon storage in their inventory. Lynch wanted to ask FRCOG to write a grant to fully study proforestation and carbon trust for Conway's state and town forests combined. Sloan talked about another round of grants which might lend themselves to these issues.

Armstrong wondered if Rowe would have to choose the same vendor as Conway, as we wrote this grant with Rowe. Sloan hasn't heard back from Rowe. Today was the day that we were supposed to award the contract. It would be desirable to make a decision ASAP. Sloan will let Rowe know if Conway decides to go ahead. Chayes was satisfied with the Longview proposal as long as other members of the public can participate. Sloan said bidders have expressed some flexibility as they're looking for public input.

- **On a motion from O'Rourke to accept the Longview proposal (\$32,500 for Conway and Rowe) to develop a stewardship plan, seconded by Armstrong, O'Rourke voted aye, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Consider new Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership grant proposal

Sloan was here to listen to what Chayes had to offer. Chayes said Sloan was helpful; she thought initial ideas were too diverse and it would be better to focus on trail enhancements. They agreed with DCR forester Alison Wright, who would do some mapping to see where gaps in the trail are and will look at what would need to be done to continue the trail portion and get some ideas about enhancing some recreational tourism. DCR has maps of all the trails. Wright and Chayes will write a draft proposal together. The potential grant would be \$20,000. The deadline for submitting the proposal is May 13th or thereabouts. Chayes will try to arrange a public conference call about this proposal. O'Rourke, Armstrong, and Kantor were in favor in principle of the MTWP grant proposal but will revisit the proposal after Chayes and Sloan put something together. Could town request that FRCOG write a grant to do a study of proforestation and carbon trust? Sloan said they could do it, but it would have to be done in this round. Chayes asked if \$20,000 was enough to do a full carbon study? Sloan doesn't know if the current budget is sufficient. Are there other grants to do this type of work? Sloan doesn't know if there are other grants that could be used for this purpose. She advised the group to identify which project is the priority, the trail project or the carbon study. Chayes has consulted with Alison about carbon market program for municipalities, and that the state DCR is planning to have a program specific to that next year; she was working with Mass Audubon on this. Kantor talked about something like this in Hampden County. Kantor would like to know more about the options before making decision. There's a project in Williamsburg that he would like information about. Sloan will get information and send it to Hutcheson. Sloan said there was a good likelihood of getting funded through this proposal. This discussion will be continued on next week's agenda.

Town messaging (tone, form, frequency, content, etc.) and actions (planning, etc.) regarding pandemic

Hutcheson and Armstrong worked on this item from last week. The goal was to come up with a communications plan that will satisfy the town's responsibility to get information out to residents. The memo from Hutcheson is only the first draft. It strongly encourages residents to maintain best practices to slow the spread of COVID-19. Hutcheson stressed the importance of assuring that forms of communication exist for staff, boards and committees. It was important for residents to know that our emergency responders are prepared and when they should call for help. Town-wide mailing might be considered. Alternate means of communication are being used for meetings etc. Conference call lines will be maintained and video conferencing such as Zoom will be looked into as well.

Hutcheson noted that the town just received a supply of 100 N95 masks, and 100 Level 1 (surgical) masks from MEMA. Kantor read there was a first-responder quarantine option for our three-county area offered by the Hampden County Sheriff. Hutcheson said he had notified department heads that they should be tracking all of the costs for responding to the pandemic. Conway will need a plan for rescheduling Town Meeting and for the FY21 budget. Secretary Heffernan is scheduled to make an announcement tomorrow for revenue numbers. Hutcheson wants to stimulate some thought about more and better ways to get things done, primarily communicating with residents.

O'Rourke said we can't say anything until we hear from Heffernan. We've got the website for sharing information; emergency management is monitoring especially vulnerable residents. We're also approaching having a publishable Town Report which would let residents know that Town Meeting is postponed, so that they know the town has a

plan. Kantor wants to know what's planned for Town Meeting. We need to know what's going to happen with our budget before we can decide on a date for Town Meeting. Kantor stressed that three towns in Frontier have set their dates. Kantor's concern is that we need to coordinate with other three towns so we don't have Town Meetings on the same night. Hutcheson said he had planned for a discussion on this at next week's Select Board meeting and is hoping it results in a decision. Armstrong wants to go to a video platform such as Zoom because he doesn't think using phones is working. Next week's meeting will be videoconference.

New Business

None.

Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting

Decision on term for borrowing for Highway Maintenance Building

Hutcheson tried to contact Joe Markarian to review the plan that Treasurer Janice Warner developed, as requested by Kantor, but learned that he has retired from any type of consulting from Sloan. Warner proposed securing a loan through 15-year notes. The cost of the loan is estimated at 3½% interest but that is expected to decline even further in the near future. The taxpayer impact in the first 10 years stays around \$25-\$30/year. Warner consulted with the Finance Committee about the term for this borrowing. Kantor asked if long-term financial instrument has been compared with shorter-term revolving notes. Warner said that this is the route that the town's financial advisor has recommended. Armstrong asked if interest rate will be lower than the 3½% thus making the loan less expensive Each year at Town Meeting it would be necessary to make a free cash plan; alternately we would have to raise and appropriate. At what point does a shorter-term note make sense, asked Kantor; events are in flux. If we don't use all the money from the loan it sits in a special fund, and can only be used for the purpose it was appropriated for. The accountant recommended spending from the loan first, then stabilization. Kantor wanted to check in with Ouimette and Goodridge to see if they're comfortable with reducing the amount of the loan. The decision can wait another week or two. Warner was worried about cash flow which isn't going to be there without the loan. Armstrong feels there's a serious risk that the tech school won't be able to do the plumbing and electrical work they were looking at. O'Rourke said it made sense to wait until next week. Whatever information we have at that point, the vote will be taken.

Address items in recent legislation: (1) extend the property tax due date to no later than June 1, (2) extend the date for exemption applications to no later than June 1 and (3) waive the payment of interest and other penalty in the event of late payment of any excise, tax, or other charge added to a tax for bills with due dates on or after March 10th and paid by June 30th

Hutcheson reported there's ongoing discussion in the Treasurer community about these things; lots of logistics are still being discussed. Warner got a bulletin just about these measures today. Sec. 10 allows the Town to extend the tax due date from May to June; to extend exemption applications doesn't apply to us; and Sec. 11 allows waiver of fees and interest; she is not clear that is desirable. She will have to send a notice to every taxpayer, and there will be some cost associated with that. She suggested holding off until DLS figures it out. She recommended meeting again mid-week. Another Select Board meeting will be scheduled for Thursday, April 9th at 6 p.m., via Zoom, if possible. Also on the agenda will be the highway maintenance building loan.

Town Administrator update

Committees

The Planning Board is nearing a final order of conditions for Vertex Tower to build a cell tower off South Deerfield Road between the Deerfield line and Mathews Road. The final draft is being reviewed by Town Counsel.

Departments

The due date for invoices for all departments, boards, and committees has been changed to Fridays at noon.

I plan to put on next week's agenda a discussion of postponing Town Meeting. As you'll recall, today would normally be the day the Select Board would sign the warrant. I'm considering sending out the Town Report early, as soon as we know we're postponing Town Meeting, along with a note explaining that. Nick Filler says that he'll declare a postponement of Town Meeting at the Select Board's request. With the current legislation, he can postpone Town Meeting 30 days at a time.

FCRHRA has asked whether we would like to add some pandemic-related rental assistance to CPA funding. They are offering to process applications, establish qualifying factors and verify income eligibility, and otherwise administer the program, including paying landlords. There would be an administrative cost; they're calculating that now. There are about 15% of Conway residents (115) rental housing units in Conway (2018), out of 777 occupied units. I'll be getting a more formal proposal and forwarding that to the CPC.

I have been trying to get a government account from Zoom, after requests from both the planning Board and the Select Board chair, but they have so far not responded to either a web form (with an e-mail confirmation) or a phone call. I gather they're quite busy. The Planning Board is particularly interested in having something web-based for their April 16 hearing on the citizens' petition to repeal the marijuana by-law, though a revised petition has not been submitted (and the Planning Board has an e-mail out to the petitioners to ask whether they plan to move forward). In any case, I may simply set up one or two regular Zoom accounts for Town use (probably premium, to allow for more host control during calls).

There are various COVID-19 conference calls happening regularly. One is regional, between the Frontier towns, and includes Boards of Health, public safety staff, and town administrators; one is state-wide, with MMA hosting MEMA and DPH reports; one is a brief check-in for Conway. So far, communication is fairly good.

Concerns of Selectmen

None.

Mail

Letter supportive of Lynch's position on forest stewardship issue

Announcements

None.

Next meeting: Scheduled for Thursday, April 9, 2020.