*Minutes*

**SELECT BOARD**

Tuesday, April 21, 2020, 6:00 p.m.

**Zoom meeting**

Go to **zoom.us** and click “Join Meeting”. Enter **Meeting ID: 592 560 789# Enter Password: 015609#**

One tap mobile: **+**9292056099, 592560789#, 015609# US (New York)

**To call in via telephone:** Dial 1-929-205-6099 US (New York)

**Meeting ID: 592560789#**

**Password: 015609#**

*Select Board present:* Phil Kantor; Bob Armstrong; John O’Rourke, Chair

*Others present*: Janet Chayes, Open Space Committee; Priscilla Lynch, Resident; Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Lisa Turowsky, Assistant to the Town Administrator

*Minutes April 13, 2020*

* **On a motion from O’Rourke to approve the minutes of April 13, 2020, seconded by Kantor, Armstrong voted aye, Kantor voted aye, O’Rourke voted aye, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

*Meetings Attended by Select Board Members*

Kantor listened on a call with DESE concerning ethics. The towns won’t have state budget numbers until after June 30. He said that a rescheduled town meeting may have to be held outside if social distancing guidelines are still in place. Kantor noted that Conway Grammar School’s budget meeting was held by Zoom. Students are learning and participating in school activities every day, but the state is “doing poorly” with getting budget numbers together. O’Rourke noted that he is “distressed” that our state is being tied together with New York and New Jersey in regionalizing response to the pandemic. Armstrong went to a ConCom Zoom meeting concerning power line in an area near Ashfield where there are numerous wetlands. He also went to a hearing about marijuana establishment that are the subject of attempts to change the bylaws regulating such businesses in Conway. Armstrong also participated in a Cable Advisory Committee meeting dealing with ascertainment process for Comcast. O’Rourke went to the MMIA Board meeting and Selectmen’s Association Board meeting where they discussed programming for later in the year. O’Rourke also attended an EMT personnel meeting where it was noted that PPE is adequate, and Conway is in good shape.

*Public Comments None.*

*Old Business*

*Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership: further discussion*

This was a discussion, carried over from last week, about a grant application that must be submitted imminently. Priscilla Lynch reminded the Select Board that Peggy Sloan of FRCOG was supposed to send them a copy of the Williamsburg scope of work related to carbon sequestration. Janet Chayes spoke with Alison Wright, a local forester with DCR, about possible improvements to a section of the Mohegan Mohawk Trail that is located in Conway. Due to collapsing culverts the Conway section of the trail is not fixable. Chayes discovered that such improvements would be enormously expensive for Conway to participate in. There is not enough time to pull this grant application together, said Chayes. Wright will continue to be a good resource for the town for other applications.

Another possibility for a Partnership grant could involve carbon sequestration. Mary Wigmore, a forestry consultant, is familiar with such efforts on the part of municipalities and Hutcheson will reach out to her to be on the next Select Board call on April 27th. Kantor asked that discussion of this potential grant application be on the next Select Board agenda. He would like to put together a group of interested parties from Conway to work on this grant. Carbon sequestration grants are very complicated. It is hoped that Wigmore would be helpful in this process, as well as study of the Williamsburg scope of work.

*Policy for deciding Town is ready for Town Meeting*

*Financial issues: Revised FY 2021 budget: timing, dealing with potential shortfall, etc.*

Revised State budgets will take months to pass. One of the things Conway can do is try to minimize our expenses, holding off on anything that could wait until the next fiscal year. We are doing well fiscally so maybe we should looking at spending for things we’re going to need in the future (office supplies, e.g.) Hutcheson suggested that we could go with a budget with some kind of a cut; on the off chance the State decides to prioritize local aid, we could store the amount that was cut in the reserve fund that is still appropriated but not dole it out until finding out what is going to happen with local aid. We’d have this money in case the budget could be brought back to where it would normally be. The benefits of this approach: it would stabilize property taxes, relatively level from last year to this year then to next year. This approach would give the town flexibility and would authorize spending but “sock it away” so that the operational budget wouldn’t be spending at that level until/unless legislature said it would hold the town harmless. Kantor asked if this would include the school budgets; Hutcheson says it would be accessible. Kantor said he doesn’t think the town can legally do this. O’Rourke said chapter 70 is going to be kept in place. Hutcheson proposed that the current funding request of Frontier schools can be adopted, as well as the operating budget as it exists now, but we’d have to cut some percentage from the operating budget to be brought back in once we know the state is coming through. That gives us a cushion, eliminating the need to go back to special town meeting. Armstrong said he thought the idea was we would lower residents’ taxes this year. Hutcheson said he wasn’t sure the town is going to run into a tax deficit. There may be a delay but not a revenue issue. Kantor pointed out to Hutcheson that it’s the school committee that would make cuts to school budget. Kantor noted that cuts to school programs and services can’t be made with surgical precision. Hutcheson said he was not all that worried and that, if we thought there was going to be a problem, the things he described above would be some of the ways we would address it. Hopefully, chapter 70 stays in place.

Hutcheson wanted to authorize more spending just in case the cuts are bad. It would be good to have the Town Meeting by the end of the fiscal year. Some capital expenditures might have to be thrown overboard, said O’Rourke. Kantor said the safety and health of Conway residents must be primary. We will follow state guidelines, said O’Rourke, but we don’t know what the guidelines are yet.

Hutcheson sent out an Excel sheet with a number of different scenarios for the budget to give an idea of what kind of numbers we’re talking about; dealing with the operational budget and holding schools harmless, with no school cuts proposed. “Cut and store” strategy is what O’Rourke called it.

*Public health issues: State advisories and mandates, any other factors*

All agreed that it is not known what we’ll be dealing with a month from now. We know that in general things have improved in Massachusetts but there was an uptick in numbers yesterday, according to Hutcheson. We’re still going to be in the thick of the pandemic in May. Berkshire, Franklin, and Hampshire are doing much better than Sussex and some other counties in the East. There is no place that’s safe, said Armstrong. The May 25th meeting would be the absolutely drop-dead date for sending out the warrants. O’Rourke said we’ll know well before May 25th when we will be able to have Town Meeting. We might have to do it outdoors sometime before 7:30 (or sunset) at night, preferably on a weekend. Armstrong asked if we have any sense of how many people are at home and how many are going out to work; Hutcheson said he didn’t know.

*Review draft notice for notifying Town regarding Town Meeting postponement*

Hutcheson sent out a proposed statement notifying people of the schedule for Town Meeting. Kantor likes the language that’s on website, suggesting that language saying we’re going to follow the state guidelines be added. Kantor said we need to make people feel better. Hutcheson said he didn’t see any harm in letting people know that we’re not aiming to push this through by taking risks with people’s health. He will add the sentence Kantor suggested. It must be clear that the state has not formalized things; the state’s indecision is creating the uncertainty that Conway is experiencing.

*New Business None.*

*Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting None.*

*Town Administrator update*

**Committees**

The second newsletter is on track and should be coming out on time. It’s still taking shape, but stabilizing.

**Departments**

I’ve gotten a renewal summary from MIIA that I’ll put on the agenda for the next meeting. It came in just under the budget I had proposed but does not yet include the sub-contracted Police and Fire insurance we have for Chapter 111 obligations (injured on duty) which comes through a company called Chubb.

We’ll need to meet with the consultants for the Forest Stewardship plan for your initial input into the timeline and process, and to answer any questions you may have, especially about public input, which will be different during this time of physical distancing. I’ve begun, with Lisa, to set up a page on the Town website for related materials, so people can have access to a variety of materials and links to surveys and further resources.

The four Frontier District Town Administrators had a conference call with the Frontier Superintendent to check in on the budgetary process. A joint Select Board meeting for the four towns to discuss the FY budget might be useful, as a couple of Select Bords have already gotten involved, with different proposals. Of course, the Frontier School Committee is presumably addressing this as well, and it might be good for the combined Select Boards to hear from that body so that everyone can get closer to being on the same page. A coordinated strategy would certainly help get us to an FY 2021 budget.

The response date for the next round of MTWP town implementation grants has moved to June 18, 2020.

*Concerns of the Selectmen*

Keep supporting local business!

*Announcements None.*

*Mail None.*

*Next Meeting: Scheduled for Monday, April 27, 2020, via* ***Zoom***