

Minutes
SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, October 13, 2020, 6:00 p.m.
Town Hall, 5 Academy Hill Road
Also via conference line: 413-369-1541, PIN 1541

Present: Bob Armstrong, Erica Goleman, Phil Kantor, Louise Beckett, Tom Hutcheson

Bob Armstrong called the meeting to order at 6:01, live at the town hall with a conference line for outside callers.

Minutes

Armstrong moved to accept the minutes of September 28, 2020. Erica Goleman seconded and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Warrants

Armstrong moved to approve the vendor warrant of \$43,725.22; the payroll warrant of \$110,968.64; and the payroll deduction warrant of \$27,778.53. Goleman seconded and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Meetings Attended by Select Board Members

Phil Kantor attended a school board meeting and said that there seems to be more understanding with the union now that negotiations have restarted. A contract with Grybko has been concluded. Frontier agreed to it and Conway Grammar is voting on it next Tuesday. Rates are for both online and virtual school closures. Armstrong asked whether the school buses are currently running. Kantor replied they are but they are serving Conway with two instead of the usual three buses and have redone the routes.

Public Comments

None.

Old Business

Creating a Forests and Trails Committee

Hutcheson said he was hoping to have a forest and trails committee formed sooner rather than later, but there seems to be no compelling interest for either timetable. We have done our due diligence in inviting them to the discussion. It is important to have a focused charge for all committees involved so people know what is expected of them - why the committee is being formed: in particular, oversight of the forest stewardship plan, including going for grants. Another important charge would be to oversee maintenance of town trails, some of which go through town forests. There is a map that could use an update and more sophistication using computer mapping. A unified effort is important: to get committees to work together.

Armstrong asked if we could put an item on the town website as a proposal and ask for volunteers and interest. Hutcheson agreed that if we had the names of people who are interested, the Select Board could choose from them, and a committee whose objectives match those of the select board could be formed. Armstrong said this could form a productive committee. Kantor asked if the item should be tabled until after the holidays? We need to fulfill the obligations of the feasibility study grant. Armstrong noted that "best practices" is something we want the committee to do.

Kantor said two people have called and asked that the select board write a letter regarding logging in the state forests. Hutcheson recommended that they have someone get some points together that can be turned into a letter with specific objections rather than the idea of scrapping the plan. Kantor said that writing a proposed law and sending it to the State might be a good way to get people in Boston interested. Hutcheson recommended that an even more productive way could be to write it and give it to (Massachusetts State Senator) Adam Hinds directly for review by legislative counsel.

New Business

Sign warrant for 2020 State election

Hutcheson said that the warrant needs to be signed, then posted, and then the election is legal.

Armstrong moved to sign the warrant; Goleman seconded and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Appoint Jeffrey Clairemont as on-call Transfer Station Attendant

Armstrong asked if Jeffrey Clairemont is to be appointed as an on-call transfer station attendant?

Hutcheson said it was at the request of Board of Health. We need an appointment form, but if the select board votes to appoint, the form can be signed later. Goleman noted that the minimum wage is not being paid to four other attendants and asked if there was any action being considered in this regard.

Hutcheson replied that towns are exempt from minimum wage laws but noted that this remark in the Board's letter is a reminder that the minimum wage is going up in January of 2021. **Armstrong moved to appoint Jeffrey Clairemont as an on-call transfer station attendant; Goleman seconded and the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Discussion: Hallowe'en activities

Hutcheson said people are wondering what's going to happen for Hallowe'en, and the Select Board should probably take its cue from the Board of Health—they need to plan for whatever may happen. Kantor and Goleman said the Rag Shag parade and costume judging have been cancelled. Other towns are publishing ways to have candy distribution without coming in contact with the children. Goleman reminded the board that the Rag Shag parade and costume judging have been put on by the Firemen's Auxiliary for many years, but the members are not comfortable with continuing this year due to Covid-19. Hutcheson recommended that the cancellations be posted on the website. Goleman said she would be willing to forward language. Hutcheson said he would ask the Board of Health for guidelines.

Discussion: Wind event of October 7-8

Hutcheson said he had heard a report of 'moderate winds' at 3 a.m. Wednesday morning. However, the next report said that the wind damage was much worse than expected. Kantor said that Eversource did what they could, but it was 24 hours before there were any crews onsite, which is not acceptable. He also heard on MassLive that Conway was one of the worst towns hit in the state. Verizon was just not timely and Comcast was not reliable and not responsive. When a new contract is negotiated, there should be a longer backup time – 6 hours is not enough. Hutcheson is setting up a meeting with Verizon to discuss the problems the outage presented. Kantor noted that the loss of 911 service is serious and the Town pays for this not to happen. Hutcheson will address these issues at a Zoom meeting with Verizon. He also said that the Comcast contractor did help out at the end. Kantor added that the level of consternation from Conway's first responders was notable.

Hutcheson asked that the board rescind the state of emergency that followed the recent windstorm.

Armstrong moved to declare the state of emergency over. Goleman seconded, and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting

Formal agreement with FCAT; rate of contribution

Armstrong said that FCAT has just increased their rates. Deerfield has a formal contract with FCAT; we should do so as well. (Town Treasurer) Jan has a quarterly bill for \$3,500. Ten years ago, when Conway signed up for services the rate was \$2,500 and it never increased. Meanwhile, Comcast began sending the Town a check. As more people signed up with Comcast, the percent we were getting went up, but FCAT never increased their billing so we were paying \$2,500 to FCAT and we were getting \$6,000 from Comcast. We now have \$56,000 of unspent FCAT money that we can use for public access TV and to upgrade the school's overflow room which could be used for town meetings for social distancing. Armstrong asked if some of this money could be put into hiring people and salaries? Regarding web work, Kantor asked that access to meetings be easier on the web site; Hutcheson will work on that. **Armstrong moved to ask the Treasurer to pay the FCAT bill. Goleman seconded, and the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Town Administrator update

Departments

I'd like to commend everyone who worked on getting the Town through the wind event of last Wednesday and Thursday. The Highway and Fire crews worked especially hard to make sure the roads were clear and Chris Herrmann in particular led the early organizational efforts and also the groundwork to ensure our most vulnerable residents were safe. I'd also like to commend Jan Warner for putting in a tremendous amount of work under very challenging conditions to get the tax bills out. There were software and address glitches, as well as the wind event, which knocked out power for a half day and our internet capacity for almost a full day. She performed very professionally under the circumstances and deserves thanks.

The financial team successfully completed its pro forma FY 2020 tax recap, necessary for sending preliminary tax bills, after a last-minute flurry of activity and amendment. Tax bills went out with only a minimal delay, and as always have a 30-day payment window.

The Town Clerk got a \$5,000 grant for election-related costs. She plans to use it mainly for an electronic tabulator, which will be especially useful if ranked-choice voting is established.

I'd like to commend our Assistant Treasurer/Collector, Lynn Kane, for having obtained her certification as a Massachusetts Municipal Assistant Treasurer. This involved an examination and other requirements, and is a substantial accomplishment.

For FEMA reimbursements, after Conway seemed to have not met the minimum threshold for FEMA funding for COVID-19, which is \$3,300, the school weighed in late with substantially more in claims, and I scrambled to get the application in. It can be amended, which is good, as the school added more costs today.

State budget leaders heard from economists last week on the probable state of the FY 2021 state economy. Senate Ways and Means Chairman Sen. Michael Rodrigues maintains that his goal is to have a budget for the remainder of fiscal year 2021 on the governor's desk by Halloween. That would require unprecedented cooperation between the chambers as well as a highly centralized and opaque process. Economic experts have provided a range of possible revenues and other figures for the state for the current fiscal year: The Commissioner of Revenue's figures were a decline in FY21 of total state revenues of \$2.764B to \$5.233B from the projected revenue of \$31.151B (out of a roughly \$45B total budget). Income tax revenue by itself is forecast to go

down 8.3% to 13.7%—similar percentages to the revenue decline. (For context, Massachusetts gets about 38% of its revenue from income taxes; another 21% is from federal aid, and about 27% comes from other taxes). Conway is down to 87 people unemployed from a high of over 200 (from a baseline of 20+), which is a good trend; good news for FY21 property taxes. FY22 of course remains terra incognita.

Joe Strzegowski has found that a lot the town has been interested in for some time for flood mitigation is for sale. The lot is where the river turns just south of the bridge by the Conway Inn. He is gathering information about the property and potential funding sources.

Concerns of the Selectboard

None.

Mail

There was only the Board of Health letter requesting the transfer attendant appointment acted on earlier.

Announcements

Armstrong announced that early voting starts next week. Kantor remarked that he felt that it is safe to vote in person in Conway.

Next Meeting: Scheduled for Monday, October 26, 2020, at 6 p.m., Town Hall, 5 Academy Hill Road.

Armstrong moved to adjourn at 7:16 p.m. Goleman seconded and the vote was unanimous in favor.

The listing of agenda items includes matters reasonably anticipated by the Chair to come under discussion at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed and other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law.