

**Minutes**  
**SELECT BOARD**

Monday, November 23, 2020, 6:00 p.m.  
Via Zoom

*Present:* Selectboard: Bob Armstrong, Chair, Phil Kantor, Erica Goleman

*Others:* Charlie Olchowski, Chris Curtis, Patrick McCoy (Deerfield River Watershed Association); Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Louise Beckett, Assistant to the Town Administrator,

**As Chair of the Selectboard, Bob Armstrong called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.**

*Minutes*

*Approval of minutes from November 9, 2020*

**On a motion from Bob Armstrong to accept the minutes of October 26, 2020 as amended, seconded by Goleman, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

*Warrants*

Vendor warrant: \$111,470.68

Payroll warrant: \$107,030.41

Payroll deduction warrant: \$26,999.28

**On a motion from Bob Armstrong to sign the vendor warrant for \$111,470.68, the payroll warrant for \$107,030.41 and the payroll deduction warrant for \$26,999.28, seconded by Goleman, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

*Meetings Attended by Select Board Members*

Erica participated in radio host Monte Belmonte's 43-mile march to raise money for the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts with Congressman Jim McGovern. She will also participate tomorrow.

Phil attended a Conway Grammar School budget meeting and a number of school board meetings. He noted that in the budget meeting what jumped out was that the generator needs to be replaced at a cost of \$60,000. Conway is one of the few schools that has a capital stabilization fund containing about \$200,000. He sent George Murphy, the Fire Chief, and the school board notice that it should be replaced within a few years. If the monies have to come out of the school budget, we might need to layoff a teacher or other position. The school committee is asking if there is other funding to pay for the new generator.

At a Frontier School Committee meeting, the metrics for school closures was discussed. The feeling is that the school might need to go all remote after Thanksgiving, though there were no plans to do so at the time of the meeting.

Phil also attended a four-town Board of Health meeting (Emergency Dispensing Site, or EDS), They said it would be best to go all virtual the week after Thanksgiving.

Phil also had a meeting with the Williamstown folks, and there will be another meeting on November 30 with them regarding Conway's carbon credit market participation.

Bob attended a few Cable Advisory Committee meetings. Preliminary negotiations with Comcast have begun. He also attended a meeting with Phil of the Capital Improvement Committee with Frontier – the hot issue is the track which will cost more money than budgeted, which raises the question of where to find additional funds. Phil said what schools call "excess and deficiency" (the school's free cash) should go a long way to cover most of the cost. The school committee went along with the plan for the playground. Construction is to be done 2021.

Bob also noted that there has been a Conservation Commission inspection regarding the solar array in southern Conway. Construction is nearing completion, and there will be one more inspection after winter.

*Public Comments*      *None.*

### *Old Business*

The Board formally approved the Employee Handbook amendment from the last meeting regarding not pursuing employee paybacks if additional post-FMLA leave was authorized. If additional leave (beyond FMLA) is granted, the town will not try to get the money back. There were no further issues. **On a motion from Bob Armstrong to amend the Employee Handbook as requested, seconded by Kantor, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

### *Update on 69 Main St.*

Tom reported that Kitchell Lee signed the agreement and will have something for us in 3-5 weeks.

### *FY 2021 Town Budget update*

Tom said we are in better position than we anticipated, with a 94% tax payment rate, right where it normally is. FY21 finances are therefore looking unexpectedly healthy at this point. For FY22 it depends on whether we get state and local revenue relief from the federal government.

### *New Business*

Charlie Olchowski, Chris Curtis, and Patrick McCoy from The Deerfield River Watershed Association presented a synopsis of their proposal. The Deerfield River Watershed Association has been working to ensure that segments of the Deerfield River and its tributaries be designated as a National Wild and Scenic River. They have met with other municipalities to gain interest in the initiative. The Deerfield has great whitewater boating and trout fishing and is of historical significance with a trail running along its length. The designation could provide a number of benefits: protecting the river from new federally permitted dams among them. Chris plans to meet with towns in Vermont as well as Massachusetts. Back in the '70s a dam was proposed for the area running through Conway at Bardwell's Ferry and downstream. This designation would address such proposals and can be helpful in terms of grant money. He had met with Deerfield, Savoy, Ashfield, Buckland, Shelburne and Colrain today. How does it happen? First thing is to gain the support of select boards in the watershed communities. Next, go to congress members to get the designation, making funding for the study possible which should confirm that the river is eligible for funding. Then, a committee of local representatives to guide/oversee the work. Once the study is done, go back to congress with the idea of getting the designation. He reminded the Select Board that there is no cost to the community for this designation, and then asked for questions.

Bob said the group had provided an excellent factsheet. One problem he said he has observed at meetings on the topic is the way in which people get access to the river. There are issues with parking, trash, and rescues. This summer, lots of people were looking for access at Bardwell's Ferry. Would this project impact those issues? Chris said it would bring attention to them, and likely ideas for better management of access. Bob mentioned that it's a big issue now, particularly since Charlemont is thinking of shutting down their access, and those folks will be looking to Conway for it. Phil said that there can't be much done regarding parking enlargement because our roads are narrow and that can't change. What would be the impact on abutters? Private landowners? Would it raise their responsibility? Chris: The designation would have no impact on private property or landowners. In Westfield they wanted to have input into policy for better protection regarding zoning. It's up to the local community. Phil asked: What about corporate entities? - pre-existing dam owners? They are taxpayers, yet what about what they may be doing to pollute the environment including the river? Chris: having representatives from the communities gives them more of a voice. The designation gives weight behind your voices. Dams are not 'free-flowing' sections of the river so those sections would not be eligible for the designation. Phil mentioned a long-term goal of removal of the 'high' dam: it has a massive sediment load. The State has been accumulating a fund for dam removal for several years; the town couldn't do it on its own. Chris said that it has been done, he thought in Becket. Bob remarked that that's a great question, and said there appears to be no downside to signing the letter to support the project. **On a motion from Bob Armstrong to sign the letter of support for the project, seconded by Goleman, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

### **Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting**

Phil noted that he had meant to mention earlier that for Frontier and the four elementary schools, the State has given Conway the ability to participate in Phase I COVID rapid testing, covering those students who are asymptomatic. Erica expressed the need for the language for parental consent in any agreement pertaining to the

testing. She also asked who administers the testing; Phil responded that he believes the Conway school nurse would administer the testing.

An offer was made to the town of a 22-foot white spruce for an additional holiday decoration. Wendy Stayman just cut down a spruce tree and Tom spoke with the highway superintendent. There are several questions, including how to mount it, where it would go, and how to decorate it. Tom noted it is a very nice offer, though it would involve work. Bob felt it would be best to politely decline. Erica said it sounds complicated. Phil said the Fire Chief might object. No vote was necessary; Tom will reply to Wendy.

## **Town Administrator update**

### **Committees**

The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions has awarded a Certificate of Achievement to Grace Larson for completing eight units of its training program.

Hope Crolius got an unexpected opportunity to re-locate, and so will be leaving town, and the Agricultural Commission will need to elect a new chair.

I submitted a reserve fund transfer request to the Finance Committee for the customary Select Board stipends, which the chair received sympathetically.

Working with other committees, I have changed the current Zoom account the Select Board uses to a general account for the Town, which should save some money. So far, the committees using or wanting to use Zoom are the Planning Board, the Cable Advisory Committee, the Newsletter Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Board of Health. Of those, only the Board of Health has a scheduling conflict. The Town should probably add a second account. These may be reimbursed by CARES money only through the end of December. It is still quite unclear whether the HEROES Act or another federal relief package will be successful in the coming year.

### **Departments**

Work on the Highway maintenance building has been set back by two factors: the pandemic and the Technical School. The School lost its electrical instructor, who has not yet been replaced, and the pandemic has forced practical projects to be postponed. While this is a disappointment, it's not a major roadblock. The Committee anticipates going out to bid for electrical work after the floor has been poured; since there was no need to hurry for the electrical work, the Committee is now thinking, with colder weather coming, that it should wait till spring. Having trucks and equipment in the shed is enough of an improvement so that the Highway Superintendent is not overly upset with the delay.

FY 2021 revenue continues to look good, with local taxes coming in well to supplement the level-funded state aid. The Town has a 94% collection rate for the November real estate taxes, about a percentage point lower than normal, but still good. We billed about \$2.4M in FY 2021 real estate taxes (which were due on November 9) and approximately \$155,000 is still outstanding. This includes all USPS or hand delivered payments received as of Monday, November 16 and all electronic payments received through Tuesday, November 17, so some payments may still come in.

We just received today two letters from Ken Pleasant about either side of his property. I know the Highway Superintendent has a useful perspective on the items so I've asked him to look at the letters and provide some comments for your next meeting.

**Concerns of the Selectmen**      *None.*

*Mail*                                      *None.*

*Announcements*                      *None.*

**Next Meeting:** Scheduled for Monday, December 7, 2020, at 6 p.m., via Zoom

**Executive Session:** For Reason # 6, to consider the purchase of 69 Main St., if the chair declares that an open meeting may have an effect on the Town's negotiating position. **Tabled to December 7, 2020 Meeting**

**Executive Session:** For Reason #7, to act under the authority of any general or special law (to approve minutes of previous executive sessions). **Tabled to December 7, 2020 Meeting**

**On a motion from Bob Armstrong to adjourn, seconded by Goleman, the vote was unanimous in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.**