

Minutes
SELECT BOARD
Monday, December 7, 2020, 6:00 p.m.
Zoom Meeting

Present: Bob Armstrong, Erica Goleman, Phil Kantor for the Selectboard.

Others present: Ron Sweet; Highway Supervisor; Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Louise Beckett, Assistant to the Town Administrator

Bob Armstrong called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Minutes

Approval of minutes from November 23, 2020

On a motion from Armstrong to accept the minutes of November 23, 2020, seconded by Kantor, the vote was unanimous in favor.

Warrants

Approval of the following warrants:

On a motion from Armstrong the vendor warrant for \$131,413.82, the Payroll warrant for \$146,355.28, the payroll deduction warrant for \$34,002.04, the PW 21-03-ADD for \$215.46, and the PDW 21-03 –ADD for \$60.11, the vote was unanimous in favor.

Meetings Attended by Select Board Members

Erica will attend her first meeting with Lifepath on the Age-Friendly Communities on Monday morning, so had nothing to report yet.

Phil attended a November 23rd, meeting of the four Frontier towns Boards of Health, which he felt was very productive. At two subsequent meetings of the joint Boards of Health there was no quorum. On the 30th he attended a carbon credit meeting with the Williamstown group, who are the senior partners. New Ashburnham will also participate in the Conway/Williamstown group. George Murphy and Jack Lochhead are interested in making their support public.

December 1st was the first Frontier Regional Budget Committee meeting and a leading discussion was how to pay for the track. There will be a capital request from the budget committee as the stage curtain's flame retardance has expired, so they will need to purchase a new one. Bob asked if there is enough money in E&D for their expenses. Phil said the track should be around \$800,000 with a \$180,000 shortfall between what was authorized by the town and how much the project will cost.

At a Thursday school board meeting the perspective of those on the school board was made evident; we need to have transparency and public participation when deciding whether schools will be cancelled. At the four-town Boards of Health meeting, the Board had made their decision before inviting the public for input. For special needs students who need one-on-one learning, many parents were upset that the week after Thanksgiving was cancelled.

Bob attended three meetings: a Conservation Commission meeting; another cable meeting to talk about strategy with Comcast (two weeks from now Comcast will attend our next meeting, hopefully a short hearing to accept our license: and a Frontier Capital meeting.

Public Comments

Phil reported a comment from Peter Engelman regarding parking along the River relative to bank erosion on the lower part of Reeds Bridge Road. Parking has accelerated the problem. Some work was done around 10 years ago. Would the bank and road itself be better protected by roping off one side and have parking on the other side? Ron Sweet joined the conversation by phone, stating that he hasn't seen any change on the bank on Reeds Bridge since he's been Highway Superintendent. Because of the big trees that were around some years back, the bank had slid, but there have been no changes since. He stated that he saw no threat to the road, as there are no longer any trees. Parking doesn't seem to have had an effect on the bank's erosion. Ron offered to meet with Peter.

Old Business

FY 2021 Town Budget update

Tom Hutcheson said that he has about 1/3 of the proposed budgets, so we're doing pretty well. We're also on track with FY 21 tax receipts. There's a new cherry sheet from the conference committee; the majority of state aid is in chapter 70, which is level funded. Our state aid is not looking bad and our local revenues are not looking bad, plus we have \$300,000 in free cash. There's back and forth about a Federal relief package but at least the current package has aid to state governments. Most town's concern is the effect on the hospitality industry, including meals taxes, which Conway doesn't have. The major question for Conway is the effect of long-term unemployment on our population and people's ability to pay rent.

New Business

Letters regarding Town property on and near Fournier Road

We have a proposal from Ken Pleasant regarding a swap involving property lines. Ron Sweet stated that there are several reasons why this is not good for the town. First: why would the town be willing to give up any of its property? Fournier Road goes through Ken Pleasant's driveway. What he wants is our access to the left side of the property, and there is no other access. Right now, there are issues of getting to the school well. The former owner always granted access, but we don't know about this owner. What Ken has done on town property is concerning, and has been brought to the select board's attention. Bob remarked that there are two pieces of property, one to the west/north, the other is the east side of the sheep barn. Are those two items related to each other? Ron said that in the past he asked the Select Board to move the driveway to the salt shed. Ken now has a driveway by the sheep barn that the Town uses. We have utilities that run through there and shouldn't give it up because of that. The Town gave a right of way to Gary Lisewski when they bought the school property so Gary could get to his property in back of the Grammar School. Bob asked if we could solve the problem by building a new driveway on our property; Ron said yes. The School is fine with moving the driveway and Ron said we would put a fence on the school side of the driveway. Bob asked if trees would need to come down – at least one at least is pretty dead. Ron stated that only one has to come down, but others only need a few limbs cut off. Bob said Ken's map shows moving the edge that leads up to the drive up towards the sheep shed a bit. Ron said that Ken doesn't want the town to have any right-of-way on to his property. He owns the land right to the transformer, but what is his gain? Phil offered that he is interested in privacy and safety for his family. Ron agreed that he is all for moving the driveway in the name of safety but as far as the other land is concerned, the town shouldn't entertain the idea of giving it away. Bob said that if we built another driveway we would be well away from him. Ron agreed to moving the driveway for safety's sake, but said he can't see how the town could entertain the idea of giving away the property mentioned. Erica said she felt she can't weigh in until she can go to the property and see the issues. Bob reminded everyone that we would need a right-of-way for the utility lines because they go under the driveway. Ron said we need to be careful as we must be able to maintain the utility lines and if we move the right-of-way and something happens we would have a problem. Bob asked if the board members might go to the property and meet with the owner. Ron said he is more than willing to meet with anyone interested. Bob said that we need to reply to his (Ken's) note, but not necessarily today. We should look at the property and then respond to his note. Tom said we should do a site visit between now and next board meeting, so it could be discussed. It was agreed that Erica and Ron would set up a meeting with Ken.

Approve stipends for George Murphy, Joe Colucci, Bob Armstrong, Phil Kantor, and Erica Goleman

Tom said that the Finance Committee has not yet met to approve restitution of the Select Board's 2021 stipend. Jan (Warner) is hoping to pay them out in the next warrant. Alan Singer will have to call a meeting of the Finance Committee before the end of the year. It would be best to approve the two stipends and leave the Select Board stipends for the next meeting because it would put the Board's budget into deficit. Bob made a motion to approve stipends for George Murphy and Joe Collucci, Phil seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

License renewals for Baker's Country Store, J&J Auto Sales, J&J Maggs Antiques, OESCO and Vight's Garage

Erica moved that the board should move to approve the licenses; Bob seconded and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Sign letter supporting House and Senate budget proposal for school transportation *Tabled.*

Carbon credit plan discussion

Phil said the meeting went well and in general we are partnering with the right group. They need our acreage for their project to go through. The more acreage, the higher the revenue. Bob said that when they had a meeting with Deerfield, they were very interested. Most of these people who would be interested in the proposal already have forest-management plans, so wouldn't incur additional costs to enter into the agreement. If the amount of acreage is too small, the owner wouldn't realize enough profit from the carbon credit plan. Phil said he spoke with someone from an agency associated with the Franklin Land Trust, and they are keen on assisting with our project, so Phil will put in a grant proposal.

Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting

Request for ½ reduction of the annual business license fee due to the pandemic

Tom said we were approached by another license holder who heard that the Conway Inn's licenses had been halved, and also wanted half off his business license fee. The total we would lose from cutting all the licenses, excluding the Conway Inn, in half is \$140.00. The town would be losing \$140 if we cut all the licenses in half, but it would be fair and a gesture of good will. **Erica moved to discount everyone's business licenses fees this year by 50%. Bob seconded it, and the motion passed unanimously.**

Town Administrator update

Committees

I was made aware that the Council on Aging is planning a dinner at the Whately Inn. I wrote expressing concern due to the pandemic, and Pat Lynch replied saying that "The Inn has a safe capacity set, and safety precautions will be taken by all attending. In other years it's been a buffet, but no self-serve this year. It was up to individuals to decide whether they wanted to sign up, and there was no problem filling all the spaces available."

Departments

The state legislature passed an FY 2021 budget on Friday and sent it to the Governor. The numbers look sufficient for municipalities.

I am pleased to report that we are receiving \$4,000 from MIIA in risk management grant funds. \$2,000 of that is for ultraviolet disinfecting equipment for Frontier, and \$2,000 is for additional road safety signage and related equipment. We had asked for an additional trailer to put the equipment in, but we got one a few years ago and did not get an additional one this year.

I am less pleased to say we were not successful in our MassWorks grant application (for further paving for Shelburne Falls Road) or for our Community Compact IT grant (the Assessors wanted a tablet and related software to be able to more efficiently transfer field data to their GIS system).

In better news, our FEMA Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant has been moved forward to the next phase. One more tweak from our engineer should suffice to put it into competition—this has been a very long process.

I got a request for the Forest Stewardship Zoom hearings to be made available to the public. Since they are too large for our current website subscription, I asked FCAT to post them, and the videos of the meetings are now up on FCAT's YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/FCATMedia/videos>). If you don't see it, search for "Conway Forest".

I will note that the Federal bi-partisan \$908B stimulus package, the latest, includes state aid, and that the Massachusetts budget was passed days afterward (on Friday). It seems clear that there is sufficient support in Congress for state aid that FY21, and even FY22, will be much more manageable than expected.

Insurance: Bob and I met with the public safety officers who are, or supervise, personnel over the age of 70. They indicated they would prefer to remain employed as usual, and I have forwarded our five-year loss history to an insurance company called VFIS, who have no age limit. I have recently learned that MIIA will insure public safety

employees over the age of 70 as well, and Bob and I are planning to continue our efforts toward a solution on a video call with them to see what they might offer.

Concerns of the Selectmen **None.**

Mail *None.*

Announcements *None.*

Next Meeting:

The next select board meeting is scheduled for Monday, December 21, 2020, at 6 p.m., via Zoom. Tom reminded the board that we need to post the site visit to Ken Pleasant's property, once scheduled, as it needs to be posted 48 hours in advance.

At 7:15, Bob moved that the board adjourn the meeting to go into two Executive Sessions, one for reason number 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, which he so declared, and one for Reason #7, to act under the authority of any general or special law (to approve minutes of previous executive sessions), the Board to adjourn from open meeting immediately thereafter. Phil seconded the motion. Bob voted yes, Phil voted yes, and Erica voted yes.