

sMinutes
SELECT BOARD
Monday, January 11, 2021
Via Zoom

Present for the Select Board: Bob Armstrong, Erica Goleman, Phil Kantor

Others present: Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Louise Beckett, Assistant to the Town Administrator; John Fitz-Gibbon, Town Counsel; Joe Stzregowski, Planning Board; Kimberly MacPhee, FRCOG; Alan Singer, Steve Dinkelaker, Roy Cohen, Rhyanna McLeester, Finance Committee; Robert Baker, Fire Chief; Ken Ouimette, Chief of Police; Gemma Vanderheld, Ambulance Director

Armstrong called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Minutes

Approval of minutes from January 4, 2021

On a motion from Armstrong to accept and approve the minutes of January 4, 2021 as amended, seconded by Goleman, the vote was unanimous in favor.

Warrants

Payroll deduction warrant PDW21-13A, an amendment to 12/7/20 PDW21-13: \$133.31

On a motion from Armstrong to approve the amendment to the payroll deduction warrant PDW21-13A for \$133.31, the vote was unanimous in favor.

Meetings Attended by Select Board Members

Erica reported that there was an Age Friendly Communities meeting scheduled this past week but she was not able to attend.

On the 5th Phil attended the first Frontier/Union 38 budget meeting followed by a Frontier Regional School Meeting. At the budget meeting on the 6th, the December 29th deadline to close their spending was extended. We have CARES act money, but to spend it, we would have to go contrary to our regional agreement. If we don't spend it by the 31st we forego any funds not spent. Tom said the town was granted \$160,000 in CARES funding but only about half has been spent. The other towns should consider using their own funds for any extraordinary costs over their allotment. Erica asked if we should have a policy if one of the other towns has spent all their monies; how we would handle a request for giving them some of our funds. Tom asked: do we want to spend more than the other towns so that it can get things done unless they and the other towns dipped into their own alternate funding. Phil said that one of the things that is much higher than expected is the Chromebook replacement expense. Additional building modifications are not being done because the towns don't see any option, having run out of CARES money. Tom said we should put this on the agenda for next week, as it seems worth deliberating and wasn't on the agenda.

Bob said he attended no meetings but we are still expecting a letter from Comcast regarding the franchise agreement.

Public Comments *none*

Old Business

UCC request for splitting cost of reinforcing foundation wall near Whately Road (\$14,375)

Tom said we have a letter from Town Counsel stating that if we don't have a written agreement with the church to pay it for a service, it falls under the anti-aid act, and that the Highway Superintendent doesn't believe there's a threat to the road, nor that the town should subsidize private work just because it's near the public road. Phil said that the engineer's letter suggested that the stabilization of the wall should be done to stabilize the road. We

should ask the engineer for his rationale as to how a wall 15 feet from the road would impact the road. Tom said he didn't see why the town should help pay for a wall just because it's close to the road, when the highway boss doesn't see a problem with it, and we wouldn't do this for any other landowner. Erica agreed that we should see something justifying the engineer's conclusions. Tom will write to the engineer asking for this information.

New Business *none*

Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting

Choose delegate to MMA Annual General Meeting

We need to choose a delegate to vote at the Mass Municipal Association Annual Meeting. John O'Rourke always represented the town when he was chair of the Select Board. Bob said he didn't mind doing that. Erica will also attend.

6:30 P.M. Joint Meeting with Finance Committee

FY 2022 Budget

General update *None.*

Hearing: Major Public Safety Departments (Police, Fire, Ambulance)

Police: Ken Ouimette said FRCOG told him to figure 2-1/2% increase for radio fees this coming fiscal year. Regarding salaries, Ken is the only salaried employee in his department; all others are hourly. Training is up \$100 and the only other increase is vehicle maintenance because we have almost exhausted the current year's budget with 5 months to go. The cruiser is 3 years old, so it has a few more years to go. Cameras: Ken said he is in favor of having them. However, the cost of the cameras matters less than the cost of the data storage. Ken said he would check with the state on the amount of time data needs to be stored, and what the cost would be.

Ambulance: Gemma Vanderheld said the biggest change for the Ambulance Department was that the employee payment was lowered to bring up the assistant director's salary and not change the bottom line. She doesn't anticipate any other changes. The phone expense is under the Fire Department. Bob said he signed up for First-Net, which lowered the bill quite a bit, so he absorbed the Ambulance Department at least for this year. Tom said that in regard to salaries, it's amazing what the volunteers do, even those on stipends, and we need to increase salaries in this area to approach fairness. It may be time for the Select Board to reconsider not having a compensation policy. Gemma said that most training is online, and is not a great expense. Some EMTs don't ask for reimbursement for expenses they have incurred, and when asked say they don't need the reimbursement. Steve asked if COVID had impacted the budget at all, and Gemma responded she didn't think so – we haven't transported any known COVID victims. Alan asked how many more positions the department could use, and Gemma responded that they currently have five EMTs, though one hasn't yet started, and 10-12 is the number she would like to see ultimately, so that she and Chris (Herrmann) don't have to go out on every call. One person has signed up for EMT training in the spring.

Fire: Bob Baker said he had cut his budget last year and so now is asking for what he would have asked for last year to bring his budget to where it should be. The \$7,500 for vehicle maintenance is really not enough for all the vehicles, which are aging. It's hard to know how to budget for this, because when a fire truck is broken, you have to fix it immediately. Tom said that he would like to see the Chief's salary increased based on the number of hours he works, and that a \$1,242 increase, the first of two proposed increases be considered. When asked, he explained that the difference between equipment and turnout gear is that turnout gear must meet OSHA standards. Bob said his preference is to have equipment and turnout gear kept as separate budget line items for clarity. Alan asked about vehicle maintenance: what is the year-to-date expense? Bob said between \$4,000 and 5,000, which is average. Alan said maybe we're underestimating the amount needed for the budget. Bob said the trucks are very well maintained considering how other towns do on this. He was asked about the oxygen tanks and said that they are all up to snuff now. Asked about how many calls we had this year, he said there were 76. There were many river calls in the summer, but since fall we have had almost nothing. Is there training

in the budget? Bob said that the training in the budget is for the grammar school students. Is there any outreach for residents? An inspection program? Is there funding (state/federal) for such a program? Bob said there's a possibility once COVID is in hand. He added that he'd like to do something with the senior citizens in terms of fire prevention in the home. If the highway department moves out of the building, and the department can take over the whole building, there may be some large expenses: upgrading the heating system for example. Tom said this would be a capital item which should go to that committee. There is some money for the renovation of that building and could be used to help with updating. Ken Ouimette could put a figure on it. Tom said that the Town oil bill is less because we are using a lot more propane. Steve asked about labor which has jumped up a bit over the past few years. Bob said that we learned in 2020 that the state makes it mandatory that we pay for training, which we weren't doing previously. There are 28 firefighters and 8 juniors; the labor budget is used for paying those who go out on fire calls.

Town Administrator update

State tax collections of \$2.842 billion last month were \$230 million or \$8.8M higher than collections in December 2019, and midway through fiscal 2021 tax collections are running \$372 million or 2.7 percent higher than the same period of in fiscal 2020.

MassWorks got about 100 applications. 38 were for STRAP grants, for \$18M in requests, out of which 7 were funded, for a total of \$7M in grants. The strengths of our application included a local match; local support through letters; a demonstration of financial need; and we clearly described roadway in disrepair. Next time we should strengthen the narrative on how disrepair affects health and safety, and we need hard numbers to show that.

He is working on CARES reconciliation round for expenses incurred before December 30.

We continue to refine our approach to the carbon credit work with Williamstown. It looks as though we are farther along than they are and need a different set of tasks completed. He got a call from Mary Wigmore today, who is interested in further work along these lines, and an e-mail from the American Forest Foundation looking to establish communications around resident education on carbon credits.

Concerns of the Selectmen *none*

Mail *none*

Announcements *none*

Next Meeting: Scheduled for Tuesday, January 19, 2021, at 6 p.m., via Zoom

On a motion from Armstrong to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m. 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.