

**Minutes
Selectboard Meeting
Monday, March 21, 2022
Town Hall, 5 Academy Hill Road**

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

Others Present : Representative Natalie Blais; Corrinne Coryat, Assistant to Rep. Blais; Véronique Blanchard, Town Administrator; Louise Beckett, Assistant to the Town Administrator

Minutes **On a motion from Phil to approve the minutes of March 14, 2022, Erica seconded, all said aye and the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Warrants None

Meetings Attended by Selectboard Members Erica had no meetings; Bob had no meetings. Phil had a Conway School Committee Meeting to approve the budget. He also had a final negotiation session with the Union and concluded all agreements with all four schools. He attended an ARPA meeting, a Public Building Committee meeting, and said some of the monies needed to renovate the Public Services building may be eligible for ARPA funding. He also attended a Conway Swimming Pool Committee in regard to their emergency action plan.

Public Comments None

Unfinished Business None

New Business: Annual Update: State Representative Natalie Blais Rep. Blais introduced her aide, Corinne Coryat. She said it was important to have a conversation with the town and to get to know the town's priorities so we're all on the same page. She has been working hard with Senators Jo Comerford and Adam Hinds to introduce legislation to create a municipal building authority to ensure a dedicated funding stream to support senior centers, public safety complexes, etc. ARPA money could be used for seed funding, but a steady stream is necessary to support large projects. On a comment that funding often raises the cost of a project so that the net result is not cost-effective, Natalie said she appreciated the comment and that there should perhaps be a grant program with a rural formula baked into it that takes into consideration the inability for small rural towns to take advantage of funding for large projects - taking the scale of the project into consideration. One such idea for Conway is a community leech field project would serve 70-80 Conway homes closest to the (South) River. The project is small enough not to be regulated by DEP, but the cost of \$1.5 million is something the homeowners who would benefit by it can't afford, and those who wouldn't benefit by it wouldn't want to help fund. Natalie is participating in a forum with Jo Comerford to explore ways to fund rural water and sewer projects. The secretary of EEA agreed to allow the MVP program to be used for water/sewer infrastructure projects. The challenge is that once a grant application is opened, it's hard to get administration officials out to the rural communities so they can explain the importance of the project. Prior to grant round opening we should invite the officials out here, which was done for the Community One-Stop road program in Huntington: They were funded for \$1M. Rural communities are often left behind in terms of school funding too, and lost ground recently with the

rise in inflation. When asked about the availability of Chapter 90 funds, she said the house just passed legislation for an additional \$100M for winter road maintenance which will be distributed by road mileage. She said she would be supportive of a FY23 budget of \$300M for this funding. Some of the problems that may not be apparent to people outside of Western MA are public safety and economic impacts. Climate change, including the recent severe storms in Western MA, freeze-thaw cycles, etc. have an impact on the life of pavement and make it difficult for example, for an ambulance to get through especially on dirt roads. School transportation reimbursement is far less than the 100% promised, and towns don't know the reimbursement figure until the last minute. Natalie said shared services should be supported to accommodate regionalization of the Commonwealth's 170 rural communities. Bob asked how we might be impacted by losing a representative. Natalie remarked that there are 13 reps in all of western MA and 13 in the city of Boston alone, so we need to make sure our voices are heard. If we don't invest in Western MA - in education, public transportation, jobs, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and support of small business, we will continue to lose population and by the next census that will result in the loss of another house seat. We need a strategic approach: people outside of western MA think it's a black hole with no broadband. This is not true, and we also have a high quality of life. The house passed the wind bill and grid modernization legislation which now will be taken up by the senate. Another climate bill is being prepared to allow single parcel solar to make it easier for co-ops and condos to take advantage of solar, which they can't now. Bob said that Eversource made it impossible for Conway to do a municipal solar project. The number of charging stations for electric vehicles has increased, though there still aren't enough. Federal dollars should be coming in to expand the ev charging station program. We have to be looking at the grid and make sure it can handle the transition to green transportation. Bob remarked that we need to get over the hurdle of people believing there aren't enough charging stations. Natalie said that she has legislation to support e-bikes, which could get some cars off the road for some time. Phil remarked that the state has filed an intent to log in Conway's state forest and that there should be legislation requiring a host community's consent before the state can do any logging. Bob asked if we can we get the logging held off until the legislation has been passed. Natalie has met with the new DCR commissioner Stephanie Cooper, and found her smart and responsive, so maybe we are turning a corner with DCR. There is an opportunity going forward because there is a 10-year review of the landscape designations that DCR uses. They will undertake a public process on the landscape designations that DCR uses, and carbon sequestration has to be considered - centered and factored into state goals and metrics and practices as we consider how to help commonwealth meets its climate goals. There has to be a conversation as people on both sides feel strongly about this issue. Bob said that when we recently rewrote our forest management 20-year plan, people in Conway were unanimous in wanting us not to authorize logging and to limit cutting to what is absolutely necessary. Natalie asked for a copy of Conway's plan. Phil said that during Hurricane Irene in 2011 Conway had a major rockslide and lost part of Delabarre Avenue up by OESCO. We just recently got the amount set in 2015 so the amount doesn't close to covering the amount given by FEMA. It takes too long to get payment as that amount buys much less road. A 10-year process to get a road fixed is not justified. Natalie said she would support action at the federal level to speed up the process, and not necessarily bringing (a road) back to the condition it was in when the storm occurred, but to include improvements or we'll keep seeing these problems over and over again as these storms increase.

Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours

None

in Advance of the Meeting

Town Administrator Update None

**Selectboard Member Comments
and Concerns** None

Mail Phil received a Census Survey of Government and Survey of Public Employment
and Payroll. Véronique will complete these surveys.

Next Meeting

Adjourn Monday, March 28, 6:00 p.m. Joint Committee with the Finance Committee
At 7:00 p.m. on a motion from Phil to adjourn, Bob seconded, all said aye and the
vote was unanimous in favor.