

TOWN OF BENNINGTON

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Minutes of the Meeting – December 6, 2016

Selectmen Jeffrey Rose, James Cleary and Steven Osienski were present as well as Administrator Denise French. Also attending the meeting was Bethany Craig. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

By invitation, Michael Roina was present to follow-up discussion with the Selectmen regarding the Board's November 9, 2016 vote to discontinue Mike's Highway Department/Fire Department split work schedule as of November 28th:

- Selectmen Chair Cleary stated the Fire Department administrative hours were cut back because cautionary statements didn't seem to have an impact on the amount of hours the employee chose to work.
- The Fire Chief prefers to be proactive rather than re-active.
- The Selectmen have concerns for the amount of weekly hours worked by a single employee and their affect on the Budget.
- Conceptually discussed Mike's consideration of leaving the Highway Department; the Selectmen did not support this concept.
- Selectman Rose was authorized to speak with the Road Agent, on behalf of the Board, to determine if a floating schedule would benefit the Highway Department and the Fire Department during slow times when projects are minimal. Highway Department activities would dominate Roina's schedule with occasional down time being allotted to the Fire Department for the completion of administrative tasks.

The Selectmen authorized reimbursement of four Responder parkas and the purchase of three additional new Responder parkas from funds within the operating budget.

The Selectmen acted on the following matters:

- Reviewed and approved the Selectmen's November 30, 2016 Minutes.
- Signed an Employee Time-off Request.
- Heard a report that Stephen Stockwell has restored the berm at his Mountain Road property where it intersects with Class VI Mountain Road. Road Agent Gary Russell is satisfied with the result and has signed off on this restoration project.
- Accepted the proposed Transfer Station holiday schedule, as follows:
 - Saturday, December 24th – 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
 - Sunday, December 25th – Closed
 - Wednesday, December 28th – 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
 - Saturday, December 31st – 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
 - Sunday, January 1st – Closed

By invitation, the Selectmen met with the Budget Committee and discussed the following:

- Compliments to the Department Heads for demonstrating their dedication to doing the best job possible for their fellow citizens and through proposed changes and improvements to their

Board of Selectmen Minutes – December 6, 2017

Departments are becoming more efficient and responsive to the ever changing needs of the community as a whole.

- The Committee recommends better management practices; namely Departments budgeting and working more closely with the Selectmen and Budget Committee which could help in the long run to improve long range planning and direction.
- Water Department:
 - Although the Water/Sewer Commissioners are agreeable to closing the Sewer Lagoon Dredging Capital Reserve Fund, the Commissioners recommend that the funds from the closed Sewer account be deposited in the Water Department Capital Reserve Fund. The Budget Committee and the Selectmen unanimously agree to closing the Sewer Lagoon Dredging Capital Reserve Fund with an approximate \$94,000 unspent balance in the Sewer CRF being deposited into the Town's general fund as an offset to taxation.
 - Disappointment that the Water/Sewer Commissioners decided, without consultation with the Selectmen or Budget Committee, to purchase twenty-five digital water meters which can only be read by a digital reader. It was unanimously voted that until a meter replacement plan is drawn up and approved by the Selectmen that the Commissioners intent to purchase a digital reader for \$12,000 is denied.
 - Unanimous vote that only defective analog water meters be replaced from the existing supply of digital meters; no proactive meter replacements are to be done in 2017.
 - Unanimous vote that the Commissioners need to review income and expenses for both water and sewer utilities to determine an adequate rate change that, excepting infrastructure, will support payment of both Departments' expenses. State data shows that average annual water usage cost is \$583; comparatively Bennington's average annual water usage cost is \$359.
 - Unanimous vote that the Commissioners develop a meter replacement plan for 2018 consideration.
 - Heard a report that approximately \$7,000 +/- was removed from 2016 Water Department's actual expenses and reallocated to 2015 encumbered Highway Department line-items to adequately reflect 2016 TEP2 expenses. Based upon the reduction in 2016 expenses the group voted not to increase the Town of Antrim Water line-item
- Highway Department:
 - Collective agreement that the Town needs to address deferred road maintenance on an annual basis. The Road Agent has submitted a five year road maintenance plan with an approximate annual cost of \$70,000.
 - The Road Agent is committed to rehabilitating the roads so they are acceptable and safe. He is highly supportive of meeting periodically with the Budget Committee to review progress and discuss future planning.
 - Agreement that contracting with certain vendors makes sense if it will save labor and equipment use.
 - Now that the second phase of the downtown sidewalk construction project has been completed the Town could experience a cost over-run in the "hired plowing/sanding" line-item for snow removal.

Board of Selectmen Minutes – December 6, 2016

- Fire Department:
 - Collective agreement that the ever increasing costs and requests of the Fire Department are a real concern to the Budget Committee and Selectmen.
 - Collective agreement that 2017 funding for acquiring a used ambulance and incorporating ambulance service into the duties carried out by limited Fire Department staff is unreasonable. Consensus indicates it is imperative that a carefully crafted plan needs to be thoroughly researched, reviewed, and agreed to by the Selectmen before any presentation is made to the townspeople. The research proposal should be detailed and backed up by research and discussion with fire service and safety experts, among others, to determine the need and the ability to respond to that need. A change will determine how the Town equips the Fire Department with trained staff, equipment, supplies and apparatus.
 - Funding for cardiac monitoring equipment has already been removed from the Chief's proposed 2017 budget.
 - The proposed budget includes \$4,000 funding to replace four of the 28 aging radios. There is collective agreement that the Chief needs to inventory existing radios, determine their reliability and document radios that are indeed in need of replacement.
 - Proposed vehicle maintenance funding was reduced by \$5,000 after the group's determination that, upon review of Hillsboro Ford's estimate for repair of the forestry truck, it does not seem to indicate the truck's frame needs extensive frame work.

The Selectmen accepted the Budget Committee's recommendation that a Town-wide Purchasing Policy procedure should be developed for any planned purchase exceeding \$1,000; whenever possible three bids should be secured and reviewed with the Board of Selectmen prior to purchase.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Denise French
Administrator