

TOWN OF BENNINGTON

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Minutes of the Meeting – October 27, 2020

Selectmen James Cleary, David Hardwick, Sr. and David Foster were present as well as Town Administrator Kristie LaPlante. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Road Agent Hazen Fisk met with the Selectmen via video conference to continue discussion of replacing the Town's Loader. At the direction of Chairman James Cleary, Hazen looked at a 2002 John Deere 544 Loader with 4,000 hours located in Burlington, MA. Prior to the meeting the Selectmen had the opportunity to view pictures and video of the Loader. Hazen reports there is little wear and tear and a little bit of rust on the machine; bushings and pins may need to be replaced in the future. There is a small hole in the left side of the bucket but that appears to be an easy fix. The batteries were dead and he could not operate the machine while he was there. He was able to negotiate a \$46,000 purchase price (with two new batteries) if the Selectmen agreed to the purchase.

Town Administrator Kristie LaPlante reported there is approximately \$216,000 in the Highway Heavy Equipment Capital Reserve Fund. After some discussion, motion was made, seconded, and approved to authorize the Road Agent to purchase the Loader at a purchase cost not to exceed \$46,000, after he has had the opportunity to test drive the machine and is satisfied with its performance. Hazen was also directed to solicit prices from area vendors to truck the equipment to Bennington. The Town intends to advertise the 1982 Loader for sale as is.

The Selectmen reviewed documentation from State Forest Ranger Adrian Reyes about the Timber Trespass for Operation 20-041-05. Ranger Reyes reported the Trespass does not appear to be reckless or intentional and appears to be a result of a missing boundary marker pin. Selectman James Cleary reported a conversation he had with one of the loggers for that Operation and they acknowledged confusion about the property boundary location. The Selectmen intend to negotiate restitution with the logger.

The Town Administrator briefed the Selectmen on the following matters:

- The Solid Waste Committee is meeting Wednesday, October 28, 2020 as a follow-up to their September 30th meeting. If after that meeting there are no further proposed revisions to the Transfer Station Ordinance, a Public Hearing will be scheduled for the proposed changes to the Ordinance the Selectmen authorized on October 5th.
- A North Bennington Road resident called to express their frustration and displeasure with scheduling and follow-up with the Building Inspector. The Selectmen acknowledged their receipt of the resident's complaint.
- Informed the Selectmen that each Selectman must be present at the November 3, 2020 General Election for the duration of voting and counting. If a member cannot be present for a portion of the day, the Moderator has instructed them to find a suitable surrogate.
- In a cursory review of 2020 Expenditures to date, it appears the Town is on track to recognize a savings of approximately \$17,000 in the Operating Budget due to COVID-19. These savings are a combined result of staffing changes and program changes in various Departments.

The Selectmen spent considerable time reviewing the First Draft of the 2021 Operating Budget as proposed by Department Heads. The 2020 Operating Budget included funding for 53 weeks of payroll.

When the cost for the 53rd weeks is removed from the 2020 Operating Budget, the 2021 First Draft Budget is \$30,645 more than the prior year. The Selectmen reviewed the First Draft and discussed the following:

- Health Insurance is projected to increase roughly 4% in 2021 but the increase will be offset by an \$11,000 premium holiday credit; the Town Administrator has not finalized calculations but reports an overall decrease in Health Insurance costs for 2021. Dental rates are staying the same for 2021.
- The Deputy Town Clerk wage line item is nearly 30% higher than the previous year. The Town Administrator reminded the Board that in 2020 the Selectmen reduced that wages by the equivalent of 175 hours. The Selectmen will revisit Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk hours and wages at a future date.
- There are significant funds remaining in the Cemetery Groundskeeping line items. New in 2020, the Cemetery Trustees have been allocating a portion of the Groundskeeping costs to Perpetual Care funds. The Selectmen intend to review Groundskeeping costs in November to see if funds allocated through the Operating Budget can be reduced as a result of Perpetual Care funds.
- The Selectmen declined the Road Agent's increase from \$3,000 to \$9,000 for Equipment Rental; the increase appears to be a one-time need for road improvement projects in 2021. There is adequate funding in the Road Rehabilitation Capital Reserve Fund to cover those costs.
- Antrim Ambulance will increase from \$20,000 to \$25,000.
- The Selectmen requested the Highway Department Laborer line item be adjusted to reflect 24 hours per week at the Highway Department and 16 hours per week at the Transfer Station. This will result in an approximate \$17,750 savings by not hiring a second permanent person at the Transfer Station.
- The Selectmen plan to reduce the Town of Antrim – Sewer line item by \$5,300 based on year-to-date expenditures.
- The Town Administrator will update the draft Operating Budget and provide it to the Selectmen for continued review in advance of their November 10 meeting.

In addition, the Selectmen acted on the following matters:

- Reviewed and approved the Minutes of the Board's October 20, 2020 Meeting.
- Reviewed and approved Payroll and Accounts Payable Registers for October 22, 2020.
- Requested the Solid Waste Committee to better define Commercial Haulers.
- Heard a report from the Road Agent that the output side of the pump on the culvert truck has been repaired; the intake side of the pump will be welded this week.
- Requested the sign at the entrance gate for the Transfer Station be repaired.
- Authorized the Town Administrator as the Town's designated signing authority for the Town of Bennington's final reimbursement request.
- Reviewed and approved a contract with Brian D. Fogg, LLC to establish the values for the distribution portions of the Eversource utility.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristie LaPlante, Town Administrator