

TOWN OF BENNINGTON

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Minutes of the Meeting – December 15, 2020

Selectmen James Cleary, David Foster, and David Hardwick, Sr. were present as well as Town Administrator Kristie LaPlante. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Attorney John Cronin was unable to meet with the Board as scheduled.

Newly elected State Representative Jim Creighton stopped by the Selectmen's meeting to discuss any concerns the Selectmen have that he can help work to resolve while he is in office. The group discussed the private control and use of the long vacant railroad tracks in Town and the lack of clarity in who can use the trestle for recreation. The Selectmen also expressed their concern over education funding.

Transfer Station Tom James met with the Selectmen to discuss Transfer Station operations. The following was discussed:

- Safety
 - Transfer Station staff have been unable to properly and timely dispose of used oil and fluids because of excess clutter, a slick floor, and no lighting in the used oil room.
 - Tom has reported to the Road Agent that the filter on the used oil drum is clogged and needs to be replaced. Until the filter is replaced the process of disposing of used oil is time consuming and not practical.
 - The Governor's Emergency Order #74 requiring masks is intended when 6' social distancing cannot be maintained, even outdoors.
- Communications
 - Tom reports he frequently hears of Selectmen decisions from the public rather than the Selectmen or Town Administrator.
 - Tom discussed his frustration with the delay in resuming recycling this summer, citing conversations with the Town Administrator indicating "a few more weeks". The Selectmen responded that the delay was under the guidance of NH DES.
 - Customers are not happy with the Selectmen's recent decision to increase disposal prices; the Selectmen increased the prices to make them more uniform for making change.
 - Now that the bulk of Facility Use Stickers have been issued, the Selectmen have turned over future issuance to Transfer Station employees.
- Scheduling/Staffing
 - Staffing and scheduling communications are poor.
 - Tom reported to the Board that he feels the hiring process takes too long from when an employee applies until they are hired.
 - The Town Administrator reported that she has no authority in the hiring process and that applications are reviewed by the Selectmen before a background check is authorized. Once the background check is authorized by the Selectmen, the candidate completes background check paperwork, which is sent to the State after accounts payables on Thursdays. The delay is a result of the totality of the hiring process and not because of lack of interest.
 - Tom reported that he was not consulted about permanently staffing a highway department employee at the Transfer Station. This has conflicted with his plans with other part-time employees.

- Security
 - Customers have been accessing the facility after hours and rummaging through the tire container. As a result the tire container is now locked. The Town Administrator reported that the Road Agent is getting prices for more secure fencing.
 - Discussed adding a security camera to the east side of the recycling building and monitoring capabilities within the office building.

The Selectmen reviewed proposed Capital Reserve Fund Requests as submitted by Department Heads and voted to approve the following allocations:

• Highway Heavy Equipment	\$ 40,000
• Highway/Recreation Department Mower	\$ 1,000
• Road Rehabilitation	\$ 15,000
• Police Cruiser	\$ 12,000
• Water Department Maintenance/Repairs	\$ 25,000
• Fire Truck	\$ 25,000
• Rescue Vehicle	\$ 2,500
• Fire Department SCBA	\$ 2,000
• Fire Department Protective Gear	\$ 6,000
• Dodge Memorial Library	\$ 5,000
• Bridge Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund	\$ 10,000
• Sidewalk Repair	\$ 1,000
• Town Buildings Expendable Trust Fund	\$ 25,000
• Revaluation	\$ 12,000

The Selectmen also reviewed and approved a third draft of the proposed 2021 Operating Budget in the amount of \$1,790,488, which is 1.5% less than the 2020 Operating Budget. Based on Conval’s Budget Hearing scheduled for January 5, 2021, the Selectmen scheduled the Town Budget Hearing for Tuesday, January 12, 2021 at the Bennington Fire Station. Department Heads will be requested to meet with the Selectmen to discuss any requested Warrant Articles on Tuesday, January 5th. The Selectmen will finalize Warrant Articles prior to the Budget Hearing; the deadline for Petitioned Warrant Articles is 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 12, 2021.

The Town Administrator presented to the Board of Selectmen five sealed bids received for the 1982 John Deere Loader. The bids were opened and read out loud during the meeting:

- BID A – David Hardwick, Sr. - \$4,100
- BID B – Thomas Keenan - \$5,200
- BID C – Pine View Excavation and Land Clearing - \$4,510
- BID D – Lewis Gould, Jr. - \$6,400
- BID E – Josh Boucher - \$4,200

Motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to sell the 1982 John Deere Loader to Lewis Gould, Jr. for \$6,400 with no warranty, with the stipulation that the sale be completed by December 31, 2020.

The Board discussed the December 5 snow storm:

- One employee was absent due to illness. The Road Agent was able to use part-time employee Zack Andersen to fill-in temporarily in the one-ton. Zack appears to be a suitable fill-in for future storms.
- The Road Agent will be reminded to clear a path for the emergency exit on the Acre Street side of Town Hall.

- The Town Administrator's decision to close the Transfer Station without consult from the Selectboard in advance. When the error was discovered, Selectman Jim Cleary and Town Administrator discussed the error and reaffirmed that future decisions are at the direction of the Board of Selectmen.
- Due to power loss, the Transfer Station was temporarily closed on Sunday but was able to open by late morning.

Selectboard Chair Jim Cleary reported to the Board that he has received verbal complaints about the Town Administrator and the public perception that she is making unilateral decisions without input from the Board. The Board and Town Administrator discussed the context of the complaints, generational expectations of Town government, and how resident expectations have changed over the last 5-10 years. The Board reported that they believe the Town Administrator is operating within their expectations and the Board as a whole does not feel the Town Administrator is negligent in her duties. Regardless, the Town Administrator reported she will be more diligent in her communications.

In addition, the Selectmen acted on the following matters:

- Reviewed and approved the Minutes of the Board's December 1, 2020 meeting.
- Reviewed and approved the Accounts Payable registers for December 3 and December 10, as well as the Payroll Register for December 10, 2020.
- Reviewed a proposed Corrective Deed for Map 7, Lot 18. Motion was made, seconded, and unanimously approved to accept a Corrective Deed as presented.
- Approved erection of Sign Kiosks at the Transfer Station and Town Hall to provide better presentation of important information.
- Heard a report that Asplundh Tree Service will remove the trees above the power lines on Map 10, Lot 2. Once the hazard is removed the Town can remove the bases of the trees and remove the failing retaining wall.
- Discussed the Road Agent's request to purchase a commercial grade leaf blower to help with ditch work and leaf removal from the roadways. The Selectmen will require three bids before any decision is made.
- Heard a report of revised Department operations due to employee COVID quarantine requirements.
- Signed the Property Tax Warrant for Bill 2020-02, Payment in Lieu of Taxes Agreement for Map 17, Lot 25, and two Land Use Change Tax bills for Map 18/Lot 2-2 and Map 10/Lot 74-4.
- Signed the 2020 Equalization Municipal Assessment Data Certificate. The Town Administrator reported she expects to see a large variance in the 2020 Equalized Assessed Values due to high sale prices of homes as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Signed an Intent to Cut for Map 22, Lot 1.
- Signed an abatement request for the Inventory Penalty for Map 9 Lot 4.
- Reviewed and executed a five-year Waste Disposal Agreement with Monadnock Disposal Services.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristie LaPlante, Town Administrator