

MINUTES OF THE SELECT BOARD
Monday November 1, 2021, 7:00 PM
Recreation Building/ Via Zoom

Present: Tom Maher-Chair, Dave McGuckin-Selectman, William Stewart-Selectman and Jennifer Smith-Administrative Assistant to the Select Board and Recording Secretary.

Public Participants: Carol White-Historical Society, Thomas Smith-Chair of Budget Committee, Atty. Tim Phoenix, Jane Nelsen, Atty. John Lyons, J.D. Barker, Curt Springer, Chris Robillard-Supervisor of DPW, Normand Houle-Chair of the Water & Sewer Commission, Jennifer Rumph-Town Clerk/Tax Collector, Gary Rumph and Deb Schulte.

Chairman Maher opened the public session meeting at 7:00PM.

1. Approve Select Board minutes of November 1, 2021

Selectman McGuckin made a motion to approve the Select Board minutes of November 1, 2021. Selectman Stewart seconded and the motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

2. Public Questions and Answers.

Carol White stated that she would be willing to chair the town's 400th Anniversary Committee with some restrictions. She would not be responsible for organizing the entire event but would be willing to work with others to coordinate the day as a whole plan. Ms. White stated that she had previously worked with Living History performers for Fort Stark's recent celebration and could secure these same vendors to perform at the town's 400th. Ms. White stated she has tentatively set June 24th and 25th as the dates for the town to hold its celebration and has confirmed that these dates are acceptable with area towns and do not conflict with their own anticipated anniversary celebrations. Ms. White said that it would be preferable for the town to have at least 5 different groups of performers, such as a Black Smith, Tin Smith, Broom Maker, Artisan and Sail Maker to represent the residents of New Castle in the 1600s. These groups would be requesting permission to camp on the Common for the weekend. They will also need permission to construct fire pits and to fire muskets and cannons. Selectman McGuckin asked what the deadline is for securing the performers.

Ms. White responded that she has spoken with the groups and they are aware of the town's tentative plans, but they would only be available until someone else books them.

Selectman Stewart expressed his support of Ms. White's suggestions.

Chairman Maher echoed Selectman Stewart's support and thanked Ms. White for all her research and willingness to help organize this event.

Jennifer Rumph, Town Clerk, expressed her support of a 400th Anniversary as a great idea but questioned whether the town is authorized to make a profit through vendors on the Common.

Sharon Platt, 65 Piscataqua St., stated that she had recently seen an excellent Artisan show at Pease Air Force Base that is run by a promoter. Ms. Platt volunteered to contact Ms. White and give her the contact information for the promoter.

Attorney Tim Phoenix, of Hoefle, Phoenix, Gormley and Roberts LLC, representing clients Wayne Feigenbaum and Jane Nelsen of 27 Colonial Lane, gave a brief presentation illustrating a wall that Mr. J.D. Barker, 28 Colonial Lane, built and requested the Select Board consider offering his clients the same agreement that they offered Mr. Barker so that they might have a curb cut to better access their driveway.

Ms. Nelsen stated that the key to the whole issue is the 77 feet of frontage.

Attorney John Lyons, representing J.D. Barker of 28 Colonial Lane, gave a brief presentation regarding Mr. Barker's retaining wall, easement and agreement with the Select Board.

Ms. Nelson spoke about the property being surveyed in the past and that as far as she knew there were never any stairs in this location previously. She also stated there is an adverse possession easement on file.

Mr. Barker stated that previous stairs were found at this location and that pictures were taken of them and given to the Select Board. Mr. Barker stated that the town's Department of Public works had been in a constant battle to keep the wall up during snow removal efforts.

Curt Springer, 98 Cranfield St., stated that he recalled a prior Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting where the original steps were discussed and opined that the current wall looks good.

Chairman Maher thanked everyone for coming this evening and that the Select Board would take their comments under advisement.

Deb Schulte, 107 Main St., requested permission to borrow the town's 3 small peg boards for a church event.

Selectman McGuckin made a motion to approve Ms. Schulte's request.
Selectman Stewart seconded and the motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

3. New Business

a. Fire Department Heart Monitor

Selectman McGuckin stated that the matter of purchasing a new heart monitor for the Fire Department has been discussed and approved at a previous CIP meeting.

Selectman McGuckin made a motion to approve the purchase of a heart monitor for the Fire Department.

Selectman Stewart seconded and the motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

b. Acceptance of Safe Path Donations

Chairman Maher read for the record one donation to the Safe Path Committee that requires acceptance by the Select Board. The donation was from David Taylor for \$500.

Selectman McGuckin offered a motion to accept the aforementioned donation to the Safe Path Committee. Selectman Stewart seconded and said motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

c. Automatic Water Meter Reading

Selectman McGuckin stated that the Automatic Water Meter Reading system will increase efficiency and the town will see a return on its investment in 2 to 3 years. The cost of the project will be \$56,700 with an additional annual fee of approximately \$2,800.

Norm Houle, Chairman of the Water and Sewer Commission, stated that the Water and Sewer Commission supports the purchase of this system.

Chris Robillard, Supervisor of the Department of Public Works, stated that it should be a 5 week turn around for the equipment to be received and another week for the company to perform its installation tasks. Once this is complete, DPW can then start to install the actual meters.

Selectman McGuckin offered a motion to approve the purchase of the Automatic Water Meter Reading system funded from the Select Board controlled Water Reserve Fund. Selectman Stewart seconded and said motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

d. Assessment and Preliminary Tax Setting Discussion

Chairman Maher stated that this year is the year we reassess property values, which is done every 5 years as mandated by the state. He added that the tax rate is recalibrated as well.

Selectman Stewart stated that, by statute, the town is required to do a reevaluation every 5 years. The town valuation was 732 million and has increased to \$1,070,592,581, a 46% increase on property values.

throughout the town. Residents were provided the opportunity to make appointments with Avitar Associates to discuss any questions or concerns they might have had. This reevaluation will be used for this year's MS-1 and tax rate. The town is responsible to raise \$5,122,374 in taxes. The Select Board has determined a tax rate of \$4.78/per \$1000, with an unassigned fund balance of \$1,031,412. This is a 17.93% retention. DRA recommends a retention anywhere from 7% to 18%.

Thomas Smith, Chairman of the Budget Committee, stated that he was pleased that the Select Board is setting a tax rate based on what the Budget Committee recommended and spoke in favor of the Select Board voting to have an increase in the unassigned fund balance. Mr. Smith expressed his belief that it is prudent to build our reserves.

Selectman McGuckin made a motion to approve the 2021 Tax Rate as \$4.78.
Selectman Stewart seconded and the motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

e. Neighborhood Water Improvement Program Update

Selectman Stewart stated that the Select Board had previously voted to award a change order to N. Granese and Sons to complete the work for Spring Hill Rd/Lavenger Lane and the loops on Mainmast and Locke Rd. Since then, discussions have taken place with other vendors that came back with lower bids. It has been determined that the reason for the significant lower bid was that the bidder did not include Davis Bacon rates. Additionally, N. Granese and Sons had agreed to sharpen its pencil and came back with an amount of \$30,000 less than its original cost. Selectman Stewart opined that the town should still move forward with N. Granese and Sons doing the work, but he would like to speak with the representatives of the neighborhood group first.

Gary Rumph, Spring Hill Rd., questioned if the cost would be fixed.

Selectman Stewart responded that the cost will be "not to exceed" and that they have a contingency built in and hope that the cost will end up being even less than anticipated.

Mr. Rumph asked if it is an option to wait until 2023 for construction where prices might come down by that time.

Selectman Stewart explained that only extenuating circumstances allow for extensions and the town has been able to be approved for two already and they must complete the project by 2022.

f. Project Update – IT Reports, Town Hall, and PALs

Chairman Maher stated that the IT firm, Portsmouth Computer Group, will come before the board in two weeks to present their report. A computer and printer have been ordered for the Town Clerk's Office.

Chairman Maher further stated that there is currently a mold problem at Town Hall and the town has quotes for remediation to resolve the situation. Chairman Maher opined that a few years ago the town had the opportunity to remodel the town hall and chose not to, and now the maintenance is expensive.

Jennifer Rumph, Town Clerk/Tax Collector, asked when the Select Board will finalize its plans for moving forward with remediation.

Chairman Maher responded that they hoped to have a plan by the end of the week. The Select Board is mostly focused on the root of the cause and the need to prevent it from coming back.

Chairman Maher stated that the PALs are all finally converted to LED lighting and the town will now have permanently lower utility bills and closed by thanking Ken McDonald, Admin Project Coord., for his work on this project.

4. Old Business

Chairman Maher stated that the Fire Department and Police Department monthly reports will be attached to the minutes.

5. Adjourn

Selectman McGuckin offered a motion to adjourn at 8:30pm. Selectman Stewart seconded and said motion passed unanimously, 3-0.