

## Selectmen's minutes of meeting July 21, 2014

Members present: Patrick Barrett, Jeffrey Gray, Rosario Messina, Lisa Blackmer, Stephan Harasyko, Rd. Sup., Dolores Harasyko

Called to order at 7:08 p.m.

Announcement made that this meeting is being tape recorded.

Patrick thanked all for attending our meetings and getting involved. He asked that everyone speak loud and clear so that all in the room can hear the questions and discussions.

Steve provided highway dept. updates. He presented Chapter 90 paperwork for crack sealing and S. Beech Plain Rd. Patrick reviewed the process of chapter 90. Paperwork reviewed and signed.

Bill Cohen expressed his concerns with West St. Steve responded that it is on the schedule for pothole patching.

Kathy Burrows commended the highway department for the great work done on New Hartford Rd. Steve thanked her and will pass this onto the crew.

Patrick thanked them for their quick response in taking care of downed trees.

Road side mowing continues. Steve reviewed the timeline for New Hartford Rd. completion.

Finance Committee members Kathy Jacobs, Rhee Kasky and John Burrows present to present their initiatives that they would like the selectboard to consider for implementation. They would like a written response from the selectmen by September on whether they will or will not act upon the initiatives.

Kathy Jacobs reviewed the initiatives.

Initiative #1 Oversight and Governance. Kathy explained that there are a lot of legends out there about town employees and by having status reports this will put that to bed. Reports would provide work done each week, plans for the following weeks, issues, work hours, any time off hours. Bethany Perry, Board of Assessor Chair, asked who this applies to. Kathy responded she doesn't want to get into the weeds and be too specific, it would be up to the selectmen to decide.

Initiative #2 Biometric Time Card Machine. Kathy explained that this would be a thumbprint time clock. It would provide automation of weekly work time reporting. She provided an example of how it would save the town money by showing if each employee were 15 minute late or left early it would be captured on the time clock. Kathy feels that by having the timeclock we may also save on insurances. Dolores asked if the finance committee considered the opposite, that it will actually cost the town money as most if not all town employees worked beyond their scheduled time. Dolores used the recent rain storm as an example. The storm was predicted to start in the afternoon, she was able to contact the highway dept. at 2:15 in the afternoon to sandbag the Library and put out

barrels on New Hartford Rd. This went well beyond 2:30 and no one put in for overtime. Dolores and Steve spent four hours on July 4, 2014 touring the town roads for storm damage to report to EMD John Burrows, also at no cost to the town. Barbara Riiska stated that the example the finance committee presented is insulting and accusatory to the DPW as they are assuming everyone shows up late and leaves early. Barbara feels strongly that the DPW is being targeted in this initiative. Dolores asked if the Finance Comm. has actually contacted the insurance company to verify the savings, they have not.

Initiative #3 Job Descriptions. Town Administrator Lisa Blackmer continues to work on them. The Finance Comm would like reviewed and goals set for all employees, elected and non elected. Bethany Perry asked who would be in charge, each department head or the town administrator. Discussed how to accommodate the reviews of elected officials. Patrick moved to have more discussion after the presentation is complete. He responded that we have looked into job descriptions. That this is an assignment that has been given to the town administrator. Unfortunately we have had many issues come up such as the pipeline, special permits, employee issues, conservation easement issues. He reiterated that they are indeed working on and will continue to work on job descriptions. Dolores asked who would conduct reviews on elected officials. Kathy responded that wasn't up to them but the selectmen to figure that out. Dolores used the town clerk job as an example. The job description is over 250 pages long, it takes years to learn the job as with any of the elected positions. She wants to know who is qualified to perform the reviews. Bethany Perry responded that the audit that is done by an outside firm is the best review. They come in every 3 years and do a complete unbiased audit of all offices.

Initiative #4 Cost Manage of the Farmington River School. They would like the Selectmen to start a conversation with the Otis Selectmen before the next budget season. They feel earlier intervention is better. Patrick explained the role of the school committee. He reviewed the process in which the state sets a minimum that must be budgeted for for each student. Discussed the increasing cost for special needs. He suggested they contact the school committee.

Initiative #5 DPW Fleet Management. This is a software product that tracks where vehicles go, it monitors activity. Any one at any time could sign into the internet to view where town vehicles are. Kathy suggested a trail on 2 vehicles. Dolores asked if this will be for all town vehicles including police, fire, emd or just the highway dept. Kathy responded that it would be for the highway department only. Dolores questioned if this was necessary as there are only 4 to 5 vehicles out a time.

Initiative #6 Privatizing Snow Removal. The Finance Committee would like a one year trail to determine if it is cost effective to privatize snow removal on all dirt roads. Barbara Riiska responded that we have a very good responsive department that shows up asap. Barbara suggested they look elsewhere to save money such as contacting the state regarding state owned land. Barbara explained the future damage from the Ash Bore Beetle. The state is going to issue a moratorium on cutting ash trees after a certain date. She suggested contacting the state for permission to allow local loggers to cut the ash on

the state owned land and sell it on behalf of the town. Dolores asked if the finance committee looked into the legality of discussing this issue and any issues regarding the DPW who are covered by the Teamsters Union. It states clearly in their 3 year contract that you cannot give union work to a non union worker. Dolores is concerned that the DPW employees could file grievances against the town. The Finance has not looked into this.

Initiative #7 Privatizing Road Side Mowing.

Patrick responded that the Selectmen have been heavily criticized in the past for outsourcing work and not doing it in house. Peter Levine reviewed his experience with mixing union and non union work. He does not feel there would be a good outcome from this proposal.

Initiative #8 Privatizing the DPW. Kathy explained that this was a “blue sky” idea, a bit on the edge. The Finance Committee feels that by reducing the DPW staff we could afford to build a smaller garage.

Kathy recapped all the initiatives and asked the selectmen to respond by September. If they do not want to look into them or do not agree with them they will not re address these initiatives again.

Jeff Gray thanked the finance committee for all their hard work. But, the response is that some of their initiatives will cost the town more. He would like to have seen the finance committee do more research before presenting these initiatives. He compared this to the proposal from the finance regarding the marijuana dispensary. The town wasted a lot of money and time on the marijuana dispensary proposal and he feels that if they had thoroughly researched that they would have found that it could not happen the way they proposed it. Kathy responded that they are only an advisory board. Patrick also thanked and applauded them for coming forward with their initiatives. However, many of these items have been brought before the selectmen in the past. He stated he carefully reviews the weekly warrants and pays attention to the bills. He spent approx. 2 hours with town staff collecting the actual numbers for the contracted plowing of the one third mile of Tannery Road. At this time he handed out a spreadsheet study of the plowing for the past 5 years. He checked with Ralph Morrison whom has held this contract for several years about what percentage of time is actually spent on Tannery Road. The contracted plowing includes Tannery Road and the two fire houses. Ralph said about 65% of the time is spent on Tannery Road. Patrick took the cost of contracting the one third mile, converted it to one mile and applied the rate to the 40 miles of dirt roads. The actual cost of privatizing snow removal on dirt roads would cost the town 3 times the amount we spend now. Kathy responded that the town of Sheffield contracts out. Patrick corrected her, that they actually have a full time road superintendent and three full time highway department employees. They do sub out in the winter in addition to their own highway dept. to help meet timelines so that school routes are open, school parking lots are open, and municipal buildings are open on time. They supplement the department, not replace it. Kathy responded that’s fine if that’s the answer. Patrick responded that before an issue is presented it should be thoroughly researched.

Dolores stated that if they did research the issues ahead of time they would have realized their proposals cost the town at least a half million more than what we are paying now. These proposals undermine all the work the employees have done for the town.

John Burrows stated that we have the largest area with the most roads in Berkshire County so it only makes sense that our costs will be higher. He stated that the stumpage fees are a done deal but we should take Barbara Riiska's advice and look into who benefits from the States logging. Barbara is suggesting the town seek permission to cut and sell timber on state owned lands that we do not get full taxes on.

Patrick asked Town Administrator Lisa to respond to each initiative. Lisa followed up with labor relations on the timeclock. This may or may not be considered a collective bargaining issue.

The GPS is subject to collective bargaining, union contract negotiable.

Privatization of snow plowing is definitely subject to collective bargaining.

Privatizing roadside mowing is definitely subject to collective bargaining. It will also mean paying prevailing wages. Since we do not pay unemployment insurance we will have to pay employee salaries plus contracted bills.

Job descriptions, Lisa continues to gather information and work on job descriptions.

She has not had an opportunity to look into the finance committee's initiative regarding the school as it was just presented this evening. Patrick suggested the finance committee contact the school committee. He explained in detail the rising cost of special needs and the "No Child Left Behind" program. He explained that much of the schools budget is state mandated as to how much must be spent per student.

Rosario responded to the list of initiatives. Most of the items cannot be addressed at this time due to the three year union contract. He thanked the finance committee for all their hard work.

Patrick addressed the highway department. He hopes that they do not feel demoralized by these initiatives presented by the finance committee. He commended them on their work. They are a dedicated group of people that always respond when emergency issues happen. There is always room for improvement but they do an exceptional job for our town.

Dolores wanted to clarify some information about unemployment insurance. The town does not carry unemployment insurance. This was recommended by the DOR as we have a small amount of employees. The average cost of salaries for the highway department including overtime is approx. \$300,000 per year. If we give their work to contracted services or privatize the dpw we will be responsible for the dpw salaries for as long as they will be approved for unemployment. If the program allows for 99 weeks that is a cost of approx. \$600,000 out of the towns budget plus the cost of contracted work.

Dolores asked the finance if they new how long it would take for the town to realize any savings from their proposal. They did not have an answer.

The Selectmen said they will have a response by August 25, 2014.

Discussed the need for a vote to support The Master Plan by the Selectmen.

Motion by Rosario, second by Patrick, passed unanimously to support the Master Plan.

We received a request from Richard Campetti to be re appointed to the Conservation Commission. Motion by Rosario, second by Patrick, passed unanimously to re appoint Richard Campetti to the Conservation Commission.

We received a request from Kathy Burrows to be re appointed to the Historical Commission. Motion by Rosario, second by Patrick, passed unanimously to re appoint Kathy Burrows to the Historical Commission.

Discussed resent meetings held by the Finance Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee that were held with out a quorum present. There is some confusion on the Finance Committee as to whether Kathy Jacobs has been re appointed. The Town Clerk has a verbal confirmation from the Moderator after the meeting was held that he did re appoint her some time in June. There definitely was not a quorum for the Strategic Planning meeting and a meeting should not have been held. It is a clear open meeting law violation. Town Clerk explained that if there is not a quorum present you can adjourn to another date or simply state that quorum requirements have not been met therefore there is no meeting.

Minutes reviewed and signed

Warrants reviewed and signed

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

---

Patrick Barrett

---

Rosario Messina

---

Jeffrey Gray