

Bethlehem Board of Selectmen
Meeting Minutes
Bethlehem Selectmen Office
February 23, 2015

Present: Chairperson Laleme, Selectman Culver, Selectman Blanchard, Selectman Fiorentino, Selectman Glavac.

At 6:00pm Chairperson Laleme opened the meeting and welcomed Brad Bailey, Erin Hennessey, and Linda Massimilla to the meeting (Jeff Woodburn arrived late). Chairperson Laleme had a book of government laws and regulations and said the state is smothering small towns with all the laws. She expressed concerns she has including, the Select Board having to walk the town boundaries every 7 years, the training now required for municipal employees to work on culverts, the training now required for the Highway supervisor about recognizing alcohol and drug suspicion in their employees, and having to sponsor an officer to go to the police academy.

Erin Hennessey suggested to the Board having a contract with new officers that they have to stay with the Town for a certain time. The Board explained that we do that currently but it doesn't hold up in court.

Selectman Blanchard said it is hard doing the budget every year and said we are trying to keep our heads above water. He also said we can't compete with Littleton on what they pay their officers. Selectman Blanchard said the Board has a responsibility to the people who put them in this position.

Jeff Woodburn discussed regionalization scenarios that other areas are looking into including schools, policing, dispatch, etc. Chairperson Laleme said North Country Council put out a wonderful regional plan but she wondered who pays for it. Chairperson Laleme said there are a lot of user fees, registrations, etc. She also said healthcare in Coos County is concerning and the roads in the North Country are bad.

Selectman Glavac said Broadband access is a problem for the North Country. Mr. Bailey said Fairpoint had to make a plan for remote areas with a grant they had and mentioned a local company – SNS.

Mr. Bailey said there is a 35% increase in auto registration fees in the proposed budget and said the concern from the Select Board about the Select Board having to recommend or not recommend petitioned warrant articles could possibly be addressed as a bill that could be introduced.

Another concern discussed was the fact that the Board can no longer go into non-public session to discuss advice from an attorney without the attorney being present or on the phone. They discussed how costly this is for municipalities and said they used to be able to discuss advice that came in an email but now have to incur the cost of having them come in person or by phone conference.

There was discussion about the fact that the Town cannot have employees that are considered seasonal because the "town" is continuously operating even though we have seasonal departments including a country club and a summer rec program. This means the town pays unemployment for those employees.

There was discussion about the possibility of regionalizing our policing. Chairperson Laleme said that would be a challenge because of the size (area) of Bethlehem.

The Board pointed out the impact of a 35% increase in registration fees to the North Country because if someone can't afford to register their car we do not have public transportation to rely on.

Mr. Woodburn said there is HB 285 that speaks on the attorney issue and encouraged the Board to express their opinion on that.

Mr. Bailey said he will tackle the issue of having to recommend petitioned warrant articles.

Mr. Woodburn mentioned the Balsams multimillion dollar project that would provide 1000 jobs. Selectman Blanchard said he understands the nature of the industry and questioned who would get the 1000 jobs and said not North Country residents. He said his concern is for people who live here now. He said we need to provide economic stability.

Selectman Fiorentino said the Balsams project is great for Coos County but what about Grafton County. He said Grafton County needs to attract jobs and he believes it should be industrial and manufacturing. Chairperson Laleme said the upper part of Grafton is like Coos. Chairperson Laleme mentioned that all we have is tourism and said the impact the Northern Pass would have on that would be huge.

Selectman Culver said our budget is tight and how we used the unreserved fund balance to offset the tax base for the last couple of years. He said we cannot keep doing that. Selectman Culver said it will be employees, services, and equipment that get cut next. He also said the education budgets are always increasing and the state keeps cutting education aid etc.

Mrs. Massimilla said the southern part of the state dealing with the pipeline understands now about the northern pass.

Butch Lucas said he is big on recycling and said too much trash is coming into the state. He would like to see a NH law about recycling. He said this area does a super job and he said we need to stop filling the landfills and need to open our eyes to the problem.

Brett Jackson said Vermont educates the drivers/operators more and said how we should do more of that versus CDL drivers.

Rita Farrell asked if having an income tax in the state of NH would help with inequality.

Mr. Bailey said any state that has offered a new tax doesn't lower other taxes and said he wasn't sure if another tax would fix things.

Mrs. Massimilla said everything needs to be put on the table and said you can't take them out of the mix.

Butch Lucas said people that live in the precinct have an additional tax for water and sewer but still have a water/sewer bill.

Chairperson Laleme said there will be a public hearing on March 23rd to amend our pole licensing. They discussed the need to have an employee petition for the amendment and that it is typically the Tax Collector. The Board decided to ask Mary Jackson if she would do this and if not, Nicole McGrath would be asked.

The Board discussed some correspondence from NCIC about Broadband. They will be contacted to let them know we have the map here.

The Board discussed the request from North Country Council about the 10 year plan for projects questionnaire. They talked about the Town Building parking lot. Selectman Fiorentino suggested holding off on this until after reviewing the Master Plan surveys.

The next Dept. Head meeting will be on March 18th at 9am.

Chairperson Laleme announced that the assessed value of all the properties sold last year is just under ½ million.

Chairperson Laleme read a request from someone to use our pool for swim lessons. They said they would need to check to see if they are insured and if not check with our insurance company. The Board also questioned if it will be a conflict with our own lessons. Selectman Glavac said he would like Rhienna Miscio's input on that.

The Board reviewed the minutes from 02/09/15. Selectman Blanchard moved to approve the minutes. Selectman Fiorentino seconded. Carried 4-0. (Selectman Culver abstained).

The Board discussed abatements. Chairperson Laleme moved to grant an abatement for John Driscoll due to assessment for \$434.70. Selectman Blanchard seconded. Carried 5-0.

Chairperson Laleme moved to approve an abatement for Chance and Tara Craig due to assessment for \$931.06. Selectman Blanchard seconded. Carried 5-0.

A third abatement request will be discussed in non-public session.

Chairperson Laleme said she and Selectman Blanchard met with the Littleton Town Manager and the Littleton Planning/Zoning clerk to discuss the boundary line issue on Railroad Street. She said the boundary line appears to be further east than the map indicates. She said this will have to be resolved and will have to meet with Littleton Town Manager again in the fall to discuss sharing the cost of a surveyor and whether to put a warrant article on next year or not. Butch Lucas asked if both Bethlehem and Littleton could do warrant articles to see if voters want to leave it alone and not spend any money at all. Chairperson Laleme said they could decide to do that. The Board discussed trying to contact John Rolley who was the fence viewer for that area years ago.

Selectman Culver said he talked with Profile Technologies about the PCI compliance and Profile doesn't want to take responsibility for it. We will check with our insurance company to see if they have any IT policy examples. Frank Claffey said they need Board approval to accept electronic payments. There was a question of the possibility of needing a public hearing for this or not. Selectman Blanchard moved to adopt RSA 80:52 to accept electronic payments if it is determined that a public hearing is not needed. Chairperson Laleme seconded. Mary Jackson said she will have to print and mail out registrations to people doing online registrations so she would like to charge a fee of \$1.50 to offset the expense to do that. Carried 5-0.

Julian Czarny said it is providing convenience for people and asked about privacy concerns. He said he is now receiving letters to register his dogs and people should know that they need to do that. He said stick with what works. Frank said it is for the convenience for customers who don't want to come to the town hall and said it is the customer's choice. Mrs. Jackson said she gets a lot of requests about taking credit/debit cards. Chairperson Laleme moved to allow the surcharge of \$1.50 to cover the cost to print and send documents. Selectman Blanchard seconded. Mr. Lucas said his father has one leg and uses credit cards for everything. He said it would give him and others in similar circumstances the opportunity to independently pay their own bills. Carried 5-0.

Rita Farrell asked if the North Country Council transportation project could provide public transportation to go to Doctors and Littleton etc. Chairperson Laleme said Tri-care does that. Frank Claffey said that it has to be for construction projects so that wouldn't qualify.

Julian said NH vacation week is coming and said Rhienna should get some plywood and paint skate rink open.

Chris McGrath asked if there would be a candidate's night and Chairperson Laleme said no they hadn't planned one.

Chairperson Laleme moved to go into non-public session per 91-A for matters of personnel and reputation. Selectman Culver seconded. Chairperson Laleme did roll call with all members agreeing to go into non-public session.

The Board reviewed an abatement. Selectman Blanchard moved to deny the abatement. Selectman Culver seconded. Carried 5-0

The Board discussed another abatement that a Board of Selectmen previously approved years ago. The Board will send letter saying he will now be receiving tax bills for this property.

The Board discussed an eviction situation and decided a letter will be mailed stating the amount owed and that the Board will be following through with the eviction.

At 8:40 Chairperson Laleme moved to come out of non-public session. Selectman Blanchard seconded. Carried 5-0.

At 8:40 Selectman Blanchard moved to adjourn. Selectman Culver seconded. Carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
April Hibberd
Administrative Assistant