

Bethlehem Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

Bethlehem Town Building Meeting Room

August 19, 2013

Present: Chairman Blanchard, Selectman Culver, Selectman Laleme, Selectman Glavac.

Excused: Selectman Fiorentino.

At 6:37 Chairman Blanchard opened the meeting.

The Board reviewed the request from a homeowner on Oxbow Road to deed the road to the homeowner. The Board said more research needs to be done.

The Board reviewed the minutes from 08/12/13. Chairman Blanchard moved to approve the minutes as written. Selectman Laleme seconded. Carried 4-0.

Selectman Culver said he wanted to clarify something that Don Lavoie said at the last meeting about the Miller's Run homeowners paying extra taxes because of having town water and sewer. Selectman Culver said that is not true. He said the assessors were asked about this and they said homeowners do not pay extra taxes for having town water and/or sewer.

The Board discussed a quote from Profile Technologies for a new assessing computer. The quote was for approx. \$1400.00 and Rob from KRT said we might be able to go a little cheaper and possibly get a laptop instead of a desktop. The Board said they will discuss this after getting a quote on a laptop. Selectman Culver said it must be well configured to be that amount and he said he would feel better having a desktop versus a laptop.

At 6:45 Chairman Blanchard opened the public hearing to accept grant funding for the hazard mitigation plan. Chairman Blanchard read the hearing notice. Jack explained that the Board of Selectmen signed the grant agreement in 2011 but there was supposed to be a public hearing as well and that never happened. This public hearing is to formalize and make things right with the grant. Jack also explained that the grant is to update our plan. Jack said the Town's share of the grant is soft money which is staff's pay for going and participating in the plan meetings. Rita asked if the \$5,000.00 is to pay for the person that is doing the plan and then the town gets reimbursed. Jack told her yes. Chairman Blanchard moved to accept the \$5,000.00 grant. Selectman Laleme seconded. Carried 4-0. At 6:50 Chairman Blanchard closed the public hearing.

Sara Guild approached the Board and did a power point presentation on why the Town should not allow the Mt. Cleveland Road property to be sold by sealed bid. She asked the Board to remove it from the sale and give them a year to raise the money to purchase the lot. Sara gave a petition to the Board that has been signed by 110 Bethlehem residents. Sara went over numerous benefits of preserving that

property including tourism, hiking, watershed, wildlife, air quality, possible financial gain from sustainable timber harvesting. Sara said she has spoken with an abutter who is interested in helping with a right of way to the property. Sara said she will be working with Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust and Bethlehem Conservation Commission to research grants and fundraising. She said they are receiving a lot of support from people and some are willing to donate.

Selectman Laleme said the Board voted to put the property up for sale and she doesn't want the Town to hold Conservation but she doesn't see why we can't hold off for a year to sell it. Selectman Laleme said it would still have to be put up for bid but thinks we should wait a year.

Selectman Glavac said 67% of Bethlehem is open land with a large part being the national forest. He said he is not sure how he feels about delaying the sale for a year.

Chairman Blanchard said he feels obligated to the taxpayers by correcting an oversight in the past. He said he doesn't want it to get harvested but the Town already has a lot of land in Current Use, Conservation Easements, etc. He said the taxpayers deserve the income that would be generated from the sale of that land.

Selectman Culver said the assessor ran a report that shows 92.7 acres of state forest, 30993 acres of White Mtn. National Forest and 18958 acres in current use. He said that is 90% of Town land.

Sara said this lot is extra special because of the peak and ecology. Sara mentioned there is an access to the property by foot but is very steep. She said there is no clear evidence of a right of way.

Selectman Culver stated the process of selling a homeowners property and said they need to be 3 years delinquent in taxes and they receive a letter 90 days before the sale letting them know to contact the Town if they are interested in repurchasing the property.

Chris Jensen asked if Mr. Howe can now redeem the property. He was told no he couldn't but he was welcome to bid on the property if he chooses to.

Cheryl Jensen said the land can be conserved and bring a source of income. She said a Conservation Trust could provide a steady income. She also said the Board can be responsible to taxpayers and also retain the land. She said the Conservation Commission just met on Thursday and they voted to support removing the sale from the auction.

Rebecca Brown from Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT) said Easton was recently going through a similar situation and Easton, Sugar Hill, Landaff, and Franconia all voted in Town Meeting to preserve the land in Easton.

Selectman Culver explained that the Town will not be able to keep the full amount. He said the Town can only keep what is owed to the Town for back taxes, interest, penalty fees and costs. He said after 3 years has passed since being deeded the Town can keep all proceeds from the sale. Selectman Culver also explained that there was a Warrant Article in 1992 that says the Town can ONLY sell town owned properties by auction or sealed bids.

Selectman Laleme said it should be removed from the sale because there is so much interest in it. Selectman Glavac asked if the Easton property is going to be timber managed. Rebecca Brown said ACT is the owner of the land on behalf of the communities and it will be managed for timber by stewardship. She also said ACT pays taxes to the Town of Easton for the property.

There was discussion about not waiting for the 3 years to sell the property so the landowner would still receive some money for the property.

There was discussion about the Board's authority to not deed property if it will be a liability to the Town.

There was discussion about having a Warrant Article to see if the Town would vote to sell this property to be conserved.

Selectman Laleme moved to remove the 235 acre parcel on Mt. Cleveland Road from the sale at this time. Selectman Glavac seconded. Chairman Blanchard said he is concerned with removing it from the sale. Selectman Glavac said he didn't know much about this property when the Town decided to sell it. Selectman Culver said he is torn because he sees the benefit of waiting but feels obligated to sell it. Chairman Blanchard said in a year from now we will be in the same boat. Selectman Culver said he was worried about setting a precedent. Selectman Laleme said this is an exception because it is unique. Selectman Laleme also said this is not being done for the property owner but doing it for the uniqueness of the property.

Motion carried 4-0.

At 8:30 Chairman Blanchard moved to go into non-public session per 91a for matters of reputation and personnel. Selectman Glavac seconded. Chairman Blanchard did roll call with all members agreeing to go into non-public session.

Chairman Blanchard moved to abate the \$100.00 shortage from tax payment. Selectman Laleme seconded. Carried 4-0. Selectman Laleme moved to refund the vehicle registration overage. Chairman Blanchard seconded. Carried 4-0.

At 8:54 Chairman Blanchard moved to come out of non-public session. Selectman Glavac seconded. Carried 4-0.

At 8:54 Chairman Blanchard moved to adjourn. Selectman Culver seconded. Carried 4-0.

Respectfully submitted,

April Hibberd

Administrative Assistant