06/29/2020 SB Minutes

Bethlehem Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

June 29, 2020
Via Zoom – Chairman Boisseau, Selectman Moore, Selectman Moritz, Selectman Caplain, Selectman Jensen.

Meeting opened at 6:00. Chairman Boisseau reminded people to mute their microphones when not talking.

Plexiglass shields for desks. Selectman Moritz said she worked with Jack Anderson and April Hibberd on them and April found perfect ones at Staples. They could be put on and taken off desks. Chief Anderson put ropes on stands to help with distancing in the lobby. Selectman Moritz said to enter the town building masks are mandatory and employees need to wear them when not at their desks.

Conservation Commission using the old community garden. Selectman Moore said they met and do not want anything to do with the garden. She said they are busy with the town forest and other things. She suggested asking Brett Jackson to remove all the stuff and planting some seeds. Selectman Jensen said the Board decided previously to remove the rebar due to safety issues. Selectman Moore said you cannot remove that until you remove everything. Chairman Boisseau said they can revisit this on July 13th and will solicit ideas from the public on what to do with that space.

Grants for small businesses due to Covid-19. Selectman Moritz said this started with looking into bonuses for other employees for highway and office staff and using GOFFER funds. She contacted Erin Hennessey and found out that money cannot be used for that, but that money could be used for grants for small businesses affected by Covid-19. She said she asked Chief Anderson about how much would be available for this and he estimated $20,000 could be used for this. Chairman Boisseau asked how long we have to spend the money. Selectman Moritz said the applications would have to be submitted by July 22nd and said there is a simple form and it takes into account if they have received other assistance. She said they could talk about it at the July 27th meeting and could be reimbursed for the grants issued by Sept. 15th. Selectman Caplain said they used the same formula the state uses. Selectman Moritz said we would have to make sure people are aware of it. She also said the town would pay it out and then get reimbursed. Selectman Moritz said she verified with the GOFFER office to make sure it was a proper use of the money and it is. It will be put on Facebook and put in the newsletter. Selectman Moritz said she will reach out to Carol Kerivan from Bethlehem Reimagined, so they know to get the word out. Nancy Strand asked if it is as open ended as it sounds. Selectman Moritz said they will have to have a tax id number and be a Bethlehem business. Independent contractors would be included. Selectman Caplain said there are parameters to apply for it. Ms. Strand said it should be considered if they have received other funding already. Selectman Moritz said that is figured into the calculation. Selectman Jensen asked how much she thought would help the businesses that have fallen through the cracks. Selectman Moritz said she wasn’t sure because self employed businesses have now received funding they can apply for. Selectman Moritz moved to utilize $20,000 from the Cares Act towards business interruption due to Covid. Selectman Caplain seconded. Roll all – motion carried.

Skip Sansoucy – Assessing Complex Properties – Board has reviewed the proposal and now the Board needs to make the decision on whether to hire Sansoucy to assess the complex properties. Selectman Moore asked if we would receive a reduced rate from our regular assessor. Skip Sansoucy said we have a contract and usually it doesn’t change. Selectman Moritz said the landfill can come off the list for now but would need to consider it in the future when it closes. Chicks gravel pit is on the list and predominately not in Bethlehem. Mr. Sansoucy said if it is not in Bethlehem, we would take it off the list. Mr. Sansoucy said the landfill would be handled as a retainer as needed and for the gas to energy plant. Selectman Moritz said there were more properties then she anticipated. Wayside, Bretton Woods, Pinetree Power, Abenaki Water, Consolidated, Arlington, PMR, Chicks Gravel Pit, Selectman Jensen asked if we could restrict how many properties to have him look at. Mr. Sansoucy said they can look at how ever many they want. It is a 3-year contract. The ones recommended for 2020 are Bretton Woods, Cell Tower, Consolidated, Pinetree Power. Selectman Jensen asked how we get a handle on how much it will cost us. Mr. Sansoucy said the contract is a fixed price contract except the landfill. He said if the landfill gas to energy files for pollution exemption the board has to act quickly. Selectman Moritz asked if we need him to defend an abatement if that is included. He said no if they file for an appeal, but the regular part of an abatement is part of this contract. Chairman Boisseau asked if the $30,000 a year would pay for itself. He said we would see an increase in utilities. He said it is so undervalued. He said the easements have not been valued. He also said it is highly probable that his cost will be covered by the additional tax revenue. Chris McGrath said when we increase values it ends up in lawsuits. Mr. Sansoucy said the new house bill does not allow appeals on utilities. Transmission can appeal but appeals won years 14 – 17 so has been upheld by the court 2014 – 2017. Courts will also consolidate cases with multiple towns. He said that substantially reduces the costs to the towns. Selectman Jensen said Bethlehem isn’t prepared to fight legal battles like bigger towns. Mr. Sansoucy said Lancaster, Whitefield, Dalton, Dummer, Northumberland, Gorham, Berlin all do not use the states utility values and we will probably be grouped with them. He said half of the utility in Bethlehem cannot be appealed. He also said they would be using the same methodology they use with all the other towns so they would have to appeal all of them. Mr. McGrath said there was a past abatement with Bretton Woods and wondered if that would affect anything and was told no. Selectman Caplain asked what the total assessed value is of all the properties to try to determine if it is likely we would be able to make that up. Mr. Sansoucy said the gondola property isn’t completely valued and the utility value will increase substantially. Selectman Moritz said the next meeting is July 13th and has some questions she wants to look into and asked how that works for them. He said it pushes things back but if they want to wait until the 13th it is ok. Selectman Moritz said the question is not about his ability but how it will look for the town financially. He said he could look at utilities and Bretton Woods and give an estimate on the increased value. Selectman Moritz said she is happy to go either way, voting tonight or waiting 2 weeks. Selectman Caplain said he would like to wait the 2 weeks. He said he is happy with the process and Mr. Sansoucy. Chairman Boisseau asked if the Board was comfortable waiting until the 13th and they all agreed. Chairman Boisseau told Mr. Sansoucy he did not need to attend that meeting.

Mountain Top Telecom – Kevin Low came to the Board to talk about Broadband. Mr. Low said as part of the Cares Act, they have allocated 50 million for Broadband. He said the need has increased dramatically due to covid-19 and people being home etc. He said being a non-profit they are in a good position to utilize this grant. He also said he has talked with Stan Harrison and Mr. Harrison has given them access on Agassiz which gives them a lot of coverage access. In Bethlehem looking at 3 different grants. He said they are expecting 2 jobs per grant. The 3 grants would be 3.3 and would be 6 jobs. Mr. Low said they are asking for municipal involvement. Selectman Jensen said Spectrum and Consolidated will not do anything. Mr. Low said they may have to do underground conduit to avoid the pole issues. Paul Greenlaw said a mountain top telecom would fill in a lot of the gaps that the other providers will not take care of and give another option to others. Selectman Moore asked if the eastern side of Bethlehem would be covered and asked if he looked at the tower at the Twin/Carrol line. Mr. Low said he had not looked at the town in Twin. He asked the Board if they would be willing to write a letter of support for the grant. Selectman Moritz asked if Cares money could be used for a commitment. Mr. Low said he doesn’t see why not. Mr. Low is going to map who will be able to utilize this service. Selectman Jensen asked Mr. Low if letters of support from residents would help. He said they are not being asked for that, but he would include them. Chairman Boisseau said having it will attract people to town and said he wished we had $15,000 in the budget to contribute but feels a letter a support is warranted. Mr. Low said they will provide 125 installs for low to moderate income customers. He said they are hoping to have an additional 5 technicians and will hear about the grant by mid-July. Selectman Moritz asked if they have ever applied for a CDBG grant. He said they applied for a CDFA for $100,000 and it was a long difficult process but will be looking into applying for more grants. Mr. Low said they will be applying for a Northern Borders grant next year and said they will be focusing on giving grants for Broadband and most companies are for profit, where they are non-profit, they feel good about that. The Board all agreed to writing a letter of support. Selectman Jensen will draft the letter.

Abatements – 415/17/4 – $149.74 the land value when compared with others didn’t line up. 420/10 $2769.89. Selectman Moritz moved to approve the assessor’s recommendation on the 2 abatements. Selectman Caplain seconded. Roll call – all – motion carried.

Public Input – none

Other – Auction – Difficult preparing for auction with office closed. Selectman Moritz said she thinks they should hold off until next year. The Board all agreed.

Selectman Moritz said she was looking into grants for bonuses for highway employees and office staff to show appreciation for what they have been going through due to the pandemic. She feels every dept. has had a hard time. She proposed a $500.00 bonus for highway employees and $250.00 for office, Rec, Matt, $4,750.00 is the total amount and would have that in the budget. She thinks it would go a long way to say thank you. Chairman Boisseau agrees. Selectmen Moore and Caplain agree. Mr. McGrath said it is a fantastic idea for the highway guys. Allegra said she appreciates Selectman Moritz’s comments and thinks the recognition is great. Barry Zitser agrees with it and thinks the staff deserves it. Selectman Moritz moved to offer a one-time bonus due to Covid to highway of $500.00 each and to 7 office including rec and Country Club. Selectman Jensen seconded. Roll call – all – Motion Carried.

Minutes 06/22/20. Selectman Caplain moved to approve the minutes. Selectman Moritz seconded. Motion carried roll call – all -motion carried.

At 7:58 Chairman Boisseau moved to go into non-public session per RSA 91 A3: II for matters of reputation. Selectman Caplain seconded. Roll call – all – motion carried.

The Board discussed background information.

At 8:11 Chairman Boisseau moved to adjourn. Selectman Moritz seconded. Roll call – all – motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

April Hibberd

Administrative Assistant