Bethlehem Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

November 1, 2021

In person – Chairman Boisseau, Selectman Hibberd, Selectman Caplain, Selectman Jensen – Selectman Morris joined remotely

Chairman Boisseau opened the meeting at 6:00pm and reminded people to leave their microphones on mute. He continued to remind in person participants to use the microphone so Zoom participants can hear

**Public Input**

**Cheryl Jensen** – town forest questions – A forest bathing startup in town is seeking permission to us the town forest for guided forest bathing sessions. They are asking about liability exposure for the town. The business has its own liability insurance. Selectman Morris – if the town land is used without charge from the town, it is immune for recreation use. There may be a difference where it is a business. Selectman Hibberd – in the past the town insurance company have asked businesses to have their own liability insurance to use town properties. The board will double check with the town’s insurance and ahs no issues with the business moving forward barring any insurance issues.

**Barry Zitser –** volunteers needed for complete streets committee – consult with energy committee to see if they will take on complete streets program as well – similar goals – electric charging for cars covered by both committees – Selectman Caplain – likes idea of involving energy commission. He has veered off complete streets path a bit and is working with Franconia and Littleton to create bike-friendly community. They have similar goals.

**Bretzfelder Park Committee Vacancy**

**Selectman Morris –** Bretzfelder committee has a vacancy from member moving from town – meets quarterly – interested residents can contact Nancy Czarny – The board discussed and decided vacancy should be posted looking for committee members.

**Health Insurance 2022 – FSA plan changes due by Nov 19th.**

**Chairman Boisseau –** changes due by the 19th – Selectman Morris – contribution limits set by federal gov’t – IRS may increase contribution limits – easy to hit limits by setting aside extra funds – Selectman Hibberd underutilized currently – outreach to employees and investigate employee contribution – table until next meeting to do more research.

**Budget guidance for department heads**

**Selectman Boisseau –** department heads meeting on 11/4, looking for guidance for budget presentations – the board discussed the cost of good and cost of living is rising, and they anticipate that budgets will have to follow. The board acknowledged that the budgets have been streamlined over the past few years and have had minimal rises. Selectman Hibberd would like to see department heads present another streamlined budget with increases only for the items that are expected to go up as well as a second budget with all of the true needs of the department. The board can use those needs to plan for large purchases in the upcoming years and help determine potential uses for ARPA funds.

**Eddie and Cathy Qi –** inflation is 5-6% - taxpayers are experience inflation as well – if budget goes up, taxpayers pay for it – does town control school budgets? Chairman Boisseau explained that the school budget is separate from the town. The Qi’s and the board discussed different options for lowering the tax rate in the town including less library hours and less police officers. The board spoke on the 24-hour police coverage that was voted on 5-6 years ago and the difficulties attracting and retaining good employees.

**Jack Anderson –** The fire chief discussed upping the starting pay rates at the town with the board. They talked about being prepared if the federal minimum wage increases. The board has talked with individual departments to adjust wages to make them competitive in hiring employees and retaining current employees.

**Chairman Boisseau –** the board has been trying to bring wages up to a competitive rate – long term employees are an asset to the town as they know the ins and outs of the departments and make the department more efficient. Chief Anderson – it’s time to start looking at a new fire station and new trucks – Chairman Boisseau – add to “ideal” budget so board can start planning now. Chief Anderson – the police department is in the same boat with their station.

**Barry Zitser –** when considering items look into regionalizing services and pool resources to increase options to town – Chief Anderson – have started conversations on regionalizing

**Andrea Bryant –** would be a similar bond item like building a new school – agrees something needs to be done to increase the capacity of the stations.

**Chairman Boisseau –** 2 budgets will be good to see needed increases and plan for future expenditures

**Eddie and Cathy Qi –** share resources with local towns – like library or other resources that may bring revenue to town – inflation increases labor costs but time to look into all expenses – Selectman Hibberd – believes library is open into other towns – and rec is available to other towns based on availability

**Rita Farrell –** how many PD officers and how many on duty at same time? – Selectman Hibberd - 6 total – 2 during the day on duty when chief is in office – night and weekends are 1 officer – Ms. Farrell – is the space crowded when 2 officers are on duty? – Selectman Hibberd – space is tight, and they need to store a lot of items

**Transfer Station Committee – recommendation on future transfer station and USDA grant opportunity for school food waste reduction**

**Selectman Jensen –** 2 items – Center for Ecotechnology – no cost grant to offer advice to businesses and schools to decrease food waste – Barry Zitser – multi state company - food waste and energy efficiency – do audit from beginning to end to reduce food waste at business or school – help communities reduce waste – Selectman Hibberd – what do they suggest? Composting? Donations? – Barry Zitser – everything from donating to people, farms, and composting – Andrea Bryant – help join pieces together between local businesses and schools – make connections – Chairman Boisseau – advisory only or infrastructure? Barry Zitser – advisory only – Selectman Morris – worked with them in Massachusetts – run giant program with state.

**Selectman Jensen – makes motion to endorse the Center for Ecotechnology and committee – Selectman Hibberd seconded – roll call – all – motion passed**

**Cathy Qi –** how is it funded? Selectman Jensen – no cost to town USDA grant funds non-profit.

**Selectman Jensen –** committee still recommends 116 location as best site for future transfer station

**Other/Follow up from board**

**Selectman Caplain –** speed feedback signs **–** mobile signs more expensive than permanent - spoke with Chief DeMoranville – 6 or 7 spots good to add to town – one current mobile sign destroyed in accident and waiting on insurance to cover them – current signs are battery powered and need to be swapped every other day – solar signs better option – could possibly use ARPA funds

**Selectman Caplain –** Small Acts – rolled out to businesses in town – very positive response – the following businesses responded so far:

- WREN

- Doogans

- Bitchin kitchen

- the Yarn Store

- Mountain Wind

- Maia Papaya

- Rek-Lis

- Meadowstone

- BES had already adopted it

-Bethlehem Library

**Selectman Caplain –** solar update – started talking with Barrington Power about contracts – very willing to work with town to get best rates with town – want to get started on engineering work, site work.

**Selectman Jensen –** member of Northeast Resource Recovery Association - meeting is coming up at the end of the month – Margaret Gale attending as part of other boards and can represent the select board as well.

**Selectman Jensen made a motion to endorse Margaret Gale as the select board representative at the NRRA meeting. – April Hibberd second – roll call – all – motion passed**

**Selectman Morris –** cemetery committee – Tuesday Nov 16th meeting – would like to show select board issues at cemetery – Selectman Morris and Selectman Jensen will go to tour cemetery.

**Minutes – 10/18/2021**

**Selectman Caplain made a motion to accept minutes from 10/18/2021 – Selectman Hibberd seconded – roll call – all – motion passed**

**At 7:29pm Chairman Boisseau made a motion to go into non-public session per RSA 91A-3 II (personnel and reputation) – Selectman Caplain seconded – roll call – all – motion passed.**

Board discussed absent committee members and removing them from positions. The board decided to remove any committee members not fulfilling their positions.

Board discussed dilapidated properties and code enforcement.

Selectman Caplain made a motion to increase pay to $15/hr for returning recreation counselors – Selectman Hibberd seconded – roll call - all – motion passed

**Selectman Caplain made a motion to adjourn at 8:03pm – Chairman Boisseau – seconded – roll call all – motion passed.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Fleury

Administrative Assistant