Bethlehem Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

November 29, 2021

In person – Chairman Boisseau, Selectman Hibberd, Selectman Jensen, Selectman Morris – Selectman Caplain absent

Chairman Boisseau opened the meeting at 6:05pm 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:**

**Cathy Qi –** last meeting talked about solar project – attended Profile school board meeting – their project delayed at least 6 months – work in shipping industry – serious delays in supply chain – container cost up from $3k to $20k – domestic trucking increased too – total cost of project may be much more with supply chain issues - would like to see current price with increases

**Public Utilities Commission –** Selectman Morris – cutting funding for energy efficiency projects – cutting programs and budgets – would like to write letter to commission from board stating displeasure – Chairman Boisseau – in support of writing letter to commission expressing board’s displeasure – Selectman Morris – huge 52 page report – short 5 paragraph statement –

WHEREAS, all of New Hampshire’s electric and gas utilities, the Office of Consumer Advocate, and non-profit consumer advocacy agencies, such as the Conservation Law Foundation, have reached a Settlement Agreement that will fund and encourage energy efficiency projects for consumers, businesses, and municipalities during 2021-2023; and

WHEREAS, energy efficiency projects provides businesses, persons, and municipalities with cost-efficient ways to lower their utility and heating bills; and

WHEREAS, energy efficiency projects enhance the environment by reducing harmful particles and greenhouse gases that pollute our air, water, and land; and

WHEREAS, energy efficiency projects promote economic activity and jobs with living wages; and

WHEREAS, energy efficiency projects provide sustainable ways to reduce the need for expensive utility plant building, and to avoid economic disruptions from fluctuating energy prices; now, be it

RESOLVED, that the Bethlehem, New Hampshire Select Board hereby requests the Public Utilities Commission to reconsider its November 12, 2021 Order No. 26,553, and to approve the December 3, 2021 Settlement Agreement.

**Chairman Boisseau makes motion to oppose order 2553 – Selectman Hibberd second – roll call all, less Selectman Caplain – motion passed.**

**Tax Rate setting:**

**Chairman Boisseau -** increase of $.54 if town does not use unassigned funds - $1,524,166 – DRA recommends keeping 17% as a maximum – if take $100,000 out of unassigned to hit 17% - makes it 25.39 - $150,000 from fund would equal last year’s rate within $.02 – The board discussed potential offsets from the unassigned fund balance. The discussed potential TAN ramifications with treasurer, Frank Claffey. If unassigned fund goes too low a TAN may be needed sooner.

**Chris McGrath** – thanks for the form – would like to see $325,000 as a compromise without using TAN as much as possible – likes to see the fund so high and would like to see the board reward the taxpayers with reducing rate.

Selectman Morris - $275k would get us close to last year’s balance - $300k looks good – Chairman Boisseau – 300k looks good - $300k would be $24.69 – lower than last year’s total –

**Selectman Morris makes motion to use $300,000 from unassigned fund balance to offset tax rate for 2021 – Selectman Jensen seconded – roll call – all less Selectman Caplain – motion passed.**

**Budgets: Highway, GGB, Town Clerk, Town Collector, Legal, Tan/Debt services, Assessing, Planning/Zoning –** Chairman Boisseau reminded folks that board asked departments to do minimal rises in budget and a “wish” budget to get items for the future -

**Highway –** Brett Jackson – GB – 3% increase for normal budget – wish is 11% increase – Selectman Morris - capital reserve for highway? – Brett Jackson – yes 2 – fuel down because town is not hauling hot top this year – Frank Claffey, treasurer – new truck $170k - $7,800 in 1995 dump truck account – drain account and resolve capital reserve – 2020 account for highway capital equipment - $112k from revolving fund plus capital fund money equals total amount. Brett Jackson – trucks being built now – hard to get outfitters to commit to build – won’t see until 2023 – get rid of ‘96 and 2007 – smaller, newer fleet is better.

**Selectman Hibberd made a motion to approve new highway truck purchase – Chairman Boisseau seconded – roll call – all, less Selectman Caplain– motion passed**

Selectman Morris – general point – GGB and energy projects – town labor included in a lot of the projects without being in the budget, need to budget for this in the future.

**GGB** – up cemetery – numbers sent this afternoon will need to adjust from presented – Selectman Hibberd – last year set up revolving fund – Selectman Morris - $7500 of maintenance needed – software up too – Brett Jackson – John Hanks – Selectman Hibberd money still in fund to encumber into next year. The board discussed the costs involved with cleaning and maintaining the existing stones in the cemetery.

**Town Clerk** – $63,102 to $70,888 – 12% increase – Mary Jackson – extra elections next year and always budget special election in case – Moderator, service supplies reflect that – longevity added due to 10 years – dues and education reflect conference stay – ePoll books make check in faster at elections – roughly $1500 each – 2 would be good – Mary Jackson – second computer works to register – second window would allow that computer to operate – Selectman Hibberd – would like to clean blinds in clerk office using GGB money – Mary Jackson – state gave printers way back for registrations but no longer supported and will need to replace soon - $800 each.

**Tax Collector** – 58823 to 60653 – 3% increase for salaries – Mary Jackson – wish list to refinish floors in slow season – getting bad.

**Legal** - $20,000 in 2021 – 2022? - Selectman Morris – would like to straighten deed problems out using legal funds – CJ $20,00 sounds good.

**Debt/TAN services** – Debt – $55,284 to $55,510 – 1% decrease – Selectman Morris – town building construction pay off? Frank Claffey – 2027 paid off – roughly $275k to pay off – save roughly $10k in interest – 3 years to pay off Cat Backhoe – TAN - $10k to $10k – flat.

**Assessing** – up 2% due to increased software costs.

**Planning and Zoning** – $22,322 to $34,438 – 54% rise – includes $10k – to review and update codes and policies – consulting a 1-time thing – Services include Harry Newell running meetings to use big screen.

**Town building mask policy, town employee COVID policy – working session, no public input**

**Chairman Boisseau –** cases increasing in region and new variants rising – Selectman Morris – currently following NH guidelines and best practices – CDC – guidelines met as well – NHMA – supports universal masking – town supportive with paid leave and remote work requests – very accommodating – worksheets lay out specific issues and responses for anything – believes mandates are strong and tough to go stronger without federal or state backup – current leave policy puts us at bad position – no carry over makes employees gamble with time off – would rather see people stay home and test if suspected sick – Selectman Hibberd – would like to see that in a policy to help people when sick – Selectman Morris – would like to see PTO policy to carry over a week if needed – Selectman Hibberd – doesn’t connect to COVID – board voted to pay employees to stay home if needed regardless – would like to encourage people to stay home to keep people safe – Chairman Boisseau - agree would like to pay people to stay home and get tested to keep transmission low – Selectman Jensen – what’s current situation with workplace exposure? – Selectman Morris – state - if vaccinated continue going to work unless showing symptoms – tough decision – 10 day quarantine – tested 5 days from exposure – stay home 10 days – Selectman Jensen – hard to pay 10 days having them stay home – Chairman Boisseau – exposure without symptoms is ok to stay away from other employees – each department is different – some departments easy to keep distance, some impossible to keep distance – office work different – Selectman Morris – agree each department may need to do own guidelines – Selectman Hibberd – emergency first responders guidelines different? – Selectman Morris – not with emergency order lifted – Selectman Jensen ask departments to work own guidelines – at department head meeting? – Fire dept able to do rapid testing – Selectman Morris – can get more tests with federal/state funding? Will have to look into it and effectiveness of tests – done by EMT versus self-test – Chairman Boisseau – won’t be able to determine fix tonight – Selectman Hibberd – use department head meeting to brainstorm each department guidelines – Selectman Jensen – check with Jack on test availabilities -

**Minutes – 11/15/2021 - none**

**Other/Follow up from the board**

**Selectman Morris –** letter from resident today regarding 12/20 public hearing – worried it’s going to be a bigger event than designed – making sure Bethlehem residents are able to speak at event over non-residents – Selectman Hibberd – can make it only Bethlehem residents – no issue – Selectman Jensen – agree only Bethlehem residents – Selectman Hibberd – is route the same? Selectman Morris – public meeting over summer – yes, still same route – Selectman Hibberd – good to outline facts first – Selectman Jensen – challenge from private group to study – no new plan to DOT –Selectman Hibberd - time limit? – 5 minutes each? – Chairman Boisseau – agree to time limit, written statements preferred to read off, limit to topic at hand – goal of public hearing is to take public comment and express to DOT – submit written responses taken into consideration compiling response to DOT – Selectman Jensen – time? Chairman Boisseau - 3 minutes, 1 time, limited to Bethlehem residents – Selectman Morris – residents and property owners – Selectman Hibberd – be prepared to back up decision – is this to form board opinion or to relay information? – Chairman Boisseau – role of meeting is to gather public input to compile it to a response to DOT based on the proposed truck route including the public and board’s opinion. - Selectman Morris – would be nice if Casella rep made opinion – Selectman Hibberd – manager is a Bethlehem resident and can attend – should they do presentation at beginning? – Selectman Jensen – opens it up to discussion and lengthens meeting – Dave Wiley – would it help contacting DOT to see how other towns have dealt with the process? – they may have experience in the process – Selectman Hibberd – need facts to help protect town – Selectman Morris – application lays out route and roadway improvements – Selectman Jensen - helpful to have lots of comments to present to DOT – Chairman Boisseau - not a debate, information gathering only.

**Tim Fleury** – ok to reorder t-shirts if in budget? – yes.

**At 8:47 pm Chairman Boisseau made a motion to go into non-public session per RSA 91A-3 II (personnel) – Selectman seconded – roll call – all – motion passed.**

**The board discussed personnel performance and job requirements – the board discussed employee performance and job expectations.**

**Chairman Boisseau made a motion to hire 2 new fire department personnel – Selectman Hibberd seconded – roll call - all, less Selectman Caplain, motion passed.**

**Selectman Morris made a motion to adjourn at 10:24pm – Selectman Hibberd – seconded – roll call all, less Selectman Caplain – motion passed.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Fleury

Administrative Assistant