

Selectmen's Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 11, 2021

At the Selectmen's meeting held on Monday, January 11, 2021 at 6:30 p.m. the Selectmen participated via Zoom:

Stanley Holz is at his home in South Carolina, maintaining social distancing.

Peter Corey is at his home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

Shawn White is at his home in Whitefield, maintaining social distancing.

Chairman Holz called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Courtney Vashaw said that she has been working out the language to set up a capital reserve fund for the library with unspent money from their budget. They want to put money aside for things like a boiler failure, roofing, things that become bigger expenses that can decimate a budget if you don't have funds set aside. Stan asked about special library fund. Courtney said that money set aside for children's programs and programs that are outside of our normal business. It is not for a roof replacement. The purpose is for big ticket items which would be hard to budget for. Courtney said they would like to set it aside little by little using the appropriations money as requested. Isn't the town responsible for the maintenance of the building? Courtney's understanding is the exterior items are the town's responsibility and the interior items are the library's responsibility. She is looking at prudent budgeting for the long term. Courtney said that her goal is most years there would not be a lot that would go into that fund. We have more unexpended funds than anticipated due to pandemic last year, she would like to see it stay with the library for the long term. We are not asking for money out of taxation. Courtney said they are looking at up to \$10,000, because we don't have a hard dollar figure right now. Shawn doesn't have an issue with it, but will other departments feel the same way? Peter said he doesn't disagree with the need to establish the forward thinking of establishing the fund. Keep in mind anything we don't spend goes back to the taxpayers and does affect the taxpayers in a positive fashion. Is it better to put it on the warrant as a regular capital reserve in a small amount of money? The library budget is so small so it wouldn't be a large amount of money. Every department is going to want to start doing that. What is bothersome for Peter is this is similar to what the school district does with their leftover funds. They present warrant articles indicating it will have no impact on the tax rate. That is not true because it does affect your tax rate in the previous year. It gets fuzzy for him. Courtney said it long game vs. short term planning. Sometimes you get grant funds for unexpected expenses. Normally they don't have unexpended funds in the library budget. If they have \$10,000 now and put it in a capital reserve, that is probably what it is going to be for the next few years. Why don't they come up with a plan and put a capital reserve fund for \$2,000 to \$2,500 a year so after 10 years they would have \$25,000. Courtney said what she is trying to avoid is an unanticipated budget season and a windfall because of COVID. This is a one-time opportunity to put some funds away. She doesn't want to be limiting themselves in the future. Courtney said she is trying to keep the

money in the library for library specific purposes. To start with \$10,000 now puts it in a solid place to build on. She wants to make sure she is not ruffling feathers. She does need permission from the town. She would rather not have to do the petition. Shawn said he would rather see a capital reserve go out and raise money. Shawn said either way it will affect the tax rate. Courtney said that she could justify a \$10,000 capital reserve. That is a decision we can determine. We can certainly do that as a matter of management. We need the voter's permission. Judy had checked with DRA and they suggested wording: "To see if the town will vote to establish a Library maintenance and repairs capital reserve fund and to appropriate \$xxx to the fund with said funds to come from the 12/31/20 unassigned fund balance. And to name the xxxx as agents to said fund (if they want agents named, either the Library Trustees or the Selectboard). Courtney asked if we can have joint agents? Peter thinks it should be the Selectboard and let the library trustees participate. Courtney said that she is hopeful to be prudent for the long term.

Rob's issues were resolved so he did not need to participate in the meeting tonight.

Shawn White re: Richardson Drive.

Shawn said he received complaints from Thom Richardson about the way the town is plowing and maintaining Richardson Drive. This has been going on 10 years plus. 300 feet of Richardson Drive is a town way. We had problems plowing there in the past. Thom doesn't want it plowed. They dig up the road and damage his lawn when they plow. A larger truck does that route. He only wants it plowed if there are 5 inches or more of snow. Shawn brought up discontinuing that road as a right of way. He asked again about plowing only if there are more than 5 inches. We need to determine if it is only an issue with Thom. There are two other property owners on the road, and we should check with them as well. If the Board wants to look at this further, we will need to reach out to the other homeowners and see what their input is. When Peter was first elected back in 2016, he received the same complaints from Thom. We have an obligation to not micromanage the pw department. Peter said that he explained that to Thom, and he never got another call after that. Peter thought it had died. He is not sure the conditions of what the adoption of Richardson drive is. Is it more like a driveway? Can we abandon? We need to allow the public works department to do the job they have been hired to do. Peter didn't realize this was happening again. Shawn said in looking at the highway grant funds from the state, it is not a big sum of money for this portion of road. Shawn said we will have Rob reach out to the two residents on the road and see what their feeling is. Richardson Drive was voted in one year with a bunch of different rods. Tom Ladd is curious is when there are other property owners who may have an interest, Tom assumes that emergency vehicles need to get in. It is 300 feet long. If it doesn't get plowed, they will plow it. We can have Rob reach out and see their opinions. Shawn said it is only three property owners on that road.

Dave Leonard, who was participating via zoom said if we disband the road, the residents and landowners on that road would have to maintain the road and have to take care of all the maintenance on that road. It isn't just plowing.

It was decided to hold the Public Budget Hearing via Zoom on February 8th at 6:30 p.m.

Town Meeting Location has a lot of issues. Bruce Brekke, Town Moderator, said that he doesn't expect a large turnout for the voting during the day. The other half is town meeting. Is the state going to allow the budget and warrant articles to be approved via SB2? Shawn said they are looking to extend the date for the meeting. One of the potential solutions is to delay the meeting. Probably by May or June most people will have the vaccine. Peter is curious, as Vermont passed a law that allows voting by ballot. Is NH talking about doing something similar? Can we get the warrant articles and the budget on a ballot for voting? Bruce said they are enabling the towns to do ballot pre-processing to carry over from elections this past year. We probably have to delay the discussion until the next meeting.

Jared Cape said there is a piece of legislation dealing with voting issues, and he suggested if the Board was interested in this to reach out to our representatives with a letter if they thought this was a prudent measure. The Board doesn't have a problem with signing a letter. Peter would like to read it first.

Stan's personal feeling is he is not sure how wise it is to put a large number of people in a confined space. Pandemic not controlled until we get a vaccine. Uncomfortable putting people indoors.

Bruce said we are going to have voting day, a controlled environment. Happy how it was done last time. Could the poll workers be qualified as front-line workers and be eligible for the vaccinations as soon as possible? It is something we can look into. Tom Ladd said a potential solution is to use a larger space than the town offices because we don't have a town hall. If we could do it at the high school or elementary school. Is there a larger space that would allow better access? The SAU has told the Board that the high school is available during the day and at night on town meeting day if the Town wishes to use that location. The Board thought we can tell the high school we want it for at least the voting during the day. We can still look at options for the business portion, i.e. ballot voting, postponing to a later date. To Bruce's point, can Chief Ross reach out to the state to see if that might be considered for vaccinations for poll workers who are up there in age, or poll workers of any age? John said the CDC is setting up the guidelines. If we are going to use the high school, would we consider transportation?

The Board asked Bruce what is your first choice, and Bruce said the high school for safety reasons. Sondra Brekke has a concern with the ballot voting, and Stanley said this is just an emergency measure.

Jared Cape said if there is an accessibility issue with people getting there, would the absentee ballot be allowed? Absentee ballots can always be done. Bruce said the pre-processing still carries over.

The Board will submit for an extension on the Tech & Civic Life Voting Grant that was not all spent in 2020.

Robert Loiacono said he received a notice on Friday from the town's attorney in reference to the town taking the 40-foot right-of-way by eminent domain. How is taking that right-of way in the public's interest?

Stanley said we have a 40-foot section of the parking lot we can't use and we can't develop it with 40 feet out of it. It is a problem we have had since it was deeded to the town. No place to park in the downtown area. Whenever a study is done on parking, the issue always comes up there is no parking in Whitefield, and we need to develop municipal parking lots.

Robert disagrees. He said you can absolutely develop the parking lot as it is. If you lose at most 8 spaces out of 60 spaces, it doesn't stop you from developing the parking lot. Robert said that he has lived here for 10 years, and we have been dealing with this for 15 years. He has a lot of files and everything else. He said to think you want to take away our right to park behind our house and you are going to let strangers park behind their property. He does not feel it is a good use of town money to go to court with this eminent domain issue.

Stanley said we had tried to negotiate and we offered guaranteed parking and this did not work out with the property owners. We are unable to develop that parking lot with that 40 foot right of way. In lieu of failed negotiations to come to an agreement, the only option we had left was to take it by eminent domain. This is one of the steps we have to take if that is the only recourse we have left. That 40 feet right of way is an obstacle to develop the lot. Shawn said he needs to better educate himself to what was done before he became a member of the selectboard.

Stanley said we don't want to go through the taking process, but we need to be prepared to do it. We would renegotiate if they are willing to do that. Leave that up to them. Bob said he did make a suggestion of what he was willing to do with Rick Wright back a while ago. Stanley suggests talking directly to the selectboard. Bob said that parking lot has never been full or even 50 percent full and there is one behind the bank which only has four spaces used. He is not sure who is telling us there is no parking. Stanley said he knows from running a business for 40 years Whitefield that parking is an issue. Issues with the tenants parking in those spaces. We want to improve the town and this is part of the process. If Bob would like to engage with the Board directly and privately, we would be happy to speak with him. Bob said he has a problem doing it privately. Who even came up with the idea that we could go with eminent domain.? WEDC? Stanley said it has nothing to do with the WEDC. They can't make any decisions for the town. They can do studies and make suggestions. Bob said he feels everything was done behind closed doors. Bob said he will be in contact

Peter Corey said that in his new job, which is with an economic development agency (EDA), he was able to see how other towns approach pursuing grants and one thing that successful towns do is to have money set aside for grant opportunities. When you apply for grants, they ask what are the sources of your match and we always say we will go to town meeting to get the match. The successful towns already have the money set aside. A neighboring municipality was very successful setting money aside. They captured \$10 million in grant funds by using those match funds and they haven't even used all the match money. When Shawn was helping Peter for the TAP application, we had to make a presentation at North Country Council and one town had a match and we didn't have the match and that was one of the reasons we didn't get the TAP money and they did. He thinks it would behoove us to create a fund for this. His recommendation is to do a warrant article to have the authority to create a capital reserve and set aside up to \$100,000 from the fund balance at the end of the year to create such fund. Whether it

is \$100,000 or \$50,000, up to us to decide. Ultimately it does affect the tax rate, but at the end of the day if we can get a 10-fold increase on our investment and get some nice improvements for the town it would be money well spent. Fire Chief John Ross asked if that can this be used for any grant? Mossy has to purchase the item and then the money is reimbursed back in that fund. Can it be used for any grant? Depends on how we word it. Used to leverage grants. Peter said he feels it could be used for those sort of things. Mossy thinks it would be a good idea. Judy can get the right wording from DRA. Shawn agrees we have gone out for grants before, and we don't have money set aside to go forward. Littleton had the money and they got the grant and we didn't. Stanley said he would support it. If it can be worded up to a certain amount, we are not held to a dollar amount. Judy will reach out to DRA.

A motion was made by Peter Corey to enter into non-public session pursuant at 7:30 p.m pursuant to NH RSA 91-A:3, II(a) the dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee, or the investigation of any charges against him or her, unless the employee affected (1) has a right to a public meeting, and (2) requests that the meeting be open, in which case the request shall be granted. The motion was seconded by Shawn White. Roll Call Vote: Holz: Yes; Corey: Yes; White: Yes. Motion passes, 3-0.

The Board adjourned from non-public session at 7:55 p.m.

Shawn asked the Board if they have seen the petition from Jared? He wants to do a resolution voted on at town meeting that the town adopts Complete Streets. Shawn has had training with that and Keene does this and some other towns down south have done it as well. When you make a resolution for that, everything we do in the town is a Complete Streets. We have problems with right of ways, and the town roads aren't wide enough. Is it binding? Shawn said it sounds like it is. Shawn said he has gone to classes on this. A lot of towns take out a whole row of parking where you don't have enough width to have the bike lane. He understands a reason for doing it is to get grants. We are competing against other towns. Need to be cautious, and before the next meeting we need to read up on it. There are design standards that we might not meet. It is a really good idea that doesn't fit this town's infrastructure.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.