

Selectboard Minutes
November 14, 2023

Present: Jenn Jones, chair
Andy Artimovich, vice chair
Russ Kelly
Paul Kleinman

At 6pm, Jones called the meeting to order.

The Board signed the payroll and accounts payable summary register.

Artimovich motioned, seconded by Kleinman, to accept the consent agenda which consisted of public minutes from 11/7/23, non-public sealed minutes from 11/7/23, recreation manifest, treasurer's report (found at the end of these minutes), and the following building permits:

- River Run Development, 39 Mill Road, Demolition
- Manchester Revocable Trust, 76 Dudley Road, Minor Project – heat pump installation
- Michelle & Gabrielle Fiorenza, 54 Middle Road, Demolition
- Julie & Raymond D'Eon, 108 Lake Road, Electrical
- Dennis Lheureux, 416 Middle Road, Electrical

All were in favor.

Jones opened the meeting to public comment at 6:02pm.

Robert Span, Peabody Drive, was present to update the Selectboard on the Pickpocket Dam. He explained he filed a public records request with the Town of Exeter. Span explained he received a letter from the Town in response to his request. The town will produce the requested documents on Monday, November 20.

Span shared there will be a River Advisory Committee Meeting at 3pm on Thursday, November 16.

Liz Faria, South Road, was present to share her thoughts on the library amphitheater costs. She stated she was impressed with the fundraising the library did. Faria added the shortfall could potentially be covered by removing some items like tables and chairs which could be purchased in the future. She believes if the shortfall could be lowered to \$20,000 - \$30,000 it could be raised through resident donations. Faria suggested publishing an article in the newsletter asking for donations.

Jones closed public comment at 6:06pm.

Daphne Woss, Tax Collector/Town Clerk, was in attendance to present her budgets – Town Clerk, Tax Collector, Town Meeting, and Elections.

Woss explained there will be four elections and a Town Meeting this year. Jones stated the increase in number of hours is reflective of the number of elections in 2024. She added the following year, the costs will go down with only one election.

Town Clerk Budget

- Budget increase of \$2,079.41
 - Increase in salary lines
 - COLA and merit
 - Increased hours due to 4 elections and Town Meeting

Selectboard Minutes
November 14, 2023

- Increase in convention line
 - Cost of conferences increased
 - Added attendance for an additional person
- Increase in cost of dog tags
- Office supply line increase is for monthly reminders
- Decrease in postage line due to postage being moved to town administrator's budget

Kleinman asked what the conventions are. Woss replied it was for town clerk conferences that she has to attend. Kleinman asked where they are held. Woss replied it was recently held at Attitash.

Artimovich motioned, seconded by Kelly, to accept the Town Clerk budget in the amount of \$76,609.76 an increase of \$2,079.41. All were in favor.

Tax Collector Budget

- Budget increase of \$5,988.41
 - Increase in salary lines
 - COLA and merit
 - Increased hours due to 4 elections and Town Meeting
 - Increase in convention line
 - Cost of conferences increased
 - Added attendance for an additional person
 - Increase in professional training line
- Budget of \$77,708.76
- Increase of 8.35%

Artimovich motioned, seconded by Kleinman, to accept the Tax Collector budget in the amount of \$77,708.76 with an increase of \$5,988.41. All were in favor.

Town Meeting Budget

- Budget increase of 42.84%
 - Increase due to stipends paid to 2 moderators
 - 4 elections and Town Meeting
- Increase from \$2,801 to \$4,001

Artimovich motioned, seconded by Kleinman, to accept the Election budget in the amount of \$4,001. All were in favor.

Elections Budget

- Budget increase was slated to be \$27,501
 - Increase due to 4 elections
 - 15 hours per election
 - 12 ballot clerks
 - Increase due to 4 elections and Town Meeting
 - 3 supervisors
 - 5 elections

Selectboard Minutes

November 14, 2023

- Increase in the meals and service line
- Cost of new voting machine factored in increase
 - Board decided to pay for machine using ARPA funds instead of within budget
 - Cost will be between \$7,000 - \$10,000 depending on machine chosen
 - 2 machines up for consideration
 - Residents are encouraged to attend the demonstrations
 - Town (Selectboard or possibly at Town Meeting) will vote on which type to use
- Budget proposed after removal of voting machine was \$17,501

Jones asked when the new machine would need to be in place. Woss replied it would have to be in place prior to the March 2025 election. Woss, speaking as a resident, would like to see the machine in place before the Presidential election.

Artimovich asked if the voting machine could be paid for using ARPA funds. Karen Clement, Town Administrator, responded they could be. Jones suggested removing the cost of the new election machine from the budget and earmarking \$10,000 of ARPA funds for the machine's purchase.

Artimovich motioned, seconded by Kelly, to accept the Election Budget of \$17,501. All were in favor.

Jones asked Woss to keep the board informed of the demonstrations and how to involve the public.

Woss added the Secretary of State will be announcing the NH Primary date on November 15.

Rebecca Dunham, Conservation Commission Chair, was in attendance to present her budget.

Dunham explained Clement assisted her by giving her information on how money was expended in 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Conservation Commission Budget

- 2023 budget was level-funded
- Since 2021, 80-97% of budget has been returned to the town
- Budget increase proposed to increase from 13,652 to \$23,862
- Professional training line increased by \$200 to \$500
 - Increase for more education
 - Benefitting members, alternates, and the public
- \$10,000 was added to the budget under audit expense
 - Would be used to hire a consultant on case-by-case basis
 - Special skill set
 - Requiring familiarity with RSA's, how conservation process works, sending out RFP's, time to follow through with conservation of land
 - \$17,000 line total

Dunham shared that the use of volunteers saved money on the monitoring costs causing a decrease in the 2021 budget. She explained there are 2 possible properties currently in the pipeline for conserving land. Dunham reminded the board that Mark Young had interviewed 2 consultants before he stepped down as the Chair. She explained she was able to speak with one of them and was able to draft a possible job description.

Artimovich asked Clement if a 120 line could be added for the consultant stipend. Clement confirmed it could be. Artimovich believes it would make more sense. Jones asked what the \$7,000 under the audit expense line was intended for

Selectboard Minutes

November 14, 2023

in the current budget. Dunham stated that line item had not been spent back to 2019, but she was unsure what it was slated for. Jones asked if there was a conversation about not needing a consultant. Artimovich suggested it was possible it was when SELT presented at the meeting a week he was not in attendance.

Dunham stated she met with Jeremy Lougee from SELT and he admitted that he is so busy, he would not be available to assist with the Swasey property until at least January. Jones recalled it was Bob Stephens who mentioned there would not be a need for a consultant if SELT or another Land Trust was involved.

Kelly stated he was not ready to vote with unanswered questions remaining. Jones asked Clement if funds from the Conservation Fund could be utilized. Clement confirmed they could be used. Dunham questioned how the money would be replenished if the Conservation Fund money was spent down. Clement responded money would be reallocated in the 900 line (annual appropriation).

Kleinman requested clarification on the \$75,000 Conservation Fund. Jones responded it is a revolving account that gains funds as the Land Use Change Tax (LUCT) is deposited into the general fund. Kleinman asked what Land Use changes are. Clement responded it is when a person takes land out of current use to begin building on it. That land is assessed a “tax” of 10% the market value.

Dunham questioned the need for a public meeting to use Conservation Funds for surveys, appraisals, or legal fees. Clement responded there is a requirement for a public hearing for land acquisition. She added it is not for bond funds, as those were approved at Town Meeting. Clement further explained it has to be at a public meeting.

Jones believes there is a need for clarification on the \$3,500 easement and \$7,000 audit before the Selectboard takes a vote on the budget. Jones recapped the conversation. She stated the board is considering removing the \$10,000 from the 301 line (audit expense) and utilizing the Conservation Fund to cover the costs. Additionally, Jones stated the remaining \$7,000 in that line may be able to be dropped to \$1. Dunham voiced her hesitation at removing all \$17,000 and suggested years prior to 2019 be examined to see how the money was expended. Jones suggested dropping the 900 line to \$1 since there is no appropriation currently needed for 2024 budget year.

Artimovich voiced his thoughts regarding the \$10,000. He stated he would like to see it have its own line for easier tracking.

The Conservation Commission budget was tabled until questions can be answered about easement monitoring. Dunham expressed her concerns with the budget being eviscerated during the critical time with the 3-million-dollar bond.

Karen Clement, Town Administrator, presented the Town Administrator and Finance Budgets.

Town Administrator Budget

- Budget increase proposed to increase from \$122,289 to \$128,828
- Jones supported increasing professional training line
 - From \$300 to \$1,000
 - Allow for Clement to meet goal of completing BET HR Certification Course
- Budget increased from \$122,289 to \$129,528

Kelly motioned, seconded by Kleinman, to accept the Town Administrator budget of \$129,528. All were in favor.

Finance Budget

Selectboard Minutes

November 14, 2023

- Budget increase proposed to increase from \$107,483 to \$113,991
 - Wage increase
 - Audit Expense increase
 - Bank reconciliations
- Overall increase of \$6,508

Artimovich asked when the last time the audit expenses went out to bid. Clement responded it has not. She explained when you put it out to bid, the new agency will not start with the current year. They require going back a year or 2, causing a higher first year of auditing. Artimovich asked if there was data on the list serve with information on what similar sized towns are paying. Jones asked if it would be possible to negotiate for a longer contract term at the proposed pricing. Clement to look into negotiating pricing/length of term.

Kelly motioned, seconded by Artimovich, to accept Finance Budget of \$113,991. All were in favor.

Clement shared with the board that medical insurance costs would be increasing 15.6% for the current plans offered. She explained the increase was based on overall claims volume, increase severity of high dollar claims, cost utilization of specialty drugs, newly indicated weight loss drugs, and losses within the investment portfolio due to downturns in the financial market. She added changes were considered to different plans including a high deductible health plan. Clement stated that based on the current makeup of employees and elections (single/2 person/family plans) the cost would increase from \$408,000 to \$557,000.

Kleinman asked what the town currently contributes toward health care premiums. Clement responded that the town covers 100% of the premium for single plans and 75% of the premium for 2 person/family plans. She added the pricing for making the ABSOS20/40 (lower premium but carries a deductible) the town's "preferred" plan would be \$595,000 which is higher than the recommended plans she is proposing.

Jones asked what the trend is for other municipalities and their contributions. Clement responded the trend is 90% coverage.

Liz Faria, South Road, asked who is eligible for health care coverage. Clement responded all full-time employees and part time employees who work 32 hours or more are eligible for the insurance plan.

Kleinman ask for clarification on the plans offered. Clement responded the town offers 2 plans: AB20 and ABSOS20/40. Jones asked Clement if she calculated what the monetary change would be if the town paid only 90% of the premium. Clement responded she had not calculated that because she was hesitant to reduce coverage. Kleinman suggested changing plans. Clement responded she was hesitant because it would not save the town money and would actually cost more to move to the high deductible plan.

Jones asked for Clement's suggestion. Clement recommended keeping the same plans. Artimovich stated HealthTrust offers Anthem Products. Clement added the town considered pooling with the school. She explained the challenge with that is the town and school are on different financial cycles and it would cause one entity or the other to always be budgeting for 6 months of unknown costs.

Jones cautioned against making drastic changes to health coverage and reducing benefits that have been historically given and other towns provide. She believes healthcare is a fixed cost. Kleinman suggested looking for alternatives that provide a lower cost. Clement advised against big changes. She believes it would be to the town's detriment to offer a plan that is more expensive to employees and the town. Clement stated we have a strong team of employees in a competitive market and would like to prevent reducing benefits especially at a higher cost to the employees and town.

Kelly believes government employees make less than at other places of employment and benefits help offset that. He

Selectboard Minutes

November 14, 2023

supports the town keeping the same plan as currently offered.

Artimovich motioned, seconded by Kelly, to stay with the preferred status quo health plans. All were in favor.

Library Director, Janice Wiers, and library trustee, Liz McConnell, were present to discuss funding for the amphitheater. Wiers shared \$31,335 was removed from the quote. This included add alternates including the dumpster enclosure, decorative chain for the walkway, a small wooden wall, and a bench. Wiers added the library plans to encumber about \$5,582.

Wiers added the total for the public hearing will be \$156,963. She explained this includes the donation from the Johnston family, an anonymous donor, raffle, assorted funds raised, and the GoFundMe amount less the GoFundMe fee.

Wiers questioned if there was an incident where unanticipated funds were denied in the past. Jones responded she was not aware of any situations.

Kleinman motioned, seconded by Artimovich, to accept the Trimmers Landscaping bid in the amount of \$342,545 with allocation of ARPA funds not to exceed \$130,000 and contingent upon the acceptance of the \$156,963 of unanticipated funds at the public hearing. All were in favor.

Wiers said there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony once the project is complete. McConnell suggested the public stop by and check in on the progress. Jones reminded everyone the public hearing would be next week.

Artimovich requested Rebecca Dunham offer the Conservation Commission update. Dunham read a letter from the Conservation Commission to the Selectboard. It reads as follows, "Following the discussion at the Select Board meeting November 6, regarding the application by Exeter for a grant from NOAA to remove Pickpocket Dam, the Conservation Commission met November 7 and discussed Pickpocket Dam and its potential removal. After a lengthy discussion and comments from the Commission members and a number of residents in attendance, including a summary review by a town resident of actions taken to-date by state and local agencies on this matter, a consensus was formed.

It was clear there are concerns and that Brentwood should notify Exeter of its concerns regarding the process and lack of contact with Brentwood regarding the plan to move forward and apply for a grant from NOAA.

A motion was proposed and seconded and approved unanimously to recommend that the Select Board:

- 1). obtain a legal opinion from Town Counsel detailing Brentwood's rights and options regarding the matter;
- 2). contact the NHDES Wetlands Bureau to see whether it participated in the dam evaluation process;
- 3). obtain all information and data available regarding the process and steps which must be followed for removal of an existing dam;
- 4). send a letter to Exeter prior to 11/16/2023 expressing Brentwood's concerns and reservations about proceeding with dam removal. (The River Advisory Committee meets at 3:00 p.m. at the Exeter Town Office.)"

Clement stated she has made calls to legal counsel, Jim Webber and Steve Doyen at DES who work in dam safety and inspection section, and Russ Dean for the status of their study. Dunham stated she believes the study was suspended. Clement responded Russ Dean was supposed to be meeting with Jennifer Perry the DPW Director for the Town of Exeter. Dunham asked if the board should send a letter and stated Span has a letter he has drafted. Artimovich suggested residents send letters on their own. He believes the letter from the Selectboard should request residents be consulted before action is taken with the removal of the Dam.

Bruce Stevens, Planning Board member, stated from 2016 to the present, remediation options and removal of the Pickpocket

Selectboard Minutes

November 14, 2023

Dam have been examined. He stated studies are available online. Stevens shared the grant provides funding towards studies on the effect of removing the Dam. Dunham believes there is no funding for remediation or further upstream study. She asked if the Selectboard would draft a letter. Jones responded she would support a letter but would prefer to stay out of legality issues while advocating for communication with the town. Jones asked Clement to look at Span's drafted letter to Exeter regarding the Pickpocket Dam.

Dunham stated there is a meeting scheduled for November 16 and asked if any Selectboard members planned to attend. Jones stated she plans to attend the meeting.

Eric Turer, State Representative, believes the process Exeter was undertaking until a few weeks ago was along the lines of the Great Dam Study – they commissioned a study and ongoing monitoring process. Turer stated the vote Exeter Selectboard recently made was that the dam removal was their intended plan.

Kleinman offered his assistance with drafting the letter. He believes it should include that the town has concerns with the process and the impact on the town and its residents if Exeter's plan moves forward. He added he expects Brentwood would be provided with information as the process moves forward.

Artimovich shared that Dunham checked with the Conservation Commission alternates. He suggested the Selectboard consider creating a policy of expectations of an alternate member to all appointed boards that includes participation and attendance language. Jones asked if the opening for Conservation Commission alternates was for one or two people. Dunham stated that because she moved from an alternate to Chair, it created one alternate position. She added there is one member who has an employment conflict currently but would like to remain on the Conservation Commission board.

Kelly stated he understands the Selectboard may need to consider a policy of attendance. He believes each committee could 'police' attendance of its alternates and appeal to attendance being common sense. Artimovich argues the issue is that there is currently no process in place to enforce that. Kelly also expressed his concerns about appointments being done in non-public. Dunham responded it was how the appointments were done for the Communications Subcommittee. Jones stated the procedure had changed. Karen added the process of choosing members for a board changed since the Communications vote. Jones explained it was based on legal counsel's advice. Dunham responded she was not aware of that change.

Dunham stated she is trying to build a relationship with the alternates and requested time to get the committee functioning to its highest level. She added she feels some alternate members could serve for just specific tasks as a volunteer.

Kelly shared an update from the Communications Subcommittee. He stated the board should be seeing the link to the website prototype sometime after the website's reveal at next week's Selectboard meeting. Kelly stated Clement has done a good job sorting through information on the new website.

Kelly shared an update from Energy & Efficiency Committee. He stated there will be a second public hearing at 6pm on Wednesday, November 15. Kelly added the first hearing was livestreamed and the second one would be as well.

Kleinman had no committee updates as the Planning Board did not have a meeting last week.

Jones shared that following the NH State Primary announcement, she will communicate with the Chair of the School Board to request the use of Swasey for the election.

Library Director, Janice Wiers, asked where the town was in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process. Clement responded the final version was adopted. Jones requested the Planning Board be on next week's agenda to share the information of the approved CIP. Wiers responded she appreciated that and explained she plans to use that information for the budgeting of projects at the library.

