

# Office of Board of Selectmen

143 Main Street, P.O. Box 310, Belmont, New Hampshire 03220-0310  
Telephone: (603) 267-8300 Fax: (603) 267-8327

**Selectmen's Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, August 23, 2023, 10:00 am**  
**Belmont Mill, 14 Mill Street**  
**Tioga Meeting Room**

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude (Sonny) Patten, Jr., Selectman Sharon Ciampi, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes, Town Planner Karen Santoro, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Captain Stephen Akerstrom, Fire Chief Deb Black, General Assistance Director Donna Cilley, Parks & Rec Director Danielle St. Onge, CEO Mark Ekberg, FD Admin Assistant Sarah Weeks, FD Lieutenant Ricky Raper, FD Lieutenant Tom Murphy and Cemetery Trustee Hilary Horn. Via ZOOM were Library Director Eileen Gilbert, Deputy Town Clerk Jenn Thomas, and TCTC Assistants Leigh Smith and Jenny Place.

Absent: Selectman Travis O'Hara.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Minutes of the Public Meeting – 08/02/2023:**

*Selectman Sonny Patten moved the minutes of the meeting held on August 2, 2023, as written; seconded by Selectman Sharon Ciampi, and the motion passed (4-0).*

**Public Hearings:**

1. **Belknap County ARPA Funds:** Public hearing held in accordance with RSA 31:95-b to accept unanticipated revenue from Belknap County for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in the amount of \$20,000.

The Chairman opened the public hearing at 10:00 am. There was no public comment, and the hearing was closed at 10:01 am.

*Selectman Jon Pike moved to accept \$20,000 in unanticipated revenue from Belknap County for the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in accordance with RSA 31:95-b. The motion was seconded by Selectman Sonny Patten. Roll Call 1: J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-0).*

2. **Accept Land Donations:** Public hearing held in accordance with RSA 31:95-e to accept donations of personal property known as parcels 218-042-001-000 (land only Dutile Road) and 211-048-000-000 (land only Witham Road)

The Chairman opened the public hearing at 10:02 am. There was no public comment, and the hearing was closed at 10:03 am.

*Selectman Patten moved to accept donations of personal property known as parcels 218-042-001-000 (land only Dutile Road) and 211-048-000-000 (land only Witham Road) in accordance with RSA 31:95-e. The motion was seconded by Selectman Pike. Roll Call 2: S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-0).*

**3. Water/Sewer Rate Change:** Public hearing to accept public comment on the proposed changes to the water/sewer rate schedule.

The Chairman opened the public hearing at 10:04 am.

Chairman Mooney asked if the sewer rate is a set fee. DPW Director Brian Jackes said yes. Selectman Ciampi stated she did not anticipate the sewer rate was also being changed. TA Alicia Jipson said it is easier to do both at one time and the hearing notice included both water and sewer changes. There is a PowerPoint presentation with additional information and hard copies are available. DPW is here to answer any questions.

Resident Tom Murphy asked about the outlook for average bills for families. On slide three, the water flow rate will increase from \$3.36 to \$6.31 per 1,000 gallons, and the base charge from \$47.52 to \$61.17 per quarter. The sewer flat rate will increase from \$57.25 to \$70.13 per quarter.

Data pulled from the NHDES Water & Wastewater Rates “dashboard” from 2021 show comparison rates with averages for other municipalities. We are still lower than average against the 2021 rates of other municipalities. The estimated quarterly cost for a couple is \$111.65, and a family \$155.82. The usage rate has not changed since 2008. The base rate increased slightly in 2018 from \$44.00 to \$47.52. When looking at actual revenues and expenditures there are years of deficits. The rates need to increase in order to break even. The Town is not making money but we need to pay our bills and put some aside for infrastructure.

With no public comment, the Chairman closed the public hearing at 10:11 am.

*Selectman Pike moved to approve the water and sewer rates as presented, effective for Quarter Three, 2023; seconded by Selectman Patten. Roll Call 3: S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-0).*

Water and sewer rate change information will be made available on the Town website and with the newsletter. DPW Director Craig Clairmont thanked TA Jipson and Former Finance Director Katherine Davis for all of the hard work that went into this. Increases are long overdue as operating costs are skyrocketing. It is a minimal increase. Our rates are 0.0036 cents per gallon. We need to hold the bottom line and be cost efficient while offering safe drinking water. Testing is more expensive, and the state requirements are more intense.

**New Business:**

**Fire Chief Promotion:**

TA Jipson swore in our new Fire Chief, Deb Black. She was promoted from Assistant Chief to Interim Chief before being hired as Chief. Chairman Mooney said she is excited, and this is an important day for the Fire Department and the Town. Chief Black was pinned by her parents. Chief Black thanked everyone for their support.

**Firefighter Ricky Raper Promotion to Lieutenant:**

TA Jipson swore in our new Lieutenant, Ricky Raper. He was promoted from the Firefighter position. Lieutenant Raper was pinned by Chief Black.

**Letter to State Representatives on behalf of the Town and Taxpayers – Voter Machine Costs:**

The Town's voting machine needs to be upgraded and it is mandated by the State. Gilford TA is asking for all local support with a letter to our State Representatives about concerns that this is an unfunded state mandate. It was the consensus of the Board to sign the letter and request that Town Clerk/Tax Collector Cynthia DeRoy also be asked to sign the letter of support.

Selectman Ciampi stepped down from the Board.

**Cemetery Trustees – Abandoned Cemeteries Discussion:**

Cemetery Trustees Hilary Horn and Sharon Ciampi provided the Board with handouts regarding 9 cemeteries. They would like to declare these cemeteries abandoned under RSA 289:20 because they are maintained by, but not owned by, the Town. If the main properties change ownership, it makes things complicated for maintaining the cemeteries. These concerns were brought forward with the sale of property on Brown Hill Road that includes the Weymouth Cemetery. The last record of maintenance is 1969. There are stones missing and it is overgrown but the remains have not been moved. This process of acquiring the cemeteries will help prevent issues with poor recordkeeping and maintenance. The Ladd Hill Cemetery is included in this list. It is rumored that the remains have been removed but there are no records. They are still doing research with the Wilkinson Beane Funeral Home and the library, and they have contacted the state library as well. Chairman Mooney asked who will pay for the surveys. There are no surveys needed because these cemeteries are already tax exempt. The handouts included examples of public notices that have been vetted by our attorney, as well as information from Candace Daigle, who has worked for many years with cemeteries in Gilmanton and worked on this process in 2004 for Gilmanton.

There was discussion about cemeteries on properties where the owners may not want Cemetery Trustees or maintenance people on the properties. The process of declaring a cemetery abandoned will give the Town all of the authorization and rights of the descendants, according to the email from Ms. Daigle. Selectman Pike said there is a cemetery on Leavitt Road however there is no one buried there. It is maintained privately. Trustee Ciampi stated documentation can be created to record that there is no one buried there. The cemetery can remain under private ownership if it is being maintained. Taking over the abandoned cemeteries will give protection so that property owners don't dig into the setback, and it will protect the

burial grounds. Trustee Ciampi explained that the public notices do not reach out to the current property owners, but instead to the direct descendants of people who may be buried there. Some cemeteries are not on this list because there are trust funds for care, and they are already maintained. Records of any burials in those cemeteries are provided to the Trustees, and the Town will not take over those cemeteries. According to the RSA, the cemeteries are owned by the descendants of those who are buried there and not by the current property owner. Research needs to be done to determine the last person buried in the cemetery and look for their descendant/s. The Trustees have decided to group all of the cemeteries together for one public notice to save money. Selectman Patten asked about budget increases to take on these cemeteries. Trustee Ciampi stated there would be none requested for at least two years, but a heavy cleanup is needed at the Weymouth Cemetery and a marker is needed for the Ladd Hill cemetery. The only other cost was the attorney consultation. The Trustees will report back to the Board after they have completed their research on all of the descendants.

Selectman Ciampi returned to the Board.

#### **Other New Business:**

##### **Mill Furnace:**

Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden reported the Mill furnace had problems during inspection last week. The liner and wall are cracked and the coupling needs replacement. This oil furnace is 27 years old. We have two new oil tanks with 500 gallons of oil. Eckhardt & Johnson have serviced the furnace since it was installed. They are going to provide a repair price and a replacement cost. He recommended if the repair price is 30% or less than the replacement that the unit be repaired. It is still in good shape, but it is not efficient. Doors and walls will need to be taken out in order to replace the furnace. It was suggested that now may be a better time to replace it than waiting until drywall changes have been made in the building. Multiple quotes should be ready for review next week. There was discussion about looking at other options for heating such as propane. B&G Supervisor Golden reminded the Board that the goal was to have a propane furnace and an oil furnace because of fuel availability and in order to play the market.

#### **Old Business:**

##### **4 Leisure Lane:**

TA Jipson said the Town took this property over for tax collection and the family was trying to repurchase it, but we have not heard back from them yet. B&G Supervisor Golden has boarded up the house and the water and sewer has been turned off. It is quite a mess, and the neighbors are dropping off junk in the yard as well. There is no door left on the garage. General Assistance Director Donna Cilley asked if it has been determined whether there are contaminants in the home. It was determined no one is going inside the home and it is waiting to be demolished. B&G Supervisor Golden has been checking the camper and has not seen anyone recently. There was discussion about how to proceed with demolishing the home and if the garage was worth keeping. Police Chief Mark Lewandoski and B&G Supervisor Golden, both stated it is trash. There is also lots of oil on the pavement. It was the consensus of the Board to obtain quotes for demolition because DPW does not have the manpower to assist with a project like this at this

time. CEO Mark Ekberg checked items on the property such as boats and determined they are over 40 years old and there is no redeemable value in them.

**Other Old Business:**

**CEO Update:**

CEO Ekberg reported there are upcoming court dates for 130 Depot Street and 15 Johnson Street. The original October date has been pushed out to November for a trial. Pretrial conference and progress hearing will be held in October. We are waiting for the same information to come back for 752 Laconia Road. There was discussion about the different types of trials. A bench trial involves a judge but no jury. The judge will visit the sites before the trial. It was a great idea that Mitchell Group suggested. Snapshots are not as good as seeing it in person because it is hard to describe.

**Department Heads Request for Budget Season:**

General Assistance Director Cilley requested the Board schedule a work session with all Department Heads to sit down and have an overview of what things are looking like. The Board has not given any direction on where they want to see budgets and saying "don't spend" is impossible. It is going to be an interesting year. Before Department Heads spend a lot of time putting budgets together it would be respectful to meet and collaborate and come to terms for expectations. Selectman Patten liked the idea so the Board can get a picture of what is happening before the budget meetings. It was agreed that a work session would be held on Wednesday, September 6<sup>th</sup>, from 8:30am to 10:00am before the Board meeting.

**Next Meeting:** The next regular meeting will be **Wednesday, September 6, 2023 at 10:00 am** with a Department Head work session at 8:30am.

**Public Comment:**

**ARPA Funds Distribution:**

Lieutenant Tom Murphy asked if the Board has made a decision yet on the ARPA funds that were just accepted from the county. It was not on today's agenda but can be included on the next agenda if the Board is ready to discuss. There were proposals from Police, Fire, Highway and Building & Grounds. Selectman Patten asked if they could make a motion. Selectman Pike said he is ready to make a motion.

*Selectman Pike moved to allocate \$20,000 in ARPA Funds to Building & Grounds for new mowers, because there are no other grants for those types of items; seconded by Selectman Patten.*

Selectman Ciampi suggested the money be split between Building & Grounds and the Fire Department.

B&G Supervisor Golden reported that one of their mowers has been down for over a week and needs parts for repair. He has been using his own personal commercial mower to keep the

Town lawns mowed. The mowers are used on rough terrain including the pump stations and the beach. He suggested keeping business in town and purchasing Hustlers. With trade-ins we can get them for \$8,500. Chief Lewandoski suggested the Hustler is a low-grade commercial mower and the Bad Boy is more heavy duty for the same money or less. He recommended shopping at Knoxland for a Maverick. Selectman Patten suggested Husqvarna which could be about \$9,800.

Chairman Mooney spoke about the other proposals for the ARPA funds and explained the Fire Department was given money this year for their escape cables. The equipment the Fire Department is looking for is important and needs to be included in the Capital budget. The Board supports the need for equipment. The Police Department's request will also need to be included in the Capital budget.

Chairman Mooney would like to see the funds put towards one large heavy duty commercial mower and make a decision on the second mower depending on the remaining funds. TA Jipson noted the county is allowing the ARPA funds to be used for "public service". The Board said taking care of the beach and trails and pump houses falls under public service. The mowers are needed for this fall. Selectman Ciampi asked Building & Grounds to do more research and check in with the Chainsaw Doctor for options and pricing as well.

*Roll Call 4: J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-0).*

**Non-Public:**

*Chairman Mooney moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II (a & c) at 11:14 am; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Roll Call 5: S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-0).*

It was the consensus of the Board to allow Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman to stay and take minutes of the Non-Public session.

Those present and voting were Ruth Mooney, Jon Pike, Claude Patten, Jr., and Sharon Ciampi. Also present were TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, DPW Assistant Director Brian Jackes, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Sargent Steve Akerstrom and CEO Mark Ekberg.

Selectman Travis O'Hara was absent.

The Board discussed a potential promotion for the DPW, job postings and pay scales. DPW Director Clairmont expressed concern about not only attracting new employees but retaining their current employees as well. It was the consensus of the Board to proceed with the changes presented.

DPW Director Clairmont reported on the recent water main break.

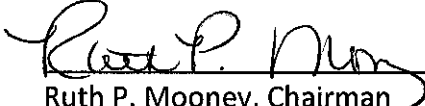
TA Jipson updated the Board that so far, there have been no Finance Director applicants with appropriate experience. Until we fill the position, former Finance Director Katherine Davis is available as a consultant to complete some tasks only the Finance Director should do so that we don't get too far behind. This will also provide separation of duties. It was the consensus of the Board that Katherine Davis provides consultant services for necessary finance duties.

*Selectman Ciampi moved to seal the minutes of the non-public session; seconded by Chairman Mooney. Roll Call 6: S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-0).*

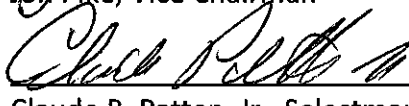
The Board returned to public session at 12:30 pm.


**Adjournment:**

*Selectman Ciampi moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:30pm; seconded by Chairman Mooney. Roll Call 7: S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (4-0).*

  
Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman

  
Jon Pike, Vice Chairman

  
Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman

  
Travis O'Hara, Selectman

  
Sharon Ciampi, Selectman