



# Office of Board of Selectmen

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**Selectmen's Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, October 4, 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 Travis O'Hara, Selectman Sharon Ciampi, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, Town Planner Karen Santoro, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Fire Chief Deb Black, and Planning Board Member Dennis Grimes.

Via Zoom were Deputy Town Clerk Jenn Thomas, Town Clerk Cynthia DeRoy and Library Director Eileen Gilbert and Brian Lim from Consolidate Communications.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Minutes – 09/20/2023 (Public & Non-Public):**

*Selectman Sonny Patten moved the minutes of the public meeting held on September 20, 2023 as written; seconded by Selectman Jon Pike. Roll Call 1: J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

*Selectman Pike moved the minutes of the non-public meeting held on September 20, 2023 as written; seconded by Selectman Travis O'Hara. Roll Call 2: S. Ciampi – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

**New Business:**

**New Hires:**

Fire Chief Deb Black introduced the Fire Department's new Administrative Assistant, Becky Parks-Beaulac. She has experience in banking and dispatch and was able to spend some time working with Sarah Weeks last week.

We also moved forward and filled the Clerk vacancy in the TC/TC office. We hired Cheryl Lewandoski to fill that position. On Friday, one of our current clerks resigned effective immediately, so there will be another new hire in that office.

DPW Director Craig Clairmont filled his two open positions for Truck Driver Laborer and Sewer Tech. The new employees are Wayne Pierce and Jesse Rolland. They are going into the winter fully staffed and there is a full-time seasonal employee for the winter as well.

**Appointment of Town Clerk Tax Collector:**

Cynthia DeRoy has “semi-fully retired” and by law we need positions staffed for elections. The Board will consider appointing Jennifer Cashman who previously worked in the office for 9 years. This motion would make an appointment until March 2024, and then Ms. Cashman would need to run on the ballot to fulfill the remaining year of Cynthia’s current term from 2024 to 2025. In 2025, Ms. Cashman would run for the standard three-year term.

*Selectman Pike moved to approve the appointment of Jennifer Cashman to serve as the Town Clerk/Tax Collector to serve out the remainder of the current term of the previously elected Town Clerk/Tax Collector until March 2024; seconded by Selectman O’Hara. Roll Call 3: S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, T. O’Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

**Halloween:**

TA Jipson reached out to Chief Lewandoski and he has set Trick or Treat hours for Tuesday, October 31<sup>st</sup> from 5-8 pm. Our Parks & Rec will also be hosting a Trunk or Treat event at the Belmont Mill on Saturday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, from 6-8pm.

**Letters to Owners on Dutile Road:**

With the recent land donation from one of the land-locked / sub-standard parcels on Dutile Road, we decided to mail other owners of similar parcels again, using a template the Jeanne previously used, asking if they would like to donate those parcels to the Town. If we do have any who would like to donate, we can merge them at the same time.

**DRA Letter - KRT Hearings:**

TA Jipson forwarded the Board the Community Action Report from NH DRA confirming that KRT held 230 hearings on the new assessments between August 3<sup>rd</sup> and August 31<sup>st</sup>, and that KRT sent them all of the hearing sheets.

**LRPC Letter - Regional Housing Needs:**

TA Jipson forwarded the Board a letter from Lakes Region Planning Commission in regards to Regional Housing Needs, which included a recap of information from their meetings over the last year and more information about a low income housing quota. The Board requested a more detailed update from our LRPC representative, Land Use Technician Rod Cameron. Town Planner Karen Santoro will ask him to provide a summary of the report for the Board.

**HealthTrust 2024 Member Rate Updates:**

TA Jipson and Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman attended the Public Hearing held at HealthTrust last week where they discussed the 2024 rates and described how the rates are set. As of today we have a tentative rate for 2024 with the final rates being set on October 10<sup>th</sup>:

- Medical Rates will see a 14.8% increase.
- Dental Rates will see a 4.7% increase.
- Short Term Disability will go from 26-28 cents.
- Life Insurance will see no change at 15 cents.

These increases are attributed to a spike in claims and pharmaceuticals. Claims have not remained at a stable volume since pre-Covid. Even now, there are increasing claims and there have also been increases in high dollar claims for specific individuals with critical health conditions.

**Belmont Bogie Busters Snowmobile Trail Permission:**

A written permission form was submitted by the Bogie Busters to use trails on eight Town-owned parcels. Last year when they came before us there were options for an indefinite term or 1-year or 5-year terms. The Board agreed to a one-year term in case there are changes that need to be made on any Town-owned parcels. The Bogie Busters have also provided proof that the State of NH provides insurance coverage. It was the consensus of the Board to approve to a 1-year agreement. Chairman Mooney signed the form for a 1-year agreement.

**4 Leisure Lane:**

Derek Spears from Spears Brothers got back to TA Jipson, and they will do the asbestos testing next week. Removal should be the second half of October or the beginning of November, depending on the asbestos survey.

**Other New Business:**

**Broadband Internet Improvement Grant:**

Jeff McIver, Senior Manager for Governmental Relations is here from Consolidated Communications to request the Board's support for Consolidated to submit an application for the Broadband Matching Grant Initiative (BMGI) for the Town of Belmont. This is a state program offering grants to get highspeed internet to unserved parts of Town. Brian Lim is here via Zoom and has a brief presentation he will be sharing with us. If the Board agrees to support the application, we will need to make a motion.

Mr. McIver thanked the Board for allowing them to make a presentation today. New Hampshire announced their third round of grants for broadband. This one is for \$25 million dollars. The presentation slides showed a map for the placement of fiber and noted the grant portion of this program will provide broadband internet for 1,618 households in Belmont, and Consolidated's CCI Capitol program will provide for 1,551 households. Both programs require no funding or bonds from the Town of Belmont.

*Selectman O'Hara moved to support Consolidated Communications' application for the Broadband Matching Grant Initiative for the Town of Belmont; seconded by Selectman Sharon Ciampi. Roll Call 4: T. O'Hara – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

**DPW Equipment Purchase – Wind Turbine:**

DPW Director Clairmont requested an expenditure of Capital Reserve Funds to purchase a wind turbine for the Bobcat machine. It will allow them to blow leaves off roads, parking lots, drainage ditches and Town trails. This will save on wear and tear of equipment and will be more

efficient for employees. The cost is \$6,490.00 and there is currently a balance in the account over \$64,000.00. The department is working on a second grant for an additional dump truck at a savings of \$150,000 but the application process is a lot of work.

*Selectman Patten moved to approve the expenditure of \$6,490.00 from the Capital Reserve Account for the purchase of a 2023 Buffalo Turbine BTHY553; seconded by Selectman Pike. Roll Call 5: S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, T. O’Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

**Hydrant Flushing:**

The Town will be completing hydrant flushing next week. Notice was provided on the Town website, in the newsletter, on the Park & Ride sign and in the newspaper.

**BOS Budget Workshops:**

The Tuesday, October 10th meeting will be held at 6:00pm downstairs for Health Agencies, Library Trustees, Cemetery Trustees, General Assistance and the Heritage Commission.

The Wednesday October 11th meeting will be held at 10:00am downstairs for Town Clerk, Elections & Registration, Tax Collector & Finance, Executive and Legal.

**Old Business:**

**Elevator Update:**

Today is the last meeting we will be holding on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor for the next 5 or 6 weeks because the elevator is being updated starting next week. Building & Grounds will start moving things to the first floor tomorrow. Everyone will continue to use the rear door and enter the meeting space across from the elevator. The LiveStream will temporarily stop but Zoom access will continue to be available, and Zoom meeting recordings will be provided to LRPA to post to their site after meetings. See [vod.lrpa.org](http://vod.lrpa.org) for meeting recordings. There is also a “View Meetings” button available on our [belmontnh.gov](http://belmontnh.gov) home page.

**Lakes Region Casino:**

Chairman Mooney asked Selectmen Pike and O’Hara to please look into any issues with the gaming license for this location. This property generates daily revenues for the Town of Belmont. Selectman Pike reported the previous owner was in default and the state wants to collect from the new buyer, but the Governor is looking into this. Fire Chief Black noted she has completed some recent inspections at the Casino and the state has also been there recently. It looks like things are moving forward.

**TA Wage Recommendations:**

Chairman Mooney read a memo with 2024 wage recommendations from TA Jipson. The memo highlighted the struggles to retain current staff and be competitive with hiring. Department Heads and TA Jipson have been working on numbers, wage comparisons and reviewing data. High employee turnover has significant costs with regards to training, reduced effectiveness and efficiency, and it becomes a burden for remaining employees to shoulder

additional work and training duties while trying to maintain the level of service expected. Other costs are overtime and burnout, as well as the time and cost involved to post jobs, review resumes, conduct interviews and on-board new employees on the HR side of things; or to generate pay-out packages when we lose an employee. This proposal includes dropping the first two steps off the pay scale for all non-union staff, union Police, union Fire Department, and union DPW employees. There were further adjustments within the scale for Police, Fire and DPW in order to combat compression issues and make increases uniform, fair and just in comparison to others. This will help us to retain current employees, and to attract quality candidates for vacancies. Chairman Mooney said this will involve opening the union contracts, but it is important so that we don't lose valuable, seasoned employees.

*Selectman Pike moved to approve TA Jipson's wage recommendations for non-union, Fire, Public Works and Police as presented; seconded by Selectman Patten. Roll Call 6: S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

Police Chief Lewandoski explained that hiring new, uncertified officers means it is 8-9 months before they can patrol on their own after training; and he has to force overtime on his current officers to cover that position while they are training. The Town pays their salary during that time, and they sign a contract to stay on, but many are leaving and fighting the contract. Ms. Kristina Benoit recommended a no-compete clause, but Chief Lewandoski stated that is illegal for government entities.

Chief Lewandoski said besides Laconia, we have the highest call volume around. Officers are making up to \$6 more per hour in other area communities. He tries to hire certified officers because they come with experience and can get started on patrols right away. Planning Board Member Dennis Grimes asked if the department has considered trying to hire part-time retired officers. Chief Lewandoski responded that he has, but there are limitations because of the NH Retirement System. Mr. Gerald Carbone asked if they have considered using volunteers. Chief Lewandoski said they can't because they need to be qualified and certified for liability purposes. Mr. Carbone said they use volunteers in Florida but they don't have police powers; they are more like a neighborhood watch. Chief Lewandoski reiterated that we can't do that here because we need police powers in this town, but there are some neighborhood watch type areas where people will report things they see to the department. Chairman Mooney said if you see something, report it, but do not engage.

**Next Meeting:** The next regular meeting will be **Wednesday, October 18, 2023 at 10:00 am.**

Note: BOS Budget Workshops will be held Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 6:00pm and Wednesday October 11, 2023 at 10:00am.

These meetings will be held on the first floor of the Mill building due to the elevator renovations.

**Other Old Business:** None

**Public Comment:**

**Waterfront Assessments:**

Ms. Linda Normandin of 61 Tucker Shore Road spoke on behalf of a group of waterfront property owners. She thanked Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman for being helpful and friendly. Ms. Normandin noted the mission of the Board of Selectmen is "The legal and prudent administration of the affairs of the Town of Belmont". Concerns were expressed about 217 waterfront properties being assessed based on only three comparable sales, the disproportionate assessment increase for waterfront properties compared to non-waterfront properties (19.2% vs. 33.3%), particularly those that are seasonal and can only be used 5-6 months of the year, and the unintended consequences of the increases and if there is any strategic plan to look long-term.

Mr. David Libby asked about the warrant article and when it was voted in. Selectman Ciampi referred people to the Voters' Guide. Assessing Admin Akerman will provide the warrant article information. *[2022 Voter's Guide, Ballot #23 includes the article and description of the intention of the article.]* Mr. Libby asked who watches the sales data and what the realtors are putting on the market? They are setting the market. He wanted to know if there is oversight of the realtors. The Board said no. The owners make the final decision on how to price their property. Realtors have an influence, but buyers are willing to pay the prices.

Ms. Normandin asked if it is fair market value if there is only one home sold as a comparable. She thinks it is not fair. Selectman O'Hara said the assessors can only use the sales that they have. Ms. Normandin asked about using data going back five years, however the state requires the most recent year of sales data be used for calculations. Our assessing company must follow the state law and regulations of the NH Department of Revenue Administration. NHdra comes out in the field to review and look at the assessments KRT is completing.

Mr. Gerald Carbone said some areas are being taxed at different rates which is not fair. Assessments should be uniform. To use a couple of properties as comparables for assessments is not fair. Chairman Mooney said the state dictates how assessments must be done. She stated the best thing is to contact legislators and senators. We are all governed by RSAs. Mr. Carbone said lakefront people are paying outrageous amounts and it is not fair. Chairman Mooney stated the Board can't control that. The state oversees our assessing company and the state calculates the ratios and tax rates. The Board's hands are tied. The tax rate is the same for all properties in Belmont but the assessments may be weighted for different types of situations with properties. The proper way to contest an assessment is to file for an abatement, which is the process provided for by state law. If an owner is not happy with the results of an abatement request, they can apply to the Board of Tax and Land Appeals for a review. Abatements are reviewed by our assessing company and the Board of Selectmen approve the determinations made by the assessing company. An unidentified resident questioned the percentage of abatements that are modified and an audience member commented "zero". Chairman Mooney countered that there are a lot of adjustments that are made. It may not always be the adjustment requested, but KRT provides the reasoning for why an adjustment is made in a particular way. If

a taxpayer is not satisfied, they can appeal to the state and they have the ultimate authority over the assessment.

Mr. Dennis Grimes explained that he reviewed waterfront assessments and tried to determine the criteria used and there isn't any. He proposed that they randomly figure out numbers. Mr. John Young added that there are a few outlier properties setting the values for properties and there is no way of adjusting for that. Mr. Grimes said there needs to be criteria for all property values such as waterfront or swamp. Tax cards show values of buildings and the property and it makes no sense to him. His tax rate on an old cottage is more than someone else with a new home and more bedrooms.

Mr. Grimes questioned the company we are using for assessments and suggested finding a new company. Selectman Pike noted there are very few assessment companies to choose from. Selectman Pike suggested having a meeting with KRT. Chairman Mooney reminded everyone that no one came to the last meeting where KRT did a presentation. Selectman Pike said we can have another meeting so they can explain how the assessments are calculated. There was discussion about the tax rate and it was clarified that the Town does not set the tax rate, the State sets the tax rate. NHDRA also oversees or audits KRT because we are not assessors. KRT is governed by the RSAs and the State of NH.

There was concern about out of state people overbidding on properties, but the Board has no control over that. It was requested that a notice about the future KRT meeting be placed on the electronic sign at the Park and Ride. Ms. Kristina Benoit said part of the problem is different quality properties are selling for similar values and assessments should be completed with physical inspections and not only sales data, but that is an issue at the state level.

Mr. Ted Moulton said we need to go back to the people doing the assessments. He has concerns about waterfront taxing for people that are only on the canal. He wants to speak with the assessors again, but Chairman Mooney stated the proper process is to file for an abatement after your fall tax bill. Mr. Carbone agreed with Mr. Moulton that the problem is with our assessment company because they are not doing a good job and if there are a lot of complaints then the Board needs to go to them with reports of inconsistencies. Ms. Normandin was frustrated that when she spoke with KRT they said they could only discuss building values, but her problem is with the land value. An unidentified resident stated that KRT was inconsistent in their responses to people and had excuses. She also brought up a concern about the accuracy of sales values and how money changes hands. Selectman Pike stated they are based on how the tax stamps are recorded on a deed at the registry. Sales values are verified through the deed and a questionnaire sent to new owners. All of that data is sent to the state for review.

Mr. Grimes would like to meet with KRT as a group and ask them questions about their baselines and the criteria they use. There was discussion about the budget, and concerns about losing police and firefighters, and the high cost of the school portion of the tax bill. At a recent meeting the Superintendent was concerned about the increase in student population due to new homes in Town, but the Town is finding that many of the new homes are "open nesters" with no

children. The Superintendent explained that declining enrollment would not be to the point where staff would be decreased. 80% of the school budget is salaries and that is 68 cents per tax dollar paid. The Town has nicked and dimed things for the last few years and now we are at a point where if we don't change our ways in wages we will be behind the times. There were no members of the public at the School Board meeting. Selectman O'Hara said he complained about the Town taxes for a long time but when he became a Board member he found out much of the tax dollar goes to the schools. The Town portion of the tax rate is stable but the Board has no say in the school. Mr. Grimes asked if that could be changed through a vote where the school budget would have to come through the Selectboard. Selectman O'Hara said he is working on a warrant article to require a budget committee for the school. They currently have an advisory committee but they don't have a vote. It would need to pass through both Belmont and Canterbury. On the Town side of things, the Selectboard reviews all department budgets, then it goes to the Budget Committee, which is a whole group of different people, before it goes forward to the voters. When you vote you will see whether the Selectmen and the Budget Committee recommend or agree on an article. Mr. Moulton does not want to blame the schools, because all schools are in the same situation.

Mr. Moulton was also concerned about permits for homes on the lakefront because of flooding. NHDES and Town zoning regulations determine how permits are issued, and some properties are grandfathered because they existed prior to zoning.

**Non-Public:**

*Chairman Mooney moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II (a) at 12:14 pm; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Roll Call 7: T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

Those present and voting were Ruth Mooney, Jon Pike, Claude Patten, Jr., Travis O'Hara and Sharon Ciampi. Also present was Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman.

The Board discussed matters of employment concerns and made decisions about 2024 wage modifications.

*Selectman O'Hara moved to seal the minutes of the non-public session; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Roll Call 4: T. O'Hara – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*

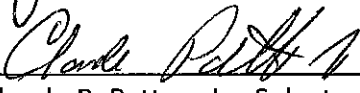
**Adjournment:**

*Selectman O'Hara moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:16 pm; seconded by Selectman Pike. Roll Call 5: S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*



  
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Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman

  
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Jon Pike, Vice Chairman

  
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Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman

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Travis O'Hara, Selectman

  
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Sharon Ciampi, Selectman