



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 20, 2024, 10:00 am

Belmont Mill, Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Selectman Jon Pike, Selectman Claude "Sonny" Patten, Jr., Selectman Travis O'Hara, Selectman Sharon Ciampi, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Captain Stephen Akerstrom, Town Planner Karen Santoro, TC/TC Jennifer Cashman, Building Inspector/CEO Glenn Caron, Assistant Fire Chief Donald Pickowicz, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, DPW Assistant Director Brian Jackes, General Assistance Director Donna Cilley, Fire Department Admin Assistant Becky Beulac, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Parks & Rec Director Danielle St. Onge, Library Director Eileen Gilbert, Budget Committee Chairman Ron Mitchell, Cemetery Trustee Hillary Horn, Planning Board Member Kevin Sturgeon, and Budget Committee Members Don Hurd and Marc Zimmerman. Also present was SAU 80 Superintendent Michael Tursi.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Elected Officials Swearing In:

TC/TC Jennifer Cashman swore in newly elected officials for the following positions:

Planning Board - Kevin Sturgeon

Cemetery Trustee - Hillary Horn

Organization of the Board & Committee Assignments:

Selectman Jon Pike nominated Selectman Ruth Mooney as Chairman. Selectman Sonny Patten and Selectman Sharon Ciampi were in agreement. Selectman Travis O'Hara offered to help with leadership if it is needed.

Selectman Pike moved to appoint Ruth Mooney as Chairman; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Selectman Ciampi nominated Travis O'Hara as Vice Chairman, and Selectman Pike and Selectman Patten were in agreement.

Selectman Ciampi moved to appoint Travis O'Hara as Vice Chairman; seconded by Chairman Mooney. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Chairman Mooney moved to appoint Selectman Pike as the Selectboard Planning Board Representative, coterminous with his Selectman's term; seconded by Selectman Patten. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Selectman O'Hara moved to appoint Chairman Mooney as the Selectboard Budget Committee Representative; seconded by Selectman Patten. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Selectman O'Hara requested to shadow Chairman Mooney during her work as the Selectboard Budget Committee Representative.

Chairman Mooney moved to appoint Selectman O'Hara as the Selectboard Heritage Commission Representative; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Chairman Mooney moved to appoint Selectman Ciampi as the Selectboard Conservation Commission Representative; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Chairman Mooney suggested someone from the Board sit in on monthly ARC meetings. Town Planner Karen Santoro offered to provide ARC meeting notes to Board members.

The Board discussed the merits of continuing with the current meeting schedule versus moving to evening meetings. Selectman O'Hara would like to try evening meetings. Selectman Pike noted the overtime cost for Town employees to attend evening meetings. Selectman Patten would like to continue with daytime meetings. Selectman Ciampi would like to try some evening meetings and see if more people would attend, otherwise the Board could revert to daytime meetings. Chairman Mooney stated the Board always accommodates requests from the Library or other Town groups to host an evening meeting.

Selectman Pike moved to continue with the current regular meeting schedule of the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month at 10:00 am; seconded by Selectman Patten. Motion passed (3-2). Selectman O'Hara and Selectman Ciampi opposed.

Review & Approve Minutes – 03/06/2024:

Selectman Patten moved the minutes of the meeting held on March 6, 2024 as written; seconded by Selectman Pike. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Public Hearing – Libraries Transforming Communities:

Chairman Mooney stated this public hearing is to accept a grant in the amount of \$10,000 in accordance with RSA31:95-b from the Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC): Accessible Small & Rural Communities Grant, with grant funds to be used to make the library more accessible based on community input.

Chairman Mooney opened the public hearing at 10:16 am.

Library Director Eileen Gilbert reported this is the second year the library has received this grant. Last year a new accessibility device was installed for the front door and furniture for wheelchair access was purchased. Public participation is a requirement for this grant, and the public will decide which option will be the most helpful to the largest number of community members. A poll will be put out on social media, as well as a paper survey, and one in person meeting.

With no additional comments, the Chairman closed the public hearing at 10:18 am.

Selectman O'Hara moved to accept a grant in the amount of \$10,000 in accordance with RSA31:95-b from the Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC): Accessible Small & Rural Communities Grant, with grant funds to be used to make the library more accessible based on community input; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Public Hearing – Abandoned Cemeteries:

Chairman Mooney stated this public hearing is in accordance with RSA 289:19-21 to declare seven Belmont cemeteries as abandoned.

Chairman Mooney opened the public hearing at 10:19 am.

Cemetery Trustees Kyle Dodge and Hillary Horn reported the Cemetery Trustees paid \$252 for ads in two different papers and did not have any responses about the cemeteries to be considered for abandonment. Town ownership will help prevent confusion on setbacks and ownership. Selectman Ciampi spoke with one property owner on Leavitt Road who agreed it would be a good idea for the Town to take over the cemetery because the Town has been maintaining it for 30 years. All cemeteries on this list are already maintained by the Town except for Weymouth on Brown Hill Road. Cleanup for Weymouth should not be in this year's budget, but possibly next year.

Resident Colleen Akerman spoke in favor of the Town taking ownership of the abandoned sites to help protect the sites and prevent disturbances in the future.

With no additional comments, the Chairman closed the public hearing at 10:22 am.

Selectman O'Hara moved to declare the following Belmont cemeteries abandoned, as noticed, per RSA 289:19-21; seconded by Chairman Mooney. Motion passed (4-0-1). Selectman Ciampi abstained.

1. **Gile Cemetery** - 229 Jamestown Road - M/L 232-006 – oldest stone--Mary Gile deceased 09/18/1828
2. **Woodman Cemetery** – Hurricane Road – M/L 222-004 - oldest stone--Frances Adelaide Woodman deceased 10/01/1845
3. **Leavitt Cemetery** – Leavitt Road behind Smith's Orchard – M/L 211-074 - oldest stone--Lewis S Leavitt deceased 01/14/1814

4. **Farrar Cemetery** – Province Road – M/L 226-026 - oldest stone--Jeduthan Farrar Sr. deceased 06/1784.
5. **Prescott Cemetery** – Northbrook Road – M/L 205-008 - oldest stone--Col. Dudley Prescott deceased 08/03/1815
6. **Weymouth Cemetery (Burial Ground)** – Brown Hill Road – M/L 229-040
7. **Swallow Cemetery** – Swallow Road – M/L 203-004

New Business:

Town Meeting Update:

TA Jipson updated the Board on the Town ballot results. The operating budget failed so we will have a default budget this year. Warrant articles for some Capital Reserve funds also failed, but all of the zoning amendments passed. Two of the union contracts passed and one failed.

Direction is needed from the Board to rework the budgets. There are some things that are contractual that cannot be cut, but they are not included in the default budget. We have no control over service contracts but we still have to meet our needs. It takes months of work to build the budget so this won't happen overnight. It is going to hurt and there are going to be cuts. The Board is charged with the authority to manage the Town's affairs. The voters have approved a budget and their interaction is done and the Board needs to make this budget work. Next week we will hold Work Sessions with the Board and Department Heads. Suggestions are needed on what to save, what to cut and how to move forward.

Selectman O'Hara asked about the service contracts. The default budget includes legal contractual obligations such as solid waste contracts, or health insurance but does not include service contracts for things like radios, even though they are necessary. The budget will need to be cut to make up for the difference.

Chairman Mooney stated her support for keeping our employees whole. Selectman Patten asked about Capital Reserve Funds but those are only for specific functions. There is no contingency fund but that is something the Board may want to consider in the future. Selectman O'Hara asked about the fund balance, but we would still need to go to Town Meeting to access the fund balance. Selectman Pike asked about the union contracts. The failed contract would go back to the original contract but not include the new increases. All non-union employee wages are not included the default budget. Our goal is to keep and retain employees and attract new employees. Many towns in the state pay more and employees need to survive in this economy. We can't provide services if we don't have employees. Selectman Ciampi asked about the Town audit due in April. The audit has been moved to June because there is not currently sufficient staff. Selectman Ciampi asked about a consultant to provide assistance, but there is no money to hire a consultant. Selectman O'Hara suggested department heads target the employees on the lower end of the pay scale where we know we are underpaying and make it more appealing for them to stay. Chairman Mooney said things are going to "get skinny" and some things will need to be eliminated. This is a town-wide issue and every department is affected. There will be some tough choices.

Operating Budget & Wage Adjustments Approval:

The Board signed the two contracts that passed. TA Jipson noted this was a housekeeping item.

Elected Officials Swearing In:

TC/TC Jennifer Cashman swore in newly elected officials for the following positions:

Budget Committee – Don Hurd and Marc Zimmerman

MS-232 Statement of Appropriations:

This is also a housekeeping item to be completed after Town Meeting. It shows which articles and appropriations passed or failed and what our new operating budget is. It must be signed for NHDRA.

Belmont 2023 Equalization Ratio Update:

TA Jipson informed the Board that the New Hampshire Department of Revenue Administration (NHDRA) provided the Town with the 2023 equalization ratio. Belmont's ratio dropped to 88.5%, which means that Belmont's assessments are still below market value. The goal is to be at 100%.

LCHIP Incentive Payment:

Each year the Conservation Commission receives an annual incentive for the Carrier-Sanborn property. The property is walked and inspected and a report is generated, which then earns the Commission an incentive payment.

Chairman Mooney moved to accept LCHIP funds in the amount of \$550.00 for the annual reporting for the Carrier-Sanborn Conservation Area with funds to be deposited into the Conservation Fund; seconded by Selectman Pike. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Community Hazard Mitigation Plan Update:

This is a 5-year renewal of our plan, which gets grant funding when we update it. The Fire Department has the funds in their budget to cover the required town matching funds. It is a time consuming process that involves Police, Fire and DPW to plan for events such as bad weather, cyber-attacks, etc.

Selectman Patten moved to accept the terms of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Plan as presented in the amount of \$9,000.00 for updating the local hazard mitigation plan, acknowledging that the total cost of this project will be \$12,000.000 of which the Town will be responsible for a 25% (\$3,000.00) match; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Beautify Belmont:

The Beautify Belmont program has been partnered with Earth Day for five or six years to collect trash on our roads. This year it is the weekend of April 20th and 21st. The program gets free blue bags to hand out to volunteers and DPW will pick the bags up on April 22nd. American Legion member Ron Mitchell reported they are trying to work on a day for the high school seniors to do a community service event working at Penstock Park and other Town locations.

Sign ups can be done at Town Hall, the Library or DPW and need to include a location/address so that DPW knows where to go to collect the bags.

Other New Business: None

Old Business:**4 Leisure Lane Auction Update:**

This property was auctioned on March 2nd for \$62,500, which went into the general fund and has already been accounted for as revenue. It covered all of the demo and asbestos abatement but did not cover all of the taxes. Someone will put a new building on it and we will get it back onto the tax rolls quickly.

COSSAP Grant Amendment – 1-Year Extension:

The COSSAP grant covers a part-time drug prevention mediator. The current grant expires September 2024, and it needs to be extended to September 2025. Selectman O’Hara asked if this position was an updated version of the DARE program. Captain Stephen Akerstrom said no, the officer interacts with the homeless and drug addicted and attends to overdoses. He is hands on and has no set hours. He helps with transportation to clinics and other appointments designed to help people move away from drugs, and he also helps educate family members and gives them guidance and direction. It is a step in the right direction but some people aren’t ready yet. Captain Akerstrom noted they were not able to hire someone right when the grant was awarded so this will extend the timeframe. General Assistance Director Donna Cilley said this position is instrumental to the General Assistance office and has saved a lot of money and services at zero cost to the Town. A vehicle, computer, wages and benefits are 100% covered by the grant and it has been a lifesaver for the Town.

Chairman Mooney moved to approve the Police Department’s COSSAP grant amendment for a 1-year extension with a grant completion date of September 30, 2025; seconded by Selectman Patten. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

BBO Mowing Update:

At the last meeting B&G Supervisor Patrick Golden reported he was approached by the Belmont Baseball Organization about mowing field #5. TA Jipson reached out to Superintendent Mike Tursi and he said that is school property and to please send BBO his way. The message was relayed and they have set up a meeting with the school.

Other Old Business:

VW Clean Diesel Grant – DPW:

We have been approved for one truck from this grant and we are now in the next stage of the process to get on the agenda for the governor and the executive council. Our Belknap County Representatives need to advocate for us and support it, especially with the Town having a default budget this year. Selectman O'Hara will pass this along to the other representatives.

SB 553 - NHPDIP:

New Hampshire Municipal Association and other towns are pushing for reps to veto the bill, which would effectively do away with the NHPDIP program that earns big returns for municipalities and schools. They are encouraging Town Administrators and Selectmen to attend the public hearings and voice their opinions. It will have a big impact on taxpayers because that interest money is used to fund projects and to offset the tax rate. Without the interest, there are more taxes to raise.

Leslie Roberts Drive Request for Exemption from Posted Weight Limit:

Town Planner Karen Santoro reminded the Board that Leslie Roberts Drive was discussed at the last meeting as the Town and the State were trying to determine the proper classification for this road. NHDOT's final determination is that Leslie Roberts Drive is a Class V Town Road, and it has received funding from the State over the years. Once that was determined, the road was posted with the same weight limit as all other Town roads. The owner's attorney has submitted a request for an exemption of the posted weight limit. A bond was posted for temporary logging access for the 36 Horse Point Road property, because even though we didn't know the classification, it was under our care and control. That bond is still in place. The property owner is working with the State to create a new access to their landlocked parcel which would avoid travel over the Winni Trail. For now we can advise them to include signage and protect the trail with mats. This exemption request is for an exemption of the weight limit on the road only, and the Town does have a bond. There is a State statute that requires exemptions be granted if a bond has been posted. Chairman Mooney asked how to protect the trail. The Town is working on whether we can require a bond for the trail, but he has been asked to provide signage and mats. It is state land but we are required to maintain our section of the trail. There is currently a cease and desist from NHDES on the new access location. We have the bond to protect the road. TA Jipson and Legal determined that the bond covers the road repairs regardless of the reason the bond was originally provided. A driveway application will be required for the new access location and any conditions become terms of that driveway permit, such as culverts. There is no longer a plan for a ten-lot subdivision and the owner has applied for a demo and building permit for a single family residence.

Selectman O'Hara moved to grant an exemption from the posted weight limit on Leslie Roberts Drive pursuant to RSA 231:191; seconded by Chairman Mooney. Motion passed (4-1). Selectman Ciampi opposed.

Public Comment:

Kevin Sturgeon commented that it is good to hear both sides. Some people who were elected could not be here to be sworn in because they are at work. Next year it might be a good idea to request an evening meeting.

GA Director Donna Cilley asked the Board for direction on prioritizing work on the default budget, because it is something we have not seen before in Belmont. Department Heads need some guidance. Employee wages are a big concern and she thinks it is important to keep the good employees we have and attract new ones. We only have a few exempt employees left, and if we only focus on hourly employees there will be a mass exit. We need to look at the costs if we lose our current employees because it is hard to find new employees. We need to have comparable wages across the board in all departments. We will all need to compromise and give up lesser items to support all positions. Work Sessions will be scheduled next week.

Next Regular Meeting Date: April 3, 2024

Non-Public:

Chairman Mooney moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II a, b, c & i at 11:25 am; seconded by Selectman Pike. Roll Call 1: J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O’Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

Those present and voting were Chairman Ruth Mooney and Selectmen Jon Pike, Claude Patten, Jr., Travis O’Hara, and Sharon Ciampi. Also present were TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman and TC/TC Jennifer Cashman.

TC/TC Cashman presented the Board with a request for an abatement submitted for property at 27 Northbrook Road.

Selectman Pike moved to deny the abatement request for 27 Northbrook Road; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Roll Call 2: S. Ciampi – aye, T. O’Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed unanimously (5-0).

TC/TC Cashman left the meeting at 11:49 am.

Police Chief Lewandoski and Captain Akerstrom entered the meeting at 11:49 am.

The Board discussed the compensation of employees but did not make any decisions.

Police Chief Mark Lewandoski and Captain Stephen Akerstrom left the meeting at 12:35 pm.

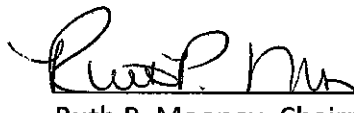
The Board discussed the default budget and provided TA Jipson with direction on creating a budget that incorporates wage adjustments so that Belmont can retain and attract good employees, but they did not make any decisions.

It was the consensus of the Board to hold Work Sessions with Department Heads next week on Monday, March 25th at 4:00 pm and Wednesday, March 27th at 10:00 am.

Selectman Pike moved to exit non-public session at 12:52 pm; 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 unanimously (5-0).

Adjournment:

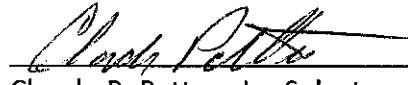
Chairman Mooney moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:53 pm; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Roll Call 4: T. O'Hara – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).




Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman



Jon Pike, Vice Chairman



Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman



Travis O'Hara, Selectman



Sharon Ciampi, Selectman