



Office of Board of Selectmen

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Selectmen's Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 20, 2023, 10:00 am
Belmont Mill, 14 Mill Street
Tioga Meeting Room

Present were Selectman Jon Pike (Acting Chairman), Selectman Claude (Sonny) Patten, Jr., Selectman Travis O'Hara, Selectman Sharon Ciampi, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Town Planner Karen Santoro, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Police Captain Stephen Akerstrom, Fire Chief Deb Black, Library Director Eileen Gilbert, CEO Mark Ekberg and Planning Board Member Kevin Sturgeon.

Via ZOOM were Chairman Ruth Mooney, Deputy Town Clerk Jenn Thomas, and TCTC Assistant Leigh Smith.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Minutes – 09/06/2023 and 09/12/2023:

Selectman Sonny Patten moved the minutes of the public meeting held on September 6, 2023, as written; seconded by Selectman Travis O'Hara. Roll Call 1: J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Selectman O'Hara moved the minutes of the Work Session meeting held on September 6, 2023, as written; seconded by Selectman Sharon Ciampi. Roll Call 2: S. Ciampi – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Selectman Patten moved the minutes of the non-public meeting held on September 6, 2023, as written; seconded by Chairman Ruth Mooney. Roll Call 3: S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Selectman O'Hara moved the minutes of the non-public meeting held on September 12, 2023, as written; seconded by Selectman Patten. Roll Call 4: T. O'Hara – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

New Business:

Body Camera for Code Enforcement Officer/Building Inspector Discussion:

TA Alicia Jipson revisited the request for Belmont's Code Enforcement Officer to wear a bodycam. She obtained a legal opinion from our attorneys and consulted with our police department and other towns. It was not a recommended practice for a variety of reasons. Because the CEO is not a law enforcement officer, all videos would be subject to Right to Know,

he will need to tell people on the record that he is wearing the camera and recording or it could violate the wiretap statute, the camera would need to be used every time any property is visited, and the CEO cannot choose to use it sometimes and not use it other times. It will raise suspicions about the instances where the camera is not in use. Recordings will capture everything that happens, good and bad. An example given was that many CEOs go on people's properties without permission to inspect, which is illegal regardless of whether the property is posted "No Trespassing" or not. That would be recorded and could be used against a CEO in a prosecution.

Our attorney stated people respond better to CEOs when those officers want to work with them to resolve the problem and do not respond well when they feel the goal is to prosecute them. Having the CEO show up with a body camera will instantly make people believe the latter, which will make it more difficult to resolve problems cooperatively. They do not recommend CEOs be equipped with body cameras.

It was the consensus of the Board to follow our attorney's advice to not pursue use of a CEO body camera at this time.

Rod Cameron Appointment to TAC and LRPC:

Selectman O'Hara moved to approve the appointment of Land Use Technician Roderick Cameron to serve as the Town of Belmont's representative to the Transportation Advisory Committee and Lakes Region Planning Commission with a term ending in 2025; seconded by Selectman Ciampi, and the motion passed (5-0). Roll Call 4: T. O'Hara – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes serves as Belmont's alternate for TAC. LRPC meets at the same time as the Planning Board, so Town Planner Karen Santoro is unable to be our representative.

Other New Business:

4 Leisure Lane Update:

The property is in disrepair and the buildings need to be removed. There is a trailer with a garage, a boat and other junk and the trailer may contain asbestos. The Board reviewed proposals from Spears Brothers and DeFranzo Demolition.

The Board will need to determine if they want to clean up and auction the property to recoup costs, or if they want to sell it as is with the stipulation the new owner must remove everything. There were concerns about potential contamination and the condition of the property. Someone could purchase it, do some cleanup and then move in. Selectman O'Hara's opinion was that if the Town owns this property, we should respect the area and clean it up. There is a good chance that we will break even after all of the costs. There have been a number of inquiries at Town Hall. Selectman Pike would like to see it cleaned up and marketed. Some money may be lost but with a new unit placed on the property it will generate new tax revenue.

Selectman O'Hara moved to approve the Spears Brothers proposal for demolition and asbestos testing for a total cost of \$13,800 for 4 Leisure Lane, seconded by Chairman Mooney. Roll Call 6: S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Budgeted Wages:

Selectman Pike moved to grant permission to TA Jipson to proceed with the union wages as proposed to remove the first two wage steps for union employees and to enter into negotiations with the unions, consistent with those terms, seconded by Selectman Patten.

Police Chief Mark Lewandoski presented information that the proposal would still be much lower than others around us including Gilmanton and Gilford. This data was obtained within the last week, after Captain Steve Akerstrom recently completed an evaluation of wages in area communities. Fire Chief Deb Black stated the same situation applies to the Fire Department with regard to wages. There was discussion about wages in the area, union vs. non-union, and benefits and bonuses provided.

Selectman O'Hara amended the motion on the table to "to grant permission to TA Jipson to proceed with union wage negotiations", seconded by Selectman Pike. Roll Call 7: T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Selectman O'Hara moved to grant permission to TA Jipson to proceed with changes to non-union wages as necessary, seconded by Selectman Pike. Roll Call 8: J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Letter from Waterfront Residents:

The Board received a letter signed by over 150 property owners with concerns about the statistical revaluation of waterfront property, which has also been forwarded to KRT. Unfortunately, many of their suggestions are out of the control of the Board of Selectmen. The assessment process is dictated by state law and the goal is to always be at 100% of market value and we still aren't there but we are close. Selectman Pike reminded everyone that taxpayers voted to do these updates due to the market changes and next year (2024) is the required five-year revaluation that happens no matter what. Chairman Mooney said to keep up with the ups and downs of the market, next year we should have a ballot item to continue revaluations each year or we could fall behind even worse. It is better to be 1 year behind than 5 years behind. Selectman O'Hara commented that voters may not have expected continued jumps at the time they voted.

Selectman Pike noted some of the examples provided in the letter:

Retiree: 2021 Assessed Value \$410,700 for \$10,726.49 in taxes and 2022 Assessed Value \$708,100 for \$14,321 in taxes which is a tax increase of \$3,594.51.

Seasonal Cottage, not winterized, kept within same family for over 80 years: 2021 Assessed Value \$227,600 for \$6,221.45 in taxes and 2022 Assessed Value \$487,100 for \$10,927.67 in taxes which is a tax increase of \$4,706.22.

He said these properties are selling for high value and that is where the basis comes from.

TA Jipson noted that if we had not completed the sales updates our values would be so far below market rate that tax rates would have been in the \$30 range. When values are up the tax rate goes down. We assume the rate will go down or stay level this year. The basis for the sales updates is what property sells for.

Chairman Mooney stated the third example is an AirBnB rental so the rents have likely increased for those properties to make up for the taxes.

Selectman Pike read one of the questions from the letter: Has the Town of Belmont leadership considered the unintended consequences of the recent focus on property revaluation such as an exodus of long-time residents and increase in out of state owners? He said he does not think he considered that, but it doesn't matter if it is a mobile home or a vacant lot, properties are worth more on the market.

The second question: Could we begin a strategic planning process to develop new sources of revenue that would alleviate the rising burden on residential property owners? Selectman Pike commented there are a lot of commercial buildings going up and the Town voted in a tax exemption for new commercial buildings with tax reductions for the first five years. We've had the Vault, a new gas station, a new revitalized property for the Dunkin' Donuts, and storage units, which have zero expense to the schools. We are headed in the right direction, but we can't control the values of properties. People are coming to New Hampshire. TA Jipson said we can't control who buys a property, whether they are from in state or out of state, and we can't control the price they are willing to pay. This is how the state values properties to collect taxes. The Planning Board recently determined they did not want to impose impact fees but that is a source of revenue where funds can be designated to offset the budget in specific areas. Chairman Mooney responded that we can only control the Town portion of the tax bill, not the school portion. The state is decreasing the amount of aid given to schools even more than before. The school budget puts more burden on property taxpayers. The Town has been conservative over the years. We can't control the school budget, but it falls back on the Selectman, "What are we going to do?" TA Jipson noted there are also county and state portions of the tax bill. Selectman O'Hara offered to send a diagram of the breakdown of the portions for towns in Belknap County.

Planning Board Member Kevin Sturgeon asked if continued revaluations should be expected going forward. Selectman Pike said yes. Selectman Pike suggested that boats are not a necessity even though automobiles are, and boats are not taxed the way automobiles are. Those funds could be used for education funding.

Selectman O'Hara mentioned the last item from the letter was to consider an annual cap on how much the budget can increase. He said tax caps sound great, but they put you at the mercy of the state, because the state and county could raise their taxes but you wouldn't be able to raise town taxes.

Fire Department Administrative Assistant Position:

Fire Chief Deb Black reported Sarah Weeks is leaving for a job with higher wages. Chief Black can't do three jobs, and she is already doing two right now. She held some interviews yesterday and found a good candidate with a banking background she would like to hire. It would be better to hire someone now before Sarah leaves. It was the consensus of the Board to recommend Chief Black to hire her preferred candidate now.

Old Business:

School Board Meeting Invite Topics for Discussion:

Superintendent Mike Tursi emailed TA Jipson looking for a list of topics to discuss at their meeting together on September 26th. Selectman O'Hara said taxes. Selectman Pike asked about the status of the generator. Chairman Mooney plans to attend the meeting.

Employee Appreciation Day Update:

The employee appreciation event was held yesterday and about 60 employees attended a bbq by Contigiani's. Years of Service awards were given out and our top two were Police Chief Mark Lewandoski with 45 years and Police Administrative Assistant Lori Schultz with 35 years. The Building & Grounds Team was honored as the Employee of the Year and Town Planner Karen Santoro was the Honorable Mention with a close second in votes.

Other Old Business: None

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting will be **Wednesday, October 4, 2023, at 10:00 am.**

Public Comment: None

Non-Public:

Selectman O'Hara moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II (a) at 10:55 am; seconded by Selectman Patten. Roll Call 9: S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

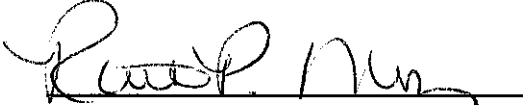
Those present and voting were Ruth Mooney (via ZOOM), Jon Pike, Claude Patten, Jr., Travis O'Hara and Sharon Ciampi. Also present were TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman and Wayne McLean.

The Board discussed matters of property violations and employment concerns with regards to the current job market and the status of job openings in the Town. Many employees are leaving for job opportunities with increased wages. No decisions were made.

Selectman Pike moved to seal the minutes of the non-public session; seconded by Selectman O'Hara. Roll Call 10: S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).


Adjournment:

Selectman O'Hara moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:36am seconded by Selectman Pike. Roll Call 11: J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – 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