



Office of Board of Selectmen

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**Selectmen's Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 1, 2023, 9:30 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, TA Alicia Jipson, Assessing Admin Colleen Akerman, DPW Director Craig Clairmont, Assistant DPW Director Brian Jackes, Building & Grounds Supervisor Patrick Golden, Police Chief Mark Lewandoski, Captain Stephen Akerstrom, Police Lieutenant Evan Boulanger, General Assistance Director Donna Cilley, Acting Fire Chief Deb Black, and Librarian Eileen Gilbert. Via ZOOM were Finance Director Katherine Davis, Town Planner Karen Santoro, Parks & Recreation Director Danielle St. Onge, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Cynthia DeRoy, and Town Clerk/Tax Collector Assistants Jenn Thomas and Leigh Smith. Also present via ZOOM were Brenda Duggan, Tom Murphy, Mark Brown, Jr., Tommy Ryan, and Katie Gargano.

The Chairman opened the public meeting at 9:30 am.

Non-Public – 9:30am:

Chairman Mooney moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II (c and e) at 9:27 am; seconded by Selectman Travis O'Hara. Roll Call: S. Ciampi – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – 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 TA Alicia Jipson.

No decisions or voting was made. Discussion was had where Chairman Mooney addressed the Board regarding the recent newspaper article.

Chairman Mooney moved to leave non-public session at 10:03 am; seconded by Selectman Travis O'Hara. Roll Call: S. Ciampi – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Patten – aye, J. Pike – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

The Board returned to public session at 10:03 am.

Those present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

Minutes - 04/17/2023:

Selectman Jon Pike moved the minutes of the public meeting held on April 17, 2023, as written; seconded by Selectman Sharon Ciampi. The motion passed (4-0-1). Selectman Travis O'Hara abstained as he was not present at the meeting.

Statement from Ruth Mooney:

"The Town received a right to know request for text messages between the Selectboard and department heads. When asked to narrow down the request, the requestor indicated that he was specifically looking for a text between me and a department head. While this text does not specifically relate to any business over which the Selectboard has jurisdiction, nor was it sent in my capacity as a Selectperson, I have always believed in transparency in government, and therefore it was provided to the requestor pursuant to RSA 91-A.

I acknowledge that the text was insensitive, and I apologize to anyone that I offended.

I also want to apologize to my fellow Board members and to the community for my insensitive comment, it was not my intention to hurt any feelings. My actions were mere comments in a quick text not meant for others.

I know it has been commented that I should resign and while I appreciate everyone's opinion on this I will not step down from my duties as Chairperson, or as a member of the Board as I feel strongly that I have always worked hard for our community, and I intend to continue serving Belmont and its residents to the best of my ability. That is all I will say on the matter.

We will allow anyone who wishes to speak on this matter a moment to do so. If you want to make a public comment you must come to the podium, state your name for the record and your address. Comments will be limited to three minutes each so that we may get to the rest of Town business on the agenda. I will not engage in a back-and-forth conversation on this matter."

The Chairman opened the floor to public comment.

Mrs. Lori Gardiner of 173 Hoadley Road in Belmont told everyone that her son Joshua is a wonderful young man, and he is kind to everybody. A lot of people in this room know him. She hopes the Chairman will be more careful with her comments in future. She said she had no issue with the feelings about her husband, but it is not acceptable to bring an innocent son into the conversation. He can't speak for himself, so she is speaking for him.

TA Alicia Jipson read a statement into the record from Ms. Tracey LeClair of 321 Brown Hill Road, who was out of town during the meeting.

"I have served on the Town's Budget Committee with Ruth Mooney for almost ten years, and last year we both served on the Canterbury Withdrawal Study Committee. If you

aren't familiar with these committees, I can tell you that both are made up of a diverse group of people from different backgrounds. During these meetings Ruth has put the best interests of the residents of Belmont first, and always in a professional manner.

I am aware of the texts that were obtained via the Right to Know Law. I do not believe or want Ruth to resign as a result of this. We now live in a time where one misstep on social media, can change your life . . . the Cancel Culture. In this case Ruth is being criticized and attacked because of texts she thought she was sending to a private phone. We should be teaching the young people in our town that if you make a mistake, all is not lost, and you can turn that mistake into a learning opportunity and move on.

EVERYONE has said something inappropriate or that they regret at one time or another. We should not be judging Ruth's worthiness to serve as a Selectboard member on texts sent in her personal time, rather by what she has selflessly done for the Town of Belmont."

There were no further comments from those present and the floor was opened to those on ZOOM.

Via ZOOM, Mr. Mark Brown, Jr. (no address given), said the Chairman made a comment not understanding it was not being sent to a personal phone. As an elected official it doesn't matter who you're sending it to. You don't put it in writing if you are making a comment. You should not make a comment about someone's son. His aunt has the same disease, and she could not speak. He feels terrible for the child and stands with Brian [Gardiner]. He commented that you don't attack someone's son or child. Mr. Brown stated the Chairman should stand down as Chairman or resign. If his special needs children were brought up this way, he does not know what he would do. There is no justice with the Town not holding a person accountable for this. It is a shame, and the Chairman should apologize to their face.

There were no additional comments.

New Business

Police Department New Hire Request:

Police Chief Mark Lewandoski reported that Sergeant Matthew Terry has gone back to work at the training academy. He has been looking for a Patrol Sergeant and found Chris Rideout from the Belknap County Sheriff's Department. He hopes Sergeant Rideout can be sworn in at the next Monday meeting and start his official duties the same day.

Selectman Pike moved to approve hiring Chris Rideout as a full-time Police Sergeant for the Town of Belmont starting May 15, 2023; seconded by Selectman Ciampi. Roll Call 1: J. Pike – aye, S. Patten – aye, T. O'Hara – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

Police Department Resignation:

Chief Lewandoski stated Officer Cobis has submitted his resignation and joined the NH State Police, so he has another opening to fill and it is not going well. He has not had good applicants so far. Three were non-certified and two did not pass the physical, and one was a no-show. The State Police offered Officer Cobis a \$7/hour raise, a \$10,000 signing bonus and another raise on July 1. The Town can't compete.

Selectman Sharon Ciampi asked if exit interviews are done. TA Jipson said she tries to do one for every employee, but some take vacation time there last week or two and some have already been gone when she tries to schedule.

Conservation Commission Appointments – Jane Jordan & Pauline Tessier:

Selectman Ciampi moved to approve the Conservation Commission's request to re-appoint Jane Jordan and Pauline Tessier as full Conservation Members with terms to expire March 31, 2026; seconded by Selectman 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).

Old Business

Code Enforcement Update – 130 Depot Street & 752 Laconia Road:

Code Enforcement Officer Mark Ekberg distributed copies of the petitions for 130 Depot Street and 752 Laconia Road to the Board. He said there was one typo in each, and he has talked to the Mitchell Group about those. Everything has been signed and notarized. Mitchell Group requested information for the final documents for 752 Laconia Road and the owner was there and discussed his plan to remedy the issues. CEO Ekberg notified him that it is the intent of the Town of Belmont to file a suit. Since last Tuesday they have removed one RV but still have multiple RVs and boats and the property remains a junkyard.

Mr. Walker at 130 Depot Street has a new RV on the property. He explained he owns it and will be fixing it to sell. CEO Ekberg notified him that it is the intent of the Town of Belmont to file a suit.

Chairman Mooney suggested a body cam for the CEO based on people calling with complaints who are not happy. It is a thankless job. Police Lieutenant Evan Boulanger provided information about the costs. The equipment is not the high cost; the data is the high cost. It is \$3,200 for 5 years for the cam and 250GB of data per year, which is the national average for a police officer. The CEO would record less, and he could ride on the cloud with the Police Department, but this should be bounced off a legal mind. RSA 105 covers policing with body cams and what falls under the violation of privacy or wiretapping. He is not sure how to navigate this. Chairman Mooney asked CEO Ekberg how he feels about this. He answered that he would use this more for the code side of things, but a decision would need to be made on whether it is used for all code interactions, or only those that are potentially volatile. He would be okay using it all of the time. It clears up a lot of language hurdles. Selectman Pike

commented that it eliminates the “he said/she said” when there are differing opinions on how an encounter went.

Selectman Sonny Patten asked if other town CEOs have body cams. CEO Ekberg said it has come up at monthly meetings he attends, as well as using drone footage, and both are gray areas. A legal decision is needed to see if this falls into invasion of privacy. He has heard that if you stay in the Right-of-Way, it is not in violation, but that opinion could change from attorney to attorney. He is not aware of any other CEOs using body cams yet. Selectman Ciampi supports the idea of a body cam for the CEO. Given the different situations in society, he should be protected. Chairman Mooney said her personal opinion is that we need to find some money in the budget for the cost. Lt. Boulanger said the \$3,200 cost for 5 years includes a camera replacement about every 2 and ½ years. Selectman O’Hara suggested getting clarification from legal on this, and what to say and what to do if someone does not want to be recorded. Selectman Patten stated he is against the proposal. Selectman Pike said he is neutral until we hear from our lawyer. CEO Ekberg will also get some advice/input at his next NHBOA meeting. Chairman Mooney said the more input the better, and she would rather be proactive than reactive.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting will be **Monday, May 15, 2023, at 10:00 am.**

Non-Public:

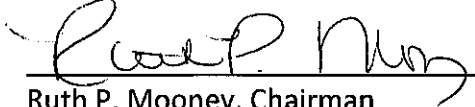
Chairman Mooney moved to enter non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3 II b & i) at 10:30 am; seconded by Selectman O’Hara. Roll Call 3: S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, T. O’Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).

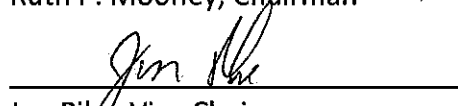
Those present and voting were Ruth Mooney, Jon Pike, Claude Patten, Jr., Travis O’Hara and Sharon Ciampi. Also present were TA Alicia Jipson, TC/TC Cynthia DeRoy, Chief Mark Lewandoski, Captain S. Akerstrom and Evan Boulanger.

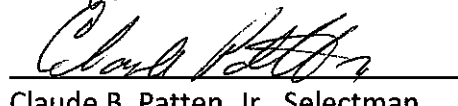
TC/TC Cynthia Deroy discussed her decision with the BOS to promote Jennifer Thomas as the Deputy TC/TC. The BOS collectively agreed with her decision as it is her decision as an elected official whom to place in the Deputy position. Deroy left and members of the PD took their seats. Discussion was had in regard to the safety of the officers and scheduling.

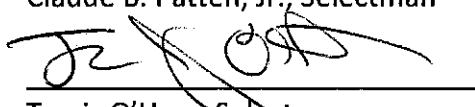
Adjournment:

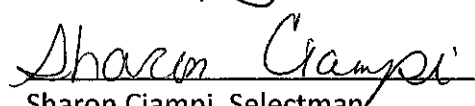
Chairman Mooney moved to adjourn the meeting at 11:30 am seconded by Travis O’Hara. Roll call: *Roll Call 3: S. Patten – aye, S. Ciampi – aye, J. Pike – aye, T. O’Hara – aye, R. Mooney – aye. Motion passed (5-0).*


Ruth P. Mooney, Chairman


Jon Pike, Vice Chairman


Claude B. Patten, Jr., Selectman


Travis O'Hara, Selectman


Sharon Ciampi, Selectman