

New Salem Select Board

Meeting Minutes

February 20, 2024

Select Board members present: Sue Cloutier (chair), Zara Dowling, Rick Taupier

SC called the meeting to order at 7pm.

No public comment.

Interim Highway Department chief Tim Hunting gave his report, which included the following items:

- He has been assessing equipment and trucks. None of the trucks had a current inspection sticker. He found the old inspection report for one of them, which made mention of oil leaks, brake issues, and light issues. It looks like the highway department may have done that work. Hunting did a bit of work, replacing lights, an air valve, and a few other things. It passed inspection.
- The transfer case on the Ford 550 is cracked. This job will require bringing someone in to look at it. It was pulled out of the garage for now.
- 2 garage doors would not open. Hunting called Overhead Door in Leominster and they fixed the doors promptly, within 2 or 3 days.
- The waste oil heating system is not being used for unknown reasons, which will be looked into.
- Hunting voiced his concern about the town's plowing capacity, noting the town has only 2 plow trucks and that the loader is also used to plow, though that the loader would be better used to haul sand.
- One of the wheels on the '14 Peterbilt 10-wheeler was locked up. Hunting went to Raymond's Repair in Bernardston, where it turned out the issue was just a brake drum. The town provided the parts so the charge will just be for labor and the truck should be inspectable 2/21.
- He noted that he called Shutesbury to arrange to borrow a plow truck in case we needed it for the big storm last week that didn't materialize.
- He has been cleaning and organizing the shop. He will have some scrap metal contributions to the town when the scrap metal bin is back at the transfer station.
- He would like to see the backhoe working, which it isn't right now. The batteries are being replaced as a first step.
- Hunting noted the newest truck needs a windshield, then should be inspectable. SC noted that the New Salem name is not on the new truck and she requested that it be added.

Hunting and the board briefly discussed funding needs for this fiscal year and next.

Hunting suggested the budget line for the Highway Department could be level-funded next year if necessary. ZD and SC noted that level funding would not account for increased Highway

Department wages already voted in. In addition, SC asked Hunting to assess the department's vehicle fleet and other equipment and provide a list of requested capital expenditures for next year.

ACTION: ZD will email the Select Board, Hunting, and the Finance Committee in order to coordinate budget planning meetings. RT will attend a budget meeting with the Highway Department and the Finance Committee.

Town Coordinator Kathy Neal presented her report, which included the following items:

- There has been no recent progress on the bylaw compilation project.
- Wendell wants to set up a meeting with the Select Board to review the proposed budgets of Swift River and Mahar schools.

ACTION: KN will follow up about the bylaw project.

ACTION: KN will send the Select Board budget to all Select Board members.

The board discussed the hiring process for a new Highway Department head.

KN noted the previous supervisor's salary was just under \$65K/year. Hunting noted the salary of the recently-hired Shutesbury Highway Department employee was around \$66K. Hunting suggested offering \$65-70K, based on experience, plus overtime.

ACTION: KN will email the board a draft of the job posting prior to the next meeting. She will also suggest places to advertise and any associated costs. At the next meeting the board will finalize the job posting and determine how it will be advertised.

SC and ZD requested that the advertisement contain a link to the town website where the full job description will be posted.

The board decided that the search committee will consist of RT, Hunting, and KN, and that the job will be posted for three weeks.

Mason Colby discussed his proposed plan (attached) to move a bench currently near the town tennis courts to a ledge outcrop that sits above Fay Field.

ZD suggested posting the proposal on the town website and New Salem News, to which MC agreed. MC expressed his desire for community feedback. ZD also asked Colby to talk to the Tree Committee about any small trees that need to be removed, specifically relating to any insurance issues that may be involved and whether someone on the Tree Committee may be qualified to help Colby remove the trees. MC noted there are some small 6" trees but nothing dangerous and expressed his willingness to consult with the Tree Committee. The Select Board approved the proposal provided the plan is publicized and Colby consults with the Tree Committee.

MC noted that it may make more sense, given the current bench's condition, to rebuild the bench. He said he talked to C&M Rough Cut, who said that when they turn on their mill in the spring they will be willing to sell the necessary lumber at a good price.

VOTE: RT moved to approve the bench plan proposed by Mason Colby and allocate \$100 out of the Town Maintenance budget line in support of it. ZD seconded. No discussion. Passed unanimously.

The Select Board discussed the proposed town-owned flagpole policy (attached). The policy is related to a Supreme Court case in which Boston's denial of a conservative group's application to use a public flagpole was determined unconstitutional on first amendment grounds. A conservative religious group has emailed New Salem with a similar request, though it was noted that in the Boston case the flagpole in question was routinely used to display flags for community groups and causes, while in New Salem no such flagpole exists.

VOTE: ZD motioned to approve the flagpole policy as slightly amended. RT seconded, no discussion. Passed unanimously.

The Select Board discussed the draft Select Board Meeting Preparation Procedures document. ZD suggested the punch list should be a different document, which SC said she is fine with. RT asked what this document will become. ZD replied that the document will serve a policy or operating procedure. The board discussed some other minor edits to this document.

ACTION: ZD will make discussed edits before sending a finalized draft to other Select Board members. The board will vote to approve the final draft at its next meeting.

The Select Board noted the need to find candidates for the Select Board election in May.

ZD reminded the board that it needs to approve an updated Building Inspector job description.

SC noted she is getting estimates for remediating and painting the town annex. RT emphasized the need for the work to be set up as quickly as possible. SC stated she hopes to put out an RFP by the end of March.

SC moved to close the meeting at 8:30.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Maurer
Select Board Clerk