

**New Salem Select Board
Meeting Minutes
July 31, 2023**

Select Board members present: Sue Cloutier (SC), Zara Dowling (ZD), Rick Taupier (RT)

SC called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

During the public comment period, Bruce Dunbar (Millington Road) stated that he spoke with Joan Aboud recently about the town flagpole in front of her house. The pole is rusty and the rope is broken, so she would like to have the pole painted and the rope replaced and is willing to pay for it herself. Dunbar mentioned that the flagpole at the veterans' memorial is also in need of attention and that having both jobs done at the same time might save some money.

ACTION: KN will check with the Veterans' Committee whether they have funds for fixing the veterans' memorial flagpole and what their plan is for repairing or replacing it. She will also check whether there is any financial benefit to doing both jobs at the same time. If there is not, the Select Board recommends that Joan Aboud go ahead with the work on the flagpole in front of her house now.

Highway Superintendent Jacob Cooley stated that new Highway Department employee Aaron Thibeault enjoyed his first day at work and did a good job. The Select Board asked Cooley to pass along their welcome to Thibeault.

The board briefly discussed the need for a Meeting Owl webcam to improve the hybrid meeting experience.

ACTION: KN will look into purchasing a new Meeting Owl webcam and determine a source of funding.

The Select Board planned their next meeting for Thursday, August 10, 2023.

Wayne Hatchey discussed the work he has done so far to install radiant floor heating at the highway garage, in response to a request by the Select Board that he present information on the work he's done on the project and the costs up to this point. Hatchey stated he spoke with Finance Committee chair Gabe Voelker and determined that \$15,000 for the project was set aside when the building was built. Hatchey stated that project costs have exceeded this amount, due in part to the high price of concrete and a complicated pouring process. Two thirds of the project is finished, and Hatchey estimated that the remaining part will cost about as much as the first. A total figure for the cost of the first phase was not provided.

ZD thanked Hatchey for the work he has done up to this point. She also expressed reservations about the fact that the Select Board did not receive a comprehensive bid or plan prior to the

start of the project. SC concurred, stating that the board will require a bid that lists the entire scope of work and expected costs prior to the next phase of the project.

ACTION: KN will provide Hatchey with an RFP stating the scope of the work for “Phase 2” of the project, which will include pouring the last third of the floor, rough plumbing, and getting an inspection.

VOTE: RT motioned to approve Wayne Hatchey for 20 hours of work at \$25/hour (\$500), for preparation of the “Phase 2” bid for the Highway Department building. SC seconded. Approved unanimously.

ACTION: KN will follow up with Finance Committee chair Voelker to create a full accounting of all money spent on “Phase 1” of the floor heating project, based on receipts submitted by Hatchey. The Select Board, Hatchey, and Voelker will work together to determine how much earmarked money is still available for the building, how to fund any outstanding bills for the first phase of the project, and funding sources for the remaining stages.

The Select Board discussed that a third phase of the project—to include the heating system, office walls and doors, and plumbing fixtures—will be dealt with separately at a future date.

VOTE: SC motioned to approve the appointments of Wayne Hatchey, Amy Fagin and Nancy Aldridge to the Cultural Council. RT seconded. Approved unanimously.

VOTE: SC motioned to approve the following names for the Council on Aging:

Jeanne Clayton, Through 2024
Betsy Pelz, through 2024
Marny Ashworth, through 2024
Alfred Ohlson, Sr. through 2024
Edith Watson, through 2024
Diana Zany, through 2024
Donna Ballentine, through 2024

Seconded by ZD. Approved unanimously.

VOTE: ZD motioned to approve the following names for the Conservation Commission:

Phil Arnold, through 2024
Dan Grubbs, through 2024
Josh Rapp, through 2025
Chris Bouda, through 2026
Zara Dowling, through 2026

SC seconded. Approved unanimously.

Highway Superintendent Jacob Cooley gave an overview of recent highway department developments. He stated that road maintenance has been difficult to keep up with because of the constant rain this summer, and that it's been useful to have a new employee to help with this and other tasks. He said his team's regular activities include mowing, fixing potholes, fixing washouts, and keeping catch basins, runoffs and culverts clear.

RT made note of several improvements he would like to see in the operating of the Highway Department. He stated that the Highway Department needs to keep a basic schedule of tasks. He also noted his desire for improvement in communication between the Highway Department and townspeople who contact the department. As an example RT mentioned a recent urgent problem with washout on Moosehorn Road, during which there was some confusion about whether the Highway Department had received notification about the issue and was planning to respond. Cooley stated that he did respond to the issue within a day or two of learning about it.

Cooley stated that the problem with Moosehorn Road is largely due to berms on either side of the road, and that a similar problem exists on Cooleyville Road(s). SC and RT stated that it may be useful to bring in an engineer to help come up with a plan to make maintenance of these roads easier in the future. Cooley said he was willing to have someone look at the problem but expressed doubt that an engineer would be able to produce a workable and affordable plan.

Cooley stated that he is happy to be in charge of public-facing communication for the department and stated that calls will be answered on the next working day, within 24 hours. He noted that the members of the department are often out on site most of the day, without much office time during which to respond to calls and emails. RT stated that public communication is important enough that, if necessary, it would be worth stopping work 15 minutes early in order to be able to deal with correspondence in a timely way.

Select Board members stressed that they appreciate the work the Highway Department is doing and that Cooley can rely on them as a resource for anything he may need.

Stacy Senflug posed the idea that there may be a Massachusetts highway superintendents group online where Cooley could get ideas and answers to questions. She also suggested that contacting other local highway department heads could be a way to get more local insight.

Jenny Potee stated that Cooley and his team are very helpful at the Transfer Station and that she contacts him regularly via text to communicate about this.

ZD asked whether street sweeping would be happening this summer and Cooley said it would be and that he will know the date by the end of the week.

ACTION: KN will contact FRCOG about having an expert in dirt roads come out to discuss strategies for dirt road maintenance with the members of the Highway Department.

ACTION: KN will try to find the job description for the Highway Superintendent. If one doesn't exist, the Select Board will write one in collaboration with the Highway Superintendent.

Brad Foster, director of the 1794 Meetinghouse, spoke about the need for a new fire alarm system at the meetinghouse. During the yearly inspection of the building's safety systems it was discovered that the fire alarm system panel was inoperative. The organization is requesting help from the town to replace it. Foster noted that while they typically pay for more minor maintenance themselves, they cannot afford the entire replacement cost of the panel right now, and that the situation is similar to one about six years ago when roof work needed to be done and the group came to the town for assistance.

Foster noted that the old system was a non-monitored system and that the town Fire Chief would strongly prefer a monitored system. The monitored system will incur a \$700/year fee, which the 1794 Meetinghouse would take on.

Foster stated he is in the process of getting bids for a new system and is currently leaning toward a bid from Northeast Security for \$6,650, with one other bid for \$8,856 having been received from Impact Fire. Of these two companies, Foster stated he feels more comfortable with Northeast Security and that they have a good reputation. He said the 1794 Meetinghouse could cover half of the \$6,650 bid right now and is requesting the other half from the town. If funding from the town is not available the organization could raise funds specifically for this purpose; however, this would take some months. Another option would be to wrap the alarm upgrade into a larger grant-funded capital project, but this would take even longer—probably a year and a half.

Foster clarified that the alarm system is for protecting the building when it is unoccupied and that all systems for warning building occupants of a fire are operational.

ZD asked whether the 1794 Meetinghouse had a formal lease on the building, to which Foster responded that they used to, but that it is expired. He noted that at some point the group began the process of getting a new lease, which stalled out, and that they also started the process of purchasing the building from the town, which also stalled out. He described some of the issues that led to the pause in the lease and purchase discussions, and noted that the meetinghouse and the town are currently operating as if the old lease were in effect. He stated that the group is still interested in purchasing the building.

ZD stated she thinks it is important to forge a long-term path incorporating an updated lease and/or purchase agreement with the organization. The other Select Board members concurred. RT noted that the alarm replacement issue should be dealt with immediately, separate from a longer-term plan.

VOTE: SC moved to table further discussion on the issue until the next Select Board meeting. RT seconded. Passed unanimously.

ACTION: BF will send Select Board members the old version of the lease and the latest versions of the proposed purchase and sales agreement.

VOTE: SC proposed to accept the warrant for the August 29 debt exclusion vote as written. ZD seconded. Passed unanimously.

VOTE: ZD proposed directing Entre Technologies to set up Microsoft 365 and create three email addresses—one for the Town Coordinator, one for the Police Department, and one for the Fire Department. RT seconded. Passed unanimously.

VOTE: RT moved to approve the last meeting's minutes as amended. SC seconded. Passed unanimously.

VOTE: SC moved to close the meeting at 8:50pm. RT seconded. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Maurer
Selectboard Clerk