

# New Salem Selectboard

## Meeting Minutes

September 5, 2023

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

SC called the meeting to order at 7:03pm.

There was no public comment during the public comment period.

**Town Coordinator Kathy Neal presented her report. She said a team from FRCOG inspected the bridge on Moosehorn Road and found no indication of imminent collapse, but they noted that work will need to be done in the future.** The team stated that the road does need to be regraded immediately to get rid of the berms on either side. This information was forwarded to the Highway Department, and RT stated he would check in with the Highway Department in the next few days to make sure this gets done. SC stated that FRCOG also made a suggestion that new culverts be put under the road.

**KN discussed the next phase of the highway barn project.** She stated that Wayne Hatchey won't be available until later this month to do the planning work for Phase 2 (rough plumbing and pouring the last third of the concrete floor). ZD noted that the planned energy audit of town buildings needs to happen before Phase 3 (heating system installation). She suggested the town ask Hatchey to begin planning for Phase 2. RT expressed concern about the coming of winter and encouraged the board to move as quickly as possible, ideally in order to be able to install the heating system for use this coming winter.

**ACTION:** KN will check with Hatchey to ask if he can have procurement documents ready for Phase II for the early October meeting.

**The board reviewed a report from the town accountant detailing the amount that has been spent so far on Phase 1 of the highway barn floor project.** Town Treasurer Gabe Voelker said she believes the Select Board authorized some amount of money for this (\$15,000, she thinks), but stated there have been major cost overruns. Select Board members do not remember authorizing this.

Based on the report, following Phase 1 the project, there is approximately \$7,500 left in the building maintenance fund (voted at Town Meeting in June 2022). Of that \$7,500, \$500 was allocated (but has not yet been spent) to have Hatchey develop a plan for procurement of services for Phase II of the project.

**ACTION:** KN will look through old minutes to find out how much was originally allocated for the floor part of the highway barn project.

SC stated she wants to look all the way back to the beginning of the highway barn project and trace how much has been spent and where. Erin the town accountant would need to produce this.

Voelker noted the highway barn was built with Chapter 90 money and that this included authorization for using the money for the floor, but not for building an office and bathroom as are planned for Phase 3, and therefore a different source of funding would need to be used for these aspects of Phase 3.

**ACTION:** KN will request the Chapter 90 sheet from the Massachusetts Highway Department, and also from the New Salem Highway Superintendent.

**Town Treasurer Gabe Voelker asked the Select Board what they would like to do with a town-owned property.** She said that a former town clerk named Mrs. Weatherbee owned the property at 11 S Main St, which was put into land court and is now owned by the town. The property is the site of the old town post office. It is less than ¼ acre in size. Voelker stated that the typical process in this situation is to sell the property in order to put it back on the tax roll. She said that if the board desires to sell the property it must by law be auctioned, and she discussed different kinds of auctions that could be used. She also stated that a neighboring property owner is interested in the lot.

The board decided to table the discussion and make a decision at its next meeting. ZD wants to look at the property, while SC and RT are in favor of selling immediately.

**Gabe Voelker stated that there are a number of town employees making less than the new minimum wage of \$17,** and that the Select Board may want to take up this issue, although municipalities are not legally required to pay minimum wage. She said she could provide details of how much it would cost based on the number of employees and their pay rates. The board briefly discussed this and noted it would need to be approved by the town. Voelker stated she would be willing to serve on a re-formed Personnel Committee.

**ACTION:** SC will send suggested names for the Personnel Committee to Voelker. Voelker will share the list of all town employees with the Select Board.

**ZD discussed the new lease she drafted for the 1794 Meetinghouse.** Her version is based on the Old Academy Building lease and the K.P. Law-authored 1794 Meetinghouse lease, which are similar. The board discussed the document. RT suggested keeping the lease as short as possible.

**ACTION:** ZD will remove several unnecessary parts from the lease and send it to town counsel for review, with a goal of discussing it with the 1794 Meetinghouse at the October 2 Select Board Meeting. KN also agreed to review.

**The Select Board discussed a request from Highway Department employee Cody Hamlett for an hourly wage increase.** Hamlett is asking to be paid the same amount as the most recent hire, Aaron Thibeault, which is \$1.10 more than Hamlett is making now. RT stated he thinks the request is justified based on a discussion with the Highway Superintendent.

**VOTE:** SC moved to increase the wage. RT seconded. ZD abstained. Passed. It was noted that there is money available in reserve if the wage increase were to bring the line item for Highway Department salaries over budget.

**ACTION:** KN will send the job advertisements for the past two Highway Department hires to RT.

**ZD asked other board members about their level of interest in webinars offered through the Franklin Regional Planning Board's Citizen Planner Training Collaborative.** The Select Board noted that most of the topics seem more relevant to the New Salem Planning Board, so ZD will forward the list to the NSPB, who is meeting soon.

**ACTION:** ZD will notify the FRPB that the Select Board is interested in material related to fair housing and ask the NSPB for their input about other topics.

**SC noted that she attended the Western Massachusetts Solar Forum event this afternoon and that it was well done, and she thanked ZD for her role in organizing it.**

**VOTE:** ZD motioned to add KN and Alison Gage at FRCOG to Mass Energy Insight, the online system the town uses to track its energy use, maintain its Green Communities status, and remain eligible for certain grants. SC seconded. Passed unanimously.

**VOTE:** SC moved to appoint Claire McGinnis to the Open Space and Recreation Committee. ZD seconded. Passed unanimously.

**ZD outlined a plan for a publicly-viewable shared document that would list action items by person and probable future meeting agenda items.** The board briefly discussed this and ZD agreed to draft the document.

**VOTE:** RT moved to adjourn at 8:48pm. SC seconded. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Maurer  
Select Board Clerk