

New Salem Selectboard

Meeting Minutes

October 2, 2023

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

During the public comment period, Albert Ohlson (Cooleyville Rd.) and Andrew Ohlson (Whitaker Rd.) complained about the condition of town roads.

Town Coordinator Kathy Neal (KN) presented her report.

- She noted that the recent flu clinic was well organized, with 33 residents receiving flu shots.
- Today she attended a meeting sponsored by Rep. Saunders and Sen. Comerford plus the secretary of Energy and Environmental affairs, the head of DCR, and the head of the Department of Fish and Wildlife. The meeting included a boat ride on the Quabbin and lunch at the town hall. She presented a copy of a bill Rep. Saunders and Sen. Comerford have filed, with which they are trying to increase the amount of money Quabbin-adjacent towns receive from the state.
- She reported that later in the afternoon there was a meeting with Director of Rural Affairs Anne Gobi, who talked about what she wants to accomplish. KN stated that the Director understands the needs of small towns, including the onerousness of paperwork, and wants to simplify the processes of filing paperwork and applying for grants.

KN reported that she and SC led an engineer around some town buildings, including the town hall, the Stowell Building, the annex, and the 1794 Meetinghouse. The engineer suggested keeping the heat running in the town hall during the winter in order to mitigate further structural damage caused by freezing and thawing cycles.

The board discussed having the engineer also evaluate other town buildings. The library and the Hagerville fire station were identified as likely buildings of interest. The Board decided to determine a final list at its next meeting.

The Board discussed the agenda item about heating the Town Hall in the winter. Board members determined that they need a projected annual cost for heating the Town Hall before being able to vote.

ACTION: The board asked the Town Coordinator to secure 3 estimates of annual heating costs for the town hall.

The Board discussed needing to find a slate roof specialist to repair the Town Hall roof. The Town Coordinator will collect the names of possible candidates and the Board will discuss all building issues in more detail at its next meeting.

RT discussed the latest developments in the effort to improve town roads and Highway Department processes. He noted it is problematic that no one on the crew has a job description. He is writing job descriptions for the crew based on other towns' job descriptions and the descriptions that were advertised when some staff members were hired. He noted that in the case of the Supervisor the description is being written from scratch because the board doesn't know under what expectations Supervisor Cooley was hired.

RT noted that numerous people have complained about town roads, including Cooleyville, Whitaker and South Main, among others. He noted that the town's new excavator is being used and that the Highway Department is fully staffed for the first time in multiple years. He asked meeting attendees whether they have seen improvements. SC noted she has seen improved crowning on some roads that have been graded using the new equipment.

RT noted that some roads are so far gone that he wants to know how much it would cost to bring someone in from outside to fix the most problematic roads, using them as a tutorial for the New Salem highway crew. ZD stated three priorities for the Highway Department: a written plan and timeline for repairs, renewal of licenses, and better communication.

RT suggested that money may need to be spent on bringing in outside help for the town roads, particularly because no Select Board member is qualified to manage highway department operations at a high level. The Board agreed that for its next meeting it would consider who could provide consulting about this.

ACTION: KN will provide a summary to the Board of what can and cannot be discussed with and about an employee at a public meeting, and what should be reserved for executive session.

KN discussed a quote for videoconferencing equipment, and that there may be a used system available. The Board tabled the vote on this until its next meeting.

The Board discussed the proposed 1794 Meetinghouse lease as modified by town counsel. ZD noted that the new version makes no mention of major repairs and suggested KN ask town counsel whether this was intentionally left out. 1794 Meetinghouse Director Brad Foster stated he appreciates the simplicity of the lease and that given that it is a one-year lease a larger discussion of major repairs may not be necessary. The Board discussed setting the yearly rent at \$1, with the expectation that the 1794 Meetinghouse would continue to oversee routine maintenance. The group's lawyers will look at the revised lease and Foster expects any changes could be ready for review at the next Select Board meeting.

Foster noted several areas of concern about the building, to be addressed at some future time, and SC suggested it may be helpful to include Foster the next time the engineer comes to assess town buildings.

The board reviewed the document of ongoing projects.

VOTE: ZD moved to approve the 9/18/23 minutes with minor amendments. SC seconded. No further discussion. Passed unanimously.

VOTE: SC moved to close the meeting at 8:44. ZD seconded. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Maurer
Selectboard Clerk