

New Salem Selectboard

Meeting Minutes

October 16, 2023

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

SC called the meeting to order at 7:00.

During the public comment period, Arthur Adams expressed the opinion that the small property next to the town hall should be kept by the town until the town knows what it wants to do with the town hall. He inquired about why the board is considering heating the town hall. RT explained that the engineer who looked at the building said that heating the town hall would prevent further damage to the building, and that with this building and others remediation would be less expensive than replacement.

Town Coordinator Kathy Neal (KN) gave her report. She stated that the Secretary of Rural Affairs is partnering with small towns to learn about their needs, and that Lt. Gov. Driscoll will be holding a listening session. She asked Select Board members what issues they would like to have addressed so that she could include them in a letter to the organization. Select Board members suggested the following:

- ZD suggested that it would be useful to have help with gathering the information required for grant applications and that a list of available grants would also be helpful. SC concurred.
- ZD also suggested technical support and/or funding for common types of litigation towns may find themselves in.
- RT noted that Quabbin towns are in a unique situation in that much of the land is owned by the state, so the town doesn't have a big tax base yet still has to maintain the same infrastructure and address the same responsibilities as other towns. He noted that increased support from the state would help the town protect the quality of the watershed and maintain the character of the community. He suggested a special examination of the needs of rural communities surrounding the Quabbin Reservoir.
- ZD suggested more stable funding for regional planning agencies.

KN mentioned a notice the town received from MassDEP that the Swift River School PFAS filtration system is not yet fully functional.

KN noted that FRCOG informed her that the cost of their accounting software is increasing dramatically, which could affect all the towns in the FRCOG Town Accounting program. There is a possibility FRCOG may discontinue the program. Town Treasurer Gabe Voelker noted that at least 3 pieces of software are currently being used for accounting in different town departments in New Salem.

ACTION: KN will email the finance committee so they can prepare for potential upcoming changes.

The Board discussed declaring a John Deere tractor as surplus. Jen Potee of the Board of Health noted that the tractor was originally purchased for mowing the lawn near the transfer station but is not appropriate for that job, and she asked the Board to approve selling the tractor. The Board decided to check whether the tractor can be used by another department in town before selling it.

The Board discussed the tax title property at 11 South Main St. SC gave an overview of public responses to the issue.

VOTE: RT motioned to have the Town Treasurer hold the building and not auction it, SC seconded. Gabe Voelker and the Board discussed what to do with the building on the property and agreed that the Building Inspector needs to look at it. Passed unanimously.

Relative to another town property on Lovers Lane that was previously auctioned off, GV noted that the enforcement officer for the property is the Building Inspector and that if the Board wants the property to be improved as stipulated in the sale, that should be enforced by the Building Inspector.

The Board discussed town road issues. RT noted that Highway Department Supervisor Jacob Cooley was supposed to be present at the meeting but was not. The Board discussed the need for a special meeting with Cooley to discuss highway conditions and scheduled the meeting for the following Monday. KN will forward new highway department job descriptions to all Board members, for discussion at the Board's next regular meeting.

SC outlined building issues found by an engineer who toured several town buildings. The engineer felt the town hall was in fairly good condition and that mold there can be remediated. She noted the structure itself is historic. The roof is not badly damaged, except in the case of the cupola, which has more damage, though the items needing repair are not major structural elements. The soil around the building needs to be moved back by shovel because it is damaging the foundation. SC hopes the building can be restored rather than being torn down.

She noted that water drainage issues around the foundation of the Stowell Building necessitate immediate work.

She also noted the engineer's concern with water intrusion at the 1794 Meetinghouse, where some of the beams holding the steeple need to be remediated.

ZD suggested checking with the librarian and fire chief about the library and Hagerville fire station.

ACTION: KN will ask the historic commission about any recent architectural or engineering analysis of the Old Academy Building. She will also ask the fire chief about anything needed at the Hagerville fire station.

The board identified the slate roof on the town hall as an immediate concern, given that winter is approaching.

VOTE: RT moved to approve up to \$500 to have someone estimate the cost of what needs to be done to repair the slate roof on the town hall, from building maintenance funds. ZD seconded. No further discussion. Passed unanimously.

VOTE: SC moved to approve \$1000 from building maintenance account for having the engineer look at the library, the fire station, and the Hagersville fire station. RT seconded. Al Ohlsen (Cooleyville Rd.) asked why the building inspector is not doing the building inspections. The Board decided not to take up this issue in the short term because it may slow down the process. Passed unanimously.

The board discussed heating the town hall for the winter. ZD determined that according to the town's Energy Reduction Plan from 2009, the average heating oil usage when the building was heated all winter was 2230 gallons per year.

ACTION: KN will have someone estimate how much heating oil the building will need for the winter and how much it will cost to get the furnace running.

The Board discussed video conferencing equipment, and asked KN to purchase an OWL or similar. This was approved by the Select Board on 8/14/23.

Brad Foster from the 1794 Meetinghouse discussed the proposed meetinghouse lease. He stated his main concern is the language around capital vs. maintenance projects. It is his intention to continue to deal with routine maintenance issues that come up, and safety related concerns, and he wanted to make sure that this is the intention of the Select Board, which the Board stated it is. ZD and Foster will make minor changes to clarify the meanings of capital vs. maintenance projects in the lease.

VOTE: SC moved to close the meeting at 8:42. ZD seconded. Passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Maurer
Select Board Clerk