

New Salem Select Board

Meeting Minutes

January 22, 2024

Present: Sue Cloutier (chair), Zara Dowling, Rick Taupier

SC called the meeting to order at 7pm.

There was no public comment.

Peter Valinski from engineering firm Tighe and Bond, which has overseen the Swift River School PFAS remediation project, reported on the successful completion of the project.

He noted that the contract originally included an item specifying the replacement of a water tank bladder. This contract item was not required for the treatment of PFAS, but was included as a maintenance item to be addressed at the same time the treatment system was installed. During the project the contractor determined that access to the tank would require heavy rigging equipment that would not have been covered in the scope of the original contract. Given that the existing bladder has not yet reached its end of life, Valinski recommended leaving it for now and accepting the contractor's offer to eliminate the bladder work from the contract and refund the town \$3800 that would've been used for this work.

VOTE: ZD proposed eliminating the bladder work from the contract and accepting the credit offered by Ardent Group, concurring with Wendell and the Swift River School. RT seconded. No discussion. Passed unanimously.

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

- A second company—Mahan Roofing—assessed the slate roof on the town hall. The roofer concurred that the valleys of the roof are in bad shape. He felt that taking out bad slates would affect good ones and that repair would be impractical or impossible. He gave a ballpark figure of \$300,000 for replacing the whole roof.
- She presented a letter from Town Counsel stating that legal rates are going up as of July 1, 2024, from \$225 to \$245/hour for non-litigation matters and from \$350 to \$375/hour for litigation-related matters.
- She noted that the warrant for the special town meeting on February 1 includes the bus contract with Wendell and two bills from the DPW.
 - **ACTION:** KN will post bus contract details on the website and note that Wendell has already approved it.
- She noted Highway Department Supervisor Jacob Cooley handed in his resignation today, effective in two weeks.
- She noted she worked with ZD to update the list of needed job descriptions.
 - **ACTION:** ZD will work with KN to draft job descriptions for the Police Department.

SC suggested seeking an interim Highway Department head. SC suggested the retired Shutesbury highway person might be willing to serve temporarily. RT noted the town needs to offer a competitive rate to attract qualified candidates. RT will check on neighboring towns' DPW salaries. SC suggested a 3-month interim person to help for the rest of the winter.

ACTION: KN will email the person from Shutesbury to gauge interest, and talk to Treasurer Gabe Voelker about the financial side of it.

Jenny Potee commented that it is vital that the transfer station stay plowed, not just on dump days. The Select Board agreed to keep her posted about who will be in charge of plowing the transfer station.

Cam Dunbar stated that the rate for his freelance plowing work for the highway department is currently about \$22/hour and that he would like a raise. He would like his pay to be more equal to that of Highway Department staff members. He noted there has been no formal agreement about a pay rate in the past but that other towns pay more. KN noted other towns pay approximately \$30-\$32/hour for similar services.

ACTION: Call other towns in Franklin County to check how they handle plowing needs in excess of what their full-time Highway Department employees can handle, including what they pay part-time plowers.

VOTE: SC moved to appoint Paul Beachell to the Veteran's Memorial Committee. SC seconded. No discussion. Passed unanimously.

Fire Chief Joe Cunio was present for a discussion regarding participation in a regional Fire Department with Leverett, Wendell and Shutesbury (report attached). He noted the study will not cost New Salem anything except time and work.

VOTE: SC moved to participate in the study involving shared fire services between Leverett, Wendell, Shutesbury and New Salem. ZD seconded. No discussion. Passed unanimously.

Joe Cunio presented his request for ARPA funds for a new jaws of life, which would cost approximately \$50,000 or slightly less. He noted the current machine is 12-15 years old, gas powered, and does not work very well to cut through modern cars, while a new machine would be safer and more effective. He stated that the usual anticipated lifespan for these machines is 10 years.

KN noted that of an original amount of \$305,000 the town has spent \$136,683 in ARPA funds, leaving approximately \$165,000.

VOTE: RT motioned to allocate \$50,000 from ARPA funds for a new jaws of life. SC seconded. Yea: SC, RT Abstained: ZD. Passed.

The Select Board discussed some other ways ARPA funds might be used. SC noted the annex building needs to be painted and soil needs to be moved away from its foundation. ZD noted her priority for doing building work with ARPA funds but that she wants building assessments to be reviewed before committing ARPA money to anything. RT suggested giving a deadline for the library report, which is the last remaining building assessment needed.

SC expressed an interest in putting a temporary heating system in the old highway barn office, and the board discussed that the town highway barn may be a priority for ARPA funding.

ACTION: ZD will have an update on the town building energy audits for the next Select Board meeting.

ACTION: KN will contact FRCOG by the next meeting to find a contractor to give a bid on creating a plan for the remaining highway department barn work. She will follow up with whoever FRCOG suggests.

There was some further discussion about priorities for ARPA money. SC questioned whether the highway barn should be a priority.

The board determined that the discussions of how to use remaining ARPA funds and budget planning for FY25 will be moved to the next meeting.

The board and the Town Coordinator expressed frustration with the lack of volunteer help in town. Jen Potee mentioned that Wendell has a sandwich board announcing when help is needed and suggested there may be ways of reaching out to new people.

ACTION: Andrew Maurer of the Technology Committee will look into where things stand with Entre Technologies regarding setting up Microsoft 365 for town emails.

The Select Board discussed its priorities for FRCOG and listed them on a form to be sent to FRCOG. Priorities include:

- Capital planning
- Open space and recreation planning
- Assistance with grant applications for building needs
- IT support, including collective purchasing of technology, group subscriptions, etc.

SC moved to close the meeting at 8:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Maurer
Select Board Clerk