

Town of *New Salem* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
August 8, 2022
Held Virtually via Zoom

Convened: 7:00 pm

Present: Hugh Mackay, Carl Seppala, Selectboard; Kathy Neal, Town Coordinator; Joe Cuneo, Fire Chief; Larry Eaton, Fire Dept.; Gabe Voelker, Claire McGinnis, Chuck Hartwell, Finance Committee; Zara Dowling, Green Communities; Cam Dunbar, Board of Health; Lisa Finestone, Tree Committee; Nancy Slator, *New Salem News*; Jeanne Clayton; Marty Ashburne; Dan Grubbs

Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:

- Payroll & Vendor Warrants
- Warrant for September 6, 2022 State Primary Election

Discussion Items

Heating System for the Fire Station

Joe began by reporting on a tour with some folks at the Fire Station with the Green Communities Committee as well as Carl. The bottom line is that heat pumps won't be feasible. He feels that we'll have to do some kind of fossil fuel solution that perhaps adds or includes some kind of renewable option. He then went over the RFP parts of the project highlighting some of the boilerplate. Joe then provided some figures based on quotes. \$21,000 was what was asked for at town meeting, the latest quote appears to be \$17,400. The difference is that this lower cost would be a straight replacement of the existing oil burner. The ask at town meeting had been for funds that would have covered the cost of replacing with a propane system instead. Hugh noted a few fine points of Chapter 30B's rules. Joe stressed that this needs to be done sooner rather than later. There was some discussion about prevailing wage and advertising in appropriate places. Hugh agreed to assist with the RFP bid package. Joe reminded those present that if we go with the oil burner idea it's cheaper than we'd budgeted for to date. As for the generator part, we'd originally thought we'd also make that propane fired, but if in the future the town comes up with grants for alternative sources of heat we can't really size the generator. The specifications for a generator that might come under ARPA funding is for what we have now. So doing a straight up replacement of the oil burner would allow that to translate. Zara noted that one of the people who looked at it was an engineer. He had the opinion that the best solution for now is to do the straight replacement. But she's consulted with some people at UMASS and it was suggested that because the system is only using about 700 gallons of oil a year and it's a 6,000 square feet space it may be possible to include some kind of heat pump system. So she suggested the RFP include not only the time issue but that it's language be flexible for air source heat pump or propane option. Basically we should go with the timing, but also keep the ability to include some kind of green component. She agreed to help provide the language for the RFP.

Hugh noted that when we start looking at grants and alternatives we have to remember that they can take a long time. Air source heat pumps are many weeks delayed. So we need to get this done and we cannot lose another year to come up with alternatives. Zara stressed what she's asking for is a little flexibility in the RFP to allow for respondents to propose such solutions if they are feasible. Otherwise the solution can be a fossil fuel one if that's our only option. By keeping that language broad we can consider more options if they are proposed. Joe interjected to note his own research and he reminded even with a greener solution we will likely still need a fossil fuel backup. He was concerned that if we allow too much room in that RFP the responses could come back over budget. Which might force another RFP round. We are up against the clock on this. Zara asked if ARPA funding could be extended. We have \$21,000 funded so far. She saw no reason why we couldn't use any ARPA funding if a bid comes forward that's above that but is ideal. Hugh noted that we have the money to replace the boiler and that's what we have. We may be able to use ARPA funding separately at a later date to add efficiencies or to supplement. But there are also limits to the ARPA funding and we have other projects to consider. Zara stressed that what she's asking for won't hold up the process. Carl reminded that we have to consider the generator as well as existing equipment. By the time we get to all of that it could set us back. The best path forward he saw was to pursue the oil burner option and the generator with the intent to focus on alternatives and supplements. Hopefully the oil burner could be transformed in time to a back up solution. But we have a short term immediate

heating problem and to his mind we are out of time. He stressed that he wants to see greener solutions, but this is the circumstances we find ourselves in. Joe interjected to say that he's researched the rental option and the cost would be \$1,280 every 4 weeks plus an initial \$1,400 dollars. Hugh responded that it would be a waste of money. Joe generally concurred noting he doesn't have those funds in the budget. Carl noted he does genuinely wish to see time and effort into finding better solutions for the Fire Station. That building is key for safety.

FY22 End of Year Transfers for Negative Accounts

Finance Committee called itself to order. Claire then noted that these are typical requests. Each need has a source of funds identified by the Treasurer and the Town Accountant. She noted that the normal process is for the Finance Committee to vote to approve them and then they go to the Selectboard. Hugh clarified that these need to occur to prevent negative balances. Claire responded affirmatively. Gabe interjected to explain this is a little different. Here we are holding a joint meeting and doing this together. A lot of this happened in the last warrant of the fiscal year. So departments have been very diligent in FY22. Hugh asked for a primer on the process. Gabe explained that we take the funds needed from an account that has funds left and move it to an account that is short. If we didn't do this it would hit Free Cash as DOR would charge a loss against it. Still Gabe noted that Department Heads need to be better about not resulting in these kind of shortfalls. Substantial transfers include \$11,203 for SRS Transportation, \$4,825 for an encumbrance, then a number of Highway ones such as \$5,364 and \$457 for Highway expenses. Library had a small one around \$793 which resulted from wages due to the process of having a Library Director retire and then hiring an interim and later a new Library Director. Hugh then asked about the SRS Transportation in particular. Claire explained that they are bad at giving us the proper sum for the transportation costs. This forces us to use the prior year's costs. We did that here and it resulted in this shortfall. Carl recalled that they didn't ask for any increase for fuel costs for transportation at the last town meeting. He had been worried at the time. Gabe concurred but elaborated by the time of Annual Town Meeting it's too late. This is a problem we've struggled with for several years with them. Chuck noted that the Reserve Fund has been increased. So one way of dealing with these sorts of things is to increase the Reserve Fund. Gabe noted that some of the funds for this is coming from the Reserve Fund and the rest are transfers from other accounts. Those transfers from Reserve Fund do not require the Selectboard. Just Finance Committee.

A motion was made to transfer \$1,357.02 from the Reserve Fund to cover the ZBA General Expenses and the Snow & Ice Line. The motion was seconded by Claire and passed by unanimous vote of the Finance Committee.

A motion was made to move \$22,824.64 in End of Year Transfers for FY22 by Gabe. The motion was seconded by Claire and passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Hugh to concur with the Finance Committee's motion and to approve the End of Year Transfers for FY22. The motion was seconded by Carl and passed by majority vote.

Finance Committee adjourned after participating in some of the conversation relating to other items.

Grant Application for Electric Bus

Zara reported on this topic. The Commonwealth contacted the Green Energies Committee to inform them of this program with the EPA. It would provide, depending on size, between \$200,000 and \$300,000 in funding for an electric school bus. The committee is still figuring out if this is something that can be done with the towns bus company. We are very rural which both makes us of interest for this, but also possibly a question of range for the bus. The town might have to do this, but the bus company might also. So it'll depend. She asked if it does need to be submitted via the town that she be provided approval to proceed with an application in such an event. If we apply there's a lottery system that determines if the town gets the grant. The bus company would technically end up owning the bus, but they'd have to use it in New Salem and they wouldn't be able to charge for fuel for it. Hugh noted we have a bus contract. He had some concerns over us applying for a grant for them to get the bus. He didn't see it as a bad idea *per se* but felt it important that we better understand this. He wasn't comfortable voting on it at this time. Zara responded the problem is that the grant is due by August 19. We'd need a vote at this meeting to approve submission of the application if it comes through the town. A vote at this meeting is solely for the application. We'd have to accept it assuming we got it. She further shared that in addition to funding for the bus the grant also provides \$20,000 for charging infrastructure. Where that would go would depend on where the bus is housed. We might have some say in that, but it would have to work for the bus routes, etc. Carl noted he didn't want to see the town in the business of owning buses. The charging aspect does bring questions up for him as one interesting direction for the town is developing charging infrastructure. That

said he had no problem authorizing an application. Hugh was still not entirely comfortable with a vote at this juncture. Zara responded it's to approve submission of the grant application only.

Lisa expressed admiration for Zara's work in light of our responsibilities to do things positive for climate change. She felt that this isn't making any commitment beyond authorizing application and didn't see the issue. Lisa also felt the suggestion that there is a lack of preparation is an unfair assertion. Kathy noted that the EPA's website has a lot of information on this subject for anyone who wishes to hear more. Zara then presented some slides from Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. One of their priorities is certainly rural districts like ours and they are aware that in those cases the buses are on contract. The ultimate funding for this grant is from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed by Congress (about \$500 million was allocated). Hugh asked again about the interest of the school bus company. Zara elaborated that they'd been uninterested in the past because they thought their routes would be too long for range. But the Clean Energy Center maintains that the buses are more efficient now and have longer range. So the bus company was willing to consider it. Part of the application includes identifying a diesel bus that would be retired. So the town isn't necessarily going to be involved in the actual purchase and later rebate. The bus company may very well end up being the ones to do all of that. Carl asked why the school district isn't doing this. Hugh agreed with that position and further asking if Wendell is on board. Zara responded Wendell is on board. Carl was fine with approving this assuming it is not a commitment to buy at this stage. But he felt the School Committee might be the more appropriate public body to sign off. Zara noted she asked the Commonwealth and their response is for this initial application that wouldn't be required. There will be more information and criteria to meet later. Carl noted that the contract for busing is with the school district. But if this is just for support to look at the rebate program he was fine with it.

Warrant for State Primary Election on September 6, 2022

This is a *pro forma* matter. MGL merely requires the Board to approve the warrant and for it to be posted.

A motion was made by Carl to approve the posting of the warrant. The motion was seconded by Hugh and passed by majority vote.

Board of Health Update

Cam briefly updated the Selectboard. COVID remains a threat. But we don't appear to have many if any active cases. Jen remains the Public Health Nurse which means she's working and keeping an eye on communicable diseases, not just COVID. He also reported we have the new walk ways for the Transfer Station. That's been great. Cam then reported with regret that we've lost our Board of Health Agent as Mr. Newton has taken a job as a professor. Carl reminded that Mr. Newton has agreed to continue helping with the Swift River Elementary School's PFAS issue.

ARPA Funds Discussion – Suggestions from Townspeople

Hugh began by briefly going over what's been spent so far and what's been allocated for departments projects. The main expenditures so far have been for one of the ramps at the Transfer Station and the main allocation has been for the Fire Station's generator. He then went over some suggestions from the public. These have included suggestions for allocations to non-profits, repairs to the playground, residential relief, investment in new equipment for Highway and Fire in particular, paying down the broadband borrowing, and public transit. It was also noted that some have suggested use for things like restoring some hayfields and the support for the community garden. Kathy noted that another issue is childcare in town. We don't have a lot and while Swift River's programming is affordable, not all can afford it. Hugh reminded not all of the asks will fit what we have or what is feasible. Some of this is just maintenance work we need to catchup on. Kathy then brought up a list of requests from departments that will be up for discussion at the next meeting. Hugh reminded that the Selectboard has been requesting departments submit requests for ARPA funding for months and it hasn't resulted in anything until now. Lisa turned to the playground reminding that the playground needs work. It's not ADA compliant and isn't as user friendly as it could be. In fact some upgrades to this could help address some of the concerns about childcare programming as a good playground can help. She couldn't say what the cost would be, but it definitely needs to be considered. Hugh reminded we should also keep in mind the PFAS issue at Swift River Elementary. We have some funds set aside from a Special Town Meeting and we also have an earmark for further funding from the General Court utilizing the ARPA funds set aside for it. The Commonwealth's contribution is \$40,000. At the moment we are waiting for the engineers to determine what needs to be done. A filtration system seems

likely to be the final solution. Carl agreed and recalled that we've already spent about \$23,000 in engineering work to date on this. This is ongoing.

He turned to Highway Dept. We built a new building and didn't install a floor because we'd expected to do it later. Well it is later. We have everything for a radiant heat system for the floor and therefore we already have sunk costs. We need to fix this. Plus that building would be a good place to seek some green energy. Then there's the Police Dept. The current Police Station really isn't suitable anymore. We've talked about the Annex to the Stowell Building, but we'd have to approach that. Carl also reminded the Town Clerk would like a drop box. So there are some items that should be seriously considered. Still some are big ticket items. We've committed to at least \$75,000 and we've only got around \$300,000. So we have to keep that in mind. Gabe interjected to note that our Chapter 90 funds were to help with the barn for Highway and if it's still there we can do that. We can also use Chapter 90 to fund the flooring. Carl responded that we didn't use what was allocated for that fast enough and it was reallocated by the Commonwealth. Gabe returned that even if that is so we can talk to MassDOT. Hugh stressed we don't have a lot of money here. We really only have about \$225,000 left to allocate. He didn't want to commit too much more until we have more on the PFAS issue at Swift River Elementary. We don't want to be caught with that being very expensive. Gabe asked if Wendell would do the same with their ARPA funds. Hugh responded that they have been seeking funding sources for this and their efforts are substantially why the Commonwealth did it's \$40,000 earmark. But he was not aware if they've made any further commitments such as against their own funds. Carl stressed that Wendell has been cooperative. Kathy didn't think they likely did from what she was aware. Carl suggested some of the smaller items that's come up in this conversation might be doable as a capital item. Perhaps an article could be placed on a town meeting warrant that would fund a variety of things and utilize Free Cash as a source. Some of this is basic maintenance that we should seek more long term funding for. Cam concurred stressing that we've got 25 years of deferred maintenance. This includes all the bad invasive species and the scope of the work to be done. We've got a fair amount of things that have been let go and restoring circumstances will have costs.

Lisa broached the playground in the Town Center and the potential for liability. Gabe answered that we don't have to have two playgrounds and it does appear that it does bear some liability. It's nice to have two, but the liability is there and she suggested we simply tear it out. Hugh was generally agreeable feeling that the playground has been a hazard the entire time he's lived in town and it goes unmaintained. Lisa expressed disagreement. She stressed the Library is a gathering space for many including children. The playground is part of that and to her it is an essential common space that should be restored to use. To that end she was willing to suggest a few options like maybe removing some pieces of equipment. We should do research first. Carl noted he likes the idea of the playground being there, the problem is liability. Hugh reminded about the history and the fact that efforts have been promised in the past and it hasn't resulted in action. We now have this before us. Carl agreed that the framing with the ADA and potential liability results in a conversation we might perhaps have wished to avoid. Gabe clarified that she is not against a playground there at all. In fact she was willing to volunteer to help figure this out. But we can't leave something dangerous there. In the meantime there is another playground in town. Zara suggested that we simply identify the equipment that should be closed off and leave what is okay there. Perhaps we can salvage some of it and work on repairs and replacements. Gabe noted that Orange identified a building as a hazard and dangerous and fenced it off. That building was still burned down by some minors. So if there is dangerous equipment it should be removed. Lisa was willing to agree to that. She noted one specific piece of equipment that should be removed in particular as a danger. Carl suggested inviting someone from Swift River Elementary, whoever is more or less charge of maintenance for their playground, to come over and look at what we have. Kathy had some surprise that our insurer hasn't brought this up. Hugh suggested we start from scratch. We remove the equipment that's not compliant and we begin working on a redesign. Lisa reminded the swings aren't a problem. Not all of the present equipment is problematic. Hugh suggested we obtain some expert advice and then act from that. It was so agreed.

Old Academy Building

Hugh reported that the Old Academy Building remains pending.

Conservation Commission Appointment

Zara asked that Dan Grubbs be appointed to the Conservation Commission. Dan noted he's present and is willing to sit on the commission.

A motion was made by Carl to appoint Dan Grubbs to the Conservation Commission. The motion was seconded by Hugh and passed by majority vote.

Meeting Etiquette

Hugh expressed concerns about the manner by which meetings are occurring. He acknowledged that some people may think he can be rude, but he feels that often many are unprepared or have the expectation that the Selectboard must do everything. Many feel they can bring things to the Selectboard and expect it done. He noted it has impacted his work performance. Carl spoke on his opinions as to this. New Salem is a small town, but there is a lot of expectation that three elected officials will do most everything. In bigger towns you have more elected bodies to share the burden. And in the past it was true that three people could do this. But times have changed and Selectboard members need to have a relatively high level of expertise. Further those towns have Town Administrators and full time staff to see to many topics and the carrying out of delegated responsibilities. But New Salem is more or less part time in all offices save its Highway Dept. Kathy suggested that complaints and comments should probably come through her office. Hugh agreed with that, but noted he's hearing complaints from people during the work day. It's as simple as not being able to walk his dog without someone coming up to him. He submitted he was considering resigning. Carl urged Hugh to consider carefully before making any final decisions. Hugh acknowledged that but determined that the matter of a Special Town Election should be placed on the next meetings agenda.

Minutes

The Selectboard noted the minutes for July 25, 2022, were late in submission and as such the Selectboard wasn't ready to adopt them. It was decided to table the minutes until the Selectboard's next meeting.

A motion to adjourn at 8:55 pm was made by Carl. The motion was seconded by Hugh and passed by majority vote.

Respectfully Submitted
Jakob K. Voelker, Selectboard Clerk