

**Town of *New Salem* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
November 1, 2022
Held Virtually via Zoom**

Convened: 6:30 pm

Present: Carl Seppala, Susan Cloutier, Zara Dowling, Selectboard; Kathy Neal, Town Coordinator; Joe Cuneo, Fire Chief; Lisa Finestone, Tree Committee; Jen Pottee, Board of Health; Marny Ashbourne;

Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:

- Payroll & Vendor Warrants

Discussion Items

Reorganization of the Selectboard including Election of Chair & Appointments to Committees

Zara proposed Susan as the chair. Susan agreed to serve in this capacity. Carl concurred. Kathy then turned discussion to the designations for members of the Selectboard. Carl offered he's willing to do any of them. Zara was interested in the Police or Highway. But asked Carl if he had any recommendations. Carl suggested that Highway would be a good fit as they have a fairly new highway barn that needs work and he felt Zara's skill set. Susan saw no issue with that assignment going to Zara. Zara thanked her and then inquired about how he communicates with departments. Carl outlined what he does. Susan then asked him how he facilitates the conversations with departments to best elicit a response on what they need. Carl elaborated that it's mostly just asking honest questions. He highlighted that he's been encouraging the Highway Chief to pursue some projects and helping. It's mainly just trying to make sure things don't get dropped and ensuring resources and communication is open. Zara noted her schedule and expressed a desire to work with the Police Dept. Susan asked her what her preference be, she submitted Police. Carl encouraged that department noting they are easy to find and much of their needs are focused on equipment. It was agreed to exchange contact information. As for Highway, Zara was willing to still help with the highway garage. Susan then asked Carl what he was most comfortable with. Carl felt he'd keep Highway. Still, he suggested a liaison to the School. We need to pay more attention to what's going on there and it would be a good idea. Susan asked if he would still keep Highway or prefer to focus on School. He was fine with keeping Highway. Susan then agreed to take the Fire Dept. She then suggested that the Selectboard members develop a criteria for what should be asked about and what members should do for guidance. Kathy reminded that Department Heads are selected to lead their departments. Selectboard members more just need to check in with them regularly.

A motion was made by Zara Dowling to name Susan Cloutier as chair. Carl Seppala seconded the motion and it passed unanimously by vote of Zara Dowling, Susan Cloutier, and Carl Seppala.

Designation of one Member to Sign Warrants & Authorize the Payment of Bills Pursuant to MGL Chapter 41, Sections 52 & 56

Carl began by asking if the designation for signing is really necessary given a full Selectboard. Zara felt it a good idea to retain it. Carl suggested in that circumstance Susan should be designated as the chair. Susan saw no reason not to adopt the role as she drives by the Stowell Building daily.

A motion was made by Zara to designate Susan in her capacity as chair to sign the warrants, payroll, and bills on behalf of the Selectboard. This motion was seconded by Carl and passed unanimously.

Vote to Apply for Technical Assistance Grant for Electric School Bus

Zara reported on this topic. A variety of events occurred relating to the program including the state having its own related similar program. But they have limited funding and it appeared the town wouldn't be granted anything. Meanwhile Zara noted she's found another program that might be more appropriate that may be more of a study. Still the town is a rural one that should qualify. It was agreed she'd apply for the technical assistance grant.

Vote to Approve the Green Communities Report & Designation of Signing by Chair Thereof

Zara noted this is something we fill out every year that tracks our energy use, describing any changes from prior years, etc. Unfortunately after years of progress we've lost ground due to the pandemic and some inefficiencies that it

required relating to ventilation. But things should be getting back to normal this year. Susan suggested that it would be better for Zara to sign this rather than her as chair. Kathy noted that the chair doesn't have to be the Selectboard member assigned. It's just usually the case. Zara then briefly went over a few other related items that have seen efficiencies and things we can expect to see from there. Susan then asked if a digestible copy could be put on the towns website. Zara felt it would be possible to do and promised to pursue it.

A motion was made by Susan to authorize Zara to sign the report on behalf of the Selectboard and to approve the report for submission. The motion was seconded by Carl and passed without objection.

Report on Fire Station Heating System Contract

Kathy reported in place of the Fire Chief. The contract has been signed and work will start soon. A meeting will likely be held with the contractor prior and they are assuring the town that the work can be done by the end of November. Zara asked what precautions are being taken to protect any equipment or firefighters working in the station during the work. Kathy reported that the Fire Chief feels it will be doable but agreed to follow up.

Oil Bid for Town Buildings

Kathy reported that we've bid this out 3 times and we've received no bids or high ones. At present we are still okay with oil but will need additional as winter sets in, and FRCOG is recommending a fourth bid. FRCOG also has a program for towns to participate in and she's already requested New Salem be included. But it won't start until spring. So we have to get through this winter. Zara asked if there is a charge for this. Kathy responded there is one, but she wasn't certain how much it would cost for this as it tends to vary based on how many towns participate. So we won't just jump into the program without finding out what the cost will be. Susan submitted that we are part of FRCOG and provide them some funding, we should certainly pursue any advantages that pooling our resources with them might provide.

Discussion & Update on Current Issues for the Selectboard's Attention

Zara began by asking about the ARPA. Kathy updated on what's been voted on so far including a generator for the Fire Station, a steel walkway for the Transfer Station, and funds for the PFAS problem at Swift River Elementary. In total the town received a little over \$300,000 in ARPA funding and then a supplemental earmark of \$40,000.00 from the General Court, from the states ARPA funds, to help with the PFAS problem. The earmarked state funds have essentially been spent. Carl noted that the PFAS problem began in November 2020. A process went forward and the school appeared to be solving in house with an engineer, an installer, and a filtration system agreed on with DEP. Somehow no action occurred and DEP got involved. So last April the two towns, New Salem and Wendell, signed a consent order with DEP. The towns also hired Tighe & Bond to do the engineering and that cost \$23,000. We've also had to pay the towns Health Agent which brought the total cost to date of approximately \$30,000. So what was supposed to be a \$40,000 to \$50,000 matter is now looking to be a total cost of \$100,000 to \$230,000, to be split between the two towns. Further DEP has imposed a timeline. The next step will be the engineering. Wendell has held a Special Town Meeting and is working hard on this. In terms of what it will cost, what we have to remember is that we have a mix of funding. We have ARPA funds, we have the remainder of the earmark from the General Court and we have some funds from a Special Town Meeting in New Salem that previously allocated funds. So in that confluence New Salem can likely pay its half of the bill and Wendell's STM has ensured it can as well. The only unknown is there could be some asbestos abatement required. Susan asked where the asbestos is coming from. Carl responded the location of the filtration system would put it in a closet that's floor was built in 1972. The school is doing everything they can to avoid that location since they do need the space and any asbestos is presently sealed.

Zara asked whether DEP expressed any opinions. Carl responded the impression he got from DEP was that they approved a filtration system in 2021 and that was what they expected. So this appears our best way forward. Zara asked if there was any consideration for ongoing maintenance. Carl responded there is and unfortunately it's about \$7,000 a year split between the towns. Kathy cautioned that this figure really is an estimate and it may vary from year to year. Zara asked if we are on the schedule DEP has laid out. Carl responded we are. Zara asked if there are any town meeting votes needed in relation to ARPA. Kathy responded it simply requires a majority vote of the Selectboard. Zara recalled that the town has allocated around \$118,000 with a possible cost of upwards of \$100,000 for PFAS in worst case, and so that leaves maybe having about \$100,000 left. Carl submitted that the highway garage floor project would eat that up. Susan suggested we shouldn't really consider any more projects. Perhaps the highway garage floor and maybe some small things. Carl agreed suggesting we have to have allocations complete by the end of 2024. Kathy reminded that we do have a list of small projects. Susan suggested that we include the playground. Lisa interjected to agree. Still, she noted some challenges faced. The Library's septic system is under the playground so we need to determine limits. She could not put forward a ballpark cost yet. But promised to do so as soon as she was able. Carl suggested the town should consider the entering into of a formal agreement with Wendell to hire the Fire Chief's position as a joint one.

This would require an inter-municipal agreement. The same kind of arrangement once held by the Town Coordinator between the two towns. He further suggested that discussions regarding the future planning by the town for the Police Dept. continue. We recently lost a cruiser in an accident after another vehicle struck it. So we're down to one vehicle. We're also experiencing a problem with obtaining a cruiser that we'd previously determine to buy, with the supply chain problem being related to it being a hybrid.

Zara noted they're worth it for so many reasons, but she conceded the supply chain issue with this particular vehicle is it being a hybrid. As for the cruiser totaled, we should be able to get a replacement. Kathy agreed noting we have replacement value on the vehicle which is capped at \$55,000. With another \$20,000 for equipment. Zara asked what the process would be for approving the purchase. Carl reminded we have a "strong Chief" which means the Police Chief has considerable authority to take care of this. Zara then asked about the committee for future planning for Police. Susan recalled that Clair McGinnis is the chair. Zara then asked about the current restructure. Carl reported that this established one full time officer in place of having 4 part time officers. We also had the Police Chief retire and other towns attempted to hire away our officers. We've kept one full time officer, one officer we're paying one day a week, and the part time Chief. Susan suggested we might need two full time officers. She also expressed the opinion that the town shouldn't be afraid to pay benefits. Carl concurred. Zara suggested we still wait for the report from the committee. Susan was not opposed but reminded that recent research on the situation has concluded we need to improve the Police Station, or perhaps move it. Carl submitted the Selectboard's role here is to talk to the Finance Committee about the Police Dept.'s budget. Susan briefly reported on the Fire Chief's retirement. Carl noted he is mandated to retire by age by October 2023. The town could petition the General Court to allow him to continue in service, but frankly the Fire Chief isn't certain he'd agree to it. Still Carl still felt it wise for the town to consider petitioning anyway in the event that it isn't disadvantageous for him. That said, we should continue planning for his replacement. This should also include the Emergency Management Director role. Zara felt it important to keep that hat near to the office of Fire Chief. It was agreed this doesn't have to be decided at this time. Zara then finished by suggesting a person who can assume the webmaster role for the town's new website. She also made further suggestions relating to providing instructions and materials for the various departments.

Board of Health Update

Jen brought up this unanticipated item. She noted that the Board of Health is down an attendant at the Transfer Station. Board members are working to fill the role. Unfortunately Cam Dunbar has resigned from the Board of Health. So this leaves a lot on her and Lynn Layton. Carl noted he may be able to find someone to help fill the vacancy until the next election. Jen then reported on a bear problem at the Transfer Station and its compost. Susan recommended an electric fence. Jen then reported on the next inspection for the towns closed landfill. There is a mower up there, they just need someone to do the mowing. Zara suggested one of the Highway Laborers could do it. Jen submitted she'd also put out inquiries to see if a volunteer may be found. Susan noted an Agricultural Commissioner who has helped mow around the community garden who might be willing.

Minutes

The Selectboard considered the minutes for October 17, 2022. Susan noted these are in Carl's ballpark as he's the only member who was serving at the time. Carl was fine with the minutes. Discussion then shifted to having a public forum period limited to 15 minutes at the start of Selectboard meetings. Carl was amendable, but reminded that the Selectboard can't make substantive decisions based on anything that's brought up.

A motion was made Carl by to accept the October 17, 2022 minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Susan and passed by majority vote with Zara abstaining.

A motion to adjourn at 8:14 pm was made by Zara. The motion was seconded by Carl and passed without objection.

Respectfully Submitted
Jakob K. Voelker, Selectboard Clerk