

**Town of *New Salem* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
November 28, 2022
Held Virtually via Zoom**

Convened: 7:00 pm

Present: Carl Seppala, Susan Cloutier, Zara Dowling, Selectboard; Kathy Neal, Town Coordinator; Eric Hamm, Bill Lafley, Board of Assessors; Gabe Voelker, Claire McGinnis, Finance Committee; Jen Potee, Lynn Layton, Board of Health; Adam Hemingway, Working Assessor; Gillian Budine, Wendell Selectboard; Kelley Sullivan, Swift River Elementary; Nancy Slator, *New Salem News*; Mike Yohan; Steven Soucy, National Grid Representative; Ben Cenedella

Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:

- Payroll & Vendor Warrants
- Class II Used Car License for New Salem Auto

Discussion Items

Public Forum

Susan called the meeting to order and began by briefly explaining the purpose of the Public Forum which is to allow for public comment. Mike then asked to speak.

- *Sanding Materials*

Mike (53 Wendell Road) raised concerns regarding the size of sanding materials put down on the roads during the winter. He indicated the size of the rocks were too large and he had sustained windshield damage. He noted he had raised this concern previously and it had not been addressed.

ACTION ITEM: Carl agreed as liaison to the Highway Dept. to make inquiries.

Pole Hearing for 27 Lovers Lane – National Grid & Verizon

Susan began by recalling some questions from the hearing, when it was continued. These included the accuracy of the location of the proposed pole on the map provided as well as the potential for any underground work which might disrupt the public way. Steven, the National Grid representative, responded that 27 Lovers Lane is presently served by underground line that is privately owned. But they wish to upgrade their service. The existing underground line would have to be dug up. This would disturb their driveway. So it is less expensive for them to ask National Grid to extend the pole line with this new pole, which would be approximately 104 feet east of pole 9. Then from this new pole 10 they can put in a new underground service line which would be located on their property. There is no crossing of the road. Zara asked about the depiction of pole 8 which appears to be in error. Steven responded that this pole was erroneously depicted on the map. The pole won't be moved.

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara to approve the location for the new pole 10 as requested by National Grid and Verizon on the edge of 27 Lovers Lane. Carl seconded and the motion passed without objection.

VOTE: A motion was made by Susan to close the hearing at 7:21 pm. The motion was seconded by Zara and passed unanimously.

Public Hearing on Tax Classification

Eric introduced Adam who is the working Assessor. Adam outlined the purpose of the hearing, which is to set the tax rate. He also provided some information regarding work done by the Board of Assessors and DOR. After this is done the L5 form will be signed on Gateway and then DOR will have to approve the final rates and bills. He then went over the levy. The levy has increased 2.7 percent which comes out to about \$65,641 more. New Growth Revenue is about \$27,568. The levy limit is 2 percent and the sums fit. So the levy limit is around \$2,515,714. He then briefly described some debt excluded for the payment of bonds. Zara asked about the 2.7 versus the 2.5 percent. Adam elaborated on how that is reconciled. Susan then asked about the calculation behind new growth. Adam explained it's any change in the town that can have an assessed value times the previous tax rate which substantiates what can be added to the tax levy. Adam then explained where the town sits on tax shifting. The total valuation in town adds up to \$161,670,055. In towns that have a large commercial base, it can be advantageous to shift the tax rate to dial up on the commercial, industrial, and personal property classifications. But New Salem has such a small commercial tax base, a shift would have to be 8 percent to achieve just a 1 percent reduction in residential taxes. The most useful shift would be around 30 percent, which would be substantial. Further, people in Chapter 61 could get hit harder by such a shift. The estimated tax rate if we do a factor of 1 is \$15.46. The values of homes have increased, but the rate would fall from \$18.92. Still, with increases in value there won't be a significant reduction in tax bills overall. But on the other hand the bill won't radically increase either as the rate itself per thousand will fall. Claire noted that recent price increases in town have been dramatic. Adam conceded that, but again reminded that the tax rate will fall

significantly; to a 4 year low. The average residential rate for a single family would be about \$4,729. The average tax will go up about 4.48 percent. So from \$4,526 in FY22 to that \$4,729 in FY23. Claire noted the budget approved at town meeting was only a 2 percent increase and asked about broadband. Adam elaborated that that debt isn't included in the levy and its increase, is added after. Eric reminded that this would also include the MSBA school loan which is excluded. So that's why the increase is 4.48 percent rather than 2.5 percent. Adam then presented the recommendation of the Assessors. Which is a single tax rate with a Residential Factor of 1. Zara asked about personal property. Adam noted it's anything that can move like a farm animal. Zara highlighted the number as significant and asked if solar panels are included. Adam elaborated that they can be considered, as well as things like equipment. Eric then asked the proposed motion be by roll call vote.

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara to accept the recommendation of the Assessors and to act in accordance with MGL Chapter 40, Section 56, as amended, to approve the percentage of local tax levy which will be borne by each class of real and personal property, relative to setting the FY23 tax rates and to set the residential Factor at 1.0, with corresponding CIP shift of 1.0, pending approval of the town's annual tax recap by DOR. The motion was seconded by Susan and passed unanimously by vote of Susan, Zara, and Carl.

Swift River Elementary School: Replacement of Furnace Pumps

Carl and Kelley reported on a recent site visit. One of the circulation pumps has failed and the other also appears to be in need of repair, since it is running around 270 degrees. There is a need to act quickly.

Ben introduced himself as the likely person doing the repair work and provided details on the testing and attempts made to isolate the problem. If the system has to be turned off in order to work on it, this would require the closure of the school. Hence, all attempts will be made to repair the system in place, or to schedule repairs for a time when the school would already be scheduled for closure. Ben proposed a process by which this could be done, including contingencies. He then reported he's proposing provide the equipment at cost. Ben noted that the pumps are on order and should be in within 10 days.

Zara asked about the high temperature. Ben elaborated that typically one pump does all the work and the other pump lags and they switch weekly. In really cold weather both would run together at lesser speed. The reason for the heat with this pump is really due to the motor dying and the related strain.

Susan asked about the average life span of the pumps. Ben responded anywhere between 13 to 20 years and these pumps are about 13 years old. Still the new pumps would probably last about 15 years. He recommended measures in the future to keep an eye on the pumps. Their lifespan can be measured with annual monitoring that can help prevent these sorts of emergency situations. Zara asked if the extra ventilation from COVID measures might be responsible to some extent for the decreased longevity of the pumps. Ben conceded it is possible as they would have run harder and we did see a dramatic increase in fuel usage during that timeframe. Ben then elaborated on valves as also an issue. Kelley interjected to remind that one of the pumps was rebuilt 8 years ago. Ben asked if the actual pump or the motor was rebuilt. Kelley responded it was the motor. She agreed to provide the documentation to indicate which one. Carl asked if there could have a report on the valves condition to determine the cause as there may be an iron issue. Susan asked if the PFAS filtration system would help. Carl responded that we already have some things to address an iron concern, but we should make sure Tighe & Bond keep it in mind for the PFAS.

Zara asked if there is any opportunity to increase efficiency. Ben responded that we could install variable speed drives to ramp up the pumps on start up. We could also look at some options to run pumps on differential pressure. But that can be added later.

Claire then suggested there is more than one way to pay for this, including unspent Swift River capital lines, Special Town Meeting, or ARPA. Susan expressed concern about waiting for a STM. Kathy suggested a Reserve Fund transfer. Claire responded its very early in the fiscal year, and the fund really needs to be maintained for fuel costs this year. Carl proposed considering use of ARPA funds or Stabilization Funds. The total cost of the work would be \$19,500. Wendell is anticipated to share the cost with New Salem, so for New Salem it's likely \$9,750. Further, the grant potential regarding PFAS could save us enough to cover this. Susan suggested in that light we use ARPA funds. Gillian noted she will report back to Wendell at the next meeting of their Selectboard. Still, she asked Kelley about this vote whether it's just support. Kelley responded the work will be done and she could move around her budget to buy time if necessary. This vote is about ensuring funding support from the towns. Zara felt that New Salem could vote now on its part now. Carl was more comfortable with approving the full \$20,000. Claire objected submitting that the school has a method for doing capital projects like this. She recommended a vote for \$10,000 with the expected source being ARPA. Gillian noted that while she could only speak for herself, she didn't see Wendell as having a problem in funding its half.

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara to commit up to \$10,000 in ARPA funding for a project to replace furnace pumps systems for Swift River Elementary. The motion was seconded by Susan Cloutier and passed unanimously with Carl, Zara, and Susan voting in favor.

Town Coordinator Reports: ARPA, Heating System in Fire Station, Swift River Elementary PFAS, & Oil Bid

Fire Station Heating System. Kathy reported on the Fire Station's heating system. It's up and running and was done in the timeframe promised. She then reported the Fire Chief will now turn his focus to the generator which is to be paid for from ARPA funding.

PFAS Grant Opportunity. Kathy then reported that a grant opportunity has emerged to apply for funding from MassDEP to pay for a PFAS filtering system at Swift River Elementary. Senator Comerford has been very helpful and supportive. Zara asked a few questions about the process including who the actual applicant should be. Kathy responded it should be the school itself as they're the ones that hold the public water supply license. Still, we can assist them and the application doesn't appear onerous. Tighe & Bond would also provide assistance.

Oil Bid. Kathy then reported on the oil bid. She's done the bid again, and there was no response. Still, the Commonwealth has a standard state contract bid and she has contacted the appropriate regional entities. Zara proposed authorizing Susan to approve a vendor if one is found through the state's system. Susan was amendable, but asked if we could pay an Orange Oil bill. Kathy responded we can. In the meantime Zara proposed the tank be looked at. Susan agreed.

Stowell Building Heating Use. Temperatures are beginning to drop and the Stowell Building experienced a rapid drop in oil level. Kathy wasn't certain if there are any issues with its heating. She promised to follow up further.

Highway Department Garage. Carl then took a moment to discuss the Highway Dept.'s barn. The posts that go into the ground supporting the structure go into the ground with some exposure to water, although they do go into concrete. He then briefly reported on plans to pour a floor in April. The cost could ultimately be around \$150,000. He expressed hope that we might have some breathing room on the PFAS project that might afford us the ability to complete this project. Zara asked if the poles are pressure treated. Carl responded they are, but they have been there 7 years. Fortunately there is already some insulation on hand for the floor to help. Zara asked about rebar and other measures. Carl briefly responded with the likely solution, noting it is a solvable problem. We can do this work in stages, which may help. Susan asked about office space there. Carl responded that's a long term goal. So we'll ensure there's plumbing in place and the like to ensure future plans remain possible.

ARPA Funds. Zara asked Kathy about the proposed spreadsheet or word document be put together. Kathy said she had started work on it

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara to authorize Susan to sign off on approval of an oil bid from a state vendor to be determined by the Town Coordinator. The motion was seconded by Carl and passed unanimously.

Approval of Class II Used Car Dealer License – New Salem Auto

Kathy answered several questions related to this license and explained its purpose and issuance. We've never had any complaints against this applicant. It won't take effect until January 1, 2023.

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara to issue this Class II Used Car Dealer License to New Salem Auto. The motion was seconded by Carl and passed unanimously.

Board of Health Transfer Station

Jen began by reporting on the situation at the Transfer Station. Board of Health has been searching for an attendant for six weeks. Ads have been done in a variety of ways including placement in newspapers. There has been no response. The Board of Health is also down a member. The two remaining members are having to help staff the Transfer Station. The job on Saturdays is a two person job and the remaining attendant simply can't do it alone. Jen put forward the options as she saw it. We increase the hourly rate to \$20 an hour. It's currently just north of \$17 an hour. If we cannot find a new attendant, there will be no choice but to cut hours. Susan asked about the various ad locations. Jen answered by again stressed there has been no interest. She's called many people including those who have worked the Transfer Station in the past. She's looked for a part time basis substitution. To no avail. Carl noted he teaches at Mahar and has mentioned the job to eligible young people. Jen noted that anyone 18 or older can work the job. Carl felt it doable to potentially find someone. Perhaps coupling it with the community service hours required of High School seniors. Jen stressed that whoever it is they have to be reliable and be there from 8 am to 4 pm. All of the ideas are great, but in order to get interest, in her mind the hourly rate must be raised. And further she proposed it also be done for the existing attendant. Susan asked about the funding. Jen responded that Board of Health will look at its resources first, but may need assistance. Still, the savings on the vacancy could help pay for the increase for the remainder of year. She was uncertain whether that would be the ultimate answer or not. Gabe felt confident that the Board of Health would have the funds. To her the problem is that we already pay many employees low wages and raising the attendants could pose problems. It's a chronic problem the town has. We should consider re-evaluation of wages for all employees. Zara asked about measures regarding inflation. Gabe responded we focus on 2 to 4 percent. But many places are paying more. Gabe further noted that inflation was far higher than the 4 percent increase granted to employees last year. It's also worth noting that many towns are doing wage survey's now. FRCOG just completed its FY22 one. Still she expressed a desire not to distract from the Board of Health's problem. Jen reminded this cannot languish. Further the job is not as easy as many think given the various responsibilities entailed. Susan suggested a few ways to potentially develop substitutes. The Selectboard then thanked the Board of Health members for their work.

VOTE: A motion was made by Susan to authorize an hourly wage of \$20 per hour for all Transfer Station Attendants henceforth and to allow for advertisement in that sum for the vacancy. The motion was seconded by Zara and passed unanimously.

Agenda & Minutes

The Selectboard considered the minutes for November 14, 2022. Zara provided a number of proposed changes. Carl suggested the minutes be tabled at this time as he had not had an opportunity to fully digest the amendments. Still he suggested a small modification that should be added regarding the playground by the Library noting it may be over the septic system that serves the Library and the Old Academy Building. Susan noted an engineer needs to look into that. Discussion concluded there.

VOTE: A motion to adjourn at 8:50 pm was made by Zara. The motion was seconded by Susan and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted
Jakob K. Voelker, Selectboard Clerk