

**Town of *New Salem* Selectboard
Meeting Minutes
February 21, 2023
Held Virtually via Zoom**

Convened: 6:30 pm

Present: Susan Cloutier, Zara Dowling, Selectboard; Kathy Neal, Town Coordinator; John Bonafini, Chief of Police; Gabe Voelker, Town Treasurer/Finance Committee; Jen Potee, Lynn Layton, Board of Health; Claire McGinnis, Cameron Dunbar, Robert Treutlein, Police Future Planning Committee; Laura Barletta; Marny Ashburne; Patrick Temple; Betsey Vinciulla

Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:

- Payroll & Vendor Warrants
- Appointment Slip for Patrick Temple

Discussion Items

Public Forum

Susan called the meeting to order and briefly explained the Public Forum's purpose. There being no comment, Susan moved forward with the agenda.

Police Future Committee – Police Dept.

Claire began by noting that the committee has submitted its report and is now available for questions. She declined to read it into the record given its length. She then gave an overview of the committee's charge and its work and noted for the record that there was no appetite among residents for services to regionalize. Cam agreed stating there was a strong opinion from residents. Claire then praised the Chief of Police for his support and advice. The direction is to continue to maintain a town department with at least one full time officer and a part time Chief. Continuing to ensure proper funding along with community engagement and support.

Some recommendations and comments include:

- the Chief of Police being required to periodically meet with the Selectboard
- establishment of routine normal office hours for the department
- periodic review should also be held with various stakeholders. The committee is also willing to stay in place to participate in discussions by all parties if desired.
- Residents have made it clear they want to know their police officers by name and by face.
- There is also a strong desire by residents for the Chief to be a town resident.
- There should be public review and transparency.
- There is also strong support for an improved Police Station.

Claire noted there was one thing not in the charge, that being a recommendation for the composition or size of the department. When the committee started it was 54 hours shared by all part time staff. Since then we've changed that to one full time position. The committee really didn't consider a recommendation on size given its charge.

It was then agreed that the report be placed on the committee's webpage of the town's website.

Discussion Items:

- Susan noted as to the Police Station question, she would support taking some sort of action. We've had some proposals in the past and we should look into them.
- Zara then asked John regarding the ability to publish information for police on the town's website. John noted that some of the department's policies can be made available. He was fairly certain they're already on the website, but agreed to ensure they will be as well as some new policies he's drafting.
- Zara then suggested having some information on the website regarding its officers. John saw no issue with a pictures and a brief biography.
- Susan suggested we track community events for opportunities to have police officers engage with the public.
- Zara noted that while she isn't opposed to considering residency as a qualification, it may be best if it's not a requirement. Claire agreed reminding that we're a small town that only offers a part time position. Technically the requirement is formed under MGL and the Chief has to be responsive at all hours. But the town can use requirements like the Chief live within so many minutes drive of the town or so many miles beyond the town's borders.
- Zara then noted for office hours, she was in favor, but not within the current station. Cam reminded that these are more general thoughts by the public that aren't necessarily specific to the current station. This is a 30,000 foot review and a peak over the horizon. It was agreed to pursue a plan, perhaps of 3 years, for the Police Dept. John was in favor of the idea suggesting the budget will need to be thought out. Zara agreed to pull together a draft for review with him.

Action: Placement on the town website of the Police Future Committee's report

Action: Revisit after the Special Town Meeting the writing of a plan for Police with input from the Chief of Police

VOTE: A motion was made by Susan to authorize Zara and the Chief of Police to draft a plan for the Police Department for the next 3 years. The motion was passed by majority vote.

Appointment of Patrick Temple to Vacant Position on the Board of Health (Joint Appointment with BOH)

Kathy noted that this appointment requires both boards meet together and make the appointment jointly. The Board of Health has nominated Patrick Temple for its vacancy. If appointed, Patrick would only serve until the next town election. Jen then called the Board of Health to order. Patrick then briefly introduced himself. He's lived in town for the last 23 years and is willing to dedicate time for this important public body. Susan thanked Patrick for his willingness to serve noting that the board has faced challenges with only two members.

VOTE: A motion was made by Susan to jointly appoint Patrick Temple to the Board of Health until the next town election. The motion was seconded by Zara and passed by majority vote with Susan, Zara, Lynn, and Jen voting in favor.

Action: Sue and Zara to sign Appointment Slip

Approval of Participation in the Statewide Opioid Settlement (Teva, Allergan, CVS, Walmart, and Walgreens)

Susan began by asking Kathy if this topic was run past Town Counsel. Kathy responded it was not, but is substantially similar to 3 others we've participated in. The agreements are pretty similar as the Commonwealth negotiates the settlements. At some point we'll have to decide how to spend it within the rules and we'll need to include Board of Health. Susan asked for a vote to authorize her to sign the settlement. Zara interjected to ask how much we are likely to receive. Kathy reported we've received a few hundred dollars from the other settlements. She agreed to dig deeper into the process for spending the funds we already have. Zara noted that some of it is fairly specific. Jen agreed reminding that she's involved in various programs relating to this subject and it is true that there will need to be talk about the expenditure part in a joint meeting with Board of Health. Kathy promised to gather more information on what the funds may be spent on.

VOTE: A motion was made by Susan to authorize assent to the settlement paperwork with the chair being authorized to sign. The motion was seconded by Zara and passed by majority vote.

Action: Kathy to report back what the funds may be spent on to the Selectboard and the Board of Health with the Chief of Police and Fire Chief to be included as well.

Approval of Special Town Meeting Warrant with Possible Date Change

Susan asked about the possible date change. Kathy reported that we've had some materials on backorder in relation to the Town Hall Annex building. As such the state computer isn't running and that would preclude some materials for Special Town Meeting being produced, such as needed voter rolls for registering voters for attendance at the town meeting. Zara interjected to ask if Cam had any dates. Unfortunately, Cam exited the meeting, but Kathy had some dates from him. The one that worked best was March 21, 2023. Kathy then went over a few articles including one from the regional school district and some prior year bills. Zara asked if Finance Committee has weighed in or not. Claire, putting on her Finance Committee hat, requested a copy of the warrant. She also expressed concern about the timeline for the meeting being proposed in March with this Mahar request. The request is to establish a capital stabilization fund as well as a special education stabilization. They always increase the assessment by more than 2.5 percent. It is hard to imagine how the towns could therefore fund any stabilization request by them especially when it would be in addition to the assessment itself. She suggested the STM should be pushed back to provide more time. Susan suggested having a joint meeting of the Selectboard and the Finance Committee on March 21, 2023 right before the town meeting. Gabe reminded that the budget hearing will be held soon by the Finance Committee with the plan to have the budget ready by May for the Annual Town Meeting. She then clarified that we're not doing any budget matters on the STM. Kathy confirmed noting its really the petition to the General Court we need for the Fire Chief, some prior year bills getting paid, and a few other housekeeping items like the Mahar request which wouldn't involve funds at this stage simply permission to setup the accounts. It was agreed to hold a joint session on March 21, 2023.

Action: Kathy to schedule a joint meeting of Finance Committee and Selectboard for March 21, 2023. Agenda to follow.

Electric Aggregation – Vote to Authorize Acceptance of Colonial Power's bid

Kathy began by reporting on a meeting she attended on this process. We have a 3-year contract at a set rate which is far lower than the current residential rate from National Grid. So we will have to go through a bid and be able to sign that date. Likely a time in April. Zara interacted to provide a brief overview of how the aggregation works which simply put is that via a municipal aggregation the town can bulk-purchase electricity on behalf of residents to secure a better electricity rate. Kathy was not aware of what date it would be. Zara asked that Susan sign it since it's likely to be in the day during business hours. Susan was willing to do so, so long as Zara was willing to make herself potentially available for consultation if need be. It was so agreed. Zara then revisited some concerns she had regarding some elements of the rate discounts for low income. There has been some concern in the state that these programs may not be benefiting low income households in the way that the state intended. Still, it was agreed that this process should go forward.

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara to authorize Susan in her capacity as chair to accept the bid for the towns aggregate electricity bid and to sign contract thereafter. The motion was seconded by Susan and passed by majority vote.

Town Coordinator Reports: Budget Process & Updates, Generator Bid for Fire Dept., Electrical Issues at the Town Hall Annex, and Possible Extension of the Open Meeting Law regarding Virtual Meetings

Select Board Budget for FY2023. Kathy began by reporting on her meeting with Finance Committee which is forthcoming and provided some details on budgets that the Selectboard is accountable for superintending directly. These accounts span various elements from dues and memberships, training and salary for her office, general supplies, maintenance for various town buildings, and general pooled purchasing. There was then some discussion about ways to deploy funds to help departments. Kathy noted one specific being the Town Clerk and some specific work that needs to be done for things like electrical and equipment.

Building Maintenance. Kathy then gave an update on maintenance, particularly on the Stowell Building. Zara followed the report with the suggestion that a discussion needs to be had with Finance Committee on this. Susan generally agreed reminding that we need some expertise to be consulted on this subject as we should know generally when we need to do things. What's due in 3 years, 5 years, and so on. We need that information to help assess where the funds need to be allocated in the budget. Kathy suggested FRCOG may be able to provide support. Zara asked if this would entail funds not within the existing budget. Kathy was uncertain as to what the cost would be. Gabe noted that there has to be an estimate and a plan for deployment of the funds. You must know what you are repairing before you come to Finance Committee and put forward a warrant article. She suggested Kathy could call some contractors to find out what it will cost with prevailing wage. If an expert is to be brought in as a consultant, you'll need that written up with an estimate on the cost of the consulting and that is what you present. She further submitted that the Building Inspector could do the review. Typically that's what towns would do. The Building Inspector then can compile a list of specific items. She didn't think it was too late to present it at the Annual Town Meeting. But some work has to be done soon. Gabe asked what happened to some funding that was requested by Wayne Hachey when he was a member of the Selectboard. There were funds allocated. If it was done by special article it would still be available. Zara asked who would be the person to contact for such information. Gabe responded the Town Accountant. She then further recalled that it was something like \$50,000 with the idea of converting that garage space attached to the building into a proper Police Station.

Generator Bid. Kathy then reported on the generator bid. They're due March 10 and there is a scheduled site visit.

Town Annex Electrical Issues. She followed up by reporting on the electrical issue at the Town Hall Annex. Until it's resolved the Commonwealth will not repair the current state computer. We need this up and running for a STM.

Virtual Meetings. Kathy then turned to the Open Meeting Law. There has been some action by the state representative to pursue an extension of the ability to have virtual meetings. Virtual meetings have been well received with many residents liking the ability to simply listen in. Zara noted that it is nice to see people in person, but remote is accessible. Susan noted she'd like to see a transition to hybrid meetings. Kathy agreed that would be a good idea, but recalled there could still be some Open Meeting Law concerns without extensions in some concessions by the General Court in its emergency legislation.

DEP PFAS. Gabe reminded that we've received about \$35,000 dollars from DEP with funds for PFAS.

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara that the Selectboard supports the idea of the General Court continuing to provide the option for hybrid and remote meetings past the current expiration date of March 31, 2023. Susan seconded the motion and it was passed by majority vote.

Action: Kathy to check with the Town Accountant regarding funds for the Annex to the Stowell Building.

Action: Susan to get in touch with the state representatives office.

Action: Kathy to provide some materials to the Selectboard regarding a grant.

Agenda & Minutes

The Selectboard considered the minutes for February 6 and February 10, 2023. Zara noted a series of minor edits to the minutes. After review Susan agreed to the proposed edits. Susan then reminded that with Jake's decision to not seek re-appointment the Selectboard will need to begin the process of finding a replacement. Zara agreed suggesting that if someone is found sooner perhaps Jake could depart prior to July 1, 2023.

VOTE: A motion was made by Susan to approve the Minutes of February 6, 2023 as amended. The motion was seconded by Zara and passed by majority vote.

VOTE: A motion was made by Zara to approve the minutes for February 10, 2023 as written. The motion was seconded by Susan and passed by majority vote.

VOTE: A motion to adjourn at 8:06 pm was made by Susan. The motion was seconded by Zara and passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted
Jakob K. Voelker, J.D.
Selectboard Clerk