

**Town of *New Salem* Selectboard**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**May 1, 2023**  
**Held in person and Virtually via Zoom**

**Convened:** 7:02 pm

**Present:** Susan Cloutier, Zara Dowling, Selectboard; Kathy Neal, Town Coordinator; Richard Taupier, Claire McGinnis-Finance Committee, Carol-Anne Fiske, On Zoom: Nancy Slator and Marney Ashburne

**Selectboard Reviewed & Signed the Following:**

- Payroll & Vendor Warrants
- Cemetery deeds

**Discussion Items**

**Public comment:** Carol-Anne Fiske (a former member of the Agricultural committee) commented that she did not think that the Right to Farm bylaw was applicable to the chicken hearing.

Rick Taupier stated he was at the meeting to observe as the election was not yet over and he would have to be sworn in.

Rick commented that he would be traveling this summer but should be able to zoom in. Sue brought up a time limit on public comment of two minutes that would enable five people to speak. Zara commented that some issues may take more than 2 minutes and if no one else has comments, they should be able to comment for a longer time.

**Chicken hearing:** The hearing was postponed for two weeks at the request of Jean Derderian. Kathy commented that the issue may be resolved by the date of the continuance.

**Finance Committee:** Claire McGinnis was at the meeting to discuss the FY24 budget. Zara and Sue commented that they were not familiar with the budget process. Claire explained that they started in February, passing out budget forms for requests and they begin to meet in March with any department that has requested an increase or capital items.

Process: The Fincom is suggesting an 8% salary increase due to inflation and to attract good candidates. The overall total increase in the budget is 7.5%. Fincom wanted to present the Police Chief's requested increase even though they all did not agree.

Schools: Maher and Franklin County Tech are down due to our enrollment decreasing. Claire thought Swift River had a 22% increase but was recently informed it was less than that. Overall property values did not increase as much as in prior years.

Budget Limits: Claire went over how the amount for the budget is calculated: 2.5 percent increase from FY23 (Prop2.5) plus new growth. The trend in past years is lower enrollment in the schools which has helped our free cash position. We are likely to use free cash this year to balance the budget. There was a request from Highway Dept. for an excavator and trade in the backhoe, which is to be paid for within the budget. Anything in Article 4 is the general budget and closes out at the end of the fiscal year. Anything in articles do not close out at the end of the year and are carried forward if it is not all spent in the current year. Sue asked if broadband is in the budget. Claire said there is a debt payment in the budget and is for a total of 10 years.

MLP: Claire is not sure how much MLP (Municipal Light Plant that runs the fiber network) is paying to the town yearly but eventually it should be able to pay the full yearly debt. It is uncertain what the MLP will do with their income once the construction debt is paid off. After MLP pays their expenses, MLP could direct surplus to the Town providing a new revenue stream.

Line Items: Claire has moved some special articles into the line item budget, this year the fire department physicals and the tree budget, as they are now yearly items and should be in the line item budget.

Increases: Group health increased, as we added a benefited employee-a full time police officer. Police has asked for two full-time officers. Claire thought that it was too soon to add another full-time employee and should see how the first one works out and we have denied other departments full-time positions due to finances. Sue questioned whether we need 3 full-time employees in the highway department. Claire said it has been that way as long as she's been here. There was some discussion about filling part-time positions. Claire thought it depended upon the position and who may be attracted to it. There are positions where part-time is sufficient.

Shared Fire Chief: Discussion followed on the Fire Chief being a full-time shared position with Wendell. Sue wanted full-time benefits in the FY 2024 budget for the Fire Chief but it did not make it into the budget as currently proposed.

Police Proposal: Zara thought that one full-time police officer was sufficient but we should bring it to town meeting. Claire thought bringing it to town meeting would mean that the town meeting would be stacked by police/fire and it would pass. In the current police budget we had 54 hours of policing and two full-time officers would add a lot of coverage so that we don't have to rely on mutual aid. Rick questioned whether there was a true need for additional staff time. Claire commented that she did not see that we have had trouble adding part-time. Kathy commented that he wants to do more community policing and have a better relationship with the school, he goes into the school regularly, has lunch with the kids, etc. Rick stated they are creating data with additional staff.

Zara will talk to the Chief about having one full time and one part-time. There was also discussion on sharing a police officer with another town so the person would be full-time and get benefits. Zara asked what are the mechanics of handling a difference in the staffing levels

between Fincom and Selectboard. Fincom would meet again with us and try to reach a compromise.

Budget Process: Sue asked if there are excess funds in a budget, where does it go? Claire said it would go to free cash. We are already using free cash for this budget.

Timing of Raises: Sue stated she was concerned about new shared Fire Chief getting higher wages and would feel bad for Joe. Claire said it's an inherent problem in recruiting new staff as you bring up wages to attract good people and feels disrespectful to current employee. When Joe applied, it was a very different situation as to hours and pay. Sue asked, if we keep Joe on, could we him to 20 hours. Claire said it would be difficult to do so for FY24 as we are using already free cash to balance the budget. Zara feels like we've been cheating Wendell. Claire said we have provided the chief's vehicle both for New Salem and Wendell. Zara said it might be helpful to hear from Wendell. Sue said she is on the committee with Wendell. We have a job description and close to having an MOU and filed the special Home Rule petition. Claire thought it would be confusing to go to town meeting and ask for increase for Joe when we are just getting special legislation to keep him on. Zara doesn't think it wouldn't be that difficult to explain to town meeting why we are giving Joe an increase for a year to two. Rick asked if 7.5% includes the requested police increase. Claire said it does. Rick suggested that if we take that out, we should calculate the percent increase with adding increase for Joe.

Sue said we also need to budget consistently for buildings and grounds as well. Claire said the fire chief's job has expanded over the years, some by state law and some by local expectations. Claire will go back to the numbers and re-figure if we add hours for Joe and for paying for half his benefits.

(In reference to the expanding budget need, Sue pointed out that the push for additional money comes from all quarters as we also need to budget consistently for bridlings and grounds as well as positions.)

Budget Considerations: Claire said the Fire Chief's job has expanded over the years, some by state law and some by local expectations. Claire will go back to the numbers and re-figure if we add hours for Joe and for paying for half his benefits.

The budget will go down by 50K from Swift River budget and go down in police department by going to part-time police for 2<sup>nd</sup> officer. Claire will have to re-do the numbers adding the fire increase to figure out the overall increase and whether it will stay at 7.5%.

Claire noted there is an increase in ambulance fees from Orange, which is an assessment to the town from Orange.

One of the reasons for the School Budget increase in Swift River is that New Salem has a special needs child with an out of district placement at \$140K. The school will use circuit breaker funds in future years but that takes a year to receive. Each town has to pay for their own children's special needs according to the two towns' agreement. They will get 75% of the cost next year and thereafter. Wendell's costs have gone up as they have more children in Swift River.

Mahar's assessment is down due to a decrease in students from New Salem. Assessment is also down from Franklin County Technical School for next year but will likely go back up as more students from New Salem are going to be attending.

Articles: Will be eliminating \$4,000 for revaluation as RRG is doing the revaluations as part of their cost. The debt we pay goes down as principal goes down. Gabe bundles all debt into one Statehouse note each year to get lower rates. Gabe should describe the process.

Wage adjustment is 8%, last year 4%. It's important so as to keep people with high inflation. We raised rates for some positions this year. The wage adjustment does not affect the school as they are union. Claire never heard there is a ripple effect to school when we raise salaries. Gabe asked for 10K more for counsel for tax titles.

Capital requests: Highway requested an excavator and we plan to use Stabilization fund to pay. We have three stabilizations accounts. We are purchasing a Zobrio cash management system for the accountant, which will be paid from free cash. Years 2 and 3 of the contract will have maintenance which will go into regular budget.

New pumper truck. Debt on tanker truck will expire this year. He's been asking for it for a number of years. This is a first response vehicle so it goes out to car accidents as well. The passing would be contingent on a debt exclusion. The cost is \$615,000. \$150,000 would come from Stabilization and the rest by debt.

Zara concerned about them not paying anything from grant until all signed. Check with school.

Next Steps: We will need another session with Fincom on May 15.

*Action Item: Invite Police and Fire Chief to present their requests at this Selectboard meeting rather than at town meeting.*

Zara said we should be looking at putting solar on highway building to defray some costs overall of building. We need to change our net metering and we are trying to fix as some of the buildings and accounts have huge credits. We may want to do central processing of electricity to keep on top of the credits and where they are allocated.

ARPA funds: Now that we know the cost of PFAS and what needs to be allocated from ARPA for the amount of the remediation, we will have additional amounts for other town needs, including the town barn.

There was discussion on an alarm for the fire station and that we do not need one for theft. We should hear from the library as to their needs as they doesn't ask for much and they have a building and a large number of users especially for those who don't have internet.

Sue wants to talk about street lights and dark skies.

Kathy brought up plumbing issues in town hall-plumber said tankless tank is expensive. She should try to get an exact quote. There was a question on whether we legally need hot water for the building. There was some discussion on town hall issue and how to fix them.

*Action items: Sue and Kathy will work on letter to House in support of our legislation regarding the fire chief.*

There were some questions on open meeting law, such as editing minutes outside the meeting.  
Next meeting: appoint Selectboard Clerk.

Motion to adjourn by Sue at 9:04 p.m. Second by Zara. Vote: All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Neal