

**TOWN OF NEWFIELDS SELECT BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
TUESDAY NOVEMBER 21 2023**

At 6:29pm, The Select Board, by motion of Select Board Member Sununu, seconded by Select Board Member Harmon and in accordance with RSA91-A:3, to enter into a non-public session for purpose of legal matter [RSA91-A3(II)(e)]. By roll call vote the Board passed the motion: Harmon-Affirmative; Kessler-Affirmative; Sununu-Affirmative

A motion to leave non-public session was made Select Board Member Sununu and seconded by Select Board Member Harmon. The motion was passed and at 6:57 a public session reconvened.

**Select Board Present:** Chairman Michael Sununu, Hoby Harmon & Mike Kessler  
**Others Include:** Jeff Buxton, Win Fream, Police Chief Young & Trust for Public Land representatives – Lynette Batt & Shelby Semmes

**Call to order at 7:00 pm.**

The Select Board reviewed and approved the following items:

Checks Dated	11/22/23:	Accounts Payable Manifest \$	4,511.52
Checks Dated	11/22/23:	Accounts Payable Manifest \$	7,329.02
Checks Dated	11/17/23:	Accounts Payable Manifest	\$13,172.84
Checks Dated	11/22/23:	Payroll Manifest	\$41,009.72

Michael addressed the large group of attendees. He explained that there was a lot on the agenda for the night. He said assumed most showed up to hear about the grant application deadline for the Rugg property. He informed them that the Board was going to discuss the grant application deadlines and that it was not a public hearing. There have been numerous Select Board meetings and two public hearings regarding the Rugg property which provided ample discussions on the matter. Assuming this goes on the Ballot, there will be a bond hearing and it will also be part of the Deliberative Session allocating additional time for the Town to weigh in on the matter.

**Fire Department Budget**

Fire Chief Buxton presented his \$172,826 budget to the Board for review. He informed the Board that the shift coverage is going well. Three people cover the night shift, and one to two people cover the day shift. Jeff discussed the future firetruck purchase. He received three proposals and has narrowed it down to one. He is still waiting for another proposal to come in. The all-in firetruck cost would be \$871k. He expects to get the price down to \$810k. In the proposal is a \$20k contingency for price increases. If the cost goes up more than that the Town

would not be responsible for the additional expense. There is \$490k in the capital reserve account. It will take 825 days to deliver the truck. The department is about five years behind in purchasing a new truck. They will be selling two trucks and purchasing one. The old trucks will only bring in around \$30k for both. Jeff plans to submit a Warrant Article for the \$50k this year and next year which will bring the reserve balance to approximately \$640k. This will leave a balance due of approximately \$150k-\$200k. The Town may either lease the remaining balance or come up with additional funds. The issue is that the Town needs to commit to the purchase even though it will not be available for two years. Jeff confirmed that he needs two Warrant Articles - \$50k for the firetruck and \$2k for equipment. Since the Select Board are agents of the Capital fund, a Warrant Article is not needed to utilize the funds for the firetruck purchase. A Warrant Article will be needed in two years to fund the remaining \$150k-\$200k. Jeff said the Town should put the \$500-\$550k deposit on the truck to save \$50k on the purchase price. Michael will reach out to DRA to see how the language should be in the Warrant Article as it is a future contractual obligation that the Town would be making, and he is not sure how that would fall under State statute.

Jeff mentioned that a cost recovery company in Maine is starting to move into NH. If certain equipment is used such as the Jaws of Life during an accident the recovery company will reach out to the car owner's insurance to recover costs. The recovery company will retain 20% of whatever amount is received. Jeff will gather some more information on it.

Michael asked Jeff to provide information on the shift details. Jeff confirmed that he would get it to him later in the week.

### **Police Department Budget**

Police Chief Young presented his \$724,89.30 budget. He noted that before the changes to the Health Care Plan the largest increase would have been to health insurance at 16.6%. He listed other items which have gone up including fuel, uniforms, office supplies and vehicle repairs. Salary increases are competitive with other law enforcement agencies. The Board discussed the line items and the police detail/cruiser accounts. Police Chief Young discussed a State accredited software that allows users to look up policies and procedures and sign with a digital signature.

### **Library Budget**

Win presented his budget to the Board. His goals and strategic planning are to keep and maintain personnel. They hired a consultant, Scott Campbell, to determine how the Library can compete with other towns to keep and maintain personnel. Win reached out to the Department of Labor to see what salary range is commonly offered to personnel. They plan to maintain the same Library hours opened to the public but will be adding additional hours for administrative work. Brittney Thompson is being promoted to Director. The Library has been looking for a children's librarian for eight hours a week. Win would like to maintain Scott Campbell assistance throughout the year for a total of thirty hours to help Brittney in her new position.

Michael voiced his concern with the 18% increase from last year. He asked Win to refine the budget and come back for another meeting with the Board. Win expressed his opinion that the salaries need to stay as they are to remain competitive.

Hoby suggested online training instead to cut back on costs.

Win will return on the 28<sup>th</sup> to discuss his amended budget.

Michael told Win that if the asbestos removal is not completed by the end of the year, the Library will need to retain a contract to encumber the funds for next year.

### **Trust for Public Land - Lynnette Batt & Shelby Semmes**

Lynnette Batt & Shelby Semmes from Trust for Public Land (TPL) discussed the grant application deadlines for Rugg property proposal. Since April, TPL has submitted two grant applications and a loan application to the State; a LChip grant for \$500k, a drinking water grant for the Exeter portion of the land for \$500k and a Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to fund the land purchase of \$2.5 million. The two grants were denied. Lynnette said they are looking to receive permission from the Board to submit for two more Federal grants which will be coming up on December 15<sup>th</sup> & January 12<sup>th</sup>. Unlike the other grants, the Town would need to be the applicant. 20% of the Clean Water loan will be forgiven if the Town moves forward. Lynnette's intent is to reapply for the original two grants next year, apply for these two Federal grants now making the funds available in 2024 & 2025 and compile all public funds together with the Warrant Article to accept the loan to close in 2025.

Lynnette spoke of the proposed Warrant Article for the \$2.5 million loan which recognizes TPL is basing the budget on the preliminary June 2023 appraisal. The property will be reappraised in late 2024 between August and November.

Hoby confirmed with Lynnette that the December & January grants will not obligate the Town to proceed with the project, nor accept the grants.

The December grant from the Land & Water Conservation Fund is State run but Federally funded in the amount of \$500k. The January grant is a Community Forest Program for \$600k. Lynnette will be applying for the maximum amount but cannot guarantee how much the Town will receive. Both grants would have deed restrictions which would be recorded with the property. It would not be a conservation easement. Instead, the Town would be the sole owner of the property with Deed restrictions to protect against certain developments & uses.

Hoby asked what the interest rate would be on a \$2.5 million loan. Lynnette believed it to be 2.8% for 20 years as of August.

Lynnete believes they will be successful when they reapply for the grants next year. The feedback Lynnette received was that the grant submission was too early. They would need to show intent from the Town by initiating the loan application (Town bond) first. It is easier to

receive grants when the bulk of the financing has been established and the grants are on the back end. Lynnette said the plan is to close on the property in the first half of 2025.

Michael asked if they could still do an appraisal if Exeter is not involved. Lynnette said the appraisal will be done to Yellow Book standard which requires looking at the larger parcel. If Exeter chooses not to go forward, that would be a question for the appraiser at that time.

Hoby pressed that if the Town residents chose not to go forward with this transaction, the Town is not financially obligated by applying for these loans.

Lynnette confirmed that this does not legally obligate the Town to accept any funds they are awarded. After the full appraisal is completed in 2024, there will be layers of review. The Town will be named as an intended user at that stage. This will allow the Town to have tangible input. There will be State and Federal reviews depending on the type of grants. There will also be a third-party independent appraisal contracted to review the appraisal and provide a report as Federally mandated. Shelby added that sometimes there are adjustments made as a result of the third-party review.

Michael Motioned, seconded by Michael, to work with Trust for Public Land to apply for the two Federal grants for December and January. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Michael asked Lynnette to call him tomorrow to start the process. He added that the Citizens Petition's required signatures are due by January 5<sup>th</sup>. A Warrant will have to be drafted. It cannot come from the board. It can be petitioned by the citizens with the required twenty-five signatures. The Budget Hearing is on January 9<sup>th</sup>. Since they are dealing with a bond over \$100k there will be a bond hearing possibly on January 16<sup>th</sup>. January 23<sup>rd</sup> is the Presidential Primary. The Deliberative session is on February 6<sup>th</sup>. Assuming this goes on the warrant, this would be discussed at the Deliberative Session. The final vote will take place on the Town Election Day, March 12<sup>th</sup>.

Lynette asked when the Board would vote on the support of the Warrant Article. Michael replied that it would be at the Budget Hearing.

### **Municipal Association Dues**

Michael motioned, seconded by Hobby, to approve the \$1,834.00 for the Municipal Association Dues. All were in favor and the motion carried.

### **Tax Rate**

The Board discussed the final 2023 tax rate with Sue McKinnon. Reassessment of all properties in Newfields increased from \$306 million to \$451 million. This assessment is completed every five years. The Town needs to raise 7,113,000 for 2023 which is an increase of 751,369 from last year. Using these numbers, the tax rate without using any unreserved fund balance is \$15.90 with a \$30k overlay. The unreserved fund has a balance of \$1,183,000. Michael asked Sue what will happen if the Town does not access the unreserved funds that were assigned to the

Pleasant Street & Summer Street rain gardens and Fire Department and whether they would roll out and need to be encumbered? Sue believes they do not as they were from a Warrant Article. Michael added that they have historically utilize \$50k funds from the unreserved fund balance to offset the elderly & veteran's exemption credits so the credits are not imposed on taxpayers. Michael opened it up for discussion among the Board and then Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to utilize \$50k from the unreserved balance to offset the tax rate. All were in favor and the motion carried. The municipality rate will be \$2.76, the county will be \$.58, the local education will be \$11.21, and the State education will be \$1.24 for a new tax rate set at \$15.79; County, usually around 4.5% is at 3.7% this year; the local education has been between 68%-71%, they are at 71% and the State has been as high as 10% is now at 8%.

### **Miscellaneous**

Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to approve the Town Hall rental by Billie Bell for the Holiday musical on December 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. All were in favor and the motion carried.

The Board acknowledged correspondence from the Vernon Family Farm indicating a noise complaint against their neighbor, Scott Wachsmuth. The Board will investigate it and address it at a later meeting.

The Board tabled a property abatement until 11/28 to be held in a non-public meeting.

Michael motioned, seconded by Mike K. to approve an elderly exemption for map 104/15. All were in favor and the motion carried.

The Board acknowledged receipt of the NH DOT payment in the amount of \$12,263.86 for road maintenance.

The Board acknowledged notification from the FAA notifying the Town of flight routes changes for low altitude helicopters.

The Board acknowledged SELT correspondence dated 11/17 advising the Board of upcoming habitat management on Piscassic Greenway which is expected to take place around November 27<sup>th</sup>.

The Board received correspondence regarding a mold issue a tenant is having in a rental unit. Michael said that the Town does not have a role in this issue but will reach out to the Health Inspector and leave it up to him as to whether to get involved.

Hoby informed the Board of his discussion with Jim Maxfield, the replacement building inspector for the Vernon Family Farm (VFF) new renovation. Jim Maxfield charges \$90 an hour, plus travel fees. The Board decided to take the half of the building permit fee that Larry Shaw would normally receive and place it in escrow for Jim's fees. Any additional fees incurred will be billed to the VFF. Hoby will speak with the Town's accountant to set up an account.

The Board tabled Partikian's correspondence until the next meeting.

### **29 Runaway Road**

The Board discussed 29 Runaway Rd whose owner clear cut trees down to the river which is designated wetlands. A bridge was also added over the water. Hoby spoke with Mike Cuomo, Rockingham County Certified Wetlands Scientist and Glenn Greenwood, the Town planner. Glenn advised Hoby of the Shoreline Protection Act; section 9.4.1 requires a 50ft setback. Mike recommended the Town send a notice requesting a walk through of the property. A remedy as deemed appropriate after site walk. Hoby added that it was mentioned to him to let the homeowner's association take care of the issue but since it the state regulation covers it, he believes it's an issue for the Board to address.

Michael said the Conservation Commission (CC) has historically handled these issues. He referenced a similar incident when Steve Shope formally from CC handled the walkthrough and raised the issue with DES. CC addressed it mainly because the Conservation Commission understands the wetland issues and the set back requirements better than the Select Board. Their relationship with DES places them in the best position to address these types of issues on behalf of the Town. He said this in case in CC chooses to take more of a direct role in the future.

Chris Griffith said CC prefers to allow the Select Board to address all issues that deal with ordinances and state statutes.

The Board decided to discuss it further at the next meeting to take formal action.

Hoby reiterated both Mike Cuomo and Glenn Greenwood's recommendation that at which point the Board agrees to move ahead and draft letter to the homeowner, to proceed with inspection, with or without the landowner's cooperation.

Michael asked Hoby to draft the letter for the Board to sign at the next meeting.

Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to approve the November 7, 2023, Select Board meeting minutes as drafted. All were in favor and the motion carried.

At 8:51 pm, Michael motioned, seconded by Mike K., to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kisha Therrien