

**TOWN OF NEWFIELDS SELECT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY DECEMBER 12, 2023**

Select Board Present: Chairman Michael Sununu, Hoby Harmon & Mike Kessler
Others Include: Police Chief Young, Chris Griffith, Jeff Couture, Josh Lent & Town Residents

Call to order at 7:00pm.

The Select Board reviewed and approved the following items:

School Tax	12/07/23:	Accounts Payable Manifest	\$470,559.00
Checks Dated	12/15/23:	Accounts Payable Manifest	\$3,707.34

Encumbrances

Michael motioned, seconded by Mike K., to approve the Library encumbrance for the asbestos abatement in the amount of \$9,020. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to approve the paving contract encumbrance in the amount of \$23,630 for paving in 2024. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to approve the encumbrance from Emergency Management for the Microsoft 365 email exchange in the amount of \$8,552 which includes the \$2,900 one-time fee and the \$5,652 yearly cost for fifteen people on Plan One, the Town Office personnel on Business Basic & the Police department on Business Premium which is an encrypted service to start in January 2024. Michael feels that they should not require other Town boards to migrate to the Town email since it will be an added expense, and most do not generate enough Town business to make necessary. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Grant Authorization Bond Legal counsel

The Board members received a letter from the Trust for Public Land (TPL) who reached out to Attorneys Devine & Millimet who represented the Town when it did the Piscassic Greenway bond. Devine & Millimet requested permission from Michael to speak with the TPL about the bond. This would be a formal engagement letter. The Board deferred the discussion until next week to have the opportunity to review the engagement letter.

29 Runaway Road

The Board had previous discussions regarding this property whose owner cut trees down in the wetland area of his property. A notice was sent to the owner, Hoby said the property owner is very receptive to work with Hoby and Mike Cuomo to rectify the issues presented in the letter. Mike Cuomo works with the Rockingham County Conservation District and will charge

\$125 per hour to visit the property and decide on a resolution plan. Michael motioned, seconded by Hobby, to sign an agreement with Mike Cuomo to assess the property and come up with a resolution. Hobby also drafted a letter to the property owner informing him of this decision and will mail it with the Board's approval.

Turkey Trot

The Board acknowledged and thanked E. William Johnson for his letter expressing his appreciation for the Police department's assistance with the Turkey Trot.

Rugg property

Michael acknowledged receipt of a variety of emails and phone calls in support of the Rugg property acquisition.

3 Hilton Avenue

The Board acknowledges receipt of the ZBA notice of decision regarding 3 Hilton Avenue.

Rugg Property Grant Application

TPL has an application due by 12/15/23 which requires a member of the Board to authorize someone on behalf of the town to be the authorizing person. Hobby motioned, seconded by Mike K. to authorize Michael to be the authorized figure for the application. All in favor and motion carried.

Michael then informed the Board that the State after saying the preliminary application for the Rugg Property grant is good is now requiring the Town to add an encumbrance on the forty-one acres the Town owns. This land abuts the Rugg property. The Town acquired the land around 1963 by the Kimballs. There are no encumbrances or restrictions on the land. The State is now requiring the Town to put encumbrances on the land. Michael has serious concerns about adding encumbrances to the property without any input by the Town.

Hobby has an issue with making a last-minute decision.

Mike K. agreed with Michael that the Town should have input.

Hobby asked how this came up.

Michael responded that the state gave the town a preliminary green light, then added this requirement today and that the State would be reluctant to move forward without agreeing to this requirement.

Jeff Couture said there are two different ways to apply for the grant. The best option to receive the most funds requires this encumbrance. Jeff was on the site walk today and this encumbrance was communicated to him this afternoon.

Michael said the encumbrances would impose restrictions on land that the town already owns.

Jeff responded that this encumbrance is simply supporting the intent of creating a Town forest. This will keep the forest in perpetuity.

Michael told them that he looked at Rockingham Registry of Deeds book and page which showed a simple transfer from the Kimball family was granted to the Town in 1963 for this parcel without any restrictions. There was no declaration of this land, the town just owned it. Deertrees was built in the late 1990s that is when the access to this parcel became available and this was when the trails were made etc. No change or restrictions were added to this land. The town may do whatever it wants with it, even sell it. It is a Town asset. The new encumbrance would in essence turn this land into a Town forest. If the Town acquires the Rugg property, it would just be an extension of the Rugg forest.

Hoby is not necessarily opposed to the concept but does not feel it's reasonable to decide like this without the support of the citizens.

Michael told Hoby that if the Town moves forward with the anticipation of it being part of the bigger Rugg property, but the town then votes it down, the Town would have essentially devalued an asset and made it a Town forest without the residents' input. Michael said as a fiduciary of the Town, he has a hard time justifying this action.

Mike K. asked if there will be another grant opportunity if they do not make this decision tonight.

A person in the audience said that he works for the Federal Government and said that if the encumbrance is not listed as part of the application, then it is just a preference and suggested the Town apply for the grant and wait for the State to come back asking for the encumbrance thus allowing the Town to ask for an extension.

Michael suggested going through the application process then if the town receives the grant and votes to purchase the land, the Town can encumber it later.

Hoby stated that there are multiple nuances floating around in situations like this, items will be missed, and he is uncomfortable deciding this without sufficient knowledge to make an intelligent decision. He is not saying he is opposed to the idea.

Michael said that he will reach out to Lynette Batt tomorrow and ask if they can move forward without encumbrance.

Budget

The Board worked through the budget materials line by line. The budget is as follows:

Executive - Town Offices – \$175,824.00

Elections - \$14,400 there are four elections this year. Vital Records will be a separate line of \$1,200.

Financial – \$27,715 this includes the Treasurer salary and annual audit.

Revaluation – \$21,750 this is for the Town Assessing contract.

Legal – \$18,000 the Board does not anticipate 2024 to be like 2023; they spent \$30k last year on the Vernon Family Farm issue but had only budgeted 12k.

Planning & Zoning – \$14,250 contains the \$8,750 contract with Glenn Greenwood, the Town Planner. Michael asked Mike K. and Hoby if they would be okay with the Planning Board reducing this number when they meet on Thursday, possibly finding a less expensive person to fill Glen Greenwood's position. The Board agreed.

General Government - \$28,200 Michael will incorporate the Library's landscaping \$3,214 to this line which brings it to a new total of \$31,414.

Cemetery –\$31,515 this is the same amount each year.

Insurance - \$42,811 This will be reduced by a Primex credit of \$16k reducing this line to \$26,811.

Advertising -\$5,150

Other General Government – this line includes the computer contracts, website, document scanning, Town Report printing charges etc. Hoby emphasized the need to record all Town meetings but did not feel the cost of the new equipment is prudent given the current budget size. He did request Mike K. and Michael added the cost to live stream all Town meetings to the budget for an additional \$1,200. This brought the line to \$33,200.

Public safety – \$724,890 This is a 6.6% increase mostly due to personnel increases. Michael said Town needs to maintain personnel especially with other towns reaching out to our officers.

Ambulance -\$5,100 – this is a contracted amount.

Fire dept – \$172,816

Building Inspector – this is based on building permits issued.

Emergency Management - \$15k includes radios and communication equipment.

Streets – \$420,600 – this includes the paving of the upper half of Old Lee Road (5,500 ft.) Hoby said the Town is so far behind and wondered if the Town is doing enough to catch up. Michael responded that the biggest issue is the cost of asphalt. The town will need to do a mile a year each year for the next several years. This will mean a yearly paving budget of \$400-\$500k each year.

Lighting – \$5,500 – the town changed to LED lighting a few years ago which reduced this line item by \$5k.

Welfare Assistance – \$4k with the additions of outside resources they have been able to supply assistance for several people in town.

Debt service line – \$65,020 this includes principal and interest for the Piscassic Greenway loan.

Mosquitos – after a brief conversation, the Board decided to zero out this item.

Health Agency Line – These funds contribute to various local agencies that provide support to Town residents. Michael said he does not feel the Town should collect taxes from residents just to redistribute to outside agencies. Michael suggested, given the current environment to zero it out and allow people to donate on their own. Last year, the Town made \$4,750 in contributions. After some discussion, the Board reduced this line item to \$4,500.

Trash and Recycling – The Town currently pays Newmarket \$8k in fees so Newfields residents may bring recycling and other items not able to be placed curbside to the Newmarket Transfer Station. Michael is not proposing to get rid of this since many people in town utilize this service.

Spring/Fall Cleanup - \$4,500 Michael suggested zeroing this line item. This ended up costing the Town more this year to dispose of the household items and the turnout was quite low. As stated earlier, if someone needs to get rid of something, they can access Newmarket's Transfer Station.

Waste Management – the Town disposed of 600 tons of municipal waste, 120 tons of recycling and 52 tons of cardboard this year. Under the current cost structure with ELM Services, the municipal waste collection fee for next year will cost \$81,885. The tipping fee will be \$81 per ton which equals \$48,600.

The collection fee for recycling will be \$49,890 and approximately \$135 a ton for recycling which will be around \$16. When one looks at the cost per ton for trash, it will be \$220 a ton for municipal waste; \$570 a ton for recycling. Michael said the reality today, with the changes in the recycling market, not much is getting recycled. It will go to a recycling company, but most do not end up being recycled. Most plastic is not recycled as it is no longer cost effective for companies to do so. Corrugated cardboard is recycled, and the Town has a separate receptacle for it.

Michael said he spoke with Jim at ELM Services, and they came up with the following options:

1. Keep the status quo, which will cost the Town \$197,000 next year.
2. Combine everything as trash, including the corrugated cardboard. If residents want to recycle, they may take it to Newmarket. This will cost the Town \$171,000.
3. Trash is collected each week, recycling every other week and keep the cardboard receptacle for \$179,000.
4. Combine everything as trash but continue the corrugated cardboard receptacle. The cardboard will cost us \$5,200 but the total collection of municipal waste and cardboard will be \$164,000. This is a savings of \$33,000 and residents can still use the Newmarket Transfer Station for recycling.

Michael said option #4 provides the largest line-item savings he could find in the budget. With mosquito and recycling removed, the budget increase will decrease from 9% to 4%-5%.

Hoby spoke with other NH town officials who said they never recoup on the recycling, the only thing they can do is mitigate their costs and suggested reducing the recycling pickups per month. Only 1 & 2 plastics are recyclable. He would love to take the trash down to Wheelabrator to have it burned and converted to electricity. He added that while some may not have an issue with the increased taxes, many residents are on fixed income and cannot afford any extra in taxes.

Michael reiterated that recycling is still an option for residents, they just need to drive it to the Newmarket Transfer Station because our Town cannot afford to pay \$570 a ton for items which mostly are not recycled. Nationally, less than 10% of plastic gets recycled; paperboard does not get recycled. Some residents joined the discussion and added their comments. Michael said he has a hard time presenting another 8%-9% increase in the budget to the Town, but the final decision will be up to the Town residents.

Michael suggested putting the \$163,945 for trash and corrugated cardboard pickup in the budget with recycling taken by residents to Newmarket. This will bring the budget increase down to around 4% -5% increase instead of 9%. Hoby said that he is okay to go that way contingent on people deciding at the Deliberative Session.

Michael mentioned that he spoke with Jim from ELM Services who mentioned some addresses in Town have an excessive amount of trash each week, possibly from in home businesses. If the town had a policy allowing only two trash cans per household, this would lower the cost slightly. Mike K. expressed his concern for larger families and holiday trash. Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to make a two trash can policy. Mike K. opposed and the motion carried.

Rugg Property

Chris Couture said the Town does not need to encumber the land prior to the application.

Michael stated the Board acknowledges that if the Town receives the grant, the Town will consider the option to encumber the 41 inland acres the Town currently owns as part of the acceptance of the grant.

Minutes

Tabled

Warrant Articles:

Fire Truck

Michael reminded the Board of their discussion with Fire Chief Buxton regarding the purchase of a new fire truck. The Town will utilize the funds the Fire department has in reserves for the purchase of a fire truck with a \$50k Warrant Article this year and next. Since the fire truck will not be delivered for another 2-3 years, there was a question as to whether they could have a Warrant Article for the future purchase. Michael informed Mike K. and Hoby that they can have a Non-Lasting Appropriation, the language would be as follows:

“to see if the Town of Newfields will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$200,000 for the purpose of providing the funds for the final payment for a new fire truck to be funded by \$200,000 from the December 31, 2023, fund balance. This scheduled Warrant Article will be a non-lapsing appropriation per RSA 32.7 section 6. It will not lapse until the fire truck purchase is complete or by December 31, 2027, whichever is sooner.”

This will allow the Town to spend the money at a future date to purchase the fire truck. If the Town does not support the Warrant Article, the Town will not have the funds to purchase the fire truck. The Select Board recommended support of the Warrant Article. Support of this will not have an impact on taxes. The Board recommended support of the annual \$50k Warrant Article for the fire truck reserve and the \$2k capital reserve.

Hoby suggested a Warrant Article which would allow the use of any funds in excess of \$100k in the Police Detail account. This account was specifically set up for the purchase of a new cruiser. Since cruisers are under \$100k, Hoby would like to use the excess funds for other Town expenditures. The Board will address this subject once Hoby writes the Warrant Article. Warrant Articles must be submitted to the Town Clerk by 3:00 on January 9th prior to the Budget Hearing.

Noise Complaint

This subject was tabled.

399 Piscassic Road

Hoby informed the Board of complaints made by residents regarding 399 Piscassic Road. There is trash all over the property. Neighbors are finding rats on their property due to the trash on the abandoned property. Hoby would like to send a letter to the property owner. Michael advised Hoby that this would be a long expensive court battle similar to the Hazell property. He suggested waiting until the end of December when the property will be another year behind in taxes which will allow the town to take possession of the property at that time. Under a tax lien, no legal fees are incurred. Hoby believes it to be a health issue and will research further.

The Board's next meeting will be on Monday the 18th at 7:00pm.

Michael motioned, seconded by Mike K., to adjourn the meeting at 7:00pm. All were in favor and the

Motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kisha Therrien