

**TOWN OF NEWFIELDS SELECT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY DECEMBER 18, 2023**

Select Board Present: Chairman Michael Sununu, Hoby Harmon & Mike Kessler
Others Include: Police Chief Young & Residents

Call to order at 7:00 pm.

The Select Board reviewed and approved the following items:

Checks Dated 12/22/23: Accounts Payable Manifest \$62,185.92

Financial Review

Michael informed Hoby and Mike K. that any Warrant Article the Board does not support must come as a Citizen's Petition which requires twenty-five signatures and to be filed with the Town Clerk by January 9th.

29 Runaway Road

The Board discussed the FOIA request the Town received by the homeowner. Michael told Hoby and Mike K. that he was informed the Town complied with the request. Hoby said he sent the signed contract to Rockingham Conservation agreeing to Mike Cuomo's \$125 hourly rate. They also sent a copy to the homeowner who agreed to reimburse the town. The homeowner has been very cooperative, and Mike Cuomo and Hoby will be visiting the property after the holidays.

Abatements

Michael motioned, seconded by Mike K., to approve the abatement for Map 209 Lot 4 in the amount of \$1851.00 for 2023. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to approve the abatement for Map 102 Lot 72 in the amount of \$50.00. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby to approve the abatement for Map 204 Lot 24 in the amount of \$50.00. All were in favor and the motion carried.

399 Piscassic Road

Hoby drafted a letter for the homeowners of 399 Piscassic Road to clean up their property. Michael reiterated his opinion from the last meeting that it would be best to wait until the end of December when the homeowner will most likely default on payment of taxes. The home will then become property of the Town via a tax lien with no legal fees incurred. If the Town goes via the court, it will take 1-2 years. Hoby felt the Town should still send a letter to the homeowner. After further discussion, the Board agreed to send the letter.

Authorization for Bond Legal Counsel

Michael motioned, seconded by Mike K., to allow Devine Willette to provide legal counsel for Trust for Public Land regarding the Rugg property. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Noise Complaint

The Town received a noise complaint from Amy Manzelli, the legal counsel for the Vernon Family Farm, about an abutter. Hoby said this 11/21/23 email did not provide a date or any specifics of when this noise complaint occurred. It also specified an incorrect address of the neighbor the email was supposedly addressing. This email included two decimal readings but no further information. Hoby referenced audio readings of the Vernon Farm and found 67 noise violations coming from the farm on 7/28/23. He believes this is a tit for tat between the two neighbors.

Michael will request the actual data from the Vernon's legal counsel. If they cannot provide the information, there is no further action the Board can do.

Recycling

Michael addressed the public attendees. He said he first mentioned this issue two meetings ago. The Town has a large operating budget this year. It is 9% higher than last year and that is in addition to the 8% increase last year. The difficulty they face managing the budget this year is the lack of other expenditures in the budget short of personnel cuts to Library, Police, Fire and Town Office that can be reduced or cut. The largest savings they could find is recycling. At the last meeting, they concluded that recycling was the best option to reduce the 9% increase in the operating budget. Even with this cut, it is still a 6% operating budget hike. This does not include any Warrant Articles. This is just to keep the lights on and to keep providing services to the Town. He knows everyone wants to weigh in and there will be long discussions at the Budget Hearing and the Deliberate Session. Michael then opened it up for questions.

Phyllis Mackey said the decision cannot wait until the Budget Hearing in January because the contract will be expiring at the end of December. She added that they have 142 signatures asking to place the recycling back in the budget and are willing to have pick up every other week.

Josh Lent discussed the costs and said he spoke with Jim from ELM Services about recycling and where the items are dumped. He said he was told ELM uses two facilities, Greenworks in Peabody, and Waste Management in Billerica.

Mike Mackey said he was upset residents were not notified that recycling was taken out of the budget and that the contract would expire without notice. He does not understand this given the large number of recycling supporters.

Debbie Pawlencio said everyone has a budget they must adhere to. We are maxed out. She walks around other towns and sees bins full of items that are not recyclable. She said she does not know what the answer is, but it needs to be addressed by the manufacturers who should not be putting plastic in our stores which should not be going into our carts and then to our homes only to be thrown in recycling bins expecting it to be recycled when it will not be. It is costing us money and the Town must cut somewhere. Where do we suggest the budget gets cuts?

Another resident referenced a study that showed more people will recycle if it is curbside versus driving it to a recycling station.

Kelly McGowen said in 2021, the Recycling Committee showed substantial community support for recycling.

Jacqui Silvani said her concern is that once the contract expires, the costs will be much higher if the Town must renegotiate a contract in March. She said Jim from ELM Services is willing to extend the contract costs that we have currently. If the Town sends it out to bid, it will be higher.

Brian Johnson asked if Warrant Articles expire and how letting a service for the Town expire, which results in higher costs, serves in the Town's best interest. Michael replied that they do. They are only good for the year in which they are passed. He added that he and Josh Lent had discussions with Jim. He provided the Town with a quote for four options with pricing that the Board can choose from. It is the Select Board's job to recommend a budget to the Town. Brian suggested contracts that are in alignment with our Elections. Michael said that the appropriations expire in December. There is no assurance that the body or the Town will continue a contract beyond December 31st.

Jacqui said Jim told her ELM can do a month-to-month contract starting in January.

Hoby said that he spent a lot of time on this issue since the last Select Board meeting. He apologized that this meeting came up in the past two Select Board meetings and that there was not a lot of information passed to the community. He will work to prevent this in the future. When the Board spoke last week, they were given four options, which Hoby listed. If the contract expires, they will have to place it out to bid and he does not want to put the Town in this situation. He referenced articles that stated only 9% of recycling is being recycled. Where do we go from here, we can zero it out and tell people to go to Newmarket. He is certain there will be a Warrant Article for recycling and it will be placed out to bid. Jim from ELM is willing to renegotiate but as he told Hoby, if he must bid on it, it will be for a higher rate. Hoby added that it is not easy. They have a responsibility to not take money from people's pockets. If the Town goes to every other week, there will be \$18k in savings. The Town is spending \$65k a year on recycling. Hoby is leaning towards maintaining the contract month to month.

The recycling represents 2%-2.5% of the budget increase. If we leave it in the budget will be 9% higher than last year.

Michael said you are not the ones being stopped on the street by residents upset over the most recent tax bill. The December property tax bill represented an 8% increase and now there is another 9% increase. If someone can identify another place to take the money, please let him know. Should the Town take it from the Library and shorten the hours? The Fire department? We are trying to be fiscally responsible. This was manageable when we had a 2% increase but not at 9%.

Trish Cox asked to budget for recycling every other week so the Town will not have to put in a Warrant Article.

Hoby said he has been getting phone calls from elderly on fixed incomes that have been here 60-70 years who do not know how they will pay their tax bills and families working 3-4 jobs trying to raise their kids who are saying they cannot afford to pay their bills. We also need to consider the new fire truck, paving increases and that we are still paying until 2026 for Piscassic Greenway - \$66k a year; Rugg property acquisition and the Hilton house...how do we take all these factors into account? We cannot mitigate the financial impact on these individuals.

Michael said he understands it's only a few dollars here or there, but it all adds up to a large amount. We are a fiduciary for everyone in Town. He asked the residents to find \$20k to cut. If we present a budget

that the rest of the town thinks is too high and votes in a default budget, then this all goes away. He guarantees that people in Town will vote against a 9% budget increase. He understands people want curbside recycling. If recycling cost \$10k, we'd be recycling. It is the balance of fiscal responsibility with services you want to provide. Each of you measures this differently from everyone else.

Another resident asked about the paving budget. Michael said as the road deteriorates, the more it costs, reclaiming triples the cost. The Town has a paving plan, so each road is redone every twenty years. The biggest issue is the cost of asphalt. The budget includes the cost to finish Old Lee Road. Based on this, the paving budget will go from \$200k-\$250k to \$400-\$500k for the next several years.

More comments were made about recycling. To which Michael replied if people think it's divisive, they are making it divisive. There is a responsibility of the people sitting on this Board to weigh and measure and pick the priorities. Right now, it is very difficult to find other places in this budget to cut. If someone knows where to cut \$15k-\$20k without cutting personnel from the Police or Fire departments, slashing the hours at the Library please let me know. He added, municipal tonnage is less than \$220 a ton; recycling is \$550 a ton.

Catherine Tarnowski suggested a program so people who can afford to recycle can help those in Town who cannot afford it.

Hoby said there are lot of folks who are very dedicated to recycling, he is one of them but there is also a lot of people asking why they are spending all this money on recycling when only 9-12% is recycled. This country does not have a good recycling program.

A resident asked when budgeting starts. Michael told him that they start requesting departments start on their budgets in September and come before the Board starting in October and wrapped up in December for the January Budget Hearing.

Michael listed the following dates:

Budget Hearing January 9th

Bond Hearing January 16th

Presidential Primary January 23rd

Deliberative Session February 6th

Town Election March 12th

Hoby expressed his concern that if the recycling contract expires, it will end up costing the Town more money in 2024 than it would if the Town moves to every other week recycling. Michael responded that it can be a separate issue from if you are considering changing the budget line item. We can have a conversation with Jim about going month to month to March.

Hoby motioned to move recycling to every other week and not terminate the recycling contract on 12/31/23. There was not a second and the motion failed.

Michael motioned, seconded by Hoby, to approve the 11/21 & 11/28 Select Board meeting minutes as drafted. All were in favor and the motion carried.

The Select Board decided on the following dates for upcoming meetings:

January 8th & 22nd

At 8:21pm, Michael motioned, seconded by Mike K., to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kisha Therrien