

Town of Wendell
Selectboard Meeting Minutes
January 3, 2024, 7 p.m.
Hybrid Meeting: Selectboard Offices and by Zoom

Present:

Chair Laurie DiDonato, Vice Chair Gillian Budine, Member Paul Doud

Also Present: Glenn Johnson-Mussad, Town Coordinator; Cynthia Bolling, Selectboard Clerk; Treasurer Carolyn Manley; Project Coordinator Phil Delorey; Beth Erviti, Alistair MacMartin, Road Commission; members of the public and press.

I. Roll Call/Call to Order

With all members present, the meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. Announcements

There were no announcements.

III. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

IV. Selectboard Updates and Comments

The Town newsletter is going out in the mail today and tomorrow.

V. Selectboard Meeting and Warrant Schedule Review

There will be a meeting and warrants on Jan. 17 and a Special Town Meeting on Jan. 31.

VI. Consent Agenda

- A. Approve minutes of December 20, 2023
- B. Approve letter of support for the Erving MassTrails grant

Laurie DiDonato moved to approve the consent agenda. Gillian Budine seconded.

Discussion

Replace "President Laurie DiDonato" with "Chair Laurie DiDonato" in the Dec. 20, 2023, minutes.

The December 20, 2023, minutes were approved as amended to include the new wording as written above.

The amended motion was approved unanimously.

VII. Project Coordinator Report. Phil Delorey

Wendell Recycling and Transfer Station (WRATS) Landfill Capping Project

- Samples were taken from the wells that were installed in November 2023.
 - a. No reports have come back yet, but they're expected to be benign.
- The project's \$75,000 budget has been just about depleted, so Phil will need to revisit the issue in the spring.

- a. By that time, Phil may have convinced the Department of Environmental Protection to approve a 2-to-1 slope for the fill instead of the 1-to-3 slope they recommend.
- b. If granted, a lot less fill will be needed, for a significant cost savings.

Wood Bank

- Phil plans to meet with Tree Warden Cliff Dornbusch sometime in January to map out a new site for the wood bank, at the bottom of the landfill slope.
 - a. Access to the wood bank will be along the same road that's been used for the tree cutting and well drilling, not through the WRATS gates.

Library Project

The contractor was called back to do some finishing work and now the project is pretty much done.

VIII. Road Commission Budget Needs Assessment. Road Commissioner Phil Delorey

The Road Commission is willing to revisit its budget to help replenish the unexpected expense (roughly \$80,000) of the second Mormon Hollow culvert repair.

- Phil offered these options:
 1. Some of the \$100,000 the Town has generously added to its operating budget in fiscal year 24 for paving could be used for the Mormon Hollow Culvert repair.
 - a. Paving work still needs to be done on three roads, however.
 2. Instead of purchasing equipment in the future, the department could use Chapter 90 money for a leasing program, which would free up some money.
- While the Highway Department has an extra \$123,794 in Fair Share money from the state, it can't be used to pay for the second Mormon Hollow culvert repair because it's governed by Chapter 90 , which doesn't usually allow for retroactive reimbursements. Additional Chapter 90 constraints:
 - a. Towns must get approval for the money from the Department of Transportation (DOT).
 - b. Towns have to use their own funds first, then send invoices to the DOT for reimbursement.
 - c. Emergency storm damage reimbursement exception: An account can be opened and funds approved for storm damage without submitting invoices if a claim is made immediately after a storm. This can be done for future storms.
- Phil noted that the additional Fair Share money is very welcome and has helped the Highway Department to keep from falling behind, so he hopes that the state will continue it.
- The Highway Department very much appreciates the Town's generous support over the years, enabling the department to equip and pay its staff well.

Discussion

- Gillian noted that 66% of the \$420,000 highway budget has already been spent, but without a line-item breakdown, it wasn't clear to her what the expenditures were for and what had to be spent for the rest of the year.
 - a. Phil can ask Joy to get that line-item spreadsheet to Gillian.
- The possibility of using American Rescue Plan Act money was considered. (ARPA is a federal grant program originally restricted to COVID-related expenses that now can be used for any regular municipal expense.)
 - a. The remaining \$20,000 or so in ARPA funds must be committed by the end of this calendar year.

Next Steps

- Phil called Highway Clerk Joy Gorzocoski offline and found that a Special Town Meeting (STM) wouldn't be needed to redirect the paving funds to the Mormon Hollow culvert repair as he originally thought.
 - a. That's because the funds were not voted on separately at the Annual Town Meeting; they are just a regular part of the Highway Department operating budget.
- The Selectboard wanted to consult with the FinCom at the next Money Managers meeting about ways to make up the \$80,000 expenditure.

X. **Leverett Fire Dept. Study.** Laurie

The Selectboard considered Leverett's invitation to participate in a study about the feasibility of regionalizing fire department services in Leverett, Shutesbury, Wendell and New Salem.

- They have a \$20,000 grant for the study.
- At last month's Public Safety meeting, people expressed mixed feelings about doing this.
 - a. While more information is welcome, regionalizing would take up more of staff's time and some did not think sharing with three other towns would benefit Wendell.
- The study will be completed within 12 months of the start date.

Discussion

- Participating in the study would let the Town see what its options are.
- If New Salem decided to do this and Wendell didn't, Wendell would have to carry the costs of all fire department services alone.
- Gillian suggested that the Selectboard might want to find ways to support the additional time staff would have to spend contributing to the report.
- Glenn Johnson-Mussad offered to find out what New Salem thinks.

The Selectboard will gather more information and the issue will be discussed at the Selectboard's next meeting.

IX. **Interview for Coordinator Assistant Position.** Glenn

The Selectboard and Glenn interviewed Suzanne Hoyle for the Town Coordinator Assistant position, which requires working 8 hours a month helping Glenn with the Town Coordinator's electronic work, virtually and in person if possible.

Interview Highlights

- As a senior copywriter and department head at Channing Bete Co., where she worked for over 23 years, Su has a strong background in documenting, version control, communicating, tracking information, bringing artists and writers together, handling social media and meeting deadlines.
- She is familiar with a variety of software applications, including Zoom, Excel, Google Suite (but not Word) and OpenOffice.
- She is currently working remotely from home, is comfortable with using technology and has no problem learning new stuff.
- Su is currently working with people who have personal challenges. She has found that listening to what the person is saying and finding something in there they both can work with is key to helping them meet those challenges: She said the solution is often embedded in the information that's shared.
- While it's subject to change, Su has clients between 3:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, and on Thursdays from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Her other hours are flexible.

Job Details

- Glenn is looking for help with some tasks that have to be done all the time, like putting the agenda together, posting it and creating Zoom meeting reservations.
- He would also like some help with special projects such as compiling the Annual Report.
- The software he uses most frequently: Microsoft Word, the content management system for the Town website, using WordPress to upload pdfs and making meeting reservations.
- Hours of work are a mix: some can be at Su's discretion, and some could be specific, like when a deadline needs to be met or Glenn needs coverage in the office for walk-ins.

Glenn will request references and if everything checks out, he has the Selectboard's permission to offer the position to Su.

XI. Animal Control Officer Designation. Laurie

The state has notified Wendell that the Selectboard's annual designation of an animal control officer (ACO) must be submitted by Feb. 1, 2024.

Discussion

- Since the Leverett Police Department is currently acting as the ACO, Wendell will notify Leverett Police Chief Scott Minckler that Wendell has designated his department as its ACO.
 - a. Chief Minckler has been talking to Erving's P.D. about whether they might be willing to share its newly designated ACO with other towns. Wendell will also ask him for an update.

XII. DiDonato Lockes Village Road Deed to Town. Gillian

Laurie and Ray DiDonato own land that runs along Lockes Village Rd. where a dam, bridge and culvert meet. They would like to gift a piece of it to the Town.

Discussion

- Laurie recused herself from facilitating the discussion but explained that she and Ray own the culvert on both sides, but a piece of it extends to their property. That's the piece they're gifting to the Town.
- The Town owns and is responsible for the road, the bridge and culvert.
- Gifting the property would even up the ownership to about 50-50.
- The site is currently in good shape, and both the Town and the DiDonatos will continue to make joint decisions about maintaining it.

Paul moved to accept the DiDonato property as described in the deed. Gillian seconded. Laurie abstained.

The motion was carried by a majority.

The Selectboard will sign off on the deed and Glenn will have it notarized.

XIII. Coordination of January 17 Meeting. Glenn

Glenn asked the Selectboard to consider the posting date for this meeting, which will be affected by these factors:

- The approaching Jan. 15 holiday, if posting is to occur two days ahead as usual.
- If the upcoming designation of the website as the official posting place is considered,
 - a. Posting would have to happen a week in advance.
 - b. That would mean Glenn would send out a list of topics to the Selectboard for approval on Tuesday, Jan. 9 and post it on Jan. 10.

Discussion

Town Clerk Anna Wetherby, who will be the one who approves and posts meetings when the Town website becomes the official meeting posting place, has asked for the 7-day lead time.

Next Steps

- As A trial, the Selectboard will post its agenda Jan. 10, a week in advance of its Jan. 17 meeting.
- After a few trials, they'll be able to determine if that amount of lead time works for the board.

XIV. Special Town Meeting January 31

The Selectboard considered the articles that might be on the STM warrant on Jan. 31.

Discussion

Battery Bylaw Article

- The Selectboard had questions about the two versions of the bylaw covering the proposed battery storage facility in Wendell, which was submitted by the No Assault & Batteries in Wendell citizens' group:
 - a. Does it also need to go to the Town Clerk with a petition?
 - b. Since it's a proposed bylaw, should it be reviewed by Town Counsel before it goes on the warrant?
- According to the Town Clerk's page, proposed changes to any STM article need to be in writing and submitted to the Town Clerk at the Town meeting.

Bus Transportation Contract Article

- A Jan. 31 STM is needed to consider the bus transportation contract, which must be signed soon after.
- Glenn will confirm with Caitlin Sheridan, Director of Finance and Operations at the school, that this will be on the warrant.

Chapter 90 Deficit Article

- This is about an accumulation of unreimbursed items (totaling about \$12,000) from 2019 through 2023.
 - a. The auditors have warned that this deficit on the books should be fixed before the end of the fiscal year.
 - b. The article has already been written.
- Carolyn will resend the article to the FinCom with new language saying funds can come from Stabilization or any other available special fund like ARPA, which has about \$20,000 left.

Next Steps

Glenn will confirm the STM date with Anna, Caitlin and Constable Anne Diemand.

XV. Items Not Anticipated

Unregistered Vehicle Permit

Jesse Davis has property with four unregistered vehicles on it instead of the two allowable and wants a special permit to keep them for nonbusiness purposes.

Gillian moved to approve the special permit for Jesse Davis as presented. Laurie seconded. No discussion.

The motion was approved unanimously.

Donation to the Wendell Free Library

Gillian made a motion to approve the donation from the Friends of the Wendell Free Library to the Wendell Free Library in the amount of \$10,000. Laurie seconded. No discussion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Possible Meeting Conflict

- Gillian is part of the search screening committee for a new school superintendent. The group may have to interview people on Jan. 17 in the afternoon, so she may have to attend virtually.
- Paul will be in Town to sign the Jan. 31 STM warrant if needed.

Flagpole Policy

Glenn will respond to the person who asked to fly a flag on the Town's flagpole. According to past practice, we only fly certain municipal flags.

XVI. Adjournment

Laurie moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:49 p.m. Gillian seconded. No discussion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Documents

Project Coordinator Report, Jan. 3
KP Law, DiDonato Quitclaim Deed, Lockes Village Rd.
Jesse Davis Unregistered Vehicle Permit, Jan. 2, 2023
Fire Department Regionalization Study, Dec. 13, 2023
Selectboard Posting and Agenda, Jan. 3, 2023
Erving Mass Trails Letter of Support, Jan. 3, 2023
Required Municipal Animal Control Officer, 2023-Dec. 26, 2024
Library Donation Letter, Dec. 21, 2023
Selectboard Meeting Minutes, Dec. 20, 2023
Coordinator Assistant Job Description, Sept. 27, 2023
S. Hoyle Resume Assistant to Town Coordinator, Dec. 6, 2023
Hoyle Assistant to Town Coordinator Cover Letter, Dec. 6, 2023