

MINUTES

**SELECT BOARD/ASSESSORS' MEETING
TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023
WILLIAM L. PULLEN MUNICIPAL BUILDING MEETING ROOM
ONLINE NON-INTERACTIVE ON TOWN HALL STREAMS
6:30 p.m.**

Select Board present: Jim Justice, Adam Fuller, Martha Johnston-Nash, and Bill Packard

Others present: Jay Feyler (Town Manager), John Gibbons, Greg Grotton, Dr. Matthew Speno, Linda Mountainland, and others

- 1. Call Select Board Meeting to Order:** at 6:30 p.m. by Adam Fuller
- 2. Pledge of Allegiance**
- 3. Approve Minutes of Tuesday, April 4, 2023:**

Motion by: Bill Packard
2nd by: Martha Johnston-Nash
4-0

- 4. Approve Treasurer's Warrants dated Tuesday, April 18, 2023:**

Motion by: Bill Packard
2nd by: Jim Justice
4-0

- 5. Approve and sign the Knox County Assessors Return:**

Jay said this is a formality for board members in their roles as assessors. Adam said it's one paragraph listing out a sum. Jay clarified a total amount for county tax and dispatch. Adam read aloud the figure \$339,883. In answer to Martha, they get a breakdown.

Motion to approve, sign, and date the Knox County Assessors Return by: Jim Justice
2nd by: Bill Packard
4-0

- 6. Approve and sign the Town Meeting Warrant:**

Jay reminded they already approved it. There were a couple little changes.

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7. Town Manager's Report:

Jay said our budget material is at the printer. We are still waiting for the school to get theirs to the printer. It will bounce back and forth a few times before getting it perfect.

We had our meeting last night on zoom, and he thinks there was one citizen on other than budget committee and select board members. Hopefully we will have a good turnout at May's public hearing here, and we'll still have people say they didn't know about it. The youtube video will be up in a couple weeks. He hopes to get a draft copy of the actual ballot on the town website. Town Hall Streams did not work. Hopefully a zoom copy can be uploaded to THS.

He emailed board members about CMP work, mostly on lines and poles that are being changed. If streetlights are on there, they are required to change them over. They will start in the next week or two and go all through the summer. In answer to Jim, Jay said it costs us nothing. In answer to Adam asking about making a request re: poles encroaching on the roadway with plows, etc., Jay said if we know which ones, we probably could make a request. The companies are supposed to send us a pole permit application. Then he or Matt goes out and checks where they are, but sometimes they just put them up.

8. Other Business:

Jay said this just in came in: approve the sale back of Map 10-001 Lot 16, a foreclosed property at 203 Collinstown Road. They are coming in tomorrow to pay the full amount plus \$200 redemption fee. The sale back should be approved before accepting the money.

Motion to sell back Map 10-001 Lot 16 to the original owner as per our ordinance by:

Martha Johnston-Nash

2nd by: Jim Justice

4-0

9. Committee Reports:

a. Broadband

John Gibbons said we got the grant! Jay said almost. John clarified it was voted on positively by the committee last week. It still has to pass the board, but the board has never overturned a committee recommendation. All indications are that nothing is going to go wrong. The board meeting is Friday. The key question right now is how much the application changed between the time we submitted and the time it was approved. There were very explicit listings of Union addresses that the extended network would go to, a fairly large amount.

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He said we also know the MCA committee that made the recommendations negotiated strongly about all the applicants, partly to make sure the available funding money would cover the applications, and partly to make sure their priority of those with nothing but DSL or less right now would be the ones getting the most benefit. We do not yet know the impact in Union as a result of those decisions but expect it to be clarified in the next couple of weeks. It's primarily positive.

The next step is to transform the Broadband Committee into an ombudsman committee that will work as an interface between LCI and citizens during the buildout.

He said we should assume at this point that although this grant will greatly extend fiber network to addresses in Union that don't have it now, it will not reach all of them. The next opportunity for a supplemental grant is later this year.

Martha suggested putting out word for people to serve on the ombudsman committee and encouraged anyone interested to go online and fill out the form. John will provide a description of what they'll be doing.

Adam said the application was for 400 addresses in Union (the majority of which have DSL at best) to have fiber access. This is approximately a quarter of the addresses in town. He said fiber is not a luxury but a necessity, and this is a huge infrastructure investment for the town. Another win was they got it done without taxpayer money. This is huge for Union.

Jay reminded the federal reporting is incredible, due April 30, and they didn't open it up until April 1.

The board thanked John.

- b. Green Space – None.
- c. Sestercentennial

Martha said other than the presentation to the Budget Committee on funds requested in preparation for the celebration, they have not had a regular meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for April 27. Jay reminded agendas cannot be put out at the last second.

- d. Ambulance Advisory

Jay said they'll have their presentation at the end of May, here at the William L. Pullen Municipal Meeting Room (downstairs at the town office). It will be livestreamed.

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10. Select Board Reports:

Jim mentioned raising funds for the sign out front.

Adam said Catherine Meyer reached out about closed captioning, which raised two questions. Have we looked into our closed captioning options? How does the board feel about closed captioning and cost? Jay said we got a price through Town Hall Streams, which was quite expensive. He added it does not work as well as zoom does. It's AI generated. He's heard THS is not that great if you don't have the integrated microphones, which we priced out years ago, at tens of thousands of dollars.

Bill asked if that came out of the cable franchise money. He also thought about Survey Monkey, which could come out of that as it's public information. Jay said he uses that money to mail out the town reports; next year we just have to adjust the postage costs.

Jay talked to Dan Dunkle about candidates' night. He will get dates back. There are three contested races.

Adam brought up money reserved for resurfacing tennis courts. Realistically Jay doesn't think we'll get it done this summer. The assumption is it's at least a year out though we might get lucky, and the contractor will have a cancellation and get it done this summer. Jay reached out and told him the board put it in the budget.

11. Public Comment:

Dr. Matthew Speno of 548 Common Road spoke on quality of life issues, specifically potential changes to the sign outside the town office. He said the sign at present is 33' to the edge of his property and 70' to his front door. An electronically lit sign will adversely affect his quality of life, but he will support it if that's what the majority wants. He would like to be on the next agenda with an approximately 30-minute presentation on a comprehensive plan for the sign, utilizing his 25 years in special education including perhaps a partnership with the school's special ed department in a civic engagement framework, a potential 501c3 for scholarships, and a legacy.

He also questioned the need for a sign with all the 21st century communications options and brought up the importance of research on lighting re: epileptic seizures, etc.

Adam thanked him for sharing his thoughts. It was agreed putting this on the next agenda is the right move, so the public can comment. Concerns will include hours of operation, light at night, etc.

Matt said he saw the letter about the sign as something that came from two citizens who happen to be on the select board and referenced the July 2014 code of ethics. Jay said he would be the first to call out somebody for doing something rogue and clarified the letter was written with select board approval.

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Bill noted there are no plans for the letters to move or for the sign to be lit at night. It will be LED. Jim noted Union's "age problem": many people can't see the current sign, and it has to be updated all the time. Greg Grotton noted the difficulty of getting volunteers. Linda Mountainland said she's been talking to people and only found three averse to the potential sign changes.

Adam concluded by saying Matt will be on the next agenda. He said he personally does not communicate via the sign, and in the past the main sign concern has been cost with numbers like \$30,000 tossed around; Bill's idea was to cut the cost and not be a burden on taxpayers. Matt thanked the board for their time.

12. Adjourn:

Motion by: Bill Packard

2nd by: Jim Justice

4-0

Meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Abaldo
Secretary