

MINUTES

SELECTMEN'S/ASSESSORS' MEETING

Tuesday December 15, 2020

ONLINE INTERACTIVE

6:30 p.m.

Selectmen present: John Shepard (Chair), Adam Fuller, Josh White, Martha Johnston-Nash, and Bill Lombardi

Others present: Jay Feyler, Christine Simmonds, Greg Grotton, John Gibbons, Erik Amundsen, Amy Cornell, Catherine Meyer, Kris Jacobson, Tom Scribner, Gerry Brooks, Stephanie Jenkins, Jesse Thompson, Gail Hawes, Jayne Litts, David Poulin, Jim Justice, Jerome Morris, George Page, and Elliot R. Teal

1. Call Selectmen's Meeting to order: 6:30 p.m.

2. Public Comment: Greg Grotton emailed a question asking Bill Lombardi about the status of communication being offered to Union residents via the Board of Selectmen. Greg stated that he has not seen as much communication as originally indicated. Bill responded that the Board publishes on the Listserv a week after each public meeting. Bill also confirmed that there have been three publications for each week since it was agreed upon to post in the Listserv. Jay added that if anyone was signed up on the old Listserv, that a new sign up is required because of the new website; anyone wanting to sign up, must go to the link on the new website to be connected. Erik Amundsen complimented and thanked Jay and the town office staff for the new website; stating that he thinks it is terrific.

3. Approve minutes of Tuesday, December 1, 2020, and ES of December 8, 2020:

Motion by Selectman Johnston-Nash seconded by Selectman Lombardi to approve the minutes with one amendment. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: White, Shepard, Johnston-Nash, Fuller, and Lombardi. All in favor.

Motion by Selectman Johnston-Nash seconded by Selectman White to approve the Executive Session minutes. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: White, Shepard, Johnston-Nash, Fuller, and Lombardi. All in favor.

4. Approve Treasurer's Warrant dated Tuesday, December 15, 2020:

Motion by Selectman Lombardi seconded by Selectman Fuller to approve the warrant. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: Shepard, White, Fuller, Lombardi, and Johnston-Nash. All in favor.

5. Ambulance Update and Possible Grant Opportunities (Jesse):

Jesse announced that the Union Fire-Rescue along with Rockland Fire & EMS will begin the process of vaccinating the EMS responders for Knox County.

Jesse presented a potential opportunity to add a second ambulance to the fleet of rescue vehicles. He indicated that through the AFG (Assistance to Firefighters Grants Program) that it would be beneficial for the town to take advantage of this offer. The price tag of a new rescue is around \$300,000.00. If the grant was awarded, Union would be responsible for 5%, which would be approximately \$15,000.00.

Discussion: Adam stated that the idea behind the per diem was to obtain and retain staff. He is concerned about staffing two rescues. Jesse stated that he is still working that out. Nonetheless, his true objective is to secure a backup rig. Jesse indicated that waiting for a back-up rig from another town can take up to twenty minutes or more.

Josh reminded everyone about the charges for municipal aid. He asked how the vehicles would be used. Jesse stated that the rigs would be on a monthly rotation, having the other as a backup.

Bill said that it makes sense to have a second rescue vehicle. He asked about costs above and beyond the \$15,000.00 to supply a new rig. Jesse stated that the only piece of equipment needed would be a stretcher. He suggests a power stretcher which is approximately \$25,000.00. He also indicated that he could apply for a second AFG equipment grant. A manual stretcher is also a possibility, but not ideal, as lifting an occupied manual stretcher can be back-breaking experience.

Adam asked where a second rig would be stored. Jesse stated that would need to be worked out and discussed with the fire chief if the new rig was to be stored at the firehouse.

Martha recalled having a reserve fund set aside for this type of situation. Jesse confirmed that \$25,000.00 a year is added to the vehicle and equipment fund.

Bill asked about the timeline for the grant. Jesse indicated that he has thirty days to submit the grant application. He will not know about the outcome of the award until mid-year 2021.

Motion by Selectman Lombardi seconded by Johnston-Nash to grant permission to Jesse to apply for the Assistance to Firefighters Grant. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: White, Fuller, Johnston-Nash, Lombardi, and Shepard. All approved.

6. Thompson Community Center Discussion:

Adam feels that the private citizen group Friends of TCC should become an official town committee. He understands that they are not doing anything underhanded; with the best interest of the town at heart, he feels there needs to be more transparency.

Discussion: Martha clarified that the group is called The Future of the TCC Committee not Friends of TCC. She stated that this group was originally formed after the rejection of the Penquis deal to continue the conversation about the outcome of the TCC. She feels that if an official committee is formed, there needs to be clear, concise goals, along with structure and purpose. Jay asked for clarification, asking if it the original group still meets, or if there is another group that has branched off from the initial group. Martha stated it has been the same group since the beginning. An email from Greg Grotton was brought to Martha's attention. As part of the original TCC group, Greg wanted to know why he has not been informed since spring on the current happenings. He feels that there has been a lack of transparency. Furthermore, he has heard that there has been activity such as outside talk regarding confidential plans for the building and a tour with a developer. He also asked why the group is opposed to senior housing. Martha responded to Greg's email stating that he was part of the TCC discussion meetings that were held, not the TCC group. Furthermore, she disagrees with his accusations and that there is no agenda, stating it is not a bad thing to gather information.

Erik Amundsen clarified that there is only one group, and that there have not been any additions from the eight or nine original participants. The group voted to split to negotiate with the TCC Directors. He welcomes anyone to the meetings as they are not closed meetings. Decisions are not being made, they are only collecting data and welcoming ideas on viable uses for the building. He stated that they are merely listening to suggestions. He feels the suggestion of forming a TCC town committee is a valid one.

The only issue he foresees are members getting placed on committee's who have their own agenda. He reminded that the current group does not have a secret agenda. He also added that the group has been stagnant for 9 months because of Covid-19. As Bill Lombardi sees it, the Future of the TCC committee is about looking for possibilities. He does understand the concerns about having a clear objective; it is the right thing to do. Because of the circumstances, he feels there needs to be a creative mind set. If the building is not taken care of, it can become a liability. He stated that having a committee is a good thing, but at the same time, there needs to be defined guidelines as to how a committee is going to work. Josh White suggested applying for grants. He feels that an official committee is a good idea especially since a municipality has more strength to get tasks accomplished.

Motion by Selectman Fuller seconded by Selectman Shepard to table the topic until something more definitive can be decided. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: Fuller, Shepard, White, Johnston-Nash, and Lombardi. All approved.

7. Request from citizens to clean Depot Street Sidewalks:

Adam stated that the completed sidewalk work on Common Road is appreciated and thanked the volunteers. Despite the current request, he feels that further work on the Depot Street sidewalk area will require much needed equipment and potentially involve Public Works. He stated that private shrubbery on resident properties would need to be moved. Concrete tiles are either gone or broken and would need to be removed all together. The town would need to spend capital to clear and/or repair the path. He feels it is not worth the effort and feels it is not a smart investment.

Discussion: Martha agrees with Adam that it is not worth the effort. Her main concern is potentially being required to become ADA compliant if the town starts the project. Bill stated that he was in favor of the sidewalk project and feels that Union should pursue sidewalks more thoughtfully in the future. He agrees with the points Adam and Martha made. Gail Hawes who was present at the meeting had sent an email prior to the meeting listing her concerns. At this point, for several valid reasons, she feels that the sidewalks should no longer be a public focal point. Elliot Teel who is legally representing Catherine and Prichard Meyer was present. Mr. Teel stated that the existing sidewalks are still a right of way and passable. Under Maine law, maintenance is limited to what is required to make it passable. If people can walk up and down that area, it suits the legal need. Furthermore, his clients are not interested in anyone going on their property to work on the walkway.

Motion by Selectman Fuller seconded by Johnston-Nash to turn down the offer to have the citizens group clean up that section of the sidewalk. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: Fuller, Johnston-Nash, Lombardi, Shepard, and White. All approved.

8. Solar Moratorium update:

Jerry Brooks (Planning Board Chair) was present to speak on behalf of the Planning Board. He stated that the Union Planning Board met on December 10th and voted unanimously to rescind the Board of Selectmen's prior vote on October 6th to put a moratorium on all ground mounted solar energy systems with secret ballot vote as soon as possible. He stated because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is unrealistic to hold a public gathering at this time. This project will be pursued in the future.

Motion by Selectman Fuller seconded by Selectman White to rescind the moratorium vote from October 6, 2020. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: Fuller, White, Lombardi, Johnston-Nash, and Shepard. All in favor.

9. COVID-19 updates:

Jay stated that the Town has been doing a good job following the State's mask mandate. He reminded everyone that masks are mandatory in all business establishments, and there is no medical excuse for not wearing one. Not wearing a mask can potentially hurt the business owner who is following CDC guidelines. He is asking everyone to remain diligent. He also remains hopeful for more grant funding from the state.

10. Other Business: None

11. Town Manager's Report:

Jay provided an update on the General Assistance program. He stated that recently fifty households have been helped. There has been \$1800.00 in donations within the last few weeks. Forty Christmas dinners will be donated, and eight families have received gifts for Christmas.

General Assistance requests are increasing, and Jay expects to see more once unemployment runs out. If residents are considering donating, please make checks payable to Union Assistance Fund. Donations will be put to good use. Residents have also generously donated money to buy lunch for Union Fire/Rescue and Public Works.

12. Selectmen's Report: None

a. Broadband Committee:

John Gibbons reported that the committee is in the data collection mode and they expect to be for the next few months. Immediate priorities include figuring out where broadband and internet access is currently available and where speeds are slower. They also need to figure out if the current providers, i.e., Tidewater, Redzone, & Spectrum are willing to move into certain areas because it may not be financially viable. They will also be conducting a survey from residents to determine what their current access speeds are and how satisfied they are with their service. This will need to be a Town backed effort to greatly increase the availability of a high-speed network. Grant support will be needed for the buildout as well as a strong demand and support from the citizens. They plan to have the survey ready for the next meeting and hope to have it finalized by the end of December. Further steps include translating costs, and what the options are for funding the cost. They also need to address the issue of how to partner with internet providers at that stage.

b. Aging in Place Committee:

Bill stated that the resource guide is available. Copies are available in the front lobby of the town office. The mailing list is being updated. Residents can get on the mailing list to

have a copy directly mailed. They will be conducting January check-in calls to 75-year-old plus residents, as well as check-in calls after a bad storm. They are organizing a St. Patrick's Day luncheon on March 18, 2021, take-out only.

c. Food Ordinance Committee:

Next meeting: December 16th via Zoom

13. Future Agenda Items: None

14. Adjourn:

Motion by Selectman Johnston-Nash seconded by Selectman White to adjourn. Vote by roll call. Selectmen in favor: White, Shepard, Fuller, Lombardi, and Johnston-Nash. All approved.

Meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandy Patrick
Secretary