

MINUTES

**SELECT BOARD/ASSESSORS' MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2024
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 Linda Mountainland

Others present: Jay Feyler (Town Manager), John Mountainland, Erik Amundsen, Greg Grotton, John Gibbons, Argy Nestor, 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, February 6, 2024:**

Motion by: Linda Mountainland
2nd by: Jim Justice

Martha said on #10 she voted no on hiring Landmark Engineering.

Amended motion that on #10, Martha did not vote in favor so it was 4-1 by: Linda Mountainland
2nd by: Jim Justice
4-0

- 4. Approve Treasurer's Warrants dated Tuesday, February 20, 2024:**

Motion by: Martha Johnston-Nash
2nd by: Linda Mountainland
4-0

- 5. Approve 2024 Town Meeting and Election Dates:**

Jay said the deadline for warrant articles is April 1 as always. Adam clarified we are talking about the town meeting and election (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.) being Tuesday, June 11, 2024. Open are two select board seats, an RSU board of directors seat, four budget committee seats (one partial term), and a Pullen Committee seat.

Motion to approve as presented by: Jim Justice
2nd by: Linda Mountainland
4-0

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6. Other Business:

Linda said, re: correspondence with Candy Benner, that Prior Park has been cleaned up and you can walk to the monument. Adam confirmed this and said he will resend an email to Candy. Linda said she will get pictures this summer.

7. Public Comment:

Erik Amundsen spoke, saying he is trying to keep the select board abreast of SAD 40. Extensive discussion ensued, with Erik explaining their process with big firms such as EMC, Siemens, and EEI. Adam, referencing the \$81 million bond package, wanted to know that the school board was meaningfully ensuring that the district not end up in this maintenance hole ever again, while simultaneously digging out of the hole. Erik said that it was, adding they are trying to deliver a 21st century education from (what might as well be) the 20th century.

Erik further said the school board has an awareness of the population they're dealing with and how much they can afford. He said we have seven buildings, 400 employees, 1,800 students, and 26 buses on a 10-year schedule. Adam said the reason we've been behind the eight ball with the district's assets – no one's personal issue – is it was underbudgeted historically, and this needs to be a big part of the conversation. Erik said they start budget meetings in March. Linda said March 4.

Re: heat pumps in the schools, Adam clarified they are not talking about mini-split, and the reality is commercial heat pumps are an outdoor inverted condenser with ceiling heads run throughout the whole building – a very different animal than home/office.

Greg Grotton asked if it's a state requirement to buy new school buses, noting Luce runs used school buses all the time all over the state. Erik said he could not answer and they schedule 10 years for buses; they have a maintenance shop but can't deal with all of it. Adam said busing is changing, and the state needs to take a hard look at that – less need for long buses, less kids ride the bus.

Greg asked when the RFQs went out (TCC). Adam said end of January.

8. Town Manager's Report:

Jay reminded people to attend school board meetings.

He said the RFQs went out (TCC). He said a couple of firms are probably interested, and we are providing info to them to do their phase ones. There is a meeting Thursday at 6:30 p.m. He said neither may do anything, or they both may; they have to do their due diligence and see if they can make money. We'll know more soon.

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He said the planning board meets February 29 on LD 2003, on ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units). They will be meeting with an attorney on mining and with MCOG on the accessory development so we can have those ordinance changes ready for the town meeting in June. He urged interested parties to attend the meetings.

Jay also talked about LD 1732. He said he has been on the LPC (Legislative Policy Committee) for many years, and they spent about six months putting together this general assistance bill (LD 1732) working with advocates at Pine Tree Legal and Maine Equal Justice. The recommendation was unanimous. They went through two sessions in Augusta with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) committee and testified multiple times. On the very last day, when they were supposed to vote, they bowed to somebody's pressure and pretty much changed LD 1732 to something useless and actually costly to municipalities.

He said in his approximately 10 years on the LPC, he does not recall a Legislative Policy Committee ever revoking support of their own bill, an MMA-sponsored bill. He said they voted last week to recommend it gets axed. It probably won't. They put in some things that are just foolish and sold out to the advocates; for example, "each municipality complies with its duties to provide trauma informed services and culturally and linguistically appropriate services and require the department to provide mandatory training to municipalities" as if every municipality has 400 employees. He summarized it all got put in that bill behind closed doors by the DHHS committee. Discussion ensued. He encouraged people to call their legislature and complain about the egregiously exploding general assistance budget.

Jay then listed a few things for the board to keep in mind, as they are working on budgets. He said we have an increase in the school, most likely over 10%. The county also is a double digit increase. We are getting pressured with the tennis and basketball courts which is \$400,000, \$200,000 of which we'll get back eventually. Depending on what happens with the yellow building (TCC), we are talking about millions to do the brick building; we can raise some funds and get grants, but it will be millions.

He continued that bids are due this week for the front of the fire station, probably \$250,000. For our own infrastructure, we've got the parking lot in front of the Common Market and the parking lot across the street (in front of the pizza shop and post office). He said we can't do them all at once, we can't afford them all. Both the board and the townspeople are going to have to make decisions on what they want to do.

He added we want to keep employees and wages are still going crazy. Re: ambulance service, he said surrounding towns recruiting paramedics at \$35, \$40 an hour – stealing them from other towns instead of training them – forces everybody else to start raising their wages. He said there are tough decisions to make.

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Budget Committee meetings will be April 8, 9, and possibly 10. The meetings will be streamed but can be hard to hear with all the people, paper shuffling, etc. Adam and Jay invited everybody to attend and watch.

9. Committee Reports:

a. Broadband

John Gibbons said the issues have been worked out between LCI and MCA on the MCA grant contract. We are just waiting for it to be signed; it's an availability problem for the key guy at MCA but will happen in the next day or so. That contract commits the grant funds to LCI for the fiber expansion of the three towns and specifies the process through which they'll be released. LCI has agreed once that is signed, we will schedule a meeting to go over the details on what comes next, the status, a detailed plan for where the network is going to go, and an approximate schedule for stringing fiber. Bottom line: not the end is in sight, but the beginning is in sight. The board thanked John.

b. Green Space – None.

c. Sestercentennial

Argy Nestor said there is a storytelling session at the Vose Library on February 28 at 7:00 p.m. The committee is at its capacity and needs help with marketing and a volunteer coordinator. Anyone interested should reach out to her or committee members.

Re: select board role, Argy invited board members to let the committee know any ideas about what they'd like to do. She will email further info. She said it would be great if all board members could volunteer during the three days, bring two friends to help, and let the committee know who they are. She said they would definitely like all the select board members at the opening and closing ceremonies, in particular at the rededication of the Civil War monument.

Adam mentioned the budget meetings coming up in April if the committee needs more funds. Argy said committee members got an email about this to review.

d. Ambulance Advisory

Jay said he understands that Washington will do their budget in June like the rest of the towns (fantastic), so we will do that during our regular budget process.

e. Thompson Working Group

Jay said they have a meeting on Thursday, Executive Session.

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10. Select Board Report:

Linda thanked the town office ladies who are always helpful and have a smile. She also noted that, in the past month, the ambulance has helped three homes that she personally knows. She heard how professional, helpful, and nice our crew is so she wanted to let them know and thank them for all they do.

Martha mentioned Knox County's seat for this district is going to be open and encouraged anyone to consider running for the position. She noted we need a strong advocate for the smaller towns at the county level.

Adam brought up local news of other more coastal towns looking into having their own ambulances. He said some of the costs put forward on the cost of an in-town ambulance service would be a 50 to 70% discount on what it costs us to operate a service. He recommended everyone take those numbers with a grain of salt, and welcomed people to come to our budget meetings, see where our money goes, and our costs with the ambulance. He strongly encouraged reaching out to our Ambulance Advisory Committee. He added we get a very good return on our dollar, and the idea that we could do it for half the cost is nonsense.

Adam also said he was listening to Maine Calling re: LD 2003 (ADUs) the other day. State reps talked about how great it was going to be in the state, but no voices chimed in north of Portland. He said it was so painfully obvious they are not looking at the impact it's going to have on towns like ours, the pressure it's going to put on planning boards to navigate, extra legal fees the first time this turns into a snafu; it's pretty clear there's a disconnect between the average municipality and the state at this level, which ties in with what Martha said – there are vacancies at the county level, and we need people in there that understand how our processes work how our towns run day to day.

Jay noted some municipalities were required to do it (LD 2003) by July 1 and voted it down. He talked with the Cape Elizabeth town manager who has a big campaign to vote it down. He said what the state will do at that point he has no idea – probably strong arm, cut your revenue sharing, etc. He summarized not a good bill.

John Mountainland said it circumvents the planning board completely. Jay said it also conflicts with the Comprehensive Plan, especially with rural towns.

Martha said she heard from a couple of friends who've bought properties in Union, noting we are still getting that turnover of properties and influx. Adam said our numbers are still up. Jay said we will see a lot on the lake properties and some on the open spaces, and people are going to come in and make a quick buck.

Adam talked about towns with wastewater and central water systems vs. septic and wells designed to a capacity, and potential added strains on the latter systems. He said in Union we are very lucky to have a CEO and full-time staff; many towns do not. He said the idea

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that you can just put all that extra work on the town without any any funding for it, without any backup from the state, without any new guidance and the towns are just supposed to figure it out is just irresponsible at best and far worse in reality.

Adam said towns struggle to get a CEO. Martha said Washington just lost theirs. Jay said we'll need to hire one this late fall.

11. Adjourn:

Motion by: Linda Mountainland

2nd by: Martha Johnston-Nash

4-0

Meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Abaldo
Secretary