



## **Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes December 20, 2023**

Marybeth opened the meeting at 5:00 p.m. Marybeth made a motion to enter into nonpublic session at 5:00 p.m. under RSA 91-A:3 II (a) and RSA 91-A:3 II (b). Bob seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

**Present:** Marybeth Quill, Chair, Karl Pruter, Vice Chair, Bob Hamilton, Selectman, Lori Rautiola, Town Administrator, Laurie May, Finance Director, members of the public.

The meeting reconvened at 6:00 p.m. Marybeth led the Pledge of Allegiance. Marybeth stated the second session of the minutes would be sealed for personnel. Karl made a motion to seal the first and second session of the nonpublic session under RSA 91-A:3 II (a) & (b) personnel and hiring. Marybeth seconded the motion and it passed 3-0.

**Selectmen's Announcements:** Bob announced the Transfer Station will close at 12:00 p.m. on December 23 and 30<sup>th</sup> due to the holiday. He also noted the FPU Men's Soccer team won the national championship and congratulated them. He also noted Operation Santa was underway with twenty-seven requests and he stated he appreciated the hard work of volunteers. Karl noted he attended the school board meeting and the Board was projecting a budget that is lower than the default budget. Karl noted the FPU soccer team is assisting the Conant Varsity soccer team. Marybeth stated in regards to the social media issue, the Town has social media policies and other policies that Department Heads are expected to abide by; adding, the Board has full faith in the town's department heads to adhere to the policies at their discretion, as far as posting on social media sites. She continued stating the Board expects all employees to be professional when posting; adding, as always this is done through the oversight of the Board of Selectmen.

**Consent Agenda:** Marybeth made a motion to approve the Payroll and Accounts Payable for 12.21.23. Karl seconded the motion and it passed 3-0. The 11.29.2023 and 12.13.2023 minutes were tabled.

**Citizen's Forum:** Roni Hamilton stated she wanted to thank the Veterans and Mr. Cleveland for a beautiful and heartfelt day across America as well as Ashley Saari from the Ledger-Transcript for writing a great article. Debbie Qualey stated the Swap Shop would be closed on December 26. Lori Rautiola stated she would like to make a statement as a resident, not an employee. She addressed the social media claims that were made against the Town Administrator regarding the Police Department's page. She stated she did not tell the Police Chief to stop posting pictures and after receiving negative comments about the cat on the department's Facebook page last summer, she turned to the Town policies and made a recommendation to the Chief that the Department adhere to the Town's Social Media Policy. She explained sometimes employees have to make a decision based on what is best for the Town, even though they may not always agree with a certain policy approved by a board. She stated the employees are resilient in conducting town business and under some horrendous circumstances. She added many employees have been attacked at some point by someone or a group of people over the years and claimed the most recent social media defaming her character was "just another attack on a town employee."



Tom Coneys advised residents to look for a special meeting from the School district regarding funding and budget.

Andy DiPerri stated he wanted to voice his opinion regarding what has transpired on social media and the pettiness of the situation, adding it was a waste of everyone's time and resources. The aggravation everyone is portraying on people is ridiculous; adding, if the Town wants to post something, post something that is concerning to we the people. He continued stating there are houses on Main Street being burglarized, horrific accidents, and loiterers in parking lots. He encouraged the Town to get their priorities straight.

### **Old Business:**

ARPA Updates: It was noted the septic for the Meetinghouse will be done in the spring.

Bob gave an update on the Community Power Committee sub-committee: the Committee will continue to meet and research ways for residents to save money on electricity. Karl noted it was good to see further research being done and people interested in serving. Andy DiPerri noted Eversource will conduct an evaluation of what you have for light, heat, and power and will give money to find energy-efficient ways to save the Town money.

2024 Proposed Budget: There was a lengthy discussion on employee wages and a cost of living (COLA) increase for employees. The proposed Department Head requested amounts included wage increases for hourly employees, no COLA increase. The total DH requested budget was \$5,378,130. Elected officials and most Department heads are not on a wage scale. Roberta noted the solid waste contract should be included in the default budget. Karl mentioned he would like to look into how our default budget is prepared and stated health insurance and retirement increases should be included in that figure. The discussion moved to Police radar units. A quote was submitted for \$16,075 prior to the budget season. Karl asked if it funds could be encumbered.

The discussion reverted back to employee wages. Karl mentioned the scale that was brought before the Board to allow for the Town to compensate employees fairly and competitively has a 2.5% step increase and includes promotions, but feels due to the increases in the overall tax increase it appears they may need to decrease the wages to more in line with a 2% increase plus a COLA of 3.2%. The proposed budget showed about a \$400,000+ increase over last year; of that \$49,000 was operating, \$95,000 increase in insurance, \$75,000 for the ninth officer, and salary increases that included two Police Department promotions of about \$242,000. No COLA was set but the Board seemed to be in agreement with 3%. Roberta mentioned breaking down the increases and presenting them in a manner that shows the increases are not just for employee wages. Fire call member wage increases were discussed and Rick mentioned it may be possible to reduce that line by \$10,000. Karl explained the need for increases in call members that was due to the loss of several call members leaving to work for the County at a much higher wage. Dan Whitney suggested the Board come up with a starting budget figure and reduce it from there. Marybeth stated she does not trust the numbers for wages.



Tina Sbrega, Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) member stated her observations through the budget process was that the Department Heads are extremely frugal and there are very few areas where cuts can be made. She added the BAC worked diligently to find savings or cuts but there is not much that can be cut as there is no waste. Roberta Oeser, BAC member stated there is a need to retain employees and in order to keep them they need to be compensated well and continue to have benefits. Roberta added the Town has cut the budget year after year to make up for the school budget and cannot maintain these cuts anymore, adding, the Town needs to budget for the “needs” of the Town. Roberta also pointed out inflation was up 12% from two years ago. Karl mentioned the schools are the largest proportion and the Town tax rate is now lower than the County’s. Bob stated he would like to have a total figure before the night was over. He also noted there was still a substantial amount of unpaid taxes to be collected. There was a discussion regarding using the Department Head requested budget or a flat 2% increase for hourly employees wages plus a 3% COLA for all employees (not elected officials). It was decided to start with the Department head requested budget of \$5,378,130 and add a 3% COLA increase for a total figure of \$5,480,525. All were in agreement to work with this number but efforts will be made to reduce the final number.

**New Business:**

Proposed Warrant Articles: There were was a brief discussion on warrant articles. Articles that will appear on the ballot thus far are the last payment for the fire truck lease, articles for revaluation and the remaining capital reserve articles. Roberta noted to check which articles the selectmen are not listed as agents to expend and add that to the article if needed. There was a brief discussion on the Roadway Committee and process for approval of roads. It was noted the Committee should consist of the Fire Chief, Police Chief, Highway Director, Town Administrator, Planning Director and a community member.

The meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Lori Rautiola