

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
NOVEMBER 12, 2019

PRESENT: David Lage, Chairman, John Veaser, Bert Hamill
Scott Butcher – Town Administrator
Finance Advisory Committee (FAC) members Marc Fortier, Jack Low, Nicole Saczawa
Fire Chief Meredith Lund, Souhegan Valley Ambulance Service COO Darel Oja
Building Inspector Rick Donovan, Land Use Clerk Lori Rautiola
ZBA Chairwoman Wendy Juchnevics-Freeman

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. at the Town Office.

Announcements: Chairman Lage stated that Eversource informed us that there would be a power outage for maintenance on November 29th effecting 233 customers in the Highbridge Road area. He also said the property tax rate for 2019 had been set at \$21.73/\$1,000 valuation from \$28/\$1000 valuation. Also that Comcast had made changes to their Internet Essentials program for low-income households offering substantial discounts on high-speed Internet service and the ability to purchase a laptop computer for as little as \$150.

Old Town Hall: This discussion was postponed until the December 10th Selectmen's meeting.

Follow-up Budget Discussion: Selectman Veaser said DPW Director Goewey was supposed to get back to the Selectmen on some line item costs and Chief Lund responded back on the cost of vehicle inspections. Chairman Lage said DPW was supposed to get bids on the cleaning of uniforms and deleting one of the phones at the DPW garage. FAC member Jack Low asked if the list of town owned land had been prepared. Selectman Hamill said it had been and he will e-mail it to Jack. Selectman Veaser reviewed the cost of inspecting each Fire Dept. vehicle and that the \$5,000 requested by Chief Lund looked fine. Chairman Lage and Selectman Veaser discussed her request and the amount spent last year for those services. Selectman Veaser also stated that Chief Lund had looked at her current year budget to determine if some communications equipment could be purchased with 2019 funds, but it didn't look like there was enough surplus in the Fire Dept. budget to do that. The Selectmen also discussed the request to purchase two AED units and agreed to allow the purchase of one this year and the other next year.

The Town Administrator stated that the Conservation Commission had been rescheduled to November 26th for their budget review.

Building Dept. Budget Review: Building Inspector Donovan stated that when he was hired that the stipend he received was based upon a rate of \$25/hour. He is asking for an increase in the stipend based on his current 11 hours per week, or 572 hours per year, at \$25/hour that works out to be \$14,300. In Rindge he's getting over \$35/hour and he would like to get \$30/hour in New

Ipswich. That would work out to be over \$17,000, but he is requesting \$16,000, which works out to be over \$27/hour. The hours are based on actual time he spends in the New Ipswich office and on inspections, but does not include the time on the telephone or code enforcement activities. There has never been a stipend for zoning or code enforcement which can be time consuming. Inspector Donovan and Land Clerk Rautiola spend a lot of time doing the research and following up on the code enforcement issues. He compared the number of hours he spends compared to Building and Code Enforcement Inspectors in surrounding towns that have less activity than New Ipswich and they are either full-time or working 28 hours/week versus his 11 hours. He stated that if it wasn't for the work that Land Use Clerk Rautiola performs in the office, he wouldn't be able to do his job in 11 hours/week. He recommended that her hours also be increased based on the level of activity in the town and the time consuming nature of code enforcement.

Inspector Donovan said they have been researching permitting software to help make the permitting process more efficient and do a better job of tracking activities by property. Other town departments would also benefit from the software and access to the data. Chairman Lage wanted to know more about the Avitar software being proposed and didn't see the value of having it "talk" to the existing Avitar software the town uses in the Assessing Dept. Land Clerk Rautiola explained some of the benefits and how the software would work and prevent things from falling through the cracks. FAC members Jack Low and Jeff McCabe wanted to understand the functionality and what other add on costs and ongoing support costs would be. The Town Administrator explained some of the functionality and integration with existing software. Also discussed was some of the support that is available at no additional cost. Inspector Donovan stated that while the software will save time, there is still a lot of research and data entry that will take place. FAC member Jack Low said he was concerned about the ongoing cost of the software and that typically support costs run 18-20% of the cost of the license and this is higher than that at over \$1,400 per year. Land Clerk Rautiola explained that one of the competitive products being evaluated from iWork costs about \$7,000 year. The Town Administrator talked about other features and capability of the software. The Selectmen discussed how the software would work procedurally, what data would be gathered, and how it could be shared. Inspector Donovan and Land Clerk Rautiola explained how it would work in this environment. It will keep track of permit expiration/renewal dates and allow inspection notes to be captured. Land Clerk Rautiola explained that when she started in her position 4 years ago, everything was paper-based. They have since migrated to using spreadsheets, and this software and the next step in making the process more efficient and accurately capture data related to each property.

The discussion turned to the volume of permits issued and inspections performed in the past year. Inspector Donovan stated that 263 permits have been issued so far this year and that is about the same as the previous year and he doesn't see activity slowing down. Revenues so far in 2019 are around \$34,000. FAC member Jeff McCabe asked if the software was going to save time. Inspector Donovan said yes. Chairman Lage wanted to know if the records currently kept in spreadsheets could be imported into the new system.

Chairman Lage questioned why the communication budget request was higher than last year. Inspector Donovan said that Land Clerk Rautiola will be talking with the U.S. Cellular representative to try and lower costs. Selectman Veaser wanted to clarify that Inspector Donovan carried a separate phone for the Town of Rindge and one for New Ipswich. He also referenced the current invoices for cellular phone service as the reason for the increase in the request for next year.

The next topic discussed was the Dues and Subscriptions line item and the Education and Training line item. Inspector Donovan stated that some of those costs are split with Rindge. There was discussion on which training activities and publications are purchased with the money. Inspector Donovan explained more about the types of activities and inspections he is now required to do. Chairman Lage asked who was now doing the Fire Inspections. He said more money had been added to the Salaries line item in 2017 to have the Building Inspector perform some of those inspections. Inspector Donovan explained he is doing inspections related to new construction and that the Fire Dept. should be doing places of assembly and annual life safety inspections and that will be likely be done by Gary Somero. Chairman Lage wanted to know who specifically will be doing the inspections. He had concerns about Gary doing the inspections at the schools since until recently he worked for the schools. Chairman Lage stated that he thought the Health Officer was also performing some of the inspections. Inspector Donovan stated that she is doing a different type of inspection.

FAC member Jeff McCabe questioned whether there was an uptick in inspection activity to justify the requested increase in stipend. Selectman Veaser pointed out that it was a 45% increase being requested. Inspector Donovan said that it wasn't so much the inspection activity that has been increasing, it is the zoning and code enforcement activity. It also represent a fair wage based on the hours required to perform all of his activities. Selectman Hamill said code enforcement has been an issue. He gave some examples of activities like site and subdivision inspections and questioned who was doing inspections including driveways. There are aspects of site construction that no one is checking on. Chairman Lage said Peter Goewey is in charge of issuing driveway permits. Selectman Hamill said they aren't being inspected. Chairman Lage we don't have driveway criteria to inspect and that decisions of the ZBA or Planning Board are enforceable by the Building Inspector. Inspector Donovan stated that some of those conditions. Such as erosion control, are listed on the site plan. Selectman Hamill suggested that those duties be added to the Building Inspector's responsibilities. Chairman Lage said that the review and enforcement of some of those items are typically done by the Conservation Commission and if Selectman Hamill wants to propose creating a position to do that, he should. Selectman Hamill stated that instead of creating another position, he would prefer adding those responsibilities to the Building Inspector's duties. Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) Chairwoman Juchnevics-Freeman stated that it was ultimately the Board of Selectmen that had the enforcement responsibilities for these issues. Inspector Donovan suggested that having the site plans referred over to the Building Dept. for review would be a good place to start. FAC member Jack Low raised the concern that conditions required by the Planning Board, for example, aren't being

enforced. He wanted to know who was doing the compliance check. Chairman Lage said that the Town Engineer would handle subdivision inspections. Selectman Hamill said that doesn't happen in the smaller subdivisions. He believes the authority should be moved to the Building Inspector. Chairman Lage suggested to create a full-time position. Selectman Hamill made a motion to do so, but it was not seconded. Selectman Hamill asked that the vote be called on his motion to create the full-time position. He voted "aye", Selectmen Lage and Veaser voted "nay".

There was more discussion among the parties on justifying the request to increase the Building Inspector's stipend from \$11,000 to \$16,000. Selectman Veaser was concerned about increasing the hours and the rate was going to be difficult. Chairman Lage asked if 52 hours would cover the code enforcement aspect of the position. Inspector Donovan gave a few examples of recent code enforcement issues that take a lot of time. Chairman Lage suggested allocating 104 hours per year to zoning code enforcement and asked if that was agreeable. That would bring the stipend to \$15,600. Selectmen Hamill and Veaser agreed.

Zoning Board of Adjustment Budget Review: Selectman Veaser made a motion to accept the ZBA budget as presented. It was seconded by Selectman Hamill. The vote was unanimous.

Spaulding Fund Discussion: Bentti Hoiska came to discuss the terms of the Spaulding Trust and how the money could be spent. Unrelated to that, he said that Carol Romeril wanted to remind everyone that there is still \$6,600 trapped in the 250th anniversary fund that we need a warrant article to resolve. Regarding the Spaulding Fund, he looked at several old Town Reports to research the history of the fund. In 1895 the town was bequeathed \$10,000 to establish the fund and the annual interest was to be spent on the schools. That was done up to the point the Mascenic Cooperative School District was formed. Selectman Hamill stated that there is now over \$80,000 in the fund. Several theories were given as to why the tradition of spending the interest earned annually had stopped around 1959. Mr. Hoiska said that to repurpose the trust would require going to Superior Court and that the interests of the State of NH would be represented by the Director of Charitable Trusts. If repurposing the money was accomplished, the money could go into the Town's General Fund and be used to pay down the tax rate using the annual interest earned. Chairman Lage made a motion to have the Board of Selectmen accept the interest from the Spaulding Fund annually, starting for 2018, and be utilized to offset the school portion of the tax rate. The motion was seconded by Selectman Hamill. The vote was unanimous.

Souhegan Valley Ambulance Service – Fire Dept. Discussion: The Selectmen met with Darel Oja, COO for the Souhegan Valley Ambulance Service (SVAS), and he provided the previously requested statistics on ambulance calls that he had balked at providing earlier. He offered to answer any questions about specific calls, if necessary, and explained some of the details about the data presented. Chairman Lage and Selectman Hamill asked for clarification on what the data showed. Selectman Veaser shared some statistics on what typical average response times were for ambulance services.

Chief Lund joined the meeting and stated she wanted the opportunity to address the accusations Darel had made against her the previous week. Selectman Hamill asked the Chairman if it was appropriate to unseal the nonpublic minutes from the previous meeting. Chairman Lage asked the Town Administrator to get a copy of the minutes for him to review before taking any action. Darel objected to the meeting minutes being unsealed. Chief Lund stated that it was not his decision to make. Chairman Lage reviewed the minutes and said he had no problem unsealing them. Selectman Hamill made a motion to unseal the minutes. Selectman Veaser seconded. The vote was unanimous.

Chief Lund stated that she wanted to respond to claims made against the Fire Dept. and herself. She asked the Selectman to reveal what the minutes stated. Chairman Lage disclosed the specific issues raised during the previous week's nonpublic session.

Chief Lund said the first issue she wanted to address was the complaint to the state about SVAS operating with two unlicensed EMTs. She said complaints to the State of NH are anonymous and that it would be a detriment to the people that filed it to reveal their identity. She understands that Darel is accusing her of filing the complaint and that there was a period of 6 weeks where SVAS was operating with two unlicensed EMTs, but that it had been resolved now. Darel accused Chief Lund of spreading rumors. She asked him to let her speak because he was able to speak the previous week without interruption. She stated that someone at SVAS should've been checking on the status of the licenses and didn't, allowing unlicensed EMTs to continue working. She hoped that there was now a procedure in place to track the license expiration dates of SVAS personnel.

Chairman Lage stated that any complaint to the State of NH should've gone through the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator. If the complaint was filed by a member of the Fire Dept. representing the Town of New Ipswich, it should have gone through the Selectmen's Office first. Darel asked Chief Lund if she had any contact with the State on the complaint and she replied that she is not going to reveal who made the anonymous complaint. Chief Lund didn't bring it to the Selectmen's attention because this licensing issue had been resolved.

Chief Lund said the motor vehicle accident that Darel complained about was a particularly difficult one requiring an extrication of the driver. It took longer to extricate than originally anticipated. The patient required additional care that SVAS couldn't provide, so the Peterborough Paramedics were called in. The Greenville Fire Dept. was also called to the scene because a second set of cutting tools to perform the extrication. In the process, the SVAS ambulance was boxed in by the Greenville apparatus and was no longer able to get out. Chief Lund said it was not her, but the medical personnel that decided to have the patient transported by Peterborough to the Life Flight helicopter. Regardless, as the Fire Chief, she has the command responsibility at the scene and had conversations with the SVAS personnel while the patient was in the process of being extricated. She is also an EMT and is capable of making the determination if a patient needs advanced care. Darel complained that he didn't understand how

the SVAS ambulance got blocked in. Chairman Lage asked whether Peterborough and SVAS worked cooperatively and Chief Lund and Darel stated they did. Darel's original complaint was that Chief Lund didn't have communication with SVAS personnel at the scene. She denies that.

Chief Lund went on to discuss Darel's complaint that she visited the SVAS facility and talked to one of his people without his knowledge. Chief Lund said she stopped by to discuss a training opportunity with SVAS's training person and the car accident discussed above came up in the conversation. Chief Lund stated that this is one more complaint from SVAS that is unwarranted. Darel stated that Chief Lund tried to contact him prior to the visit to SVAS but that they never connected. Chief Lund said she is trying to get the two departments to work together, but she often finds herself needing to defend her actions. Darel complained that Fire Dept. personnel are always bashing SVAS. Chief Lund requested that the Selectmen stop the unfounded accusations being made.

Chairman Lage stated that we have a Fire Dept., a Police Dept. and an ambulance service that need to work together. We need to move forward.

Chief Lund addressed the accusation by Darel that she violated the law by interfering with a Greenville SVAS call. She stated that she was driving by the scene and asked if they needed assistance and they stated they did. She also stated that she is doing her best to support the community and work with the ambulance service. Darel is making an issue about Chief Lund's involvement in drafting the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between New Ipswich and SVAS. She stated she has had no involvement with that process for a year and a half and that Darel said Chief Lund was a major hiccup in getting the MOU finalized.

Chairman Lage said he wants to move forward and have the two departments work together for the benefit of the town. Chief Lund said she didn't think they can. Chairman Lage said we have to. Darel started talking about there being a lack of communication and that there is a lot of gossip going on. Chairman Lage said to forget that. How do we mend that? He asked Darel how he would like communications to happen. Should all communications go through him? Darel stated regular communication didn't have to go through him unless it is about a specific call. Chief Lund stated that the two of them should talk together before bringing concerns to the Selectmen. Selectman Veaser said that's why there is language in the proposed MOU to have some mutual professional courtesy to resolve issues before making complaints to outside parties. It seems that things have gotten increasingly tense while going through the MOU process. Selectman Veaser provided some scenarios where using professional courtesy and good communication could've resolved issues without creating animosity. The Town Administrator suggested that any issues should be brought to the Selectmen's Office for resolution without bringing it to a public meeting.

The Town Administrator asked Darel to reiterate his previous statement that he had assigned the unlicensed to "driver only" status and not to be providing patient care and Darel confirmed that was the case.

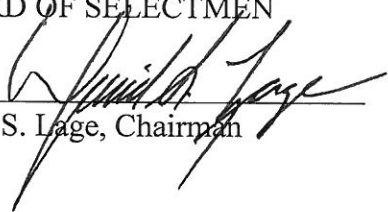
Chief Lund raised the question about the town providing plowing services to SVAS on private property and if the town had liability in doing so. Chairman Lage stated the town wouldn't have any liability.

Chief Lund asked if the Selectmen had received the information she sent regarding her budget. They said they had reviewed it.

At 9:23 p.m. Selectman Veaser made a motion adjourn the meeting. Selectman Hamill seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Scott Butcher, Town Administrator

Minutes approved by:
BOARD OF SELECTMEN



David S. Lage, Chairman

John Veaser



Bert Hamill