

December 18, 2012
Selectmen's Meeting/Approved Minutes

Present: Selectmen: R.P. McGinnity Chairman, A. Richards & A.A. Milkovits (C. Moser absent due to illness)

Also present: Treasurer Pat Letourneau & Deputy Treasurer Garth Fletcher
One resident

Meeting opened at 7:30 PM. The check manifest was reviewed and approved.

Agenda:

Appointments:

1. Carl and Mary Chandler, 605 Campbell Mill Road lot H-45, met with the Board under the BTLA order of settlement for their abatement appeal of the 2011 property taxes. Richard Rockwood, Town Assessor, was also present for the discussion. The Chandlers questioned the \$10,000 increase in their house lot value and why the current use assessment changes from year to year. The Chandlers have 53.8 acres consisting of a one acre homesite with the remaining acreage in current use. Mr. Rockwood stated that the EQ ratio is applied to current use assessments. He went on to explain how this ratio works; and how it affects the assessed value and the current use rates. Chairman McGinnity explained the affect of the EQ ratio on all property in town. The application of the EQ ratio to the current use assessments is dictated by the state and RSAs. Mr. Rockwood responded to the Chandlers' question on the increase in their one acre assessment. The land values changed due to corrections made; house lots in the past were valued incorrectly, especially in the Historic District area where smaller house lots are prevalent. Homesite values were changed to reflect equality to all the other areas in town. One buildable acre supporting a house must be assessed as a homesite, at about \$55,000 plus; a larger homesite of three to four acres is valued from \$75,000 to \$95,000. After more discussion, both parties, the town and the Chandlers agreed to settle the abatement appeal with the appeal to the BTLA as "withdrawn, no further action". Settlement forms were signed and will be sent to the BTLA.
2. Tom Maddox owner of Calphams Bedford Holdings lots A-22-3, A-22-9, and A-22-10 and his Attorney Mark Lutter met with the Board under the BTLA order of settlement for the abatement appeal of 2010 and 2011 property taxes. Richard Rockwood, Town Assessor was present for this discussion. Attorney Lutter discussed the background of the appeal by first stating that the town's assessments were too high for these lots. He stated there had been a possible sale of one of the lots in 2010 for \$57,000 but that had fallen through. At present there may be a buyer who has offered between \$34-38,000 for one lot. But he feels that the owner would be lucky to get \$25,000 for each lot. (All three lots were assessed around \$95,000 in 2010 then lowered to \$77,100 to \$77,600 in 2011. A statistical update was done in the town in 2011 which caused land values to be adjusted.) Chairman McGinnity stated that while the town recognizes that these are tough times to sell properties, it is important to be fair and equitable in the assessments across the town. Mr. Rockwood discussed the comparable sales that were used in the abatement appeal. The lots were part of an estate sale and were not qualified by the DRA for the Equalization Ratio study. Mr. Rockwood explained that the state disqualifies any bank sales, foreclosure sales, estate sales, etc. for the EQ

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- study. Attorney Lutter felt that the state had changed their position on those lots, but the recent EQ ratio study done showed that those comparable lots were still disqualified by the state. Mr. Maddox asked the town to provide comparable sales. He was reminded that the burden of proof rests on the property owner not the town. After more discussion, Attorney Lutter asked that the assessments be dropped to \$61,600. Mr. Rockwood and the Selectmen did not agree with that assessment. Chairman McGinnity proposed a settlement to drop the assessments of each lot to \$70,000 for tax years 2010, 2011 and 2012. After more negotiations the settlement was accepted by property owner Tom Maddox and voted by the Board of Selectmen to lower the assessments of lots A-22-3, A-22-9 and A-22-10 to \$70,000 each. Since Mr. Maddox has not paid any taxes for those years, any abatement refunds will be applied to the back taxes. Attorney Lutter would like to keep the option open to apply for an abatement for 2012 and to lower the assessments to \$35,000 each lot. The Selectmen were opposed to decreasing the assessments to \$35,000 but agreed that Mr. Maddox has the right to apply for an abatement for 2012 if he wishes. The settlement agreement will be sent to the BTLA within 30 days per Tax 201.23.
3. Police Chief Hutchins, Fire Chief Baker, Road Agent Greenwood met with the Board for an update on changing dispatch services. FC Baker said that the Hollis selectmen met and approved moving forward with negotiations for adding the Town of Mason to Hollis Communications. They felt this would be a benefit to their town, too and are excited to have Mason. It will not be necessary to go before town meeting to change the communication service. There will be a \$1100 start up cost. The town will also have a contract for 2 phone lines: 911 and a business line for Mason Dispatch. Some of the radios in Manchester (HC Dispatch) are owned by the Town of Mason and will be used for our new dispatch. Once again the Chiefs and Road Agent stressed the importance of changing the dispatch service for efficiency and safety. Hopefully the service will be able to simulcast on Highway and Fire/EMS calls. This will enable better response during the day to calls. Chairman McGinnity stated that all the Selectmen are on board for this change and this is one increase in the budget that is very important to support. This is a town citizens' issue - the need for the right information and response.
 4. Road Agent Greenwood, as requested, brought in pictures of damages to Abbott Hill Road that supported his request for a portion of the road bond from the timber operation on lot B-4-2, owned by Alfred Stauble. Selectmen approved his request and a letter will be sent to the bonding company.
 5. Road Agent Greenwood explained the purchase for a generator for the Police Department. The propane generator is oversized to allow for expansion of use by the department. It will take care of the present and future needs. The Selectmen agreed with this purchase.
 6. Chairman McGinnity inquired the status of a replacement well for the Highway and Fire Departments. Road Agent Greenwood has been checking the Highway yard for an area for the well. There doesn't seem to be too many possible areas for drilling a new well. This matter will be tabled until further study is done.

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7. Police Chief Hutchins gave the Board an update on Officer Willette. The officer was slated to enter the full-time Police Academy. There was an issue on paperwork on the Academy's side that led to a miscommunication. The issue has been resolved and Officer Willette will test for the Academy on Friday. The full-time Police Academy will begin on January 5th.
8. Chief Hutchins discussed evidence storage issues. The PD has no ability to store large evidence such as vehicles. Police Prosecutor recommends that there be an impound yard, a secured area with a solid fence or stockade fence to ensure the chain of evidence. Chairman McGinnity suggested that the Chief do research on fences and to get bids for prices. This may have to be a warrant article for the Police Department.
9. Conservation Commission members Liz Fletcher and Barbara Devore updated the Board on the status of the Quarry land gift. The gift will not happen this year, not until March 2013, because the Schwenks, owners of the quarry, are working with the Forest Society on the easement first before gifting the land to the Con Com. The Forest Society has recommended that the Conservation Commission pursue the easement on the four abutting lots at Town Meeting. Mrs. Fletcher presented a draft warrant article, written by the Forest Society for the Board to review. The warrant article would ask the Town to grant the easements on lots E-28, E-22, E-36 and E-38 to be held by the Forest Society (SPNHF). The Conservation Commission will vote on the draft easement article at their next meeting. The Board suggested adding verbiage to the article that this easement would be held under the direction of the Conservation Commission, otherwise townspeople may feel that an outside agency has control of town property. Mrs. Fletcher explained that the Forest Society would supervise the property forever and would be very helpful in defending the property in case of a timber trespass. The draft warrant article will be sent to town counsel for review. The Commission will keep the Selectmen updated on this issue.
10. Pat Letourneau, Treasurer, responded to the Selectmen's request for A.A. Milkovits to have access online or by phone to the town's bank accounts. Mrs. Letourneau stated that phone access is not possible, only online computer access. This is considered an advanced access – read only, for up to five users. The office computer would be registered by People's Bank for this access. This will enable the financial director (A.A.) and staff to review the bank accounts for deposits made, checks cleared, etc. The town will be charged \$10 per month for this access. Mrs. Letourneau stated that as treasurer, she could pull the access any time if it is not used appropriately. She also reiterated that if anybody needs information from the accounts she is available to acquire it. Mrs. Letourneau will also set up an activity access for the Deputy Treasurer. After more discussion, a motion was made, seconded and voted in the affirmative to approve the monthly expenditure for setting up and maintaining the advanced account for multiple users. Such users will be assigned by the treasurer.

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Selectmen reviewed the following:

Old Business:

1. Re: Minutes – Selectmen Meeting minutes from December 11, 2012 were approved as written.
2. Re: Road Bond from NESI (Georgia Stone Quarry)- Diane from NESI called about the road bond. After consulting with their CFO, it was decided to send the town a check for \$3,500 instead of a road bond. Selectmen voted to hold the funds in escrow as a road bond to be used as needed for repair to damages done to roads traveled by the quarry trucks.

New Business:

1. Abatement application for LaFlamme, Greenville Road – Ms. LaFlamme submitted a certified survey of her land. The Selectmen approved her abatement and will have the town assessor correct the acreage.
2. Building Permits: #12-34 Wilborg, lot F-35-3, LP generator, #12-35 Ardito, lot L-42, update house electrical. Permit #12-35 is for the house on lot L-42, owned by John and Barbara Ardito, that Selectmen had cited for health and safety violations.
3. State septic design approval lot L-38, Dillberger
4. Police logs
5. Copy of Fifield Conservation Easement annual monitoring report
6. Copy of Stewart Conservation Easement annual monitoring report
7. From DRA: Timber Tax procedure changes
8. Cancellation of Road Bond for Hopkinton Forestry & Land Clearing, January 15, 2013
9. Proposal submitted for printing combined town/school reports for \$959 from Puritan Press in Hollis. The reports will have the option of having different colored pages to differentiate from the town and school reports. The town would split the costs of the report with the school, which will be a considerable savings from last year's costs. After some consideration, a motion was made, seconded and voted in the affirmative to accept the bid of Puritan Press for \$959 for the town/school report. A. A. Milkovits will pick out the colors for the reports. Selectmen will send a strong reminder to all departments to have their reports in to the town office by February 1st. Barbara Devore, who was present for this discussion, offered to proofread any and all reports.
10. Other:
 - A motion was made, seconded and voted in the affirmative to encumber warrant article # 9 for \$9,500 for the Forestry Committee's projects as voted at the 2012 Town Meeting
 - Selectmen signed a letter to the NH DMV affirming the appointment of Town Clerk Debra Morrison as a Municipal Agent and approving her acting in that capacity while she is working as the Town Clerk for Mason.
 - Other correspondence

A vote was taken to enter into a non-public session to discuss a personnel issue at

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9:32 PM. Present were Selectmen and A.A. Milkovits. Two issues were discussed. First issue was discussed and no action was taken. Selectmen voted to seal these minutes for 20 years. Second issue discussed concerned changing the Personnel Policy for eligibility for family coverage for health insurance to include enrolling domestic partners. After consideration, the Selectmen voted to maintain the present eligibility for family coverage for health insurance and not extend this eligibility to domestic partners. Session ended at 9:40 PM.

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara L. Milkovits
Administrative Assistant