

**MINUTES REGULAR SELECT BOARD MEETING
6:00 P.M. THURSDAY, JANUARY 4, 2024
MEMORIAL BUILDING
20 CHURCH ST. 3RD FLOOR AND VIA ZOOM**

Select Board

Eric Remick, Chair
Ceilidh Galloway-Kane
Elizabeth Dow
Shari Cornish
Danny Hale

Others Present

David Upson, Town Manager
Tonia Chase, Town Clerk
Tom Fadden, Road Foreman

Others Present

Harry Besett
Mary Hall
Robert Alcusky

Regular Meeting

6:00 P.M. – Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, called the meeting to order.

6:00 P.M. – Set/Adjust Agenda: David said we need to add an Item #5 to discuss Fire Department equipment that needs to be purchased, potential action needed.

Upon motion by Danny Hale, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to amend agenda to add Item #5.

6:01 P.M. – Communication from the audience

No audience communication.

6:02 P.M. – Select Board to approve the minutes of the Regular Select Board meeting of December 21, 2023

Upon motion by Danny Hale, seconded by Elizabeth Dow, the Select Board voted to approve the minutes of the Regular Select Board meeting of December 21, 2023, as written. Ceilidh abstained.

6:02 P.M. – 6:08 P.M. Town Manager Report – Given by David Upson

David updated us on several items including the pedestrian bridge, the police chief position, the wastewater upgrade project, and a meeting that he and the Police Chief attended about law enforcement challenges. See attachments for the complete report.

6:08 – 6:10 P.M. Road Foreman Report – Given by Tom Fadden

Tom stated that all is good, they are working on roads and on ruts and potholes. Shari stated that there are new banners to be hung up in town.

6:10 P.M. – 6:11 P.M. Hardwick Police Department (PD) Report – Given by David Upson

Mike was not in attendance. David stated that Wednesday was Andrew's last day, so PD is down a guy. Danny asked if applications for Chief are legitimate.

6:11 P.M. – 6:14 P.M. Item #1 Town Clerk/Treasurer, Tonia Chase, to discuss time and location of Town meeting with the Board

Tonia asked if the Town House would be ready for Town Meeting, Shari stated that it will not be ready for Town Meeting and that the project is out for bid right now but should be ready for next year. Tonia asked if the Board was good with meeting being at Hardwick Elementary School (HES) at 10:00 again, she stated she would still need to confirm with HES that we could use the space. The board agreed to hold Town Meeting at elementary school, Danny said as long as we agreed to have it at Town House next year, Tonia said that as soon as stage is handicap accessible, we are happy to move Town Meeting and voting to Town House.

6:14 P.M. – 6:52 P.M. Item #2 Follow up discussion about Hardwick Rescue's request for a location for a new building

David stated that he and Kristen Leahy visited the Creamery Road site and spray painted where they think the building will fit, which is down on the flat. They measured the setbacks and stated there are questions regarding old road and state leased land because a section of where the current road is located is leased land. Where the road is currently located would be right on top of the proposed building site. Will need to have some agreements in place and road would need to be moved. Eric asked if Creamery Road is a formally laid out road and David said yes. David conveyed all this information to Tim Nisbet over the phone yesterday.

Danny said the things he noted when he did his walk around were that the corner is pretty small, and he is not sure how a building and a road would fit. He also noted that the Town is currently using that space. He said that he agrees with Eric that we need to figure out the base plan for that property before we start giving it away.

Harry Besett is asking for clarification and what a realistic breaking ground would be before they move forward with fund raising.

The Board agrees that they will try to get a conceptual plan as quickly as they can with HRS building in mind.

Answer for tonight – will try to get a needs assessment and conceptual plan.

6:52 P.M. – 6:59 P.M. Item #3 Discussion regarding Emergency Watershed Protection sponsorship for three properties identified by NRCS as eligible projects -- *Action needed.*

Eric stated that we are looking at three properties that the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) identified as needing repairs to their riverbanks to protect the existing properties. Participation by the Town would help property owners retain their properties and also helps the town by keeping those properties viable properties where people live and keeps them on our Grand List as opposed to a future flood event making worse and needing FEMA buyout and not on Grand List.

David stated they went to eight properties and out of the eight there were three properties. NRCS came back and provided a budget of \$420,193 of which \$123,586.25 the town would have to provide as a "sponsor." We need to figure out where we are going to get this sponsor money. David has since received more information from the program due to the engineering workload brought on by the July 2023 storms, plus their regular farm bill commitments, the NRCS cannot provide the engineering services. Therefore, they are asking the town to hire a third-party professional engineer to complete the necessary design work, construction, and oversight.

David thinks that it is a great program and the properties that are eligible would benefit but he thinks that we should be engaging with the landowners and property owners. He knows resources are tight for a few of them and that one may not want to participate in the program. Eric asked if we could choose who is in the program. David does not know the answer and he has to find out if we can eliminate properties from program.

Elizabeth asked how much of a hit it would be if we lost all three of these properties from the Grand List, David does not know exactly, and she wondered if that was something to factor in.

Ceilidh said it would be different if we did not have to do the engineering, she would be for this if it was not for that. Danny said we do not have \$250,000.

David is trying to get creative with one of the properties. They are going to talk to FEMA because they sustained interior damage.

Eric pointed out that documents are due back not later than February 19 and this is late breaking news coming to the Board. David is still working on gathering information and talking to property owners. David wanted to put in front of Board because it is important for consideration and not just make a motion.

Ceilidh suggested talking to landowners before the next meeting and Danny said check on Grand List values.

No action taken.

6:59 P.M. – 7:25 P.M. Item #4 Business Manager to recap the FY25 proposed budget for Select Board feedback and changes followed by Select Board considering approval for presentation to voters – *Action needed.*

Eric stated that we are currently looking at a 10% increase from last year's budget but stated that the stuff we have in there is reasonable, just added all up comes to a big increase. Eric mentioned that they have looked at places to save but in order to make an impact on such a large number you would have to remove \$200,000 - \$250,000 from budget.

Eric questioned on the police budget the retirement expense increase that he thought was large, he assumed legit but was wondering about it. David stated that VMERS has increased the employer paid contributions. Ceilidh said that it was the same in all departments.

The Board would like to schedule a special meeting next Thursday night if Casey is available to discuss changes to the capital Schedule and budget.

Ceilidh asked about cemeteries and whether Main Street and Fairview are town owned. David said that they are town owned and that we appoint people to run them. Ceilidh mentioned that each cemetery has their own budget and own fund, so she is trying to figure out increase in Town budget, David stated that the cost of mowing increased. David requested bookkeeping because we had not gotten anything since Covid, and we are still missing the last year. Shari said we need financials.

Eric proposes to move on from budget discussion and revisit next Thursday night pending Casey's availability.

No action taken.

7:25 P.M. – 7:29 P.M. – Item #5 Board to discuss purchase of Fire Department equipment – *Action needed*

Tom stated the Fire Department would like to trade in their current ATV for a larger one because they carry over seven hundred pounds on it and it is only rated for five hundred pounds. Tom is proposing using up to \$30,000 of capital to do that. David said there is \$14,000 capital and \$4,000 in their special revenue account, there is enough money in Capital General fund overall just not in that specific line for Fire Department equipment. Tom stated that they have several ATVs in stock and would be able to purchase one.

Danny made a motion to authorize the Fire Department to spend \$30,000 to buy a new safety apparatus. Seconded by Shari. Motion passes unanimously.

Select Board Reports:

Elizabeth said that the Hardwick Gazette has a new website: www.hardwickgazette.org If the Gazette has your email address, you will receive the newest addition on January 10.

Shari said the bid is open for the Town House project until January 8.

New Business:

Shari said the banners are going up downtown.

Old Business: *None*

7:29 P.M. Eric Remick, Select Board Chair, adjourned the meeting.

Minutes taken by: _____
Tonia Chase, Town Clerk

Minutes approved by: _____
Eric Remick, Select Board Chair