

Town of Benton
Select Board Meeting
Monday January 18, 2021

Select Board Members: William R. Darcy, Chair; Regina Elliott, Kimberli Carpenter

Also Present: Dwight Swauger, Treasurer; Gil Richardson, Moderator; Joe Boutin III, School Board Chairman

These draft minutes of the Town of Benton Select Board are believed accurate and correct, but they are subject to additions, deletions and corrections by the Select Board at the next meeting when the Board votes its final approval of the minutes. These minutes are made available at this time to conform to the requirements of New Hampshire RSA 91-A:2.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Darcy at 6:30 PM.

Member Elliott moved approval of the January 4, 2021 minutes, seconded by Member Carpenter and approved.

Moderator Gil Richardson discussed the arrangements for the Town Meeting that would provide social distancing in the space available in the Town Hall. The Selectboard members agreed it would be possible to hold a safe meeting, especially assuming a lower turnout and moving the Selectboard up to the stage.

Chairman Darcy discussed the Department of Revenue Administration's (DRA) misinterpretation of 2020 School Board warrant article 7 which resulted in 1) the Selectboard having to use \$65,000 of the Town's unassigned fund balance to stabilize the tax rate, and 2) the School Board education trust fund ballooning by \$100,000 to \$188,000, against the will of the voters who intended a much more modest trust fund increase accompanied by a larger tax relief component. The School Board Chairman noted that the school administration was recently informed of this DRA misinterpretation. It was agreed by the Board that the schools in the years ahead will have to rely more on the trust fund as a contingency fund to help keep taxes stable.

Alternatives to deal with the DRA's mistake, including a Town tax stabilization fund were discussed and new language for warrant articles would be discussed with the school board at the budget hearing and the DRA would be consulted.

The Woodsville Ambulance announced another fee increase, to \$7,519 per year, which would require a change in the preliminary budget.

The Board discussed a draft appropriation budget and the adjustments from the previous year's budget. The result was a proposed general fund appropriation of \$129,100, a bit less than the previous year. The Board also agreed on estimated revenues of \$608,875, with \$440,000 from tax revenues.

The Board agreed on a number of warrant article appropriations to submit to voters, some of which were the same as the previous year for work not accomplished during the pandemic. The list includes:

- Pave the 1st 500 feet of Howe Hill Road for \$35,000
- Add to Cemetery Fund \$15,000
- Add to Property Tax Assessment Fund \$3,000
- Town Hall capital improvements \$15,000
- Tax Maps \$1,000

Treasurer Swauger reported the operating account had \$350,835.59 and the ICS account \$233,457.06. The Board signed checks prepared by the Treasurer.

The joint School Board and Town budget hearing is scheduled for January 27, 2021 at 6:30 PM at Town Hall.

The Board discussed the use of the broadband fund created at the last Town meeting for public education to increase resident knowledge of much better internet service coming to Benton and the region. Demonstrated interest in fiber-to-the-home internet will increase the chances of Benton residents getting service sooner because “take rates,” signing up to receive internet service, is one of the criteria for NHEC determining where to build the network. The Board agreed using the fund for that purpose was in the interest of Benton residents.

February 8, 2021 is the next scheduled meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:11 PM.