

**Kingston, New Hampshire
Board of Selectmen
Meeting of January 22, 2024
FINAL MINUTES**

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

PRESENT: Chair Chris Bashaw; Vice Chair Chuck Hart; Glenn Coppelman, Laurie Szwed, Ellie Alessio, Select Board Members

COMMITTEE LIAISON REPORTS

Selectman Coppelman said that the Heritage Commission had put together a mailing to educate owners of older properties in Kingston. He said that an inventory of older homes was done in 1980; each homeowner received the inventory sheet on their property. The Town received inventories for the Town Hall, the Museum building, Plains Cemetery, and the Nichols building.

Selectman Hart thanked the other board members who covered for him while he was unable to attend. He said he did join in a meeting that the Conservation Commission held virtually due to Covid. He said they have new projects and also went over work that has been done on the trails.

Selectwoman Szwed said that the Recycling group chose to not hold their collection day on Saturday due to the cold weather. She said they will next be open on February 3rd from 9 - noon, and said the group is also trying to set up a meeting with Pete Lachappelle of Waste Management.

Chair Bashaw said that he is still the liaison for the inspectors but would like a secondary liaison so that someone might stop by on a regular basis as the new building inspector gets started. Selectman Coppelman agreed to help with this and will be the primary contact. Selectwoman Szwed said that a picture and brief biography should be added to the website to introduce the Town to the new building inspector/code officer, Pedro Avila. The car used by the previous inspector needs work and the status of it will be checked; Mr. Avila will be paid mileage to use his own car. A magnet for his car will be looked into.

It was agreed that a meeting should be held to include the other inspectors to set expectations. This will be discussed at next week's Department Heads meeting, and a separate daytime meeting will be set with all interested parties that are identified.

OLD BUSINESS

Website upgrade: pricing

The Board's administrative assistant informed them that two companies have been contacted and a zoom meeting held with each. One quote, from CivicPlus, which is the company that the Town currently has its website with, has been received but it may be more economical to wait for an upgrade that is apparently due. The second company will be sending a quote this week.

PUBLIC COMMENT 1:

Rick Russman, 18 Beach Drive, said that he is on the board of a drinking water and groundwater trust fund, and is seeing how Plaistow is already tied in with the Manchester water works. He said that Epping and Kingston both sit on big aquifers, and he hopes maybe in 2024 Kingston will finally get the piece of land that the voters approved \$100,000 for in 2022. This money was to come out of the land acquisition trust fund. He said purchasing the land to buy and start studying its potential for drinking water is more important than ever with the problems with PFAS contamination. Selectwoman Alessio said that the town has not been able to successfully pin down the landowner. She said \$100,000 was the agreed upon amount initially, so that is what was brought to the voters. DPW Director Phil Coombs was the last one to attempt to contact the landowner, so he will be asked about the status of this at the Department Heads meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Official Town Communications

Selectwoman Szwed said she thinks that the Town should consider an official town Facebook page. She said other towns have them and they put a lot of different information on there. She said comments can be turned off, but if people share the information they see, it will get wider circulation. She said that it might be duplicative of the Town's website, but that is okay because not everyone is going on the website, they are scrolling on Facebook and getting their information that way. The Administrative Assistant said that maybe the existing page, which was set up for the Select Board, could be used more widely, as it is barely used. Adam Faulconer maintains it, but he needs to have information given to him. Selectwoman Szwed said that she is happy to research other towns' use of Facebook.

Another question on communications was, now that the Carriage Towne News is closing down, what the official newspaper for the Town will be. Selectman Coppelman said that state law has changed, and most meetings do not require a notice in the newspaper, only to be on the website and in two physical locations. However, there are some situations that the RSA still requires a newspaper notice for. It was decided that the newspaper of record will now be the Union Leader.

There was some discussion on the way postings to the website need to be for certain meetings; they should be on the home page.

APPOINTMENTS:

Melissa Mannon, Library Director, and Scott Bogle of Rockingham Planning Commission: Transportation Options for Kingston

Director Mannon said she is here at Selectwoman Szwed's request, to share her research, noting that the biggest concern expressed on the Age Friendly Communities survey was transportation for those who no longer drive. She said she has been working with Mr. Bogle, the RPC's transportation expert.

She went through a power point presentation that outlined transportation concerns and options for the Town to address them. She also noted that the town's master plan from 2007 had sections that talked about transportation, so the vision for accessible transportation was there but not yet realized, aside from some public transportation that was grant funded for a short time.

RPC recommendations include the options of using volunteer drivers, senior taxi voucher programs, and using the revenue tool of adding a supplemental vehicle registration fee to support a range of local transportation needs. Ms. Mannon said she had joined some New England-based transportation committees to get more information and found that volunteer transportation is very popular. She said she is setting up a meeting with Carol Gulla of Transportation Assistance for Seacoast Citizens (TASC); this organization may be willing to work on options for Kingston especially if volunteers can be found in the community. Director Mannon said at the meetings for the survey, several people have already said they would be happy to drive, and she does feel that a volunteer driver program would be the best fit for Kingston, and not cost prohibitive. Director Mannon covered some other options such as borrowing the Vic Geary van or Brentwood's van or purchasing one. She also spoke about methods of getting information out to people who would be candidates for the services, as they do not necessarily go online.

Mr. Bogle followed up with further information and agreed that volunteer drivers would be a good fit. He said that most respondents to the survey currently still drive but are very concerned about what will happen when they can't. Mr. Bogle spoke about RSA 261:153 Section 4, which allows the Town to charge an additional registration fee of up to \$5.00 to populate a local transportation improvement fund for transportation uses, under the discretion of the town. This can include such things as road maintenance, intersection improvements or senior transportation.

Mr. Bogle mentioned several other state-wide services, but said they are often limited and directed at a specific population.

Selectman Coppelman asked how much TASC charges the communities they serve.

Mr. Bogle said there is not a set charge, that it depends on the number of rides provided; he said that Hampton Falls pays \$500 year, while Exeter contributes \$10,000 per year. He said he believes TASC would be willing to start in Kingston for a fairly limited contribution and see what the demand is like.

Chairman Bashaw said he is concerned because these types of roles used to be taken care of by family or faith-based or philanthropic organizations, and when the government gets involved, they make it less effective. He said neighbors used to know each other. He said if welfare is mandated, people have no buy-in, such as belonging to the church that helps you. He said he would rather be a sounding board to advocate for organizations such as the Lions Club and Veterans Club to provide services.

Selectwoman Szwed said she is confused about what is meant by government because none of these organizations is government run, both are non-profits. Mr. Bogle confirmed that TASC was started by a group of ministers in the seacoast area, and RPC got involved to help them in getting their non-profit designation and to get some pilot funding through United Way, so it was very much envisioned to fill the role Chairman Bashaw is talking about. Selectwoman Szwed said that a non-profit group supporting local residents with local volunteers is fulfilling the neighbor-helping-neighbor idea.

Chairman Bashaw said his concern comes when the town enters into a contract where the town has paid money and people will feel they don't need a volunteer or to step up to do anything, as the town has paid money and they then expect the service.

Mr. Bogle said it may be a matter of testing the water, seeing if a local non-profit would be willing to make an initial contribution to TASC in order to have a pilot project, and see how many residents use the service.

Chairman Bashaw said he is also not a fan of tacking on another user fee for vehicles because then people will say they paid their \$5 and they are not doing anything more. Discussion continued on the topics of how many people are still driving now that may need this service in 10 years, and the trends of the town's demographics.

Director Mannon said that she does not want to act just for her interest in the library because she thinks it is a bigger issue, so the "ask" is to get together with the Board to look at the issue further and to invite Carol Gulla to speak with a committee who is looking at this issue. She said this will be the opportunity to discuss some of the concerns and maybe get local veterans organizations involved; but she said she thinks it's an issue that town government should be involved in looking at.

Selectwoman Szwed said this is a town problem that residents care about and she feels a task force should work on getting the groundwork done so that in coming years there will be well established transportation options. Selectwoman Alessio agreed and said an announcement can still be placed in the Carriage Towne News.

Chairman Bashaw said he feels comfortable with Selectwoman Szwed and Director Mannon coming up with language for an announcement and forming a transportation task force. The rest of the board agreed.

NEW BUSINESS, cont.

Request for Human Services Information

Chairman Bashaw said that a request for information came to the Finance and Human Resources Director in the form of an email. He said that some of the questions were interrogatory style questioning rather than a request for public records, and these questions were referred to the Board. He said the person then posted the questions to social media that these were the questions she had asked, they were referred to the Select Board, and that everyone should submit a Right to Know request. He said the problem is that they did not make a request for specific documents that would be subject to RSA 91-a, but essentially wanted Human Resources to compile information and directed her how to do her job, and then asked a series of questions that were not really under the purview of the HR Director, they were really Board questions. The Chair said that he thought the appropriate response was to put these questions on the agenda and go through them.

Mary O'Neil Cyr via Facebook:

My questions pertaining to unrestrained growth in Payroll and Personnel & Administrative costs were:

- 1. The number of FTEs and PT EEs, by department, for the 2022, 2023 and proposed 2024 budget cycles**

Board: Chairman Bashaw said that Finance Director Paula Mahoney had responded that she is willing to map this out, but it will take time. Selectwoman Alessio pointed out that under the Right to Know law, the town is not required to create documents; Chairman Bashaw said that Director Mahoney is willing to do it anyway.

- 2. The corresponding total salary amounts for 2022, 2023 and 2024**

Board: Chairman Bashaw said that the Finance Director had responded that these amounts can be found in the Town Reports for each year.

3. **The number of current employment vacancies for the town, and the average number of days it took to fill authorization in both 2022 and 2023 (*she did answer this question - we currently have one vacancy, and they do not track fulfillment time for open positions).**

Board: No comment

4. **The number of Town-owned vehicles issued to employees for personal use, and whether /how such a benefit was considered/weighed in determining equitable and competitive compensation scales.**

Board: There are no Town vehicles issued for personal use, only for official use with ancillary personal use. Vehicles are issued to the Police Chief, Fire Chief and Director of Public Works as well as to the head Detective of the Police Department and second in command to the DPW Director. Selectman Coppelman said that the use of these vehicles by the employees that have them is not for personal use, although there are occasions where they get used for that, but it's primarily for the benefit of the town and to have these particular employees be responsive to Town needs, mostly in the areas of health and safety. In discussion, examples of ancillary use were given such as stopping at the store on the way home, or the Fire Chief picking up his son. These employees have vehicles as they are on call all the time and need to be able to respond directly to an emergency.

In response to the second part of the question Chairman Bashaw said that most of this Board was not in place when some of the department head contracts were issued, but he was sure it was taken into consideration. He added that in most towns he knows of the heads of the fire, police and DPW departments have a take-home vehicle. He said he does not think a dollar amount was put on this by the wage salary working group.

5. **under the new plan to abandon merit increases in favor of COLA adjustments for all:**

Board: Chairman Bashaw said that this blanket statement confuses the fact that for the past three years the COLA adjustments were in addition to merit-based increases. At the end of last year's budget season, the budget committee said they were uncomfortable with the subjectiveness of the pay-for-performance schedule and how they were being implemented and wanted to see a better system in place, and that is how the wage working group came to fruition.

- a. **what happens if an employee is not a satisfactory employee?**

Board: Chairman Bashaw said that the cost-of-living adjustment is not a raise based on performance, so it will happen regardless. He said his bigger answer to the question is that if you have an unsatisfactory employee, you should be getting them to the point where they are satisfactorily performing their duties, or you should be helping them to the door.

- b. **Are performance evaluations still delivered (1x,2x per year), or?**

Board: Chairman Bashaw said he is not a big fan of end-of year performance evaluations as they are ineffective. He said the town should be more concerned with developing effective leadership and mentorship within the ranks of the community that are properly supervising employees.

- c. **Will an underperforming employee still get a full COLA adjustment, even if he or she is on a performance improvement plan?**

Board: Chairman Bashaw said that yes, they would get a COLA adjustment, that would be appropriate, but that once the pay matrix is adopted, there will be steps within it, and if an employee had not met the satisfactory terms of their employment evaluation they would not be eligible for the step, and if they are not eligible at the time they should be placed on some sort of performance improvement plan. They would not be eligible for that step increase until they have gotten to the point that they are performing where they need to. Ultimately, he said that if someone is not performing you need to tell them to update their resume.

d. what if an employee is already at or near the top of a pay scale in the newly adopted compensation matrix, and there is not room to give a full COLA increase? Are there salary caps in place for all Employees?

Board: Chairman Bashaw said that one goal of the wage matrix study was that every job will have a cap. He said that moving forward with COLA the salaries could be increased by the cost of living, and the study group did not get that far or to full implementation, but there are a bunch of different opportunities and decisions that the future board will have an opportunity to make. One option he mentioned is that if a salary has reached its cap the employee could receive a stipend equivalent to the percent of COLA increase, but it would not compound and move their salary up. He said there is not an accurate answer to give at this time, as decisions still need to be made once the wage study group brings more information to the Board. They are also looking at longevity and that may come into play at some point, but it is too early to determine.

Chairman Bashaw said that he had wanted to answer these questions in public as there may be others with the same questions. Selectman Coppelman said that since a specific individual made this request, would it be appropriate to provide the official meeting minutes that reflect the comments of the board to the individual. Chairman Bashaw said he thought it would be very beneficial to provide them a copy of the official meeting minutes record that now will exist, and that could serve as an official response to the questions.

Selectwoman Szwed said that she feels it is important that everybody realizes that COLA is a cost-of-living allowance of 0% or of a percentage that the Select Board chooses to move forward, whereas the wage study is for pay increases independent of COLA. She said COLA is not merit-based and that confusion led to a lot of these questions.

Uncollectable Funds Policy

Selectwoman Szwed said there were just a few changes to the policy, mainly clarification of the types of payment included, and in the last paragraph on repeat offenses, unnecessary steps were eliminated, and the Select Board was removed from the process; it is now for the Town Clerk to determine.

MOTION: by Selectwoman Alessio, to adopt the revision of Policy No. 1701 as written

SECOND: by Selectman Hart

All in favor

BOARD BUSINESS

Meeting calendar 2024-2024

The Board had no comments on this calendar, aside from noting that it's too soon to know how the holiday use of the meeting room will affect meetings.

Town Report

The Administrative Assistant had circulated the Select Board annual report page for review of the Board and will revise it based on several comments.

The Administrative Assistant also said she had suggestions for a dedication and a memorial and is seeking ideas about what to put on the cover. It was decided to discuss the dedication in non-public session at the end of the meeting.

Lone Tree Campground

Selectman Hart asked about the status of this matter. The Administrative Assistant said that the attorney had requested meeting videos to back up the meeting minutes of a Planning Board meeting and a Select Board meeting that addressed this topic. She said she had just sent one and had Adam Faulconer help her to locate the other, so both will be in the hands of the attorney. Chairman Bashaw said that he thinks the Board should meet with the attorney to discuss her comments on moving forward on this matter, and make sure she is involved in any decision made about follow up moving forward.

PUBLIC COMMENT #2

None heard.

CORRESPONDENCE, APPLICATIONS, PURCHASE ORDERS:

- One application for an elderly exemption was approved.
- Two Veterans Credit applications were approved.
- One cemetery deed was signed.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

MOTION: By Selectwoman Alessio, to approve the public and non-public meeting minutes of January 8, 2024, as submitted.

SECOND: by Selectwoman Szwed

All in favor

MOTION: by Selectman Hart, to adjourn public session and enter non-public session at 7:57 PM, per RSA 91-A:3, II, (c) to discuss matters which, if discussed in public, may affect adversely the reputation of a person other than this board.

SECOND: by Selectwoman Alessio

All in favor via roll call vote

The Board returned to public session at 8:12 PM and voted to seal the non-public session minutes:

Motion made by Selectman Coppelman, seconded by Selectwoman Szwed, because it is determined that divulgence of this information likely would...

X Affect adversely the reputation of any person other than a member of this board.

__ Render a proposed action ineffective

___ Pertains to preparation or carrying out of actions regarding terrorism

Roll Call Vote to Seal Minutes:

Chris Bashaw Y
Laureen Szwed Y
Electra Alessio Y

Charles Hart Absent
Glenn Coppelman Y

Motion: PASSED

Meeting Adjourned at 7:50 PM

Respectfully submitted:

Susan H. Ayer, Administrative Assistant to the Select Board