

TOWN OF KENSINGTON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
Kensington Town Hall
95 Amesbury Road
Kensington, NH 03833
MONDAY
NOVEMBER 20, 2023
Minutes - APPROVED
6:30 PM

The chairperson called the meeting to order at 6:30pm and led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance.

In attendance: Joe Pace (chairperson), B. Gustafson (member), and Kathleen Felch (town administrator)

Public Comment – None. J. Pace explained that though there is a dedicated public comment period at the start of each meeting, he allows members of the public in attendance to participate in the board discussions as the meeting progresses.

AGENDA:

DEPARTMENT HEADS:

- Police Department –Chief Scott Cain –
 - Chief Cain explained that the police department will most likely exceed its overtime budget due to complex ongoing investigations. He stated that partner agencies have been unable to lend much assistance.
- Fire Department – Chief Jon True –
 - The new ambulance is in service.
- Emergency Management - Chief Jon True –
 - There is a night drill at the end of January.
 - Four different grants are opening and Chief True will be applying for them.
- Road Manager – Matthew Armstrong-
 - Plourde Sand and Gravel is unable to conduct winter services this season due to lack of help. M. Armstrong has reached out to Merrill Construction in Loudin, NH to establish a new contract. M. Armstrong confirmed that the quote of \$21.19 per ton from Merrill Construction will be within his budget.

MOTION: B. Gustafson motioned to approve the contract for \$21.19 per ton from Merrill Construction. B. Solomon seconded. All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

- Gravel shoulders have been installed on Osgood Rd by Bell and Flynn, and all work on Osgood Rd. has been completed.

- Trustees of Trust Fund – David Fabrizio
 - D. Fabrizio explained to the board that while reviewing the trust funds, the trustees discovered one for the fire department that was created in 1995 in the amount of \$3900. These funds can be dispersed to the fire chief via the Select Board. J. Pace opined that the funds would most likely be added to the funds balance since the fire department is under budget. J. Pace asked the town administrator to prepare the documents to transfer the funds.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Discuss Broadband Mapping- sign agreement to release E911 data for NH Granit project.**

The board signed the agreement that was discussed at the previous meeting (Addendum 1).

- **Abatement for 4-41-2**

MOTION: B. Gustafson motioned to abate for lot 4-41-3 in the amount of \$3087. J. Pace seconded, with the added inclusion of applying the balance to 4-41-2. All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

- **Northeast Vegetation and Mosquito Control Contract**

J. Pace commented on the efficacy of using mosquito spraying, as mosquito born illnesses have been detected regardless. B. Gustafson opined that mosquito born illnesses have been very limited with the spraying. J. Pace entertained a motion for the board to sign the contract (Addendum 2).

MOTION: B. Gustafson motioned to sign the contract with Northeast Vegetation and Mosquito Control for mosquito control and monitoring services for Kensington. J. Pace seconded. All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

OTHER BUSINESS:

- **BOARD BUDGET EVALUATION**

J. Pace thanked department heads for working to revise their draft budgets and stated that the town has gotten down to a 7% budget increase. He stated that he'd like to see that number even lower.

J. Pace commented on the fact that tax bills went up, and the town is in a frustrating situation, since 90% of that increase is out of the town's hands. He explained that 91% of the increases are due to state school, local school, and county expenses. J. Pace explained that he felt that it is the board's responsibility to ensure that the town isn't pushing the increases too much, and cautioned about the budget going upwards of 11%, as that would most likely result in a failed

vote and resorting to a default budget. B. Gustafson stated that the town must have a budget that works, is functional, and keeps the tax rate as low as possible.

J. Pace expressed concerns that cutting the budget significantly would have minimal impact on taxpayers. He stated that the negative impact of that is that the town staff will not get raises for the cost of living. B. Gustafson expressed concerns that cutting the budget significantly would reduce services provided to the town. J. Pace highlighted the quality of town staff and employees, and that doesn't feel that they are engaging in equitable and responsible management if they are asking town staff to take a pay cut in an inflationary environment. He also expressed concerns with town staff finding better paying positions in other towns.

J. Pace explained that the board is having this discussion to help convey the message that the board understands the challenges that taxpayers are facing, but that the same pressures and challenges exist for the town as well. He stated that if the board were to cut the town budget to make a meaningful impact, what would that look like? Are people comfortable with fewer roads paved, patrols two days a week with potentially significant decreases in public safety response times?

Roger Blundell of 4 Rose Petal Lane asked the board how the budget seemed to double in a relatively short period of time. J. Pace provided details on the reasons that the budget has increased, such as using funds balance to reduce the budget, flat interest rates between 2012-2018, and the rise in interest rates/inflation since then. The public commenter asked further questions about issues that are increasing the town budget, such as legal issues. J. Pace explained that the legal budget this year was exceeded due to a variety of legal issues, such as lawsuits over voting machines, Unitil, and the cell town variance approved by the ZBA earlier this year.

J. Pace explained that when he started on the Select Board, he worked with Chief Cain to address retention issues in the police department. He explained that the town would lose significant police department personnel to other departments because of salary issues after working to train and equip the new officers. J. Pace stated that they created a pay plan that aimed to retain personnel longer, and there was some impact in the overall town budget. Chief Cain explained that he has prioritized retention since he began as the chief of police. He stated that he saw 32 officers leave the department in his time before becoming chief, and that he has only lost 1 officer since creating a more competitive pay scale. Chief Cain highlighted signing bonuses that are offered by other towns.

Norman DeBoisbriand made comments about the challenging environment that the current Select Board has found themselves in, highlighting recent inflation and the cost of services. He mentioned that during his time on the Select Board, they were lucky to have a friendlier economy to work with.

A member of the public in attendance expressed concerns about the increase in the school budget. J. Pace highlighted the complexity of the school budget, but that should be a separate conversation.

Mr. DeBoisbriand discussed the possibility of establishing a budget committee to help alleviate the pressure on the select board. J. Pace agreed that a budget committee would be beneficial, but that staffing the committee is a challenge. B. Gustafson opined that before budget season starts next year, the town should solicit for staffing of a budget committee. J. Pace discussed the difference between the recent revaluations and the town appropriation, explaining the increased valuations got conflated with the budget. He stated that town spending is based off spending for the upcoming year.

J. Pace stated that he appreciated the effort to get the budget down to a 7.13% increase but would like to see what they can do to find the extra 2% reduction. He highlighted the fact that they are almost 90% though the current year, and the town is running under budget. The board discussed using the funds balance to drive down the proposed budget but expressed concerns about unforeseen events like weather events depleting the snow removal funds. J. Pace expressed concerns about having to work within a potential default budget next year, and he wants the town to work to avoid that.

The board discussed strategies to reduce the overall budget, and entertained ideas such as holding off on items like new tasers for the police department. J. Pace opined that if the town does not find items to postpone, the voters will most likely make the decision in March, leading to the challenges of a default budget that were discussed earlier.

J. Pace opined that the authority of the select board is limited and there is so much that they can do. He stated that there are other variables that impact budgeting and appropriations that the board does not have much control over, such as the independent planning board and the zoning ordinance. Mr. DeBoisbriand opined that the town should look at opportunities in the future that would allow them to do things in the future that would have minimal impact on the town as a whole. J. Pace highlighted the limitations that if rezoning were to be done, the lack of townwide municipal water and sewer would make that very challenging.

The board discussed the possibility of looking at fees, fines, etc. to help bring the budget increase down to 5%.

Town Administrator:

Kathleen Felch-

- Resignation of Health Officer- discussion on new officer for the town

The board discussed the retirement and resignation of the town health officer. J. Pace expressed gratitude on behalf of the town. J. Pace asked if there is a requirement for the health officer to be a medical professional. Chief True stated that it should be, but that he can fill the position on

a short-term basis until a new health officer is appointed. J. Pace asked that a solicitation and position description be posted to the town website.

- **Any other business brought before the Board**

- **Misuse of Power Ordinance**

Chief Cain explained to the board that there is no ordinance in place to address the misuse of power (vehicles creating excessive and unnecessary noise, as well as vehicles not necessarily driving recklessly, but still in an unsafe manner). J. Pace stated that a public hearing date will need to be set to discuss a proposed misuse of power ordinance. The board set a public hearing date of December 11, 2023, with a second public hearing to be held on December 18, 2023.

- **Solar Exemption**

MOTION: B. Gustafson motioned to grant a solar exemption for tax map 13, lot 2. J. Pace seconded. All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

- **Tax Exempt Fuel Purchase Card**

MOTION: B. Gustafson motioned to authorize the chair to sign for the board. J. Pace seconded. All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

- Approval of Board Minutes **November 6, 2023 – POSTPONED**

- **Next Meeting Date – December 11, 2023- Public Meeting for unanticipated funds and Misuse of Power Ordinance**

December 18- Public hearing for encumbered funds requests and Misuse of Power Ordinance

- **Adjournment**

MOTION: B. Gustafson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. J. Pace seconded. All in favor, none opposed, no abstentions.

The meeting adjourned at 8:23pm.

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APPOINTMENTS: If you do have something that you would like to discuss with the Board, it is best to request being on the agenda of a meeting and provide details of the subject, so the Board can prepare in advance.

BOS11-20-2023

Respectfully Submitted,

Owen Corcoran
Land Use Administrative Assistant