

Town of Litchfield
Select Board Meeting Minutes
November 12, 2024

1.0 Convenes 6:30 P.M.; Pledge to Flag; Selectmen and Guests present

Selectmen: Gary Parker, Chairman; Clarence Gowell III (identified as Rick in these minutes); Scott Weeks.

Staff: Kelly Weissenfels, Town Manager; Michael Sherman, Fire Chief; Larry Nadeau, Road Comm.; John Upham, Transfer Station Manager; Tom Wood, Chm. Budget Comm. (Zoom); Steve Ochmanski, Code Enforcement Officer (absent); and others per the sign in sheet.

2.0 Minutes of October 28th, 2024

There was a motion made by Scott to approve the minutes from October 28, 2024. This was seconded by Rick, vote 3-0.

3.0 Reports and Correspondence

3.1 Town Manager

A. Per Kelly, the November 5th election had 2329 total voters with roughly 900 residents voting early. There were 173 people that either changed their registration or registered to vote on the day of elections. During the next large vote, the town will investigate gaining access to a second tabulator/vote counting machine, since depositing ballots proved to be a bottleneck that affected parking, as well as wait time in the building.

B. Kelly has received many suggestions regarding how to improve the Town Office parking lot since the lines have been painted. Comments have been mixed between complaints and appreciation. The concerns/issues of larger vehicle parking will be addressed.

C. Kelly said he has contacted MMA (Maine Municipal Association) regarding Rick's question about the railing on the parking lot being sufficient. MMA put Kelly in touch with an insurance adjuster to whom he has sent a photo of the lot and railing. Kelly will let the board know at the next meeting what the opinion of the railing is.

D. Gary asked if the downstairs door was still being looked at as a potential ingress/egress for the public. Kelly said yes, and also that concerns were brought to his attention regarding safety, etc.

E. Regarding the origin of the Richmond Corner stop signs. Kelly has been in touch with the Richmond town manager and she informed him that Richmond requested a state study that was then brought to the Richmond Select Board for approval.

Rick suggested having the Huntington Hill and Richmond Road intersection re-evaluated for a possible location for change of signage. There have been numerous accidents at that intersection. Kelly will also be looking into adding Buker Bridge to the list of possible changes

with consideration of making it a “one-at-a time” with stop signs. Larry concurred with getting the Gowell’s intersection looked at, and suggested asking the state why the speed limit headed west is increased to 45 mph at Litchfield Fuel, instead of waiting until after Percy’s/197 Diner.

F. Kelly wanted to inform the members of the Select Board that there will be an increase in health insurance cost of 9% in the next calendar year. Per Kelly, this will be within budget. In addition, a decision must be made soon about the upcoming Paid Family Medical Leave 1% payroll deduction and whether it will be absorbed by the town or half and half with workers.

3.2 Code Officer/Plumbing Inspector

A. Per Kelly, Steve will have his report of permits next meeting. He is absent from this meeting due to a medical issue.

B. Regarding the illegal junk yard on Hallowell Litchfield Road, a message was left on Steve’s answering machine over the weekend stating the offending vehicles were scheduled for removal. Steve confirmed with Levi Bolton that he will be picking up a vehicle that was discussed at the September 9, 2024, Select Board meeting once his tow truck is repaired.

C. Kelly and Steve have discussed the boats sitting on the side of Lunts Hill Road. There does not appear to be an enforcement action that is available to the town to have the boats removed. There are not enough to be considered a junk yard. Kelly was under the impression that they were not in the town right of way. Larry corrected this and informed Kelly that they absolutely are in the town’s right of way. Kelly will look into the topic further.

D. Kelly heard back from the town’s legal counsel regarding the Lahey settlement agreement. The Lahey’s have a new lawyer and the recommendation from legal is drop the concerns about whether the settlement agreement is enforceable and instead to address the infractions individually. The town legal counsel will wait until further information comes from the Lahey’s.

3.3 Road Commissioner

A. Larry reports that the Road equipment is ready to go for the season. He reminded residents that if they are out and about and notice a hazardous area of travel before the crew is out, please let him know.

B. Driveway renovation: Larry had a discussion with residents about keeping their children safe and not letting them vandalize the newly painted concrete and railing.

C. The salt/sand shed is full and ready for the season.

D. Larry noted that he has a full crew going into the winter season, this is the first time in a while this has happened.

E. Another resident has brought up the question of striping the roads, specifically Whippoorwill Road. She stated that the turn on the hill by the previously mentioned free boat (near Overlook Drive) is quite a hazard. Residents walking on the road and people driving or hauling boats to the landing, etc. can cause an issue. Larry let her know the town has no intention of striping the local roads in town as discussed in previous Select Board meetings.

3.4 Fire & Rescue

A. Per Kelly, today is Life Flight ground training so Chief Sherman will not be in attendance. Chief Sherman did however send along an update to be relayed. He would like to remind residents that there is NO open burning right now, fire danger is high. Kelly also personally wanted to let residents be forewarned that charges can be levied against anyone who is responsible for a fire that gets out of hand and requires emergency services need to be called in. There are serious fires happening all over the country, including the East Coast.

B. Emergency Call Log Report

- Fire Calls: 15, responded to all.
- EMS Calls: 24, responded to 16 (Gardiner responded to all).

3.5 Emergency Mgmt.

A. Chief Sherman completed a draft Emergency Management Plan. Now he will be working on the finer details before presenting this to the Select Board.

3.6 Assessing Agent

Ellery was in the office this past week; Kelly was able to speak with him about the personal property policy. Ellery suggested first scheduling a workshop. This would give ample time for questions, comments and further discussion. Gary agreed with the plan and Kelly noted that Ellery could be available as soon as next Tuesday if the Select Board would like. See 4.2 for further discussion.

3.7 Transfer Station

A. There have been 4 new stickers issued for a new total of 2880.

B. John said both bulky bins needed to be emptied again. Per John, in the last ½ hour Saturday the 2nd bin was filled, mostly with furniture. Plastic and cardboard bins were also emptied this week.

C. John contacted Gary Hickey about hauling off the brush pile. He estimated hauling the entire pile would cost \$8,000.00. John noted the budget for removal of the brush pile is \$3,000.00. Larry said he would recommend shopping around. Gary asked about having someone come in and chip the pile. John explained that the last time he had asked the company that had chipped before, the pile wasn't big enough, and it didn't seem much bigger. Gary recommended revisiting how the brush pile is removed. Scott will ask around to get someone to come chip it and remove it for free. Kelly reminded the board there was a line item in the budget during review dedicated to removal of the brush pile.

D. The leaf and brush piles are now officially closed for the season; John said it was kept open two weeks longer than normal this year. John will be reaching out to a contact about getting the leaves hauled off.

3.8 Other Town Committees

A. Gary asked Tom Wood how the report for the RSU4 Withdrawal Investigative Committee is coming. A fourth draft of a final report was sent off today to the members of the committee. Per

Tom, Percy was going to be in touch with Kelly about setting up a meeting to get the final report approved by the committee. Kelly will get in touch with Percy to pin down a date and time.

B. Gary also asked if Kelly has reached out to the Rec Committee about coming to a Select Board meeting to report on how things are going for them as Scott has asked a couple times. Kelly said he has spoken with the Chair and has not yet gotten an official commitment.

4.0 Scheduled Business

4.1 Town Office structural repair and deck bid options review

Kelly reported that a bid has come in from Elwell Construction out of Litchfield and they have sent several options along with their bid. The type of decking is the main question Kelly would like to answer. A less expensive option, by roughly \$7,000.00, would be to go with ground contact lumber. Kelly introduced Luke Washburn as present to discuss options and answer any questions the Select Board may have. Kelly asked what Luke's experience is with composite vs ground contact lumber is. Luke agreed that composite can get pretty slippery, and it is known to get very hot in the sunny summer months. He noted that more than likely wouldn't be an issue here as everyone coming in and out would be wearing shoes. He reminded the board that lumber is less expensive up front but has a higher maintenance cost. He recommends treating wood decking roughly every 5 years. Kelly would also like to know if Luke has any experience with the composite holding up to shoveling and sanding vs the pressure treated. Also, any take on the more modern formulation(s) of the pressure treated lumber and longevity of similar structures. Luke spoke to the composite first and noted salt and sand can be applied, this is why it's recommended to pressure wash the decking in the Spring since the salt and sand would build up over time as the composite is grooved. Shoveling with metal or metal edged shovels can gouge both types of decking. However, since the lumber is less expensive it's not as bad on the wallet. Scott asked about what composite is made of these days. Rick wanted Kelly to speak with the insurance company about which type they get more claims on, composite or lumber decks. Luke replied to a question of which composite would be used by stating his company likes to use Trex Composite decking, and that the bid is for the mid-grade. Larry is mainly concerned about the slipperiness of the composite. This was discussed and Luke noted he gets many more comments about the temperature of the composite vs the slipperiness. Larry made a good point that perhaps most of the project Luke works on are mainly seasonal decks, not used much in the Winter. Gary stated that a decision needs to be made as it's been stated the project could be started as early as December 1, 2024. Structural repair of the building needs to be addressed before the decking gets fully replaced. Rick would like to get the answer to the insurance concerns before deciding. Luke assured Kelly that turnaround time of supplies wouldn't be that long; colors would be limited but sourcing wouldn't be hard. Budget will also need to be looked at as composite is more expensive as stated.

Gary wants to be clear as well that in his opinion due diligence has been done as this has been on the agenda multiple times over the last 3 years. The only person/company that has stepped up and said he can and will do the project is Elwell Construction. Gary would like to have a motion made to confirm that the Select Board wants Elwell Construction to complete the project.

There was a motion made by Scott to authorize Kelly to work with Elwell Construction to get the deck and the Town Office repaired. This was seconded by Rick, vote 3-0.

4.2 Set date for personal property tax workshop

Kelly explained that Renee Lachapelle (in attendance) approached Kelly and Ellery (Assessing Agent) to express concerns about how town personal property taxes were being assessed. Kelly has spoken with Ellery about coming to a future Select Board meeting to review the process and determine how to move forward. As discussed earlier Ellery would recommend having a workshop during business hours. Ellery can be available as early as next Tuesday November 19, 2024 at 7:00 am.

There was a motion made by Scott to set Tuesday November 19, 2024, as the date for the personal property tax workshop. This was seconded by Rick, vote 3-0.

Renee explained her concerns and stance regarding personal property taxes, and stated has worked as an assessor. She stated concern about how many will show up at 7:00 am for the meeting. Kelly noted there will be follow-up at the following Select Board meeting (and the workshop will be recorded).

5.0 Unscheduled Business

5.1

6.0 Appointments/Resignations

6.1 Appoint Heather Donovan to Litchfield Academy Trustees

Per Kelly Heather provided a nice letter of interest explaining her interest and background. Kelly wanted to point out that this appointment is for a normally elected position that had been contested by write-in at the municipal election. The top three candidates declined and there were many that received one vote (including Heather). Rayna wanted to clarify the length of the appointment which will be a three-year term.

There was a motion made by Scott to appoint Heather Donovan to the Litchfield Academy Trustees, seconded by Rick, vote 3-0.

7.0 Warrants

7.1 Town Warrant #9 \$432,637.64 (of which \$371,544.55 is for RSU4)

There was a motion made by Scott to approve Town Warrant #9 in the amount of \$432,637.64. This was seconded by Rick, with the added note that \$371,544.55 is for RSU4, vote 3-0.

7.2 Town Payroll #9 \$40,451.04

There was a motion made by Scott to approve Town Payroll #9 in the amount of \$40,451.04. This was seconded by Rick, vote 3-0.

8.0 Selectmen/Public Discussion/ Communication

8.1 Kelly got the numbers regarding the structural repairs for the Town Office. The budget is \$40,000.00 and the estimate for the structural repairs came in at \$45,775.00 with composite.

8.2 Gary would like to discuss the minutes of October 28th.

- Removing the boats, as Gary said there has been discussion. He understands there is more research to be done. He would like it to be known that in his opinion it's unacceptable for residents, past/current/future, to just dump their trash on the sides of the roads. If the Town needs to go to court to get the boats removed, then he is in favor of doing so. Gary doesn't feel the Town should pay for removal. Scott asked if it's known who put them there. Kelly noted there are residents who are willing to state who owned the boats but not who put the boats in their current location. Larry explained the back story of the two pieces of property. Gary would like to have the Town attorney contacted to find out what can be done.

- Lahey property, Gary would like Kelly to keep a very tight rein on the situation. He doesn't feel that what was done was legal and he doesn't want to see more and more residents of the Town of Litchfield just doing whatever they want and disregarding the consequences. Kelly explained the current issues, one being that the boulders put in are too close to the shore and the lean-to that was put in is too close to the property line and that the town lawyer recommended addressing those two issues separately. Rick has noted that he believes the property next door has since sold.

- Gary has reached out to representative Greenwood to discuss the County tax bill. He has asked Kelly to reach out to him as well to discuss.

- Determine the eldest resident of Litchfield. Larry suggested asking on the Sodalite, Rick suggested Facebook, Scott asked about the possibility using voter registrations and birth dates noted there.

9.0 Future Agenda Items

9.1 Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Program

10.0 Adjournment at 7:58 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Angela Parker