

**Town of Litchfield
Selectboard Meeting Minutes
Nov 13, 2023**

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) (absent); Scott Weeks.

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

2.0 Minutes of Oct. 24, 2023; Oct. 25, 2023 (put on hold until Rick can attend the Select Board meeting).

There was a motion made by Scott Weeks to approve the minutes from October 24, 2023. Gary seconded the motion, vote 2-0.

-Kelly wanted to make a correction in the 5.0 Unscheduled Business section which seemed to indicate that Larry had drafted a letter, instead of simply passing it out.

Scott Weeks amended the motion to approve the minutes with corrections from October 24, 2023. Gary seconded the motion, vote 2-0.

3.0 Reports and Correspondence **Schedule altered to be respectful of attendee's time**

3.1 Town Manager - Kelly Weissenfels

A. Tax bills have been sent out and delivered. There has been an influx of phone calls and visits regarding resident's bills.

B. November 7, 2023, election went smoothly per Kelly. Some of the results were as follows:

- RSU 4 Budget passed over all even though Litchfield voted it down. However, since Sabattus and Wales turned out enough in favor, the budget was passed by 50 votes.

Litchfield yes 548 / no 632

Sabattus yes 729 / no 617

Wales yes 247 / no 225

- Maine referendum results were also read aloud and discussed during this time.

C. There has also been an invitation to join the RSU4 Consolidation Committee received from the superintendent. Kelly read this aloud, noting the first meeting will be held January 10, 2023, 5:30pm-6:20pm. This is a committee organized to discuss the closure of one or more schools in the district. It was speculated that this is because maintenance hasn't been kept up and the RSU has been looking to close at least one school for a while now.

D. The Select Board attended a workshop regarding ambulance uncollectibles the morning of Nov 13, 2023. Kelly summarized, with time for the discussion.

- Towns that use the Gardiner Ambulatory Collective services (for lack of a better term) are Litchfield, Gardiner, Chelsea, Farmingdale, Pittston, Randolph, W. Gardiner, and Richmond. All these towns pool together to provide ambulance services. However, each town is responsible for its own bills that go uncollected.

- For this year's budget \$16,000.00 has been allotted to pay for Litchfield uncollectibles.

-What was clarified at the workshop this morning is that the Ambulance Enterprise Account is carrying an outstanding balance of approx. one million dollars. Divided up by each town's share, Litchfield owes \$103,000.00 for bills in the past 7-8 years that have not been paid.

- There were options of payment discussed at the workshop as well. The town can choose from anywhere between three to eight years to repay the debt.

There are some things to keep in mind.

- If the ambulance service doesn't transport someone (meaning they come to check on a patient but do not get put them in the ambulance) they do NOT charge for the trip.
- Tom Wood wanted to let it be known that the state laws are changing in that if there is a charge to the patient for ambulatory services the check coming from the insurance company will be written to the ambulance service not the patient.
- - Moving forward the Town of Litchfield will be allotting \$20,000.00 or possibly more based on a 4 year average, depending on how things progress to not be in such a situation in the future. The Selectboard will be looking at options to determine the best course of action for 2025.
- - These changes were driven by the hiring of a new auditor by Gardiner Ambulance who said they should not be holding the large debt for the towns.

E. Auction resulted in an inflow of \$23,000.00 for the items sold from the back lot of the Town Garage.

F. Kelly gave a recap on the Purgatory Dam report that was received from Calderwood. There is little drive to do anything about the dam. This Dam doesn't really do much if anything since the edge of Woodbury Pond's dam went in.

G. Town Projects discussion cont.

- Town Office Deck

There has been a quote conditionally accepted but then the contractor has had to bow out of original date of completion due to circumstances beyond his control. A second contractor has given a prelim report that he might be able to get the job done in December depending on lumber companies and delivery dates. A third contractor stopped by and spoke with Kelly and possibly "if no one else has taken the job then he might be able to do it in the Spring.

- Transfer Station building vs relocation

There has been a first draft of a request for quotes for a 30'x30' building. Also there has been a proposal to move the transfer station all together to a new location. The location being "right next door" to the current site. However, this would take work, planning, and a financial commitment. Kelly posed a question to the Selectboard asking if they would like to form a sub committee to investigate and determine which option would be best suited for the situation. Also, to survey the best practices of the surrounding transfer stations. Gary feels the best course of action is to form said committee and have them report to Kelly in turn he would report to the Selectboard. Discussion was had and concluded 3-5 people to do the work should be a good place to start.

3.2 Code Officer/Plumbing Inspector - Kelly Weissenfels

A. The Caton House clean-up project has been completed by the heirs, and the pre-established requirements due by the end of October were satisfied.

B. Steve has been consulted about the old house that is falling down by the old firehouse and he will be researching to see who owns the property and what is to be done moving forward.

C. There is someone living in the former firehouse in the Litchfield Corners village. It is recommended that the Selectboard address this, as the deed originally conveyed does not allow someone to live there. There are 2 options to move forward; either go to court to evict or alter the deed and allow the building

to be occupied. Moving forward Kelly is to find out about the septic situation, then the selectboard will move forward once they know more.

3.3 Road Commissioner – Larry Nadeau

A. The Old Mill Rd Bridge is now well underway after a very successful day of work by the Town Crew.

The families that live on the far side of the bridge are all set with accommodations per Kelly.

B. The blown-in insulation was completed in the Town Garage and Larry reports temps are maintaining nicely inside.

C. There was a minor fender bender in the parking lot of Marsten's Repair with a Town truck/employee which will be taken care of/fixed very soon.

D. The first sanding of the year is now in the books. McGee dropped off the rest of the sand and it's all in storage now ready and waiting for the rest of the Fall/Winter to come.

E. Whippoorwill Rd has been completed; shouldering is now all done. Huntington Hill Road as of today is about half done with shouldering. The Ferrin Road "drag shim" portion will have free mobilization costs next year, as the crew on the job wasn't able to complete the process this year.

F. The South end of Small Road will be fixed in the Spring by the Turnpike Authority.

3.4 Fire & Rescue - Kelly Weissenfels read a report from Chief Sherman.

A. There are now 4 new Junior Members on board with another application submitted in the last month! Captain Stevens and Firefighter Woodrum oversee that program with help and support from us all.

B. Chief Sherman also sends in his report that another new member has joined the fire department. He will be attending classes in the coming months to obtain his EMT license and will be trained properly from the ground up. Chief Sherman is also in possession of another application for membership that he will be reviewing soon.

C. Engine 65 has been delivered to the shop that is doing the frame repair. The Chief will be assessing the truck once it's apart to identify any other issues that might be underlying. He reports he isn't expecting to see any, however, he is looking forward to the opportunity to check the truck fully. All Mutual Aid Departments are aware the Town of Litchfield is down to one truck and are ready to assist should the need arise.

D. Chief Sherman will be promoting a Deputy Chief this month, he has 3 letters of interest from qualified candidates within the department. Interviews will be conducted in the coming days. This will bring the department to 3 Deputy Chiefs, with one on a leave of absence, we will have 2 active after this promotion which is exactly in keeping with our organizational structure.

E. Compliance testing on pumps, ladders, and hoses as well as Fit Testing and medical clearance (for those who wear SCBA's) are complete for another year. It has been a busy October! Additionally, there are some hose(s) that failed, but new ones are going to be purchased to replace these. Also additional hoses as funding allows, to replace some of the next oldest in line.

3.5 Emergency Mgmt. - Kelly Weissenfels read a report from Chief Sherman.

There has been a "Plan B" facility secure if Carrie Ricker is not available for shelter. This would only be if the building was physically unusable or there was a threat of some kind. The location of the facility will not be named at this time for safety, considering recent tragic events. Another meeting to continue shelter planning will be scheduled in the coming week to be sure the team is ready should they be needed before the holidays.

3.6 Assessing Agent - Kelly Weissenfels

A. The Assessing Agent was in the office on November 9, 2023, with 14 appointments., Most appointments were regarding property taxes. He will be returning November 22, 2023.

B. Kelly will have abatements and supplements for the next meeting.

3.7 Transfer Station – John Upham

A. 3 new stickers sent out since the last meeting for a total of 2601. The stickers now need to be set on the outside of the windshield, so the crew is speaking with residents about the process.

B. One bulky and one cardboard container were emptied this week.

C. Freon was removed this week, also, tires were taken away.

D. The leaf and brush piles will be closing on November 18, 2023.

E. The team attended a DEP Transfer Station Operator Training last week and learned they are on track for the most part with rules and regulations. They will be asking the folks that take the used oil drums to only take one at a time moving forward in order to comply with DEP rules.

3.8 Other Town Committees – none

4.0 Scheduled Business

4.1 Public Hearing / adoption of municipal General Assistance appendices ~~7-^{pm}~~ 7:18pm (motion)

Pursuant to 22MRS Section 4305

The question is to amend the general assistance limits by repealing and replacing the appendices A-H of the existing ordinance with the attached appendices which will be effective October 1, 2023-September 20, 2024. Time for discussion and question(s) allowed. The town generally goes with what the State recommends. The town gets reimbursed 90%. Public Hearing was closed at 7:22pm

There was a motion made by Scott Weeks to adopt the Municipal General Assistance according to the State of Maine. Gary 2nd, Vote 2-0.

4.2 Review / sign Municipal Valuation Return (motion)

The document was reviewed and signed by Gary and Scott. The town of Litchfield is valued at (total taxable value of real estate and personal property for the town of Litchfield) \$452,772,600.00

There was a motion made by Scott Weeks to approve the 2023 Municipal Evaluation Return. Gary 2nd, Vote 2-0.

4.3 Review / accept quitclaim to town of U28-028

Kelly reviewed with board. There is a property in Peace Pipe that is perennially a vernal pool, in the spring it's just flowing water. The current owner no longer wants to pay taxes on the property anymore. They would like to "quit claim" this back to the town of Litchfield. The downfall is the town wouldn't be getting the tax dollars for the property. However, Kelly noted the current owner could simply not pay the taxes and have it foreclosed on. Kelly will get the opinion from the town attorney and this will be discussed at the next meeting.

4.4 RSU4 Survey Results – Percy Gowell/Tom Wood/Chad Hill

Percy informed the board that the time spent at the ballots was very informative. He presented the results from the survey the committee had created and offered to voters on Nov 7th. Time was allotted to discuss and ask questions. He sent a big thank you to all that spent time covering the table and helping to ask questions and collect data. Tom Wood had not gotten all the survey questions compiled yet, but gave the results of those that he had as follows: There were 270 surveys collected to date with 6 questions posed to the voters. This is just shy of 25% of the voters that turned out on November 7th. Question 5 Was regarding interest in serving on the committee, and 30 people put their names and contact information.

Question 3: "I believe that Litchfield should separate from RSU4 and form its own school district. Even if it means a possible increase in property taxes." Yes 66%, no 34%

Question 4: "The Select board should put the matter of separation from the RSU and forming a Litchfield school district before the voters." Yes 87%, no 13%.

Also, Percy mentioned that he was able to talk with the Richmond Superintendent to discuss their process of separating from their RSU and forming their own district. Percy said that Richmond had hired a part-time Superintendent who has 5 people that assist him in the day-to-day operations. The superintendent recommended that the payroll position should be full time due to the scope of duties. Percy stated that (if Litchfield separated from RSU 4) high school aged children would possibly still be able to attend Oak Hill High School, and the town would be paying tuition there. He also noted that, the state would still be reimbursing per student the same as they do now, stated on the ED279, so some of the cost of tuition would be reimbursed to the town.

The committee is tasked with coming up with the timeline as to what the steps are for withdrawal to be able to move forward in a timely manner. Also, Percy and the team will be speaking with others that are working on getting out of their RSU(s) as well, and he mentioned Dresden would be next on his list. They will also find a replacement for the committee member that resigned.

4.5 Approve letter to begin road discontinuance process.

Kelly went over the legal notice that will be sent to residents that are on the 9 roads that the town is looking to discontinue servicing. Kelly will also send an accompanying letter explaining the process in everyday terms, but doesn't yet have it written. Kelly also remembered that he heard back from the attorney about the question posed by Tristen Russell about when assessing can begin. The attorney responded by saying the assessment can begin at any time and does not have to wait until a year after the letter is sent. Distances and time involved have been provided to Kelly by Larry to help in providing further information on why the town shouldn't be responsible for these 9 roads/driveways. The Town must vote on each road at a regular Town Meeting at least a year after the letter is sent.

There was a motion made by Scott Weeks to approve the letter to begin the road discontinuance. Gary 2nd, Vote 2-0.

5.0 Unscheduled Business

5.1 Kelly would like to schedule a meeting to discuss his contract as the current one expires at the end of the December. Gary would like to have all 3 members of the Select board present. Kelly will find a day when all board members are available.

5.2 Rayna said she was very excited to announce that the trusses for the food bank are going to be delivered this week and construction starts on November 27, 2023.

6.0 Appointments/Resignations

6.1

6.2

7.0 Warrants

7.1 Town Warrant #13 \$101,636.71

There was a motion made by Scott Weeks to approve the Town Warrant #13 \$101,636.71. Gary 2nd, Vote 2-0.

7.2 RSU4 Warrant #14 \$336,661.61

There was a motion made by Scott Weeks to approve the RSU4 Warrant #14 \$336,661.61. Gary 2nd, Vote 2-0.

7.3 Town Payroll #9 \$41,231.15

There was a motion made by Scott Weeks to approve Town Payroll #9 \$41,231.15. Gary 2nd, Vote 2-0.

8.0 Selectmen/Public Discussion/ Communication

8.1

9.0 Future Agenda Item

9.1 R02-017, 2783 Hallowell Road – will be removed from the next meeting agenda.

9.2 Purgatory Dam – will be removed from the next meeting's agenda.

10.0 Adjournment at 8:51pm

Respectfully submitted by Angela Parker