

Town of Litchfield
Select Board Meeting Minutes
September 23rd, 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) (absent); Scott Weeks.

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

2.0 Minutes of September 9, 2024

There was a motion made by Scott to approve the minutes from September 9, 2024. This was seconded by Gary, vote 2-0 (1 absent).

Gary requested that the minutes amended to clarify where the crew has been working to clear brush and trees.

3.0 Reports and Correspondence

3.1 Town Manager

A. RSU4 School Budget vote will be held tomorrow at the Litchfield Town Office. Per Kelly, the overall increase to Litchfield over last year's budget is 4.79%.

B. Kelly received a report that FEMA's project funding is progressing. They have reached the obligation stage at this point. Per Kelly, the next step is to send the funds out to the municipalities. This is related to the December rebuild of Gustin Road.

C. Kelly has applied for a grant from MMA, this would be to upgrade the Town Office's surveillance. Kelly hopes to have better surveillance covering the outside of and downstairs in the Town Office. He is looking to qualify for one of the two types of \$3000.00 grants being offered annually by the Main Municipal Association.

3.2 Code Officer/Plumbing Inspector

A. Steve gave an update regarding the illegal junkyard that was discussed at the previous meeting and the promise the owner of the property made to remove vehicles. Per Steve no vehicles have been moved to date. Steve and the Select Board came up with a plan moving forward. The owner of the property has 60 days from September 23, 2024, to remove vehicles. The property owner will be informed of this via the registered letter that Steve will send out through the Litchfield post office. Also, the letter will invite the resident back to another Select Board meeting to discuss the situation. Otherwise, he has 60 days to clear up his property of the junk cars, the town will proceed with legal proceedings.

There was a motion made by Gary to have Mr. Miquelon notified (via registered letter), that the Town will start legal proceedings 60 days from today if no effort has been made to remove any of the junk cars from his lot. This was seconded by Scott, vote 2-0 (1 absent).

3.3 Road Commissioner

- A. Per Larry the Road Crew is doing well, they are all working well together.
- B. The Town's one ton is still down and out of commission. There was an issue with the hydro boost. This is being resolved tomorrow morning per Larry.
- C. Plow trucks are ready to go for the winter.
- D. Larry believes that all the grinding is done for the season, weather dependent of course.
- E. Scott asked if money should be set aside for the removal/replacement of the older cable guardrails on Stevenstown Road. Per Larry replacement would be necessary and it would roughly cost \$15,000.00 - \$20,000.00. Larry noted he will bring this up at the next Road Budgetary Meeting.

3.4 Fire & Rescue

- A. Per Chief Sherman the Sportsman's Club Pond is getting quite low. He will be reaching out to the members of the club to talk about the upcoming winter season and what the low water level might mean for the Town.
- B. This is the compliance season for the Fire and Rescue Departments. There is a three-year rotation on check rides for drivers that allows people to drive. Also, it's time to check the ladders and hoses, which will be taken care of this week per Chief Sherman.
- C. There was a hydrant repair attempted on Rt. 197 at Wentzell Road in which the Public Works crew and Fire & Rescue worked together to clear out the rock debris clogging the intake pipe of the hydrant. However, during the clean out the visibility was poor, and the end of the pipe was nicked, and the end was removed. Chief Sherman will be working on getting the permits to replace the hydrant in the coming months.
- D. Recently there has been one person leave the department due to a move out of town and one person has been added to the department's roster.
- E. Chief Sherman closed with the reading of the number of Fire and Resue calls for the month of August.
- F. Gary wanted to know if anyone has investigated the removal of the stumps from the trees that were cut down and removed at the fire station recently. Kelly and Chief Sherman have been working on getting quotes.

3.5 Emergency Mgmt.

- A. Chief Sherman has been working on the emergency action plan for the town. He will be working out the details slowly until a draft copy is completed. He is looking to get the plan up to date. Also, he and Kelly will be working on emergency procedures and policies for elections. This means making a back-up plan in case power is lost, and other contingencies for emergencies that etc. during the daily processes on election day.
- B. Tom asked if the details of using the school buildings for emergency use are being worked out. Per Chief Sherman the mutual aid agreement is still in effect with one possible exception. One of the signees of the agreement has left that position and there's and new facilities

coordinator. Chief Sherman needs to reach out to them and make sure that there is no change to that agreement.

3.6 Assessing Agent

A. Per Kelly, RJD was in the office getting Spring work done in time for the Tax Commitment being discussed tonight.

B. Ellery will be back in the office in a couple of weeks. Kelly hopes residents will have their bills in time to ask Ellery any questions they might have about their bills.

3.7 Transfer Station

A. Both bulky bins as well as the one paper bin were emptied this week.

B. The plastic compactor was serviced, with the replacement of all the hydraulic fluid, they checked everything over. There was a light found that needed a new lens, otherwise all seems to be in working order. The company traveled from VT to service the compactor, which left a final bill of \$1500.00.

C. The shack the Transfer Station crew used to use will be picked up tomorrow morning around 8 am per Larry.

3.8 Other Town Committees

4.0 Scheduled Business

4.1 Resolution of Bergeron permit concerns

Kelly reviewed the discussion of the last meeting (see minutes from August 9, 2024). Kelly and Steve are at a loss for a resolution to the request to provide the original signed plumbing permit, as the documents that are on Steve's hard drive are the only documents on record, meaning there is no original paper copy of the signed plumbing permit. The signature and dates on the Bergeron's copy do not match the Town's copy, and the Bergeron's would like to have a valid copy to show if/when they eventually sell their house. Gary explained that since the Code Enforcement Officer signed the permit, it is a valid document, and went over the inspection paperwork with the Bergeron's during the meeting. He wanted to know if the Bergeron's would be satisfied with signing a new document that would that they could provide in case they decide to sell their house. They agreed that would be acceptable. Kelly and Steve were tasked to coordinate with the Bergeron's to make that happen. Moving forward, the town will be keeping all the original documents in the office. Kelly can reach out to the town's legal counsel as well to make sure the steps being taken are legal.

4.2 Junk Yard Permit renewal - Levi Bolton

Kelly hasn't heard any complaints regarding the Junk Yard. Rayna, who lives next door has no complaints about renewal. She stated they get a little noisy sometimes, but this type of business means noise and it's never at night or early in the morning. Per Kelly Levi, paid his renewal fee today and signed all his paperwork.

There was a motion made by Scott to approve and sign the junk yard permit renewal for Levi Bolton for October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025. This was seconded by Gary, vote 2-0 (1 absent).

4.3 Adopt 2024-25 General Assistance maximums

Each year MMA compiles a list in conjunction with the state a compilation of general assistance reference sheets.

There was a motion made by Gary to adopt the 2024-25 General Assistance maximums appendices A-F. This was seconded by Scott, vote 2-0 (1 absent).

Kelly will be sending along via email another ordinance that he would like to see the town adopt. Gary wants to get the document as soon as he can, so he has time to read through it and take the necessary steps to adopt it if they all agree that it's the correct step for the town.

4.4 Communications – town office text option

Per Kelly, he has signed the town up for with EZtexting. This is the first step toward providing emergency and other information via text during electricity outages or other situations when the internet may be down. The telephone number for people to text to join in to receive text updates for the town and receive emergency updates/information is (808) 289-8089. If you text JOIN to that number you will receive a basic message that reads: (Town of Litchfield, ME) Want emergency and warming shelter text alerts and other notifications from the Town? Text YES to complete your request. There is an option to STOP receiving texts if you do not like the service.

4.5 Property Tax Commitment

Kelly handed out two summary matrixes for the Select board to use for comparison of mil rates that represent a range, with an average of about a 5% tax increase. There was time given for review and questions of the sheets. Per Kelly what has been done for the last couple years is to maintain an overlay of approximately \$35,000.00.

Tom noted that the Budget Committee has voiced concerns about the revenue estimates. As they have been a little more conservative over the past three years. With the shift in political views of the residents on the Budget Committee, they are seeing the balancing act of expenditures and revenues become tighter and tighter. There has been no official recommendation from the Budget Committee to date.

Scott noted he thinks the numbers being discussed is splitting hairs, so either of the suggested center range numbers is fine with him.

Tom pointed out that the Seniors that had their property taxes frozen last year and now are no longer frozen are looking at a bump of 11 – 11.5%. So, there will likely be a shock when these folks receive their tax bills this year.

Scott would like Kelly with the help of the Select Board to put together a letter that will be sent to the County Commissioners Office regarding the fact that the town has to pay their county tax in one lump sum. Since there is no other faction that requires a lump sum payment, Scott doesn't feel this is appropriate. He understands it might not change anything. However, he feels

strongly enough to try and change the situation for the future. He would like to see the payment broken into quarterly payments as most all other tax bills are broken into. Gary supports this as a step forward.

There was a motion made by Scott to set the property tax commitment with a Mill Rate of 14.25. This was seconded by Gary, vote 2-0 (1 absent).

5.0 Unscheduled Business

5.1 Discussion of Mr. Miquelon's property – illegal junk yard

*See 3.2.A

6.0 Appointments/Resignations

6.1

7.0 Warrants

7.1 Town Warrant #6 \$99,119.88

There was a motion made by Scott to approve Town Warrant #6 in the amount of \$99,119.88. This was seconded by Gary, vote 2-0 (1 absent).

7.2 Town Payroll #6 \$37,473.94

There was a motion made by Scott to accept Town Payroll #6 in the amount of \$37,473.94. This was seconded by Gary, vote 2-0 (1 absent).

8.0 Selectmen/Public Discussion/ Communication

8.1 Larry wanted some clarification regarding 3.2 on this agenda, review was had.

8.2 Kent Ackley asked to speak about November's ballot. He spoke about the school systems and administrative overhead being a large issue. Mr. Ackley is running for state representative and is standing on the platform of trying to help with decreasing taxes by helping with the school system by introducing legislation that would make it easier for towns to withdraw from RSUs.

Tom wanted to know Mr. Ackley's opinion on building into legislation taxpayer participation in decision making and policy development at the Department of Education. Mr. Ackley stated he would be in favor of that.

9.0 Future Agenda Items

9.1 Select Board Plaque for Special Recognition Recipients

10.0 Adjournment at 8:45 pm

Respectfully submitted by Angela Parker