Bethlehem Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

December 14, 2020

Via Zoom – Chairman Boisseau, Selectman Moore, Selectman Moritz, Selectman Caplain, Selectman Jensen.

Chairman Boisseau opened the meeting at 6:02 and reminded people to leave their microphones on mute.

Chairman Boisseau started with the positive news for the week. Shoutout to teachers, families and students making education work at all three schools in town. Everyone is working really hard to make it happen. It is good to see education moving forward in trying times.

**PUBLIC INPUT:**

**Rita Farrell:** Ms. Farrell hadquestion about safety on state roads, specifically safety at intersection of 142 and 302. Is there public input after agenda items? Chairman Boisseau – yes, there is public input after agenda items. Ms. Farrell stated there are poles without lights up Agassiz from Main St. to Cross St. dark without lights. Ms. Farrell commended the board on keeping the tax rate down. Selectman Moritz stated it is good to note that the school tax rate is down and is a major contribution to the total rate being down.

**NEW ENGLAND COMMERCIAL SOLAR SERVICES/BARRINGTON POWER:**

**Ted Vasant and Jack Bingham –** Mr. Vansant represents Barrington power with Jack Bingham. Profile School and the Ammonoosuc Energy Committee worked on a solar project at school. There was an RFP put out, Barrington won proposal and entered into agreement for project. It will provide the school with almost 100% of needed electricity. The proposal was made with the assumption the town would enter into PILOT agreement. The benefits to town with a steady stream of income and it is easy to budget for. Compared to towns around state and other projects @ $3000 MW/hr – about $700 as project is smaller than a megawatt.

The board discussed in length the proposed PILOT agreement between Barrington Power and the Town of Bethlehem. The amount and length of the proposed PILOT were questioned by board members. The board listened to input from Melissa Elander from Barrington power and Mark Koprowski, NH Community Program Specialist, Rural Development, from the United States Department of Agriculture.

Chairman Boisseau opened the discussion up to public input.

Cheryl Jensen – Asked how the business makes money off the project. Ms. Jensen thanked the energy commission for the work they did and stated her support for solar energy production but opposes the project as it is giving a tax break to a private business. The town has no control over the school budget and there is no promise that the electricity savings would flow back into the town.

The board took Ms. Jensen’s comments into consideration and continued to discuss the proposed PILOT agreement. The board questioned the presented savings and discussed with Ted Vansant and Mark Koprowski. The board agrees that renewable resources are needed, and this project would be a chance for students to see the benefits of renewable energy. They continued to discuss and weigh the potential loss of tax income to the benefits of the town.

Chairman Boisseau made a motion to accept a 25 year PILOT agreement. Selectman Caplain seconded. Further discussion. Selectman Moore asked selectman Caplain if it makes financial sense as she trusts his judgement. Selectman Moore asked if there needed to be added wording to address a buyout by Profile School. Selectman Moore stated it was not needed as a buyout would end the PILOT agreement. Roll call. In favor: Selectmen Boisseau, Moore, Caplain, Moritz. Opposed: Selectman Jensen. Motion passes.

**BETHLEHEM ENERGY COMMISSION**

Mary Lou Kramber presented a slideshow increasing solar energy in Bethlehem with a proposed array on town land behind the elementary school and on the roof of the town garage. The savings to town depending on grant size is between $336,000 to $504,000. The Bethlehem Energy Commission applied for USDA grant.

Selectman Moore asked the location of the project. Ms. Kramber stated it is behind the elementary school and on roof of highway garage. There are 2 arrays: one down by ballfield and one on the highway garage roof. Selectman Moritz asked if awarded, does the grant have to be used in 2021? Selectman Caplain stated the grant is for 3 years and we don’t have to accept it if awarded.

Rita Farrell asked about the number of days for solar use. – Ms. Kramber stated the calculations presented are based on study that looked at potential solar days during year. Chairman Boisseau stated the technology on solar panels work efficiency under cloudy skies and asked if there is anything the town can do to help chances. Selectman Caplain stated the trusses in highway garage need to be updated to carry panels and the grant didn’t change because there are monies in the budget to fix trusses. Chris McGrath asked if it was on school or town property and if it would affect the ball fields. Chairman Boisseau clarified it was on town property and Ms. Kramber stated it will not affect the ball fields.

**WREN:**

Mary Moritzasked town to be fiscal agent for grant WREN is applying for. Ms. Moritz explained the town is just signing for the grant, they are not writing the grant. Pam Sullivan explained what the grant was for and that REN cannot be the fiscal agent for a grant that benefits WREN. Chairman Boisseau asked if the board had questions. Selectman Jensen asked if this was a town administered grant. Mary Moritz stated WREN will be responsible for the grant and the board chair will only sign. Ms. Sullivan stated that the letter of intent will be the next step. Selectmen Jensen, Moore and Caplain all voiced support.

Rita Farrell asked for an explanation of the ownership of the block of shops and asked why the town has to be involved. Pam Sullivan explained that the entire block was owned by the Altamonte Block condo association and the grant would benefit the entire block. The town must be involved as WREN can not be the fiscal agent and benefit from the grant.

Chairman Boisseau made a motion for the town to become the fiscal agent for Altamonte block grant proposal. Selectman Jensen seconded - roll call – Selectmen Boisseau, Caplain, Jensen, and Moore approved. Selectman Moritz recused herself from vote. Motion passed.

**ABATEMENT:**

**GB –** map lot number 416-051 - $5491.08 – religious exemption. Nicole McGrath, from Mary Jackson, a merge in software made the mistake. The entire property was billed, not only the exempt part. Selectman Moritz mad a motion to move forward with abatement. Selectman Caplain seconded – roll call - all - motion passed.

**BUDGETS:**

**Library**

Chairman Boisseau - first on list – 2020 – $123,621, 2021 $123,621 – no change – board questions? Selectman Caplain asked if expenses are expected to go down because of COVID or stay flat. Doug Harmon stated they don’t have final stats yet and don’t know yet what will happen next year. They kept budget flat with the unknow.

Rita Farrell – comment – must continue to support library as it is an asset to town.

Chairman Boisseau there are no further board questions.

**Conservation Commission –** 2020 $1270, 2021 $1270 – no change – no questions.

**Welfare** – 2020 $12,000, 2021 $28,013. Additional amount for General Assistance supervisor stipend and social security – no questions.

**Recreation** – 2020 $127,921, 2021 $113,047 – decrease of salary line and associated lines – no questions.

**Street Lights** – 2020 $26,000, 2021 $26,000 Selectman Moritz stated the budget used to be $37,000 before the LED conversion.

**Executive –** 2020 $169,911, 2021 $168,011 – Rita Farrell asked what the budget covers. Chairman Boisseau explained it covers the administrative and clerical services for the town.

**Planning –** 2020 $21,822, 2121 $21,822

Chris McGrath stated this is the first time the budget was not lowered. It has been cut to bare bones and can’t cut anymore. The salary is beyond control of the planning board. Unused funds go back to general fund.

**Insurance –** 2020 $265,274, 2021 $299,347 – no questions.

**Selectman Caplain** – budget items – fire budget – chief’s truck stipend – Selectman Caplain wanted to make sure the board is being fair to Jack Anderson. He goes above and beyond for town business. Selectman Caplain would like to add to the stipend $1000 – Selectman Moritz feels that is reasonable. Selectmen Boisseau, Jensen, and Moore all agree. Stipend raised from $3000 to $4000.

Selectman Caplain – Sullivan creative - need to increase funds for continued work next year, $18k – possible grant to offset some - $15k – Selectman Jensen stated there is a USDA grant available with contribution. Selectman Moore stated the visitor center budget does advertising – Selectman Moritz stated it makes sense to budget $15k to help with grant and to budget for future. A breakdown would be helpful from Sullivan Creative.

**FOLLOW UP: from board**

none

**OTHER:**

**Chairman Boisseau –** The board needs to start moving forward with finding a replacement for the recreation director position and figure out the salary. The job needs to be posted as school returns January 19th.

**MINUTES (12/7/2020)**

**Selectman Moore moved to accept – Selectman Jensen seconded – roll call - all - motion passed**

**Non-public not needed**

**Selectman Moritz inquired about a meeting next week? – board discussion – next meeting 1/4 meeting on 12/28th if needed.**

**Chairman Boisseau made a motion to adjourn at 8:28pm. Selectman Moritz seconded – roll call – all motion passed.**

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Fleury

Administrative Assistant