Bethlehem Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

September 12, 2022

In person – Chairman Caplain, Selectman Jensen, Selectman Morris, Selectman Hibberd, and Selectman Queiroga

Chairman Caplain opened the meeting at 6:00pm. Select person Caplain welcomed Mary Moritz to the role of Administrative Assistant

Chairman Caplain opened Public Input:

Nancy Strand asked about holding a candidate’s night for state elections. Ms. Strand suggested forming a committee to study short term rental and their impacts on the community. She encouraged the board to create a work group to research Bethlehem’s housing data and to make informed decisions, similar to what was done in Franconia Chairman Caplain thanked Ms. Strand for her comments and let her know that the select board has been looking into this.  Select person Hibberd said that she and the welfare director talked about forming a housing work group to investigate housing.

Chairman Caplain open the public hearing at 6:05 to accept the additional highway block grant funds in the amount of $92,366.79 to be used for the highway department purposes. Chairman Caplain sought comments from the board.

S**elect person Morris made a motion to accept the highway development Block Grant additional funding in the amount of $92,366.79. Select person Hibberd seconded. Chairman Caplain asked if there was any further discussion or public input and then asked the board if they were all in favor and all select persons were in favor. Chairman Caplain closed the public hearing at 6:07.**

Chairman Caplain introduced Henry Herndon and Melissa Elander from Community Power Coalition. Mr. Herndon explained Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire is a new nonprofit formed for New Hampshire communities and he was there to extend an invitation to Bethlehem to join. He explained on a high level the community coalition is an organization that allows towns to become the default electricity provider for residents and businesses. Mr. Herndon explained the three benefits of the coalition. These are voluntary programs customers can switch back to the utility or choose their own energy provider. Chairman Caplain asked if at any time residents could leave the coalition. Mr. Herndon responded at any time with no penalty within the 30-day billing cycle. Select person Queiroga asked if each town could choose their own power source or if the coalition decided for each town. Mr. Herndon responded that each town would have local control and could choose their own power source. The coalition is currently made up of 20 board members and 19 municipalities. The town will go to coalition and say what we want to achieve, and the coalition will provide that to the town. Bethlehem will benefit from the collective purchasing power and will be able to customize their purchasing. Select person Jensen asked if Mr. Herndon could briefly explain what the procedure for the residence. Mr. Herndon explained the process, and what is required by law, is for the town to develop a plan through a committee that sets up Bethlehem community power. That committee would have to hold two public hearings and then go to town meeting for approval. He continued if town approves moving forward with the coalition the town is still not under any obligation but now the select board could entertain contracts with service providers and create Bethlehem Community power. After Bethlehem Community Power was created residents and businesses of Bethlehem would receive a mailer explaining what Bethlehem community power is and notifying them, they would be switched to Bethlehem Community Power if they were on a utility. The mailer would also include what the rate of the utility is versus Bethlehem community power and how to opt out of Bethlehem Community Power.  Select person Jensen asked if the residents must actively decline to participate. Mr. Herndon stated it is an opt out program and Bethlehem Community power would become the default option. There was continued discussion on the energy coalition. If the town approves the warrant in March theoretically the town could join the coalition by fall. Select person Queiroga asked Mr. Herndon to reiterate the next steps. Mr. Herndon stated first the town will form a committee and that committee would create a plan which would include the energy need, and the goals and objectives of the town. Select person Hibberd asked if the energy committee could be committee and Mr. Herndon replied they could be. Chairman Caplain said he speak to the energy committee and see if they would be interested in becoming the committee for the town regarding the Community Power Coalition.

Chairman Caplain Introduced Pam Sullivan, Executive Director of Wren, to discuss the food pantry as WREN is the non-profit agent for the town. Pam Sullivan estimated that Wren has been administering the food pantry funds for 8 to 10 years which includes collecting donations, reconciling the bank statements, and making deposits. Ms. Sullivan explains the amount of time WREN spends working on the food pantry depends on the time of year and estimates between one and four hours a month. Wren is looking into entering an MOU with the food pantry and would like to be compensated $100 a month to cover the administrative costs. Select person Hibberd asked how many on average deposit and charges expenditures are done monthly. Pam Sullivan replied that it depended on the time of year. Chairman Caplain asked if we could see a list of transactions Pam Sullivan responded that she would provide that information to the board. Pam felt there should be some controls put in place there regarding who has a signature of the debit card and who has access to the bank account. Pam is wondering who is supposed to be making this decision. Selectmen Hibberd informed Pam that Wren is only obligated for the financial piece. The reason behind the multiple debit cards is because multiple staff and volunteers that purchases supplies, and they require a receipt that matches the purchase. Select person Queiroga did not feel the amount of work WREN is responsible for warrants the expense. Select person Morris agreed. Select person Queiroga suggested seeking another non-profit. Select person Jensen asked which other nonprofits would be interested in taking over. Select person Hibberd said the colonial and Bethlehem reimagined were contacted when the town thought they would need to find a new volunteer. Select person Jensen suggested using some of the money from the food pantry to cover the costs, all other select people disagreed. Select person Hibberd said part of the problem is they are not able to get debit cards for other volunteers. Select person Morris also said she would like to see a way around the debit card problem could we get a generic staff card. Chairman Caplain asked Ms. Sullivan to provide the bank statement and reconciliation information for the board to review.

Chairman Caplain moved to the Grafton-Coos Regional Coordinating Council for Community Transportation (GCRCC) MOU. Both Chairman Caplain and Select person Morris felt the service was duplicative. Select person Morris researched the organization and found they have not met in a long time however felt there may be an opportunity as Tri County Cap will no longer be offering transportation to Bethlehem. Select person Queiroga asked if the town could receive the benefits of services without signing the MOU. Select person Caplain said the MOU would give the town representation. Select person Queiroga asked if Frank Claffey was still a member of GCRCC and Frank responded that he was no longer a member. Select person Queiroga noted concern that the organization had not met in a long time. Chairman Caplain would like to have a follow up conversation with Tri County Cap to find out why they dropped Bethlehem and Select person Jensen offered to contact Jeanne Robillard.

Chairman Caplain discussed the childhood cancer awareness week. Select person Hibberd felt strongly that the town should participate.

**Chairman Caplain made a motion to make 9/25-10/1 cancer awareness week. Select person Hibberd seconded. No discussion. All select people were in favor.**

Chairman Caplain opened the discussion on future meeting dates. It was agreed to September 19th, October 3rd, 17th, and 31st.

**Chairman Caplain made a motion to accept the August 29th meeting minutes. Select person Queiroga seconded. There was no discussion. All select people were in favor**.

Chairman Caplain asked if any select person had anything in other. Select person Jensen said no. Select person Hibberd asked the board if she could be the voting delegate for NHMA.

**Select person Queiroga made a motion to make Select person Hibberd the voting delegate for NHMA and Chairman Caplain seconded. All were in favor**.

Select person Queiroga and Morris had no other. Chairman Caplain received a call from Yitz, PMR who apologized for not getting back to the board regarding the boards concern about pedestrian safety.

Chairman Caplain made a motion to go into non-public per RSA-91A-3 for reasons of personnel and reputation. Select person Queiroga seconded and Chairman Caplain did roll call and all were in favor.

Chairman Caplain made a motion to adjourn 8:50 pm Selectman Jensen seconded, and all were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Moritz

Administrative assistant