Bethlehem Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

February 12th, 2024

In person –Chairman Morris, Selectman Strand, Selectman Hibberd, and Selectman Bruno.

Public Hearing Skate Park Chairman Morris opened the public hearing at 6:02.

**Chairman Morris motioned to accept the $51,930 donated to honor Brendan Foley to be used for the skate park. Selectman Hibberd seconded and all were in favor.**

**Chairman Morris motioned to close the public hearing. Selectman Hibberd seconded and all were in favor.**

Little Free Pantry- Chairman Morris opened discussion on the Little Free Pantry and read a statement submitted from Rich Southwell:

*It is my understanding that the Little Free Pantry is funded through private donations and operated by volunteers. Questions about how quickly the pantry empties out or who does the emptying are therefore none of my business.*

*That said, the Little Free Pantry is located on town property right next to the playground and the town pool. It has food, electricity, a roof that doesn’t leak and a door that is never locked. It is therefore a good place for an addict to use or perform acts that will enable them to support their habit. We know that this is happening because someone left their drug mess in the pantry 2 weeks ago.*

*I would like to understand how the Select Board can allow the Little Free Pantry to continue to operate on town property with no controls, monitoring or security when they know it is being used for illegal activities that endanger the health and safety of other residents.*

*It is my hope that the Select Board will work with the Little Free Pantry to implement common sense security measures that will make the pantry safer for the people who depend on it, the volunteers who run it and the families that visit the town pool and playground.*

Selectman Strand explained that she understood that suspected drug paraphernalia was found at the Little Free Pantry however doesn’t feel that the philosophy of the Little Free Pantry should be impacted.

Selectman Bruno the main objective is safety and believes a camera would increase safety.

Selectman Hibberd stated no one wants to restrict the Little Free Pantry however believes safety needs to be considered and the town cannot control the playground however can control the pantry. Selectman Hibberd recommends locking the free pantry during limited hours.

Selectman Strand stated she spoke to Police Chief DeMoranville and his recommendation was adding a camera and locking the pantry between 11:00pm and 5:00am. Selectman Strand continued that she did an initial search for programable locks, and they cost around $500.

Chairman Morris asked what makes someone using the Little Free Pantry for drug usage than outside of the elementary school. Chairman Morris continued that The Little Free Pantry philosophy allow s people who need access to food that access unrestricted.

Selectman Hibberd suggested checking the town’s liability with Primex.

Dan Crosby recommended adding larger windows for visibility.

Bob LaFleur explained the Little Free Pantry movement is about people who need resources having access any time and the proposed limitations are against the philosophy of the movement. Estelle LaFleur commented on how many people have been grateful for the Little Free Pantry and does not agree with adding hours of operation or camera’s.

The board decided to continue discussion at a future meeting.

Solar Array- Chairman Morris opened a discussion of a possible PILOT for the Rambling Woods solar project to offset the potential future property tax impact. Dan Crosby, Energy Commission, noted the town’s support of the solar exemption that was passed and the benefit to the town as residents reduce their energy costs. Chairman Morris recommended drafting a memorandum of understanding to provide Rambling Woods an agreement showing the town’s support of the project and intent not to impact their property value. Selectman Bruno recommended using the site plan review of the solar project to help draft the future PILOT. Dan Crosby noted RSA 72:74 for renewable energy PILOT’s. The town will contact the assessing company to help draft the memorandum of understanding.

**Selectman Hibberd motioned to approve the minutes from 1/8. Selectman Bruno seconded and all were in favor. Selectman Hibberd motioned to approve the minutes from 1/15. Chairman Morris seconded and all were in favor.**

Candidates Night- The board decided to hold the 2024 Candidates night March 7th at 6:00.

Highway Department Truck- purchase from Capital Reserve Selectman Hibberd motioned to purchase of the Highway Department truck not to exceed $103,000 to be paid from the capital reserve. Selectman Strand seconded and all were in favor.

Liaison/Committee Update- **Chairman Morris motioned to the 2024 reappointment and appoint to the Forest Ranger Fire Deputy as Chief Anderson submitted. Selectman Bruno seconded and all were in favor.**

Other- **Selectman Hibberd motioned to temporarily increase the Welfare credit card limit to $6,500. Chairman Morris seconded and all were in favor.**

Selectman Strand updated the board that the Transfer Station Committee has been seeking CDS funding, but it could be problematic, so the committee is working on alternative plans which include volunteer help to build. The board would like to investigate the liability of having volunteers help build the transfer station. Selectman Bruno updated the board that Chief Anderson is working on plans to reduce payroll and he will have more information once the plan is completed. Selectman Strand updated the board about a resident creating a resource site for contractors as bad experiences continue to occur. Selectman Strand asked the board if they would be willing to write a letter to legislators asking for better consumer protection. The board decided to discuss further as an agenda item.

Non-public Session per RSA 91A-3 II (personnel, reputation, and legal) Chairman Morris made a motion to go into non-public for reasons of legal and personnel. Selectman Strand seconded and roll call followed.

The board discussed a hiring potential.

**Chairman Morris motioned to hire Sager for the next property auction and to handle the legal issue pertaining to the properties and to be paid from the tax sale proceeds.**

**Chairman Morris made a motion to adjourn at 9:00. Selectman Strand seconded, and all were in favor.**

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Moritz

Town Administrator