

Town of Haverhill
SELECT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, November 20, 2023, at 6:00 PM
R. E. Clifford Memorial Building
65 South Court St. Woodsville, NH 03785

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Blanchard called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Select Board Attendance:

Chair Phil Blanchard; Vice Chair Joe Longacre; members Rod O’Shana and Kevin Knapp. Carolyn Hoffman was present via Zoom. A quorum was met.

Town Employees Present:

Brigitte Codling, Town Manager

Members of the Public Present

In Person:

Don Vaillancourt
Kathleen Vaillancourt
Judy Harris
Matthew Bjelobrk
Dawn Lavoie
Darwin Clogston
Marilyn Blaisdell
Sherry Fullerton
Rick Henson

David Robinson
Gary Hebert
Christina Hebert
Howard Hatch
Don Kimball
Margo Longacre
Dottie Long
Alex Nuti-de Biasi (*Journal Opinion*)

Online:

Polly Bonanno
Joanne Young
Robert Maccini
Tom Mangels
Harvey Keyes
Cassie Moulton
Delcia Vinnacombe

Ron DeRosia
Vickie Wyman
Evelyn Elms
Skip Gadwah
Mary Houde

ATTENDANCE/ROLL CALL

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AGENDA APPROVAL

Chair Blanchard added a new item to the Correspondence agenda.

MOTION #1: J. Longacre moved to approve the Agenda as amended. R. O'Shana seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

October 23, 2023, Select Board Meeting Minutes

MOTION #2: J. Longacre moved to approve the October 23, 2023, Select Board Meeting Minutes as written. R. O'Shana seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

October 23, 2023, Select Board Non-Public Meeting Minutes

MOTION #3: J. Longacre moved to approve the October 23, 2023, Select Board Non-Public Meeting minutes as written. R. O'Shana seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

November 6, 2023, Select Board Meeting Minutes

MOTION #4: R. O'Shana moved to approve the November 6, 2023, Select Board Meeting minutes as written. K. Knapp seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved except J. Longacre abstained, none opposed. The motion passed.

November 6, 2023, Select Board Non-Public Meeting Minutes

MOTION #5: R. O'Shana moved to approve the November 6, 2023, Select Board Non-Public Meeting minutes as written. P. Blanchard seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved except J. Longacre abstained, none opposed. The motion passed.

November 13, 2023, Select Board Emergency Meeting Minutes

MOTION #6: R. O'Shana moved to approve the November 13, 2023, Select Board Emergency Meeting minutes as written. K. Knapp seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved except J. Longacre abstained, none opposed. The motion passed.

SCHEDULED APPEARANCES

David Robinson, Haverhill School Board

David Robinson of the Haverhill School Board reported on the committee formed to fundraise to purchase and install lights on the soccer field. He also updated the Board on the public hearing

and warrant meeting for State Aid, grant-funded projects, fall sports season, facilities, and upcoming meetings and events. He urged people to attend the School Board meetings.

Sherry Fullerton, Easement Discussion

Sherry Fullerton appeared before the Board to discuss the Town issuing an easement to access her property. B. Codling explained the process involved to make this request.

MOTION #7: P. Blanchard moved to send the easement request to the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission. R. O'Shana seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Tree Removal Project at Center Haverhill Armory

The Board discussed removal of trees at the Center Haverhill Armory. An offer has been made to cut the trees for free in exchange for the wood.

MOTION #8: J. Longacre moved to approve the Town Manager to coordinate the removal of trees at the Center Haverhill Armory, with no cost incurred by the Town. R. O'Shana seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

Excavation Regulations Discussion

The Board discussed complaints regarding the hours trucks are accessing the gravel pit. They noted this is a public road, so there are no regulations regarding its use.

MOTION #9: P. Blanchard moved that the Select Board does not set any regulations on the hours on the road to the gravel pit. K. Knapp seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

DRA Sales Ratio Survey & Data Certificate

B. Codling presented information to the Board on the sales ratio and how it is impacting the Town. Real estate prices are higher than the assessed values. The DRA is discussing implementing mandated reassessment, as Haverhill (and most towns in New Hampshire) are undervalued. The goal is to be in the 90s; Haverhill is in the 60s. The Board might be asked to conduct a reassessment in 2024.

MOTION #10: P. Blanchard moved to accept and sign the 2023 DRA Sales Ratio Study. J. Longacre seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

Schedule a Public Hearing for North Haverhill Water & Light Boundary Change

The Board discussed the intent of the District of North Haverhill to expand the district to encompass two properties. A public hearing is required before this can be presented as a warrant article.

MOTION #11: P. Blanchard moved to allow the Town Manager to schedule a public hearing for the expansion of the District. R. O'Shana seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

Woodsville Ambulance Agreement for 6-2024 through 6-2025

Chair Blanchard reported he met with the Woodsville Ambulance to review the annual agreement and contract. The Board discussed the speed of response and the obstacles to it being improved.

OLD BUSINESS

Voting Machine Discussion & Decision

Town Clerk Christina Hebert reported she and the Moderator are scheduled to observe the two voting machines under consideration in the next week. She will present their recommendation at the December 18, 2023, Select Board meeting.

A resident shared information about the Dominion voting machine. Chair Blanchard said as a result of the class he and R. O'Shana attended, he is confident about the use of this machine. The Board discussed the reasons for purchasing the machines, which includes the difficulty of obtaining volunteers to count the ballots.

Woodsville Letter (postponed from 9-23-2023 and 10-23-2023 meetings)

A meeting has not been set due to the illness of one of the Commissioners and the travel schedule of another. The Board is waiting to hear from them.

TOWN MANAGER/ASSISTANT TOWN MANAGER REPORT

There were no reports.

COMMISSION/COMMITTEE EX-OFFICIO REPORTS

Conservation Commission:

C. Hoffman reported the next meeting is November 21, 2023. They will discuss the land use tax, among other topics.

Planning Board

K. Knapp reported they had a work session last week to work on the Master Plan. The next meeting is November 28, 2023, where they will continue to work on the Master Plan.

Parks & Recreation Commission

J. Longacre reported on recent and planned events. They hope participation will improve in the future.

Airport Zoning Commission

R. O'Shana reported the next meeting is December 13, 2023.

Zoning Board

There was no report.

Public Safety Facility Planning Committee

Chair Blanchard and B. Codling reported on the status of the hiring process.

CORRESPONDENCE

Connecticut River Conservancy Letter

Chair Blanchard reported he would share this letter with the Haverhill Conservation Commission.

Resident Concern Regarding Bath-Haverhill Covered Bridge

Chair Blanchard read a letter from a resident expressing concern about the lack of a specific weight limit on signs on the Bath-Haverhill covered bridge. The Board discussed the liability of renting the bridge to hold large gatherings and why this practice has been discontinued. B. Codling shared information regarding the structural soundness of the bridge and said at some point, the Board will need to consider addressing this issue. Chair Blanchard will send the resident a letter explaining the reasoning behind denying her request to hold a wedding on the bridge.

Planning Board Membership

The Board discussed the recent resignation and subsequent withdrawal of the resignation of Vicki Wyman from the Planning Board. Chair Blanchard expressed a concern about setting a precedent for allowing Board members to resign and then withdraw their resignation. K. Knapp and J. Longacre shared their desire to allow Ms. Wyman to return to the position, citing her experience and time spent in the position. A resident said life gets in the way and Ms. Wyman has earned the right to return to the Planning Board.

MOTION #12: P. Blanchard moved to accept the resignation of Vicki Wyman from the Planning Board. R. O'Shana seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION #13: K. Knapp moved to appoint Vicki Wyman to the Planning Board. J. Longacre seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC WANTING TO ADDRESS THE SELECT BOARD REGARDING ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

NOTE: Matthew Bjelobrck requested to be on the agenda as a scheduled appearance.

Matthew Bjelobrck presented copies of emails that he had acquired through the submission of requests under RSA 91-A; the emails were related to the conduct of Selectmen Kevin Knapp through the second half of 2022 and first three months of 2023.

M. Bjelobrck asked K. Knapp why he had used his personal email address for town business. To which K. Knapp said he used his personal email address due to conspiracy theories and a lack of trust between the board and town administration.

M. Bjelobrck asked K. Knapp why he used his personal email account to communicate with attorney Chris Hawkins of DTC, representing himself as a town official. To which K. Knapp said he had not done so as a town official, but rather as a resident of Haverhill.

M. Bjelobrck asked why K. Knapp expected the Town of Haverhill to pay for bills back to September 2022 for work done by DTC attorneys on his personal behalf. To which K. Knapp said that work was not supposed to be billed.

M. Bjelobrck asked who told K. Knapp to reach out to attorney Chris Hawkins specifically, considering there are thousands of attorneys in the State of NH. To which K. Knapp responded that no one had told him to reach out to Chris Hawkins, he had just decided on his own to do that.

M. Bjelobrck asked whether K. Knapp contacted any other attorneys in the State of NH. To which K. Knapp said no, he had only contacted Chris Hawkins.

M. Bjelobrck asked K. Knapp about a letter to the DRA that K. Knapp had presented at a Select Board meeting in October 2022 as his own work, but that an email from Knapp showed the letter had been written by Lynn Macomber an attorney for the Woodsville Fire District, and that Knapp intended to present it as his own. Bjelobrck then asked when K. Knapp spoke to Lynn Macomber to coordinate on the letter. To which Knapp stated he had never spoken to Lynn Macomber.

M. Bjelobrck stated that in his RSA 91-A request he had asked for the original word document of the letter which would show who had actually authored the letter and that K. Knapp had refused to provide it. Bjelobrck then asked who on the [2022] Select Board knew he had not authored that letter. To which K. Knapp refused to answer.

M. Bjelobrk further stated evidence showed K. Knapp had lied to the public and asked Knapp if he thought it was fair for a selectman to lie to the public. K. Knapp responded that he did not think it was fair.

M. Bjelobrk further stated that the email states “Speaking with other Selectmen. We have decided to bring this [the letter] up at next Tuesday’s meeting.” Bjelobrk then stated how troublesome that statement was because there had been no discussion at any public meeting of the Haverhill Select Board, so how could Selectmen decide. To which K. Knapp said that it was not really a decision.

M. Bjelobrk then pointed to an email correspondence between K. Knapp and Hawkins on October 7, 2022, where Knapp stated, “The only concern one Selectman has is a bill for work done prior to retaining your services.”

M. Bjelobrk followed up by asking K. Knapp if he had correspondence with DTC prior to September 29, 2022. To which K. Knapp stated he didn’t think so.

M. Bjelobrk followed by asking K. Knapp when he had retained DTCs services, to which Knapp stated January [2023], and asked K. Knapp if he thought it was appropriate for the Town to be expected to pay a bill for his [K. Knapp’s] personal legal services. To which K. Knapp stated he had offered to pay the bill in one of the non-public sessions.

M. Bjelobrk asked K. Knapp why he had not yet paid the DTC bills, to which K. Knapp stated that he had no way of contacting them and was told not to contact them. M. Bjelobrk followed by stating to K. Knapp “You have an outstanding bill that you ran up, and they are billing the town, and you want to pay it?” To which K. Knapp stated, “How would I do that.” To which M. Bjelobrk stated “We will have Brigitte reach out and get you an invoice and you can remit payment.”

M. Bjelobrk stated that K. Knapp and S. Robbins had made “special rulings” related to how his RSA 91-A requests were to be handled and stated that the Select Board can’t make special rulings on how to handle certain individual resident’s requests.

M. Bjelobrk outlines an email from October 13, 2022 where K. Knapp sends Chris Hawkins the DRA’s ruling on the Woodsville Fire District’s appeal related to Article 27 & Article 28. M. Bjelobrk then asked K. Knapp why he was sending WFD documents to an attorney. To which K. Knapp stated he wouldn’t answer that question.

M. Bjelobrk then states that Eric Mahar of DTC then emailed K. Knapp asking him to send them the motion for reconsideration filed by the Woodsville Fire District in their DRA appeal and further that E. Mahar states “Woodsville is considering a special meeting”. M. Bjelobrk then asks K. Knapp who he was working for, the Woodsville Fire District or the Town of Haverhill. To which K. Knapp stated Haverhill.

M. Bjelobrk reminded K. Knapp that when Article 27 & Article 28 were petitioned by the Woodsville Fire District in 2022, that the Select Board voted not to support them, so K. Knapp was working to the contrary of what the Select Board had decided.

M. Bjelobrk then stated that the past Select Board had voted to give Town Manager Brigitte Codling full authority over all legal matters related to the Woodsville Fire District, for efficiency, so there was one single point of contact, and so board members did not single handedly run up legal bills. He further stated that her legal authority could have been rescinded by the new board [of 2022] but it never was.

M. Bjelobrk further points out that in January K. Knapp tells DTC attorneys that the select board wants to meet with them, without Town Administration present. However, the Town Manager is to be at all Select Board meetings per her contract and by excluding her he was violating her contract.

M. Bjelobrk then asked K. Knapp if, on September 29, 2022, he sent Chris Hawkins the Town Manager's contract, Article 27 & Article 28, and Town Manager Codling's last evaluation. To which K. Knapp stated yes.

M. Bjelobrk then stated that handing TM Codling's evaluation to an unrelated third party was illegal and a violation of her rights. M. Bjelobrk asked K. Knapp if he understood he violated the law and that he couldn't do that. To which K. Knapp said yes, he understood.

M. Bjelobrk pointed out that on January 24, 2023 an email correspondence between K. Knapp and Chris Hawkins that DTC would be sending the engagement letter to Steve Robbins personal address, and that they had agree to "defer responding to the Town Manager's emails to avoid questions on how they were authorized to communicate with her on the board's behalf". M. Bjelobrk then asked K. Knapp how he could sit there and talk about trust, when DTC and the board were working to cut her [TM] out. Also, how would K. Knapp like it if someone did that to him and then tried to blame him for the mess they created. K. Knapp had no response.

M. Bjelobrk then points out that there are emails where DTC is discussing with K. Knapp the individuals running for Select Board seats in March 2023. Further stating that it appears they are discussing how to control the election by establishing a narrative as to what should or should not happen and firing the town manager. M. Bjelobrk asked K. Knapp if he thought that was appropriate. To which K. Knapp said no.

M. Bjelobrk stated that the Town Manager had offered numerous times for the Town's attorneys at Drummond Woodsum to brief the new board of 2022 on the pending lawsuit by the Woodsville Fire District against the Town. However, new selectmen [Katie Williams & Kevin Knapp] had not taken her up on that, not once. To which K. Knapp agreed that he had not taken her up on it and had not been briefed.

M. Bjelobrk followed up by saying that K. Knapp had gone into settlement negotiations [in May 2022] with Woodsville Fire District commissioners with no knowledge of what had occurred prior to getting elected [in March 2022]. To which K. Knapp stated he believed he knew.

M. Bjelobrk stated that there was no way for K. Knapp to know the Select Board's legal strategy or the details of the case because it had all been discussed in non-public and he had chosen not to be briefed. To which K. Knapp said he did the best of his ability at that time.

M. Bjelobrk stated that K. Knapp told one of his friends that he had called the Town Manager a liar, however, K. Knapp told everyone he had no intention of trying to fire the Town Manager but he lied. That K. Knapp withheld information and did not act in an open and transparent manner. M. Bjelobrk asked K. Knapp if he felt it was ok to lie to people right in their faces. To which K. Knapp stated, no.

M. Bjelobrk ended by telling K. Knapp he should resign and does not deserve to sit on the Select Board.

SHOUT OUTS

B. Codling thanked numerous volunteers who were involved with stuffing the tax bills. C. Hofmann echoed this shout out.

Don Kimball thanked the residents who are picking up trash on the roadside.

A resident thanked everyone who stepped up for the Advisory Budget Committee.

J. Longacre congratulated Matt Taylor, coach of the varsity boys' soccer team, for getting the team to the championship game. A resident added congratulations to Sarah Lang and the girls' team as well.

SELECT BOARD MEMBER FINAL COMMENTS

J. Longacre asked for clarification on the policy regarding requests for the Mildred Page fund. B. Codling said in the past, requests have been acted upon on a first come, first served basis. J. Longacre asked for a distribution timeline to be established. This will be added to the next agenda.

ADJOURN MEETING

MOTION #14: A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 p.m.

Voice Vote: All approved, none opposed, none abstained. The motion passed unanimously.

Zoom Recording:

https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/TRJFFj6c1-0HHMDD5sVkfI9NIR8viAtEWY393Tc1-b_O82_vYGVxaAAcLLcL1DI6.2Ysb9KKTZInLjcW7

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