

Town of Litchfield, NH
Board of Selectmen Meeting
May 23, 2022

In Attendance:

Selectmen: F. Robert Leary, Sr., Vice Chairman; Richard W. Lascelles; and Kevin A. Lynch

Town Administrator: Troy Brown

In Attendance: Deputy Town Clerk/Tax Collector Laura Mills

Absent: Steven Webber, Chairman; and Dr. Kimberly M. Queenan

A. Call to Order:

1. 6:30 pm - Chairman Steven Webber called the meeting to order, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. Review and Approval of Consent Items:

1. A/P Manifest: 05/17/22 - \$25,420.43; 05/24/22 - \$67,291.71
2. P/R Manifest: 05/19/22 - \$56,872.03; 05/26/22 - \$57,149.25
3. Treasurer Reconciliation - April
4. Elderly Exemption - \$190,000

Selectman Lascelles pointed out that the Elderly Exemption of \$190,000 was regarding the appraised value, and the exemption was not the \$190,000.

Vice-Chairman Leary asked for a motion to approve the Consent Items.

Motion: (Selectman R. Lascelles / Selectman K. Lynch) Motion to approve the Consent Items.

Discussion: None

Vote: (3-0-0) The motion carried.

C. Request for Additional Items / Other Business:

1. None

D. Business:

1. **Meeting Minutes:**

- a. **May 9, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

Vice-Chairman Leary asked for a motion to approve the minutes.

Motion: (Selectman R. Lascelles / Selectman K. Lynch) Motion to accept the May 9, 2022 Public Meeting Minutes.

Discussion: None

Vote: (3-0-0) The motion carried.

2. Tax Collector's Property Deed:

Deputy Town Clerk/Tax Collector Laura Mills mentioned that the Town is set to Deed the property located at 25 Courtland Avenue. She commented that the property is scheduled to be Deeded on May 29, 2022, if no payment is received in full for Levy Year 2019. The Town has not received payment from the owner since February 2020.

Ms. Mills stated that the Town has made several attempts to reach out to the property owner and her family members. The Town has performed several wellness checks on the owner of the property, and the house is now considered abandoned.

Selectman Lynch noted that he had visited the property and the power has been disconnected. He stated that a couple of years ago, some cars were parked out front, and currently there is only one car parked by the backside of the property.

Ms. Mills said that the amount that would be deeded is \$5,470.90 from 2019, this includes interest through May 29, 2022. She noted that the new market cost is \$220,099, the building value is \$173,900, and the property is valued at \$139,600. The Board agreed that the house and the property were in very poor condition.

Town Administrator Brown mentioned that he would not recommend that the Board waive the Deed. Mr. Brown noted that the Tax Collector would affect the Deed on May 29, 2022. He recommended that the Board authorize the Tax Collector to Deed the property, then the Town will reach out to the owners within 90 days. If the owners do not respond, the property will likely go to auction.

If the owners come forward, within the 90 day time period, then the Town would begin discussions with them. The Town would see if the owners wanted to do a payment plan, or pay up what is owed on the property. Selectman Lynch stated that he spoke with the neighbors of 25 Courtland Avenue, and the neighbors have not seen anyone at the property.

Vice-Chair Leary asked for a motion to accept the Tax Collector's Deed.

Motion: (Selectman K. Lynch / Selectman R. Lascelles) So Moved.

Discussion: None

Vote: (3-0-0) The motion carried.

The Board thanked Deputy Tax Collector Mills for coming to the meeting.

E. Public Input @ 6:43 pm:

1. None

Public Input closed at 6:44 pm

F. Business (cont.):

3. Pennichuck:

a. Citizens Input:

Town Administrator Brown commented that a couple of residents reached out to the Town regarding the status of the Pennichuck Water rates. He noted that the PUC recently approved the rates, which was done through a

settlement agreement. Mr. Brown acknowledged that the settlement ended up being as high as Pennichuck had petitioned, and the homeowners were not happy with the settlement. The Town was able to reduce the cost of its public fire protection charges.

Mr. Brown mentioned that the Town would receive approximately a 10% decrease in its public fire protection charges annually, which amounts to approximately \$40,000 in annual savings for the Town. He stated that the legal counsel and expert witness put together a letter for the Town. Mr. Brown said he would use the letter to answer the questions from the residents, then he would then use the letter as a press release and place it on the Town's website.

Mr. Brown commented that part of the letter from legal counsel and the expert witness answered why Pennichuck's water rates are more expensive than Manchester's water rates. The reasons provided in the letter is that Pennichuck East Utility (PEU) has different distribution systems that are spread out over a large area. PEU may have different treatment requirements because of the different facilities, it provides no subsidies to its customers to reduce their rates, and PEU has a different level of cost recovery.

The letter acknowledged that a municipal system may not be required to pay property taxes and PEU has acquired other utilities and may have acquired that utilities debt. Mr. Brown noted that PEU has to look at what it costs to run the utility, infrastructure improvements, payment of debt, and that there is no reason to believe that PEU's rates are high based on the water rates of other systems.

Mr. Brown stated that the Select Board might want to have a conversation with legal counsel regarding some of their options. He noted that the Town could, if legally allowed, look into eminent domain and take the utility back. He said that the Town of Londonderry had started looking into this option, and added that the Town of Litchfield might be able to join their effort. Mr. Brown mentioned that the legal team that would attend the meeting would be the team that negotiated the settlement agreement.

b. Water Line Extensions:

Mr. Brown commented that a couple of weeks ago the Town received a consent decree to expand water service in the Town of Litchfield. The waterline extension would extend to the Hillcrest Road, Colonial Drive, Buttonbush Lane, Deerwood Drive, Rocky Hill Road, Muscovy Drive, Shirley Way, Tamarack Lane, and Heron Drive.

Pennichuck has been hired to do the design work and coordinate the construction. Pennichuck contacted Mr. Brown and informed him that they are going to proceed forward with the Town having its own engineer. They would install the waterline in the road, and reclaim the entire road. Mr. Brown noted that because of the issues with the supply chain, this project will take longer to complete than the project from three years ago. The project will likely begin in the Spring of 2023.

Mr. Brown stated that the residents have been notified and Pennichuck will be the project manager. Each home will be surveyed to decide how to get the waterline into the house. Selectman Lascelles pointed out that a representative at a Select Board meeting in July 2021 said this project would start real quick, but there are still residents in Litchfield receiving bottled water.

Vice-Chair Leary commented that he had a problem with St. Gobain telling residents what water they will receive. He noted that residents should have an option regarding which water they receive.

4. Performance Reviews:

Town Administrator Brown mentioned that this is the time of year when the Town does their annual

performance reviews. The Town plans on having the reviews done and put in place by the first of July. Mr. Brown pointed out that during the past three years the Town had \$15,000 budgeted for salary increases. The non-union employees wage adjustments are taken out of that budget. The Select Board and the Budget Committee agreed that the amount needed to be increased to \$20,000 this year.

Mr. Brown suggested that the structure remain the same. He noted that the union employees will all receive a 3% increase on July 1. The non-union overall performance rating is as follows:

- a. Exceeds Requirements - 3.0%
- b. Meets Requirements - 2.5%
- c. Needs Improvement - 0.0%

Vice-Chair Leary commented that if an employee needs improvement in a couple of areas, that does not mean the employee should go without a raise. Mr. Brown said that he has only seen one time where an employee did not receive a raise.

Mr. Brown pointed out that based on the cost of living and the increases in salaries, the Town of Litchfield is going to have to look at increasing the salaries to remain competitive with other towns. He added that if an employee is dissatisfied with their performance review they can schedule a time to discuss their assessment with the Select Board.

E. Reports:

1. Town Administrator Report:

a. Audit:

Town Administrator Brown mentioned that the auditors have come and gone. The auditors did most of their work remotely, and the Town was able to exchange information through email. There was one lead auditor and he was able to come in and find the information he needed. Preliminary reports could be available as early as this week.

Mr. Brown commented that the previous auditor left the firm, and the Town had a new auditor from the same firm

b. Conservation Commission:

Mr. Brown commented that the Conservation Commission contacted him and let him know that they are looking to contract for a recording secretary. He mentioned that Matt Sullivan, whom does the meeting minutes for the Select Board, Budget Committee, Capital Improvement Committee, and Rec Commission has the availability to also record the meeting minutes for the Conservation Commission, as long as the Board and Commission approve.

The Board discussed that the cost for a Conservation Commission recording secretary would be similar to the cost for the other Boards and Committees.

2. Selectmen's Report:

a. Selectman S. Webber:

i. Recreation Commission:

The Rec Commission will not have a meeting on May 24.

ii. **School Facilities Improvement Committee:**

Nothing to report

b. **Selectman R. Leary:**

i. **Budget Committee:**

The next Budget Committee meeting is on May 26. Selectman Leary commented that the Memorial Day festivities will occur at the old Town Hall on Monday, May 30. He noted that there would be a dedication for the Purple Heart Community, and signs would be going up on Monday.

c. **Selectman R. Lascelles:**

i. **Heritage Commission:**

Selectman Rich Lascelles commented that the Heritage Commission has not met.

Mr. Lascelles stated that former president of Poland Lech Walesa spoke to the House and Senate. He noted that a couple, who are of Polish descent, were his guests. Mr. Lascelles said that Lech Walesa had an English translator for his speech.

Mr. Lascelles mentioned that the first Annual Veteran's Group golf outing will be held on Wednesday, May 25. He noted that they are giving away a car for a hole-in-one, and they are having raffles. Some of the raffle items are a collage of Tom Brady, a David Ortiz signed baseball bat, and Bobby Orr autographs.

ii. **Emergency Management Team:**

Nothing to Report

d. **Selectman K. Lynch:**

i. **Conservation Commission:**

Selectman Lynch stated that the Conservation Commission and Rec Commission had the the Fishing Derby at Parker Park. He mentioned that the Derby was a success, and a 14" fish was caught. He noted that Jayson Brennen was made the Chair of the Conservation Commission.

e. **Selectman K. Queenan:**

Ms. Queenan emailed the members of the Board her report.

i. **Capital Improvement Planning Committee:**

The next meeting: Monday, June 6, 2022, at 6:00 pm at the Town Hall.

ii. **Planning Board:**

The next meeting: is Tuesday, June 7, 2022, at 7:00 pm at the Town Hall. At the last meeting, May 17, 2022, the Board discussed the Workshop regarding the safety concerns on Albuquerque Ave.

The Planning Board reviewed:

- a. Speed fatality rates and distances it takes to stop at 20, 30, 40, 50, and 60 mph.
- b. Signage improvements for stops, schools, parks, playgrounds, and trails.
 - i. Stop and School signs included solar-powered flashing LED lights.
- c. Zoning Ordinance of which signs are allowed on Albuquerque Ave.

- d. Master Plan visions of walkable neighborhoods.
- e. Safety issues of children trying to cross Albuquerque to get to parks and walking/bike paths.
- f. Ways to increase safety around the High School at peak times, for students mandated to walk to school. They discussed a temporary crosswalk or painted crosswalk(s), exploring moving the End School Zone sign to go past Talent Rd., making Talent Rd a 4-way stop sign, passing on right, and having students mandated to walk to school meet at specific roads so that the busses that drive by them can pick them up.
- g. Painting crosswalks at the intersections of Hillcrest, Pinecrest, and Talent.
- h. The Albuquerque Ave was built for 45 mph, but our ordinances said it should not be more than 35 mph.
- i. They showed pictures of where existing speed limit signs are along Albuquerque Ave.
- j. They showed the time it takes to drive 35 mph vs. 45 mph on the entire road.
- k. They discussed rumble strips, bike lanes, and traffic calming measures.

In-Person Community Input:

- a. They discussed keeping the road at 35 mph and increasing enforcement.
- b. They discussed increasing the speed limit to 50 mph.
- c. They discussed how Albuquerque Ave was built in stages and how some do not feel safe on the road or path since it now runs from Page Road to Route 3A.
- d. They requested that the Planning Board do research or use science to see what would be the best for that road. (Road Safety Audit)
- e. No one wanted speed bumps.

The Next Steps are:

- a. The Planning Board and the NRPC will create an Albuquerque Ave survey for the town.
- b. Work with the NRPC to see if there are grants for a professional engineering firm to review Albuquerque Ave today and for the town's future growth.
- c. Grants might be available since there is a school on the road and parks.
- d. The engineering firm should have a good understanding of Federal and State:
 - i. signage rules
 - ii. crosswalks created to standards
- e. The Planning Board will continue with this Workshop for Safety Concerns on Albuquerque Ave on Tuesday, June 21, 2022, at 7 pm at Town Hall.

iii. **NRPC:**

The Next quarterly Full Commissioner meeting is Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 7:00 pm at NRPC's Office at 30 Temple Street, Nashua, NH.

The NRPC held its Annual Forum on May 11, 2022, and the topic was Energy Supply & Demand: Emerging Trends.

- a. NH's existing grid is stable. Yet, at peak times during last year's colder months, the potential for "Brown Outs" did occur. Manual interventions by the staff monitoring the grid were needed to redirect energy as needed around the state during peak times.

- b. Similar to other states, the grid upgrades have to be done now and in the future as New Hampshire's population and businesses grow.
- c. Electric Cars:
 - i. Can New Hampshire handle more and more electric cars that have to be plugged into the grid? This is a concern, and the reason is that the grid itself will have to grow as New Hampshire does. But for now, it is “okay.” The problem that New Hampshire faces is getting more energy to the grid.

Currently, the grid relies on the Seabrook Power Plant and natural gas for power. The cost of natural gas has tripled at the moment, and New Hampshire needs new infrastructure.

It was suggested to charge the cars in off-peak times (approx midnight-to-4 am). Off-peak times are cheaper on your electric bill and would avoid future (and very seldom) brown-out situations.

Apparently, you can program your car or phone/computer to start charging your car at a specific time automatically. They said once vehicles are charged, they can be used as batteries to charge other things – such as other cars. Maybe that will be true in the future; however, at the moment, electric car dealerships do not suggest using the power in your car battery to charge something else since it may damage your car battery.

- d. In 35 years, the world of cars might be very different from today. We asked planners what we could do as a Town or as a Region to help prepare for this. There were State Reps, a State Senator, and other Legislators in the room.
- e. As planners, we did not hear a lot explicitly; however, we can still read up on the topic(s) and introduce ordinances that could help homes, schools, and town buildings prepare to plug into the grid. The ordinances could also encourage renewables, work with school bus companies going rechargeable, and see if buildings can be built more efficiently.

7. Items Removed From Consent:

- a. None

8. Non-Public:

Vice-Chairman Leary mentioned that the Board would be entering a Non-Public Session under RSA 91-a:3, ii (a) - Compensation of a public employee. He asked for a motion to enter the Non-Public Session at 7:15 pm.

Motion: (Selectman R. Leary / Selectman R. Lascelles) So moved.

Discussion: None

Roll Call:

- a. Selectman R. Leary - Yes
- b. Selectman R. Lascelles - Yes
- c. Selectman K. Lynch - Yes

Vote: (3-0-0) The motion carried.

9. Reconvene:

Motion: (Selectman R. Lascelles / Selectman K. Lynch) motioned to adjourn the Non-Public Session at 7:31pm.

Discussion: None

Vote: (3-0-0) The motion carried.

10. Adjournment:

Motion: (Selectman R. Lascelles / Selectman K. Lynch) motioned to adjourn the meeting at at 7:31pm

Discussion: None

Roll Call:

a. Selectman R. Leary - Yes

b. Selectman R. Lascelles - Yes

c. Selectman K. Lynch - Yes

Vote: (3-0-0) The motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,
Matthew Sullivan
BOS Recording Secretary

Approved by the Board of Selectmen:

Steven J. Webber, Chairman

F. Robert Leary, Sr., Vice Chairman

Richard W. Lascelles

Kevin A. Lynch

Kimberly M. Queenan