

**Board of Selectmen
Special Meeting
February 5, 2018**

MINUTES

Present: Dan Jerram, Alesia Kennerson, Eric Claman; Member of the Public Shelley Lloyd; Member of the Press Kathryn Boughton (Republican American); Economic Development Commission Members Mark Russo, Jim Brett, Bill Baxter (all in at 6:55 PM); Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward.

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. He noted that the meeting would begin with a budget workshop and would be followed by invited guests from the Economic Development Commission presenting information regarding Rails to Trails.

2018-2019 Budget Workshop:

First Selectman Jerram began his review of the budget. He informed the Selectmen that there continues to be an erosion of anticipated state revenues. This will impact the town's budget once again. Jerram pointed out that the debt service line item will see an increase for 2018 -2019 due to the implementation of the debt associated with the Antolini School renovations. He noted, however, that this is the last year for the debt for the Town Hall renovations. The increase for this year is projected at \$200,000.

Pavement preservation was a topic of discussion; with Selectman Claman asking why this line has a projected increase of 8.4%. Mr. Jerram and Ms. Kennerson defended this increase stating that this line item has "taken a hit" during the last few years. Jerram commented that taxpayers want their roads taken care of and hold this as one of the most important items that their tax dollars are used for. They both noted that it is early in the budget planning and this figure was used as a starting point and there may be adjustments later on.

Jerram pointed several line items that may need to be modified. He suggested that there might be an advantage to combining the line items used by the Conservation Commission and the Open Space Preservation Commission; noting that their work is similar and that one combined line item might serve them better than separate line items. Selectman Kennerson disagreed stating that they might not like that idea due to the fact that they prefer to have autonomy and they like to see what funding they may have access to in their budget.

Selectman Claman asked for clarification as to what the West Hill Lake funds line item is used for. Mr. Jerram explained that the funds are used by the association for weed monitoring, testing and removal of weeds from the lake. Jerram defended the line item; saying that the \$8,000 that the town contributes is just a small percentage of the operating funds raised by the association through donations and dues. Jerram noted that the Lake is an area that draws people to New Hartford and is a resource that needs to be protected. He also noted that the Town is one of the largest property owners on the Lake and should do its part to support the efforts of the association.

Jerram continued the review of the line items commenting on individual lines as he went through the document department by department. The Foothills Visiting Nurse line item was one that Jerram pointed out was "negotiable."

The Resident Trooper line item remains undetermined at this time due to the fact that there still has not been a resolution to appointing a new Resident Trooper to the now vacant position. There is a Trooper temporarily assigned to New Hartford.

The First Selectman noted that the overtime/substitutes line item needs to be funded in order to cover expenses associated with paying for the services of a CPA to provide regular assistance to the bookkeeping department as recommended by the auditors. Jerram explained that as government accounting principles become more complex, it is a wise investment to have a consultant on board to provide guidance.

Mr. Jerram suggested that the computer maintenance line item be increased this year in order to cover expenses associated with the increased complexity of technology and the demands being placed on the IT consultant.

At this point in the meeting, the First Selectman announced that members of the Economic Development Commission were present to discuss Rails to Trails with the Board of Selectmen; therefore, the discussion of the budget would be paused at this point and would reconvene following the presentation by the EDC.

Presentation by Economic Development Commission to the Board of Selectmen:

Economic Development Commission members Mark Russo, Jim Brett and Bill Baxter were introduced to those assembled.

Mr. Brett gave a brief overview of the history of the rails to trails initiative. He stated that there had been a subcommittee formed that had been meeting to investigate the feasibility of a rails to trails path that could possibly connect to the Farmington River trail in Canton. The engineering firm of Milone and MacBroom had been contracted to provide assistance with a feasibility study and recommend a proposed trail route that for that connection. Additionally, the Town was able to have a Road Safety Audit completed by the Department of Transportation to explore a possible pedestrian/bike route along Route 44 from the downtown area up to Satan's Kingdom. Unfortunately, progress with the initiative stalled in 2017 and has been dormant since then.

Mr. Brett stated that the EDC was anxious to get things moving forward again and that was the purpose of their attendance at the Board meeting this evening. Mr. Brett stated that there currently is no agreed proposed route. Without a proposed route, there can be no progress. There needs to be agreement on a route in order to proceed with seeking funding. With that in mind, Mr. Brett shared a powerpoint presentation he prepared that depicted a proposed trail that started from the downtown area and ended at Satan's Kingdom. He outlined the route which began in the vicinity of the old railroad bridge location on High Street and follows the sewer line that is located behind the businesses along Main Street. This is the former railroad bed and Brett noted that this area has recently been cleared and is very easy to walk. The proposed route would continue along this route to the "Waring" building (283 Main Street); potentially cross over at 283 Main and continue along the opposite side of the roadway down toward Marandinos. Brett stated that he recognizes that there are some hurdles to overcome in this area, but suggested that there may be alternatives for consideration. The services of an engineer would help to establish what may or may not be feasible. Mr. Brett stated that this proposal is something to "get people thinking." He stressed the importance of having an agreed upon route and a commitment to re-engage the committee.

Selectman Kennerson questioned the route that Mr. Brett presented; stating that she thought the vision was to go through the Gorge. Brett replied that it was initially, but the downtown route is level and feasible. He recognizes the challenges with the gorge and the environmental permitting that would be needed; therefore he concentrated on a route that was attainable. He stated that it would seem reasonable to focus on this first phase which could then lead to momentum for a second phase. First Selectman Jerram commented that he liked the idea of having the initial trail connect to the downtown area; but he was concerned that the proposed route included the elevated area of the old railroad trestle asking “how do we get there?” He suggested using the existing sidewalk located on Route 44/Main Street and then crossing over at the “Mobil” station to gain access to the old railroad bed. Mr. Brett agreed that there are challenges and stated that a design study would be needed and that this is a case where “experts are needed” to provide the proper guidance.

Economic Development Commission Chairman Mark Russo stated that there needs to be consensus with a proposal that can then be brought to the Board of Selectmen who can then authorize funding to hire professionals to guide the process. There was discussion regarding the fact that some of the proposed trail abuts private property and there may be some concern/negative feedback from those abutters regarding a trail. It was suggested that some outreach be done to advise property owners of what the benefits are of having a trail system in their town.

Mr. Russo then gave a brief update on what the Economic Development Commission has been working on. He noted that there had been specific goals for the EDC to focus on and they were Rails to Trails, Marketing/Branding, Downtown Business Growth and Grand List Development. Currently, two members of the EDC are participating in a 13 week webinar that focuses on branding. Branding has included development and use of the logo of “A Town for All Seasons.” The EDC would like to see this brand widely used. The logo was briefly discussed, with Mr. Jerram stating that there has been Letterhead with “A Town for All Seasons” used long before the banner design was created. There isn’t consensus regarding the logo at this point. Chairman Russo suggested that there may need the services of a graphic designer to bring it all together. He felt that using a graphics designer could aid in reaching those people who are looking to move out of the city and into the country. The Selectmen thanked the EDC members for attending their meeting and presenting information to them.

The Selectmen decided that they did not need to go back and complete their review of the budget at this time; but would hold off until their next meeting to do that. This would allow for additional time to gather information from various entities that have not yet submitted budget requests for the 18-19 fiscal year.

MOTION: by Claman to adjourn at 8:35 PM; seconded by Kennerson.

Unanimous.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant*