

**Board of Selectmen
Special Meeting Minutes
September 6, 2023**

Present: First Selectman Dan Jerram, Selectman Alesia Kennerson, Selectman Laura Garay;
Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward.

Others Present: Polly Pobuda, Penny Miller, Kyra Galliher, Mary Beth Greenwood

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 7:04 PM.

Authorize the Execution of the Resident Trooper Contract:

First Selectman Jerram informed the Selectmen that he had received the contract for the services of a Resident Trooper from the State of Connecticut. This contract was sent prior to the request for a second Resident Trooper. It is the standard agreement between the town and the State. When a second trooper is hired, the contract will be modified. Mr. Jerram confirmed that the State is working on finding potential candidates for a full-time evening trooper for New Hartford.

MOTION: by Kennerson to authorize the First Selectman to execute the Resident Trooper contract for the term 2023 – 2025 for one full time officer; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

Police Union Contract:

Mr. Jerram stated that the collective bargaining agreement with the Police is the last of the 3 bargaining unit contracts to be completed. He informed the Selectmen that the percentage of wage increase in this contract is lower than what was negotiated with the other bargaining units (Public Works and Town Hall Employees). He explained that the salary of police officers is higher than what members of the other unions receive and therefore, the percentage of salary increase is lower for this bargaining unit. The agreed upon increase is 3% for each of the next three years.

The changes to the contract are:

- a.) allowing all members of the union, regardless of number of years in the position, to “buy back” holiday pay to use as vacation time. Jerram explained that there has been a clause in the contract that allowed for members with 5 years or less on the job to forgo Holiday pay in exchange for additional vacation time. There is now no limitation on the number of years. All officers can choose the days versus pay.
- b.) an increase in the Premium Share assessed for health insurance to 20%. Jerram noted that the other bargaining units have a cost share of 15%. Jerram noted that most of police that are hired to work for New Hartford are retirees that come with full benefits. Most of the time, they usually choose to take the “opt-out” with respect to insurance coverage; which means that they receive a paid incentive for not participating in the health plan. This premium share increase will apply to any officer who comes on board and does not have existing coverage.
- c.) longevity pay was increased to \$4.00 per week for each 5 years of service; with increases at each 5 year increment of service. This is consistent with what was agreed to with the other bargaining units.
- d.) There is also the understanding that the town will pursue a memorandum of understanding with

neighboring towns that could allow officers to accept overtime assignments in other towns (with restrictions). The town would then bill for services rendered and the police officers would receive overtime pay for the special duty assignment. This is referenced in Article 6 Section 2b of the contract. Jerram stated that such a memorandum of understanding is subject to approval by the residents of the town at a town meeting. The police are aware that this agreement can take some time and is not guaranteed to be approved by residents.

MOTION: by Garay to approve the police contact for the term 2023- 2026; seconded by Kennerson.

Unanimous.

Appointment Tolly Gibbs as Tax Collector:

The First Selectman informed the Board that Tax Collector Karen Wieduwilt has retired as of August 31, 2023. Tolly Gibbs has been working side by side with Ms. Wieduwilt in preparation to assume the duties of the Tax Collector. Ms. Gibbs previously worked for the Town of Farmington as an assistant in the tax office. She is fully certified. Mr. Jerram recommended that she be appointed to serve as tax collector. He noted that the ordinance that allows for appointment of a tax collector dictates the term of office. This appointment tonight is to complete the term of office that was for retiring tax collector Mrs. Wieduwilt. The individuals elected to serve as Selectmen in the November Municipal election will need to appoint the tax collector at their first regular meeting following their election.

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve Tolly Gibbs as Tax Collector for a term beginning August 31, 2023 and expiring consistent with the terms of the ordinance; to be appointed by the Selectmen elect at their first regular meeting following the November Municipal election; seconded by Garay.

Helen Butler Trail Management Plan:

First Selectman Jerram explained that the Open Space Commission has reviewed the management plan that is currently in place for the Helen Butler Trail and has made some changes to the document. The Selectmen have been asked to review and approve the plan. Jerram noted that the Commission has included consultation with the property owner as part of the plan. Mr. Jerram stated that he has made a change to the timeline for periodic review of the plan. The plan originally called for an annual review; but Mr. Jerram suggested that this timeline be extended to 5 years or as needed.

MOTION: by Garay to approve the Helen Butler Trail Management Plan as amended, seconded by Kennerson.

Garay questioned if the Commission would be Ok with the changes made by the Selectman. It was noted that Open Space Commission Member Jean Darlington had called earlier in the evening and was notified that a suggested amendment would be to change the annual review period to 5 years or as needed. Ms. Darlington saw no problem with that due to the existence of the “or as needed” clause.

Garay asked if the management plan needed to address any mention of the possibility to pave the Helen Butler Trail at some point in the future. Jerram explained that when the trail was initially developed,

there was talk of potentially paving the trail if it became a connected part of the Farmington Trail network. That connection seems to be a long way off right now.

Unanimous.

Discussion of Board of Education request for Advisory Question re School Resource Officer:

First Selectman Jerram explained, for the record, that the Board of Education has been debating the issue of hiring a School Resource Officer to address/improve security at the schools. The budget was approved in May at referendum and since that time the Board has discussed the possibility of hiring a school resource officer. They have set aside funds that were originally slated to be used for an additional teacher to cover the cost of an officer.

A survey was distributed that used a QR code and required a G-mail account in order to respond and concerns have been raised that the survey may not have been accessible to all. The Board of Education would like to be certain that residents have an opportunity to voice their opinion on this matter and have asked that the Selectmen consider placing this question as an advisory question on the ballot for the Municipal Election in November. Mr. Jerram stated that he sent the question to the Town Attorney for his review.

The Town Attorney felt that the question was confusing on many levels. He also felt that having the question on a ballot without holding public informational meetings and using mailers to educate residents on the matter would be a disservice to the residents. He also felt that since the budget was passed in May and did not include funds for a resource officer, the people would feel that funds were not being used for what they had been approved for. They would feel like the Board of Ed was not being transparent with their budget proposal. There is also the concern of where supervision of this position would lie. A school resource officer that is a police officer cannot be supervised by a Board of Education. It is unclear whether this position should be supervised by the First Selectman or the Resident Trooper. This will need to be clarified.

Selectman Kennerson commented that there may be questions that the general public would like to ask regarding the school resource officer – and they haven't had an opportunity to do that.

Garay agreed that it may be premature to hire a school resource officer and that perhaps additional research should be done regarding security guards or other security measures before hiring an officer.

Penny Miller asked if a question can be placed on the local referendum ballot in May, if it isn't on the ballot in November. Jerram replied that it can be on the ballot and the restrictions are less cumbersome. Kennerson suggested that parents be asked "what do you think would make your child be safer in school?" Allow them to voice their opinions before making a decision regarding this issue. It could be that they are more in favor of technology rather than an officer; for example.

Jerram will create a draft response to the request from the Board of Education/Superintendent Sousa regarding having this question on the ballot in November. It will be sent to the Selectmen for their review and comment prior to sending it to Superintendent Sousa. Mr. Jerram stated that he wants the Selectmen to read the letter to be sure it represents the discussion and concerns expressed this evening.

Chairman Karl Hermonat asked that the letter be ready for the next BOE meeting that is scheduled for the 19th.

Update on proposed Senior Housing Development:

First Selectman Jerram reminded the Board members that the Senior Housing project proposed for property on Main Street by developer Tim Bobroske was the subject of a request for consideration of a tax abatement about a year ago. At that time, the proposal was for approximately 150 Senior Housing Apartments. The Planning and Zoning Commission developed a regulation that allowed the implementation of a floating zone, with the condition that there be public water and sewer, to accommodate this type of housing development. Since then, a change in the proposed location has occurred due to site limitations on the original site. The proposal has moved to a neighboring property and the proposed number of units has increased. Currently, the plan calls for 298 apartments with 63% being set aside for Senior housing. The remainder would not be restricted. Jerram noted that if 37% of the dwellings are work force and market rate, there would be 110 units that could have an impact on the school population. He stated that this is a significant change in course.

Selectman Garay noted that she had concerns regarding the change in course. She supported the original plan that would have benefited the Senior Population in town, but isn't so certain about a plan that includes more than that.

Mr. Jerram informed the Board that the Wetlands Commission is currently reviewing the plan as it relates to their concerns; i.e. waterflow and wetlands crossings.

Ms. Garay asked if the agreements made with the WPCA regarding hookups and connections was still in effect. Jerram replied that the agreement remains in effect but has been modified to reflect the change in location.

Resident Polly Pobuda commented that she was surprised to hear that there has been a change from the original senior housing plan. She was under the impression that the units were going to be similar to the ones that are in place on Reservoir Road. She isn't sure how she feels about this change.

Garay commented that she was pleased that this update was discussed this evening. There have been questions raised in the community regarding what is going on with this development. Jerram noted that there is a thorough review of the plans being performed. He said that the environmental plans that have been submitted number about 600 pages and noted that there has not been adequate time for the engineer consultant to review the plans (due to vacation schedules), so there may be a slight delay in bringing the proposal before the Commission.

Sale of Water and Wastewater Assets:

As of August 19, the sale of the water and wastewater assets was approved and now all the paperwork that needs to consummate the sale is being completed. Attorneys have been working on finalizing the deeds that need to be transferred from the Town to Aquarion Water Co. With this sale, water customers can expect to have a 12% decrease in water rates. The New Hartford sewer customers will see a hold in the sewer rates for the next year, but a subsidy will be implemented. The Town Treasurer is considering investing the proceeds into a high interest bank account in order to take advantage of the high interest rates right now rather than paying off the debt right away.

Resident Mary Beth Greenwood asked if the USDA would have any expectation of having those loans paid off right away as a condition for grant forgiveness. Jerram replied that he was not aware of a caveat stating that, but would do due diligence regarding the matter.

Brodie Bathroom project – funding:

First Selectman Jerram informed the Board that the funding sources for the project to construct a brick and mortar bathroom facility at Brodie Park include \$30,000 from Capital (set aside for septic improvements) 90,000 in STEAP Grant Funds and a donation from the non-profit Brodie Park Inc. for approximately \$20,000. The project went out to bid and the lowest bid submitted was \$250,000 – well above the current funding sources.

The Board discussed this situation and they were all in agreement that they want this project to continue. They felt that there is a need for a permanent bathroom structure at Brodie Park. The park gets a lot of use and the addition of a bathroom facility would be a welcome addition.

The Selectmen discussed alternate funding sources; including American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funds that have been slated for the Parks as well as recreation capital and recreation program account funds. The low bidder has stated that he should be able to get the site work done before the beginning of winter and he has a contractor ready to work on the structure; but that he would hold off on construction and that would occur in early spring.

The Selectmen reviewed other project ideas for the parks that have been mentioned in the past. Insulating the underside of Berkshire Hall as a way to prevent pipe freeze-ups and partitioning a portion of the Field House are two items that seem to be at the top of the list of projects. The Field House is used as storage for town equipment and it is also used for cheerleading practice by Football and occasionally as a place for the Teens at Camp Brodie to congregate. Jerram thinks that being able to separate the equipment from the area that is used for public use would be a wise investment. There was consensus on those sentiments.

MOTION: by Kennerson to retain the low bidder, ME Carroll to complete the Brodie Bathroom project using the STEAP grant funds along with recreation capital fund set aside for septic improvements and the donation from Brodie Park Inc, as well as funding any shortfalls not covered by those funding sources to be paid using Brodie Park ARPA funds; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

Operations Updates:

Budget:

The First Selectman informed the Board that preliminary projections for the closing of the 2022-2023 fiscal year show a \$240,000 surplus. Jerram stated that initial figures indicate that \$226,000 was underspent in the budget. He cautioned that these are unaudited figures at this time and this is informational only.

Roadwork:

Jerram noted that a section of South Road (the opposite end of Route 202) has been paved. Timberline Road and a small section of Arrowhead were also paved.

New Hartford Night:

The 3rd Annual New Hartford Night will be held on Saturday, September 16 at Brodie Park from 3:00 –

9:00 PM. Several local organizations/vendors have signed up for spaces. Cornhole will be offered again. Foodtrucks are confirmed and Norbrook Brewery will be present. There will be two bands for entertainment as well as the Northwestern Regional 7 High School Band, who will open the event.

Senior/Recreation:

First Selectman Jerram stated that now that Camp Brodie is over, there should be an increase in activity at the Senior Center. The Director can focus on some new programming ideas and it is anticipated that things will ramp up in the fall.

Mr. Jerram informed the Selectmen that although enrollment was higher than in the past years, overall revenue from Camp Brodie saw a decrease. He stated that this could be attributed to the increase in minimum wage. He noted that the cost of Lifeguards was higher than it has been in the past. Wages had to be increased to be competitive due to a shortage in Lifeguards. There was competition for their services.

Farmington Valley Health District:

First Selectman Jerram stated that the Health District has recently entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with neighboring health districts regarding temporary food service permits. He stated that this applies to Food Trucks. If a food truck is licensed by another district, they do not need to have an additional license (at an additional cost) to be able to operate within the Farmington Valley Health District. There are some inspections that they may be required to have, but the process has been simplified.

Mr. Jerram asked if the Selectmen had any questions regarding operations.

Select(wo)man Garay asked if there has been any movement in the Rail to Trails easement matter.

Jerram replied that there still has not been a formal notification regarding the price that the property owner is asking.

Continuation of discussion of compensation/wage adjustment/job title for Executive Assistant:

First Selectman Jerram commented that this agenda item is a continuation of the discussion that began at the last meeting regarding “continuity of government.”

Mr. Jerram stated that he did not have an opportunity to complete an accurate job description for an Executive Assistant. He wants the description to include managerial functions which will differentiate the position from an Administrative Assistant. He noted that the individual currently in the Admin Assistant role routinely handles duties that fall under executive in nature. The responsibilities of the Administrative Assistant position have increased over time as experience and length of service has increased – a normal progression. However, he noted that the wage/salary has not reflected the increase in responsibility. He wants to rectify this. He feels that there needs to be a distinction between administrative and executive positions.

The Selectmen were in agreement with this and would like this topic to remain an item for the next meeting.

Request for Tax Refunds:

First Selectman Jerram presented the following requests for tax refunds to the Board for review and approval:

JP Morgan Chase Bank	\$297.48
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James W. McCormick	\$295.69
Richard Novak	\$ 15.31
Asbestos Management Co.	\$46.32
Sue A. Armstrong	\$168.47
Corelogic Centralized Returns	\$2,394.10
Stacy B or Peter A Crochet	\$18.42
Timea Fodor	\$247.17
Hollie Hecht	\$47.60
Julia G. or Donald F.Hobro	\$60.82
Andrew or Corina Hughes	\$17.32
Juri Electric, LLC	\$246.58
Christine McNamara-Tessman	\$79.56
Motorlease Corporation	\$413.27
Bryan D. Neher	\$40.87
Richard E.Nicholson 3 rd	\$8.30
Amy Orlov	\$74.00
Joyce Steadman	\$62.14
Michelle Van Der Harst	\$892.30

MOTION: by Garay to approve the Tax Refunds as presented by the Tax Collector, seconded by Kennerson.

Unanimous.

Opportunity for Public Comment on Agenda Items:

No comments

Review/Approval of Minutes of June BOS Meeting:

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the Minutes of the June 27, 2023, Board of Selectmen meeting as presented; seconded by Garay.

Administrative Hayward commented that Land Trust President Madeline McClave had requested that there be a clarification noted that the town property near Home Depot that was the subject of possible sale is preserved as open space by a conservation easement and not a deed restriction. She also asked that it be noted that the Land Trust and the Historical Society will be working together to do the historical register nomination for the Surdam House. Ms. Hayward noted that corrections to minutes are only done by members of the Board, but she would include these comments into these minutes so that they are acknowledged.

Unanimous.

MOTION: by Kennerson to adjourn at 9:49 PM; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant

Attachments to Minutes (filed with the Town Clerk and available upon request)

Letter from Board of Education seeking advisory question on November ballot

Helen Butler Trail Management Plan