

**Board of Selectmen  
Special Meeting  
Monday, October 23, 2023**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** First Selectman Dan Jerram, Selectman Laura Garay, Mary Beth Greenwood, Selectman Alesia Kennerson (participated virtually), Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward  
Many residents of New Hartford were present in person (approximately 75) and several participated virtually (approximately 30).

Prior to the formal start of the meeting, the First Selectman welcomed those in attendance and stated that he was inviting Mary Beth Greenwood to sit at the front table with the Board of Selectmen as she will be elected to the Board of Selectmen in November; replacing Selectman Laura Garay who is not running for re-election.

Mr. Jerram acknowledged Ms. Garay's years to the Town as a Selectman and thanked her for her service. A round of applause was given to Ms. Garay.

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM. First Selectman Jerram stated that the first item on the agenda was a public safety forum regarding the operations of the South End Fire District and the Fire Department. He noted that the fire department is an autonomous, self-taxing entity.

He stated that the Board of Selectmen is willing to listen and hear concerns and they try to get people to come together to work to find solutions to problems. He informed all that commentary could be sent via email to [town@newhartfordct.gov](mailto:town@newhartfordct.gov) and the Selectmen would review them at the next meeting. Mr. Jerram reminded all that the town does not run without its volunteers.

**District 2 (South End) Public Safety Forum:**

The First Selectman opened the floor to those who wished to speak. He asked that residents of the South End be granted the opportunity to address the Selectmen since this meeting was called to address concerns with their fire department.

Laura Polakow, 195 Cedar Lane

Mrs. Polakow stated that she is a supporter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> district. It is her belief that the South End Fire Department provides adequate fire protection for the residents of their district. She commented that she has had to call the fire department on a few occasions. She expressed her feelings that she believes this matter has caused a division among the town. She feels that the Village Fire District is guilty of a hostile take-over. She questioned the statements that have been made regarding 25 firefighters leaving the fire department. She said that volunteerism is problematic in all sectors; no one volunteers anymore. She questioned how consolidation could be beneficial and to whom? She noted that there is a difference in the mill rate between the Village Fire District and the South End Fire District. She encouraged the South End Fire Department to remain strong and "fight the battle."

Justin Meyers, 391 Gillette Road

Mr. Meyers addressed the crowd. He took offense to the term "hostile takeover" stating that this initiative is taxpayer driven. He stated that it would require a 2/3 majority vote of the taxpayers to make

this happen. He stated that the South End Fire house would remain active. He identified himself as a former member of the department who resigned, along with others, due to toxic leadership. Mr. Meyers does not feel that there is a lack of volunteers; citing the fact that many former members of the department who left have switched to being members of the Village Fire District because they enjoy doing what they do. Mr. Meyers believes that termination of the district is the only option due to continued deterioration of the department, which Meyers believes puts public safety at risk. Mr. Meyers asked town leaders what they plan to do if termination of the district does not come to fruition. He asked that the leaders evaluate the state of the department periodically if termination does not happen.

First Selectman Jerram explained that the Selectmen have learned a lot about termination of a district due to the recent consolidation of the Pine Meadow and Village Fire Departments. Jerram explained that if there is a vote to terminate the District, it does not mean that it is automatically merged with another district. There is nothing in State Statutes that allows for a merger. The District has the ability to tax its residents, to lien homes when taxes are not paid and to foreclose on properties for non-payment of taxes. However, if the District is terminated, the ability to do those things is lost. The ability to do those things does not transfer to the Town. In order for a merger to occur, there has to be a Special Act of the Legislature. They will want to know that there is support for this action.

Jeff Rivard, 313 Cotton Hill Road

Mr. Rivard took the floor and offered his commentary. He stated that he was a Lieutenant in the South End Department when he resigned from service due to hostile leadership. Mr. Rivard stated that he wanted to address some false information. He said that the numbers that have been stated regarding the current number of interior firefighters and the number of resignations do not add up. He felt that the number of interior firefighters has been inflated and are being created to make the rosters look better.

Elizabeth Paul, 33 Lair Road

Ms. Paul stated that she had been the Treasurer and the Clerk of the South End Fire District for 23 years. She said that she was very involved in the district for those years and would be willing to answer any questions regarding the operations during that time. She commented that the Fire District has nothing to hide and only has the best interests of the residents of the district in mind. She said that what bothers her the most is that people who have only been paying attention for about a year feel that they know what is better for the District than those who have served for over 30 years. It is her opinion that the only reason these problems are happening now is because one person has some time available and the other person has a grudge against the chief. She stated that these types of problems happen cyclically. The Fire Department handles them and then moves on. There have been many times when there are disagreements between the members of the department and the Chief. There has to be a chain of command – not everyone will agree with the person in charge, but that is the only way that things can work. The District has run well for many years. There is a lot of misinformation that is unfair and misleading on Social Media. Ms. Paul states that there has not been a fair debate where both sides can be heard. Currently, the Chief is a 3 year appointment - but bylaws can be changed. She stated that recently members just walked away instead of taking proper channels to discuss change.

Mr. Jerram asked Ms. Paul if she was the Clerk for the District or the Department. She clarified that she was the Clerk for the District. She stated that people do need to realize that there is a difference. She also was the secretary for the Department for a bit. She stated that when she first was the Secretary for the Department, there was a clear divide among the members back then, too. One half of the members were for the Chief and one half were against the Chief.

Stephanie Meyers, 391 Gillette Road

Mrs. Meyers introduced herself as the wife of Justin Meyers who had addressed the crowd earlier. She stated that she has volunteered in fire departments in other towns, but not in New Hartford. She has been a firefighter and an EMT. She loves having a community fire department but does have a concern about the level of protection that can be provided. She questioned why the department is not willing to institute a program where fire personnel can be first responders. She witnessed a car accident that occurred in front of her house and it was a while before medical personnel arrived on scene. Firefighters were there, but they could not do anything. She stated that several of the volunteers who left had brought up the idea of a first responder program and it was turned down. They now volunteer with the Village Fire District.

Norman Scott Goff, 291 Maple Hollow Road

Lifelong resident of New Hartford who served for 17 years as a South End Volunteer Firefighter. He stated that he served along several dedicated people and noted that some of them are still in the department. He expressed his disappointment that residents are allowing the volunteers to be dragged through the mud. He questioned who would be willing to serve if this continues. Mr. Goff stated that fire departments are autonomous entities and separate from the Town. He stressed that it is up to the department, the Commission and the residents of the South End to make changes as necessary. He noted that at some time in the future, consolidation may be necessary – but not yet.

Hillary Barret Reade, 530 East Cotton Hill Road

Ms. Reade came forward to speak. She informed the audience that her house is the house that burned down on Wednesday. She is employed as a surgical technician and has worked in hostile environments but stated that when you work, you put that aside and handle what you need to do. The care provided is most important. She is not privy to the problems that are occurring. She appreciates first responders and stated that they are taken for granted. However, she is not happy with the outcome of her situation as there is nothing left of her home. Her biggest concern is that she does not feel safe and does not feel that the response to her home was a well oiled machine.

First Selectman Jerram expressed his thanks to Ms. Reade for coming to the meeting, noting that it was a traumatic experience for her to go through.

Donna Vincenti, 309 Cotton Hill Road

Ms. Vincenti stated that there is no question that dissolution of the district is a drastic remedy. She said that at a public meeting of the district taxpayers held on July on July 24, there was a much less drastic remedy recommended. It involves changing the bylaws to permit selection and authority over the Fire Chief. However, the Department/District has insisted that the bylaws cannot be amended. The current Fire Chief has announced that the department will be run by its members as it always has been. Ms. Vincenti stated the District Commissioners have been hostile at meetings. Additionally, the Fire Chief has

refused to answer questions about memberships. Ms. Vincenti commented that this is not how public officials should behave.

Ms. Vincenti commented that the town could undertake a study of consolidation and the Commissioners of the District could negotiate a plan of consolidation and inform the taxpayers of the process. However, this process could take several years which could put taxpayers at risk. She referred to the fire that occurred last week and commented on the fact that Mutual Aid was relied upon and stated that the South End Fire Department only had 2 interior firefighters at the scene. She commented that the structure rekindled during the early morning. She feels that the events leading to the rekindling should be investigated. She discussed Mutual Aid and commented that a burden is being placed on our surrounding communities to provide fire protection to our town. She feels that a single department would provide better service and better response. Ms. Vincenti noted that the Village Fire District has promised to continue to serve the South End when needed. She commented that Nepaug and Bakerville Fire Districts consolidated many years ago to form the South End Fire Department. She said it no longer makes sense to have separate fire departments in this town.

First Selectman Jerram thanked Ms. Vincenti for her commentary. He stated that the concept of mutual aid is not new. Mutual Aid has existed in this community for many years and happens on a regular basis. It is a vital part of the fire business for all towns. Jerram noted that the fire that occurred happened during mid-day in the middle of the week; a time when many people are at work.

Mark Costello, 530 East Cotton Hill Road

Mr. Costello stated that he works in a steel plant and if he is not trained in what he is asked to do, he cannot do it and won't do it. He stated that proper training is extremely important. He has concerns about training. He stated that the first fire truck to respond to the fire that occurred at his home had problems with getting water to his house. They could not get the hose to work. Additionally, he felt that someone should have noticed the smoldering bed in the house prior to him seeing it when he was allowed back into his home. He encouraged proper training.

First Selectman Jerram recognized that the experience was a traumatic experience for Mr. Costello. He stated that things do not always go according to plan – but he was thankful that fire departments from other towns came to assist. He thanked them for their response. All in all, Mr. Jerram felt that there was a good response and was grateful to those who were there.

Luke Dickinson, Litchfield Turnpike

Luke introduced himself as an active member of the South End Fire Department for 5 years. He feels that people are “nit picking” the department. He commented that it appears that the Village Fire Department is more focused on the South End Fire Department than their own department. He stated that he felt that there was a clear disrespect of authority by members of the other fire department when there was an agreement that no one should enter the house, but they did anyway. He also felt that there was an incident at a call that occurred at Routes 219 and 202 at a motor vehicle accident where members of New Hartford fire were allegedly not using proper equipment. He stated that they continue to nit pick South End and he “has had enough” and it is ridiculous.

Mr. Jerram thanked Mr. Dickinson for his volunteer service to the town, noting that the town appreciates all of its volunteers.

Ted Mulhall, Cotton Hill Road

Mr. Mulhall identified himself as a 7-year member of the South End Fire Department. He stated that he would address the assembly as a fireman and then as a taxpayer. He stated that when he first joined the department 7 years ago, there were only 12 – 15 firefighters at that time. There was a decline in volunteerism at that time. He noted that Chief Diorio reached out to encourage people to join the department. He commented that there is always fluctuation in numbers of active volunteers. Mr. Mulhall commented that many people have bosses that they don't get along with. He asked the crowd rhetorically how many people have had disagreements with their bosses. He said that he had been disciplined but he didn't quit. He stated that several resignations occurred as a response to one individual being disciplined. He said that Fire Departments are known to be full of egos. Mr. Mulhall stated that the talk of a merger has been ongoing for a long time. There was someone who was recording response times and implied that if a merger occurred, response times would be better. He questions that thinking.

Mr. Mulhall believes that the Village Fire District welcomed those who left South End so willingly because it is part of a larger plan to take control of the South End Department. He termed it a "money grab" and felt that the cell tower revenue is enticing because it helps with being able to buy good equipment.

Justin Meyer, Gillette Road

Mr. Meyer clarified his position that he did not abandon the South End Fire Department. He stated that while it is correct that he did resign, however, when he attempted to rejoin, he was rejected.

Mike Sekulski, Niles Road

Mr. Sekulski identified himself as a Commissioner on the South End Fire District. He stated that he has been involved in the department in various ways for 35 years. He has seen membership ebb and flow. Mutual Aid becomes very important during the times when membership is low. He said it is common that one department may have to cover for another department more often during different times. He stated that more reliability of response would require a paid fire department and the town does not seem like they want to pay for that just yet. Mr. Sekulski stated that normal attrition occurs in most jobs. It is not unusual for fire department volunteers to lose interest – it happens in most workplaces. Mr. Sekulski commented that Mutual Aid is a form of consolidation and it benefits all. He said that a service merger should be integrated by both departments; consolidation should not be used to solve personal vendettas.

First Selectman Jerram thanked Commissioner Sekulski for attending the meeting and noted that both Chairman Steve Sekulski and Fire Chief Bob Diorio were also in attendance.

Steven Sekulski, Winchester Road

South End Fire Commission Chairman Steve Sekulski addressed the crowd. He said that there has always been "a rift" between "this side and the other side." He stated that he has been involved with the Department and District for 51 years. He clarified that terms of Commissioners are staggered. He indicated that there are 2 seats available for election in 2024. He said that bylaws of the district go to the membership of the district for consideration. If district members want something changed, they should bring it for consideration. He encouraged volunteers to stick with it and get the job done to help the town out.

Glen Atwood, Bruning Road

Mr. Atwood thinks the Fire Department has done a good job. He wonders if a fresh start might be

needed – on both sides. He said that there are many jobs where people don't get along – but you need to stick it out and see what happens.

First Selectman Jerram opened the floor to anyone who wished to speak. He noted that there was only about 15 minutes left of the time that he had devoted to this portion of the agenda. He Hearing no other comments, Mr. Jerram summarized his thoughts and stated that volunteers are very difficult to keep, and it is getting harder and harder to find people who are willing to volunteer. It is hard to get people involved. He noted that this town has many members of the same family who have volunteered for many years.

Mr. Jerram stated that everyone needs to keep in mind that dissolution means “it ends.” It is not the answer to this issue. It is time to get everyone to get back together and work together. He thanked everyone for attending this meeting and urged residents to send ideas and comments to the Selectman for potential solutions. He and the Board will share these with the departments.

Mr. Jerram stated that a small break would occur to allow for those who wished to leave the meeting at this point to do so. He noted that the Selectmen still had agenda items to complete. He called a recess at 8:30 PM.

First Selectman Jerram declared the recess over and Called the Meeting back to order at 8:55 PM.

**Budget-ARPA updates/recommendations to Board of Finance re: transfers**

First Selectman Jerram informed the Selectmen that a quote has been received for equipment that needs to be purchased in order to satisfy the requirements of the Police Accountability Bill. This is all technology equipment that is required; includes body cameras and the equipment that is supplemental to the use of cameras. He stated that there will be a bill for \$27,130 for this order. He would like approval from the Selectmen to use the remaining funds from several dormant capital accounts to pay this bill. This would solve an unbudgeted problem and would clean up several smaller balances left from previously approved expenditures.

He reviewed his recommendations of the funding sources.

ARPA has \$7525 set aside for police technology. The capital projects that have funds remaining are: Police car - \$7111.05; WPCA well improvements -\$ 3880.00 and \$1.00 (there are 2 line items for this), Mower (Parks) \$1006.00; Woodchipper/tractor - \$256.00; DPW Gates- \$350.00; Mini Excavator \$4222.62; Skid Steer \$759.00; Muni Projects \$2019.33

**MOTION:** by Garay to approve the request for funding, including transfers from unused capital funding, in the amount of \$27, 130.00 to purchase the technology needed to become compliant with the police accountability bill; seconded by Kennerson.

Selectman Kennerson stated that residents have already been taxed for these funds and it is a good way to use up these balances. Jerram commented that this police accountability bill has already cost the town \$50,000 in equipment and this is an additional requirement.

*Unanimous.*

**Requests for Refunds of Taxes:**

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to approve the tax refunds as recommended by Tax Collector Tolly Gibbs; seconded by Garay.

Mathew Alfano	\$89.17
Ally Financial	\$383.15
Acar Leasing Ltd	\$488.62
John and Georgia Austin	\$55.31
Joseph Bieluch	\$7.58
Adam Ferretti	\$30.35
Floyd and Kelly Harrison	\$23.81
Jaclyn Kostak	\$13.78
Richard Lindboe Jr.	\$32.48
Richard Lindboe Jr.	\$137.02
Wilma Long	\$84.81
Nissan Infiniti	\$176.90
Precision Tree Experts	\$377.78
Kelly Rigby	\$29.04
Patricia Sok	\$6.96
Joanne Radwick (The Center for You)	\$181.84
VCFS Auto Leasing	\$273.26
Michael Zordan	\$61.35

*Unanimous.*

**Approval of Minutes:**

**MOTION:** by Garay to approve the minutes dated September 6, 2023, as presented; seconded by Kennerson.

*Unanimous.*

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to approve the minutes dated September 26, 2023, as presented; seconded by Garay.

*Unanimous.*

**MOTION:** by Jerram to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussion related to Real Estate Negotiations re Casey and Hawkins; Rails to Trails; seconded by Kennerson.

*Unanimous.*

Mr. Jerram invited Mary Beth Greenwood to join the Executive Session since this may be an ongoing discussion and there will be a change in Board of Selectmen members as of the beginning of December. Ms. Greenwood will be replacing Ms. Garay as a member of the Board.

Executive Session began at 9:12PM.

Executive Session ended at 10:10 PM.

There was no formal agreements/action taken regarding the real estate negotiations. Strategy was discussed.

**Discussion of next meeting date:**

The Selectmen discussed the fact that the next regular meeting is scheduled for November 28, 2023, and that is the day of the CCM Convention. Mr. Jerram and Ms. Kennerson will be attending that meeting and the Board of Selectmen meeting may have to be changed.

**MOTION:** by Garay to adjourn at 10:15 PM, seconded by Kennerson

*Unanimous.*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Christine Hayward, Executive Assistant*

*No attachments filed with these minutes*