

**Board of Selectmen
Special Meeting
VIRTUAL
March 21, 2022
MINUTES**

Present (Virtually): First Selectman Dan Jerram, Selectman Alesia Kennerson, Selectman Laura Garay, Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward

Others present (virtually): Mary Beth Greenwood, Ben Witte, Kerry Guilfoyle, and others.

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM.

The purpose of this meeting is really to finalize the budget, but there are a few odds and ends.

Review, Discussion, Action regarding MIRA amendment:

Jerram explained that trash from New Hartford goes through RRDD#1. New Hartford is about a 30% owner, along with Winchester (50%) and Barkhamsted (20%). Winchester and Barkhamsted have already voted to approve the amendment and they are a majority of the Board; so the amendment will be in effect.

\$111.00 per ton is the current rate. Costs have been rising rapidly because the facility is in need of repair. MIRA has about 40 towns who are using their facility. There used to be offsetting revenue to cover expenses. 100% of the trash used to be processed and burned and transferred to energy in CT. That is no longer the case.

If RRDD chooses not to lock in at this rate, there are surcharges that would be put into effect.

Jerram recommends that New Hartford votes to extend the life of the agreement and continue to take the trash to Torrington which then goes to Hartford and then is shipped out of state on rail cars. There is limited burn on site.

Selectman Kennerson asked about the schedule of fees that is noted on page 7. Jerram replied that there is always the ability to opt out. Kennerson asked what other towns that have opted out are doing. Jerram replied that some are trucking their own trash out of state. Jerram replied that we are part of RRDD and we don't act on our own, so we are kind of stuck with what we do now.

MOTION: by Kennerson to accept the amendment to the MIRA contract as presented; seconded by Garay.

Jerram noted again for the record that there are 5 more years with MIRA and hopefully the state will come up with some resolution to the situation.

Unanimous.

Review/Action of recommendations for Pension Portfolio changes:

Hooker and Holcomb representative/financial advisor Art Meisner had reached out to suggest some changes be made in the investment funds. Selectman Garay commented that they did appear to be

more conservative. Hooker and Holcomb has done well by the town and Jerram stated that he trusts their advice.

MOTION: by Garay to adopt the changes recommended by the financial advisor; seconded by Kennerson.

Unanimous

Discussion, possible action regarding Aquarion Tax Abatement

Jerram noted that in January 25, 2022 meeting there was discussion of the tax abatement. Without this abatement, there would be negative impact on the rate structure for the water and sewer rates. Jerram reviewed capping the property assessment at 10,000 for a period of ten years. The Selectmen were in favor of this. Additional action will be taken at a future date.

Discussion of public hearing for Sale/Purchase agreement for Aquarion

Jerram informed the Selectmen that there is need to hold an additional public hearing regarding the sale of the water and wastewater assets due to the fact that it needs to be advertised twice prior to the hearing. Jerram is planning to do this in conjunction with the annual town meeting.

Discusson of Surdam Property:

Mr. Jerram noted that there may be interest by the Historical Society for use of the house. Jerram would like the Selectmen to post a walk through meeting of the house for the Selectmen to tour the property and then resume the discussion at the next meeting to discuss what may be done with the house.

The Selectmen agreed to post a one item agenda for a walk through on Saturday, March 26 at 10:00 AM.

Budget Discussion:

Budget draft dated March 21, 2022

Jerram stated that the Selectmen have been through this before, but there were some minor changes. The Tax Collector supplies increased by \$1000. Tax Assessor data processing supplies increased by \$4500. The cable bill will be higher due to increased costs due to the change to fiber optics. Computer Maintenance line item should be increased to \$42,000 to absorb these costs. Jerram asked the Selectmen if they were ok with the allocation for town hall oil due to the present increases in oil. Jerram noted that P&Z and Inland Wetlands seem to like having virtual meetings, therefore, they may continue. Kennerson and Garay did not want to make any adjustments.

Probate Court has not sent their budget request yet; even though it has been requested.

Jerram stated that the Regional 7 budget has been lowered. The towns that are affected this year are Colebrook and Norfolk.

Public Safety line item was adjusted due to an error, but it is now correct. Deputy Fire marshal line item is at 0 because there is no need to train a new fire marshal at this time. There was money in this line item in the past for training due to the retirement of Fire Marshal Baldwin.

A brief discussion occurred regarding the police line item expenses. Jerram explained that the most senior police officer retired and received an accrued time pay out. The remainder of his salary line item for this year is being used to offset that expense. After July 1, the funds will be used to cover a new employee.

An additional highway employee will be added in January of 2023. This will then become an additional expense in the 2023-2024 budget for an additional full time employee for the full year.

Gas, grease and oil line item was a topic of discussion as was garage heating oil expense. The paving expense was also reviewed. Jerram noted that last year it was difficult for the paving company to meet their obligations due to lack of workforce. Jerram stated that there are still concerns that there may not be crews available again this year due to the same issue. Kennerson asked if additional chip sealing could be done if there is left over funds in the pavement line item.

Overtime, Tree removal and salt will be over-expended this fiscal year; but the department will not be over.

Kennerson and Garay suggested to add an additional \$5,000 to the tree removal line item. They felt the other lines were adequately funded.

Zoning Officer salary has been adjusted to reflect an additional 3% benefit to cover a contractual agreement to increase salary for completion of certification.

Bakerville Library has submitted a request for an increase of \$3,000 to their budget.

Kennerson stated that the Beekley Library is asking for ARPA funding to add programs and Kennerson is uncomfortable that additional programming will lead to increased budget growth and requests each year. Selectmen expressed concern regarding a higher rate of growth by the library than what the town budget is increasing.

Recreation is in a good spot. It was restated that there will be a need for recreation program account to cover \$15,000 of the health care expenses of a new recreation director.

Garay asked about the cost of Northwest Transportation District. Jerram replied that each year there is a grant that comes from the Federal Government that the town assigns to NW transit. Jerram stated that he reached out to NW Transportation to say that he may want to keep the grant to fund our own vehicle. Jerram has reached out for data regarding New Hartford users.

A review of capital expenses ensued. Jerram noted that it would be beneficial to have the Surdam/Antolini properties surveyed.

He suggested to remove the truck from the capital expenses due to having the ARPA funds approved by the Board of Finance.

Jerram explained that after conferring with the assessing consultant, it would be beneficial to have funds available for the revaluation costs in this next capital plan year. He suggested that it might be prudent to switch the capital funds from the highway fuel tank replacement to year 23-24 and to move the reval costs into year 22-23.

The adjustments to the capital budget reduced the bottom line for 2022-2023 to \$365,000 for the town budget.

Discussion turned to revenue. First Selectman Jerram stated that the Town Clerk revenue has been decreasing. It came in high last year due to a lot of real estate transactions. Building Inspector fees were at \$117,000 for last fiscal year. Currently, they are lower than what has been projected. Jerram suggested that the projection for next fiscal year be adjusted to \$115,000.

Hold harmless had \$82,759 as a revenue, but the Selectman chose to remove this from the revenue

projections and wait and see what happens with the motor vehicle tax increase.

Kennerson asked to review the library requests. She asked First Selectman Jerram “how much does the town fund the operations of the Beekley Library?” A discussion ensued with the Selectmen deciding to limit the library’s growth to match the town’s percentage of budget growth. The requests were limited to a 4.5% increase over the approved 20-21 budget amount for both of the libraries.

Jerram stated that at the last Selectman’s meeting, changes were made to the retirement line item to allow for longevity and experience to be rewarded in the position of the First Selectman.

Laura Garay stated that she feels an elected position is different than in private industry. The salary level of a civil servant is not the same, but needs to be transparent. She asked why the salary line item would not be increased. Kennerson offered that there is merit to funding the salary line item, but the addition of a stipend in the 457 recognizes and rewards experience. Garay feels that increasing the salary is more transparent.

Kennerson stated that funding the retirement line item this year would remain as a budgeted expense. This will carry on and will be included in the budget each year to be used for whoever is in the position.

Jerram commented that a stipend that is intended to reward longevity, growth and experience is something that will work best for the town. Employees are rewarded for their longevity and knowledge; encouraging longevity in the position of First Selectman is a plus for consistency. Jerram reiterated that he is thankful for the years he has had in office and sees the benefit to historical knowledge. If someone is not doing a good job, the voters have the final say and can elect someone else. He stated that many towns have moved toward the Town Manager route to provide stability and longevity. He feels that a stipend is better than a “one size fits all” salary. There are benefits to having things in place to keep people interested in staying on the job.

MOTION: by Kennerson to set a policy to compensate the position of the First Selectman by providing a retirement benefit that is equivalent to Article 7 Section 2 of the New Hartford police union contract; seconded by Jerram.

AYE; Jerram, Kennerson

Opposed: Garay

MOTION CARRIES

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the budget dated 3-21-22 in the amount of \$26,588,830.90; seconded by Jerram.

Garay stated for the record that she is opposed to the inclusion of the stipend for the First Selectman being included in the retirement line item; and therefore cannot support the budget as proposed.

Approved: Kennerson, Jerram

Opposed: Garay

MOTION CARRIES

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the capital plan; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous.

Minutes:

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the minutes of January 25, 2022; seconded by Jerram.
Unanimous

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the minutes of February 1, 2022; seconded by Jerram.
Unanimous

MOTION: by Kennerson to approve the minutes of February 15, 2022, seconded by Garay
Unanimous

Operations Updates:

First Selectman Jerram stated that he had received a request from the Open Space Commission to move Eva Barham from an alternate position to fill a vacancy on the Open Space Commission.

MOTION: by Kennerson to appoint Eva Barham to a full seat on the Open Space Commission; term ending December 31, 2025; seconded by Garay.

Jerram informed the Board that the long standing appeal of an assessment for solar panels on property at Regional Refusal Disposal District is heading to mediation.

The start of mediation for the Carpenter Road Bridge will occur on Thursday, March 24.

Public Comment:

No comments

MOTION: by Kennerson to adjourn at 9:00 PM seconded by Garay.
Unanimous.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant*

*ATTACHMENTS: (available from the Town Clerk upon request)
Second Amendment to Tier 1 Long Term Municipal Solid Waste Management Services Agreement –
executed by Town only*

Portfolio Recommendations (pages 32 -36 Hooker & Holcomb)