

**Board of Selectmen  
Special Virtual Meeting  
February 2, 2021**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** First Selectman Jerram, Selectman Kennerson, Selectman Garay, Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward

Others present: Denton Butler, Karen Wieduwilt, Elizabeth Domas, Mary Beth Greenwood, Shelly Lloyd, Shaw Isacson, Kathryn Boughton, Deborah Ventre and others.

First Selectman Jerram called the meeting to order at 6:17 pm. He thanked those present for attending this virtual meeting.

**Discussion of employment policies with respect to Elected Officials:**

First Selectman Jerram stated that Donna Laplante, Town Clerk has officially retired as of January 31, 2021 and there is now the process of appointing a replacement to fill this vacancy for the end of the elected term of office. He publicly thanked Donna for her years of service.

Mr. Jerram explained that the First Selectman is responsible for the operations of the Town. Day to day oversight of employees – both union and non-union is performed by this position. However, the policies and practices for employment of elected officials is set by the Board of Selectmen. They establish the policies to be followed and the First Selectman provides the oversight, but reports to the Board. Mr. Jerram noted that the past practice for policies pertaining to employment matters for elected officials has generally been that they follow the policies in place for employees. Town hall is open 35 hours per week and the public expects that their paid elected officials work a minimum of 35 hours per week. He noted that Elected Officials are not subject to overtime for any extra hours worked. Elected officials are considered ‘salaried’ employees. There is no extra pay for extra hours. Wage and salary increases are not guaranteed. Union employees may have contractual raises, but elected officials do not have that agreement. Vacation and Sick time allowances generally follow what is outlined in the union contract, but there is no accrual of time and therefore no post-employment pay out of ‘unused time.’ There is a level of latitude with respect to hours of work and there are flex hours available for elected officials. Mr. Jerram stated that there really aren’t any written policies that address elected officials, it has mostly been dictated by past practice. Mr. Jerram stated that he would like to open this up for a general discussion regarding policy.

Selectman Garay asked if a discussion regarding policy might be a moot point since there has been an initial discussion regarding possibility of making the elected position of town clerk into an appointed position. Mr. Jerram replied that even if that were to happen, there is still the position of First Selectman that should be guided by policy. Jerram stated that it brings an element of professionalism to positions and allows the public to know what the responsibilities of the office are. Jerram wanted to clarify that there has not been a problem with any office not performing and there has not been an issue with lack of fulfilling responsibilities, but the labor attorney has stated that it is good practice to have policies and a good time to do that is when there is transition in personnel within a position. Selectman Garay and Selectman Kennerson suggested that since the First Selectman is most familiar with the day to day operations that he create a draft of practices and policies and present it at a future meeting for review and consideration.

**Line Item Transfers:**

Jerram stated that the discussion of Line item transfers and the Town Clerk position compensation really go hand in hand, because the compensation offered to the Town Clerk candidate will create some excess funds in the salary line item.

Jerram stated that when dealing with initial employment agreements for employees, he looks at the qualifications, years of experience and past history of the wages for the position to determine starting wage and benefits. He stated that he has met with Debbie Ventre, currently the Assistant Town Clerk, to discuss moving into the Town Clerk position. Wage negotiations have occurred and an agreement for wage has been reached. The salary will not be the same as what was paid to the outgoing Town Clerk; it is at a lower rate (due to less years of service) but has been accepted. This has created a surplus in the current line of about \$3,800 in the Town Clerk Line item. Mr. Jerram asked if the Board would give consideration to transferring these unexpended funds into the line item for a Tax Collector Assistant. Jerram noted that it has become apparent that the move to eliminate the Tax Collector Assistant did not work out. The original plan was to have the Assessor and the Tax Collector work together in a combined space and the Assessor would be able to help the Tax Collector as needed. However, there has been a change in personnel and the replacement Assessor candidate does not have the experience at this point in time to be able to assist the Tax Collector. She is focusing on learning the duties of the Assessor. This has left a void in the area of help for the Tax Collector. Garay asked if this transfer of funding is within a department. Jerram replied in the affirmative, stating that both line items are within the General Government Department. Garay commented that sometimes things don't work out as planned. She agreed that restoring the Tax Collector position is something that she can support. Kennerson stated that she defers to the opinions of those who work in town hall and if they are saying that the assistant position is needed, she has no problem putting funding back into that line item to make that happen.

**MOTION:** by Garay to transfer \$3800 from the Town Clerk salary line item to the Tax Collector Assistant/consultant line; seconded by Kennerson.

*Unanimous*

**Town Clerk Compensation:**

Jerram stated that he has come to an agreement for a salary for the Town Clerk to be \$56,875.00 and asked for approval of this wage. He has reviewed wages in other towns and compared years of experience. This is a negotiated wage.

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to set the salary for the position of the vacant Town Clerk at \$56,875.00 annually; seconded by Garay.

Jerram noted that the salary will be subject to increases as other wages in town hall increase. This is currently an elected position.

*Unanimous.*

**Appointment of Town Clerk to fill vacancy:**

Jerram stated that the Selectmen have already agreed that Mrs. Ventre is the right person to assume the duties of the Town Clerk and he noted that a recommendation from the Democratic Town

committee has been received and they cross endorse the appointment of Debbie Ventre to fill the vacancy as Town Clerk.

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to appoint Debbie Ventre to fill the vacancy as Town Clerk, subject to the successful completion of the employment agreement; seconded by Garay.

Appointment is for the remainder of the elected term of former Town Clerk Donna Laplante

*Unanimous*

**Discussion/action of Public Hearing Date; to be followed by a Special Town Meeting**

A Special Town Meeting will be called to vote on the proposed sale of water and sewer assets of the Town of New Hartford. Jerram noted that a Public Hearing will be part of the Town Meeting. First Selectman Jerram distributed the Sample of the Official Ballot that will be voted on. Selectman Garay commented that it is a lot for the voter to have to read and process. Jerram replied that the question incorporates the resolution that was adopted by the Board of Finance regarding this proposal. He noted that Item vii of the ballot question adds the authority of the Board of Selectmen to implement the actions included in the Resolution. He stated that the Board of Selectmen is the administrative arm of the government that is given the authority to complete the process if the sale is approved by the voters.

**Set Time, Date, Place of Referendum re: Proposed sale of water and wastewater assets:**

First Selectman Jerram read the Call of the Meeting and Notice of Referendum (attached) into the meeting. Mr. Jerram pointed out that the Referendum date is a Saturday. He noted that this is not a usual voting day for New Hartford residents. He explained that during this time of COVID, it becomes difficult to use the schools because they are trying to limit access to the schools when it is in session. The poll workers have been consulted and they are agreeable to a Saturday vote. Jerram also pointed out that the time of the vote will be altered from the regular schedule. Generally, the polls open at 6:00 AM; however, they will not begin until 9:00 AM on the Saturday. Jerram explained that the reasoning behind this is to shorten the day for the poll workers which makes it easier to fill the time slots needed for workers. Since it is not a “work day” the Registrars feel that there is not as much of a need to have the polls open so early. People have the entire day to get to the polls. The Selectmen discussed their concern with being able to spread the word and getting the message out to the voters. It was noted that the town signs at Antolini School and in front of Town Hall can be used to promote the date and time. Additionally, the website will have notices on it. Word of mouth will also be used to inform people of this important vote.

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to accept the Call of the Special Town Meeting and Notice of Referendum as read (virtual Special Town Meeting on February 18, 2021 at 7:00 PM and Referendum on March 6, 2021); seconded by Garay.

*Unanimous.*

**Discussion of Economic Development Incentive Program for Dining Establishments:**

The Selectmen discussed appropriating \$1,000 either from the Economic Development Commission Budget or the contingency line item to be used to purchase gift cards from local businesses to assist in

stimulating their business. They will defer to the EDC to implement this program as they see fit. Jerram will discuss this with them at their meeting on Monday night.

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to authorize the first Selectman to work with the EDC to develop a restaurant incentive program and authorize an expenditure in the amount of \$1,000 from the contingency line item or EDC budget for this program; seconded by Garay.

*Unanimous.*

**MOTION:** by Kennerson to adjourn at 7:44 PM; seconded by Garay.

*Unanimous.*

*Respectfully Submitted,*

*Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant*

**ATTACHMENTS**

*Sample Official Ballot Referendum, New Hartford March 6, 2021*

*Notice of Special Town Meeting/Notice of Referendum*