

Town of Newington, NH  
Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes  
Monday October 16th, 2023

**Present:** Chair Bob Blonigen, Selectman Brandon Arsenault, Selectman Chris Wayss, , Fire Chief EJ Hoyt, Police Chief Mike Bilodeau, Police Commission Chair Brenda Blonigen, Police Executive Assistant Taylor Fiore, Planning Board Chair Denis Hebert, HDC Chair John Chamberlain, EDC Member Brian Semprini, Road Agent Len Thomas, Executive Director of COAST Bus Rad Nichols, Board of Fire Engineers Ann Hyland Hebert, Finance Director Sheryl Bagley, Town Administrator Martha Roy and Eleanor Boy, Recorder.

B. Blonigen called the meeting to order at 5:36pm. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Minutes Approval:** B. Arsenault moved approve the public minutes of October 2nd, 2023. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor. B. Arsenault moved to approve the Non-Public minutes of the September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023 and September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023 and October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor.

**Manifest Approval:** B. Arsenault moved to approve the manifest for \$18,258.71 dated 10/5/2023. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor. B. Arsenault moved to approve the manifest for \$91,390.89 dated 10/12/23. C. Wayss seconded the motion. B. Arsenault abstained. B. Blonigen and C. Wayss were in favor.

**Highway Budget:**

B. Blonigen was pleased to see an increase in the Highway training budget. L. Thomas said that includes salt school for all. B. Arsenault asked about the 7% increase in wages, which doesn't include the COLA. L. Thomas said the increase was due to an employee receiving his CDL-B license, which increased his wages. The contracted services budget line increased from \$50,000 to \$70,000. M. Roy said that the guardrail project wasn't completed in 2023 so it is included in the 2024 budget. Discussion ensued about the guardrail project, where it should be located in the budget, how it should be done in phases over time and the capital reserve fund for bridges. The cost is \$240,000 over 8 years. The guardrail project was recommended by the Highway Safety Committee. The project would replace the cable guardrail with congregated steel guardrail. The State specification for state roads uses corrugated steel but the cable rail is allowed on town roads. C. Wayss thinks this is a worthwhile project. E. Hoyt said that the current guardrails are very low and cars can go right over it, especially since cars are getting bigger. M. Roy said that there are eight steep inclines where there are currently cable guardrails that would need to be replaced. E. Hoyt said that they are adding and replacing guardrails in this project.

B. Arsenault thought the recommendation by the Highway Safety Committee was good, but is this project necessary. M. Roy said that the \$28,000 bid was for the southwest side of the bridge both up and down. It would probably be 60,000 to do the whole bridge. B. Blonigen would like to see more discussion about adding more guardrail and would like to see something from the Town Engineer. M. Roy said that there is no State requirement for Newington to replace the current guardrails on McIntyre Road. The Board would like to see the project be for the guardrails on the bridge. B. Arsenault would recommend taking \$31,000 for this project out of the contracted services budget line in the Highway budget and maybe take it out of the Major Roads capital reserve fund and do it now and increase the amount to be placed in the capital reserve fund in 2024. C. Wayss suggested that the town encumber some of the needed funds and then add funds to the capital reserve fund to cover the work on each side of the bridge. In conclusion, the Board would like to encumber some of the funds for the project, go under contract for the \$28,000 and then raise the money for the other side of the bridge from the capital reserve fund. B. Arsenault asked about the roads that would be resurfaced in 2024. L. Thomas said that Little Bay Road would need to be done. M. Roy said that Eric Weinrieb will give a report to the Selectmen about the sections of road that need to be resurfaced. Discussion ensued about the resurfacing budget and whether it should increased. It was decided to remain at \$190,000. B. Blonigen asked why the culvert budget line had decreased. L. Thomas said that the culvert maintenance is on track. \$580,543 is the new Highway budget amount.

#### **EDC Budget:**

The EDC mission is to retain the businesses in Newington and recruit businesses to come here. The EDC Committee needs members. Discussion ensued about how to recruit new members. B. Arsenault asked that it be put on the sign out front.

B. Arsenault said that the committee has taken a hiatus because participation was low for the members and it was hard to get a quorum. B. Arsenault thought that there was still value for this committee to work with the Planning Board. B. Arsenault would like the EDC to get on a Planning Board agenda to start over.

B. Arsenault said that he doesn't see a reason to have funds in the EDC budget when we don't hold regular meetings. B. Arsenault suggested reducing several EDC budget lines to \$1, to keep them open. B. Blonigen suggested that the wages line could be reduced from \$6,000 to \$1,500 and the marketing line could be reduced from \$5,000 to \$0. C. Wayss thought that cutting this budget completely stifles the ability to do anything in 2024. If the committee develops the membership, then there will be no money to do anything. That would be that there will be two years, 2023 and 2024, with nothing accomplished and that could be frustrating for members who have joined this committee and then there is no money to do anything. C. Wayss suggested that the marketing budget line could be cut from \$5,000 to \$2,500 and the wages line could be reduced from \$6,000 to \$3,000. B. Arsenault agreed.

### **HDC Budget:**

M. Roy said that J. Chamberlain has been in the vault categorizing many items and they have hired a part time employee to help with this project. J. Chamberlain said that the budget is very similar to last year's budget. The grant budget line has been reduced in 2024.

J. Chamberlain said that the HDC has two projects going on now. The first is the replacement of informational signs on historical buildings town and the second is the preservation of historical records. The HDC has hired someone to help with this project. This is a large project. There are 160 archival boxes at the Old Town Hall and 50 boxes at the Town Hall. The goal is to preserve these items and have them available to the public. J. Chamberlain said later this year he will give the board a detailed report about the progress that has been made. B. Blonigen thanked J. Chamberlain for taking on this project.

### **Planning Budget:**

The Planning budget has increased by 10% because the contracted Town Planner will be working three days a week instead of two. D. Hebert expects 2024 to be a very busy year for the Planning department. D. Hebert pointed out a mistake in the planning budget. The Advertising/Notices budget line should be \$3,500 instead of \$2,500. The Planning budget is now \$188,111. The Planning budget also includes the Zoning Board expenses for Advertising and Legal items. The Planning revenues for 2023 are \$50,000. D. Hebert said that this is the first increase in the Planning budget since 2017.

Discussion ensued about the computer budget line of \$2,000 and what it is used for and the engineering budget line of \$30,000. \$45,500 has been spent in 2023 and would \$30,000 be enough for 2024? D. Hebert felt that the budgeted numbers were enough.

B. Arsenault asked when the last time that the planning engineering services were bid out. D. Hebert said that it was 2017. D. Hebert said that he feels the Planning Board is fortunate to have Altus Engineering working for them. B. Arsenault asked if D. Hebert planned to bid out that service. D. Hebert said no. D. Hebert said that the Planning Board might be able to get someone for a lower amount, but the Town wouldn't be getting the same high level of service. B. Arsenault asked D. Hebert to take a second look at the engineering costs and other available engineers. C. Wayss agreed with B. Arsenault and the Town has to ask vendors to go back and give the Town the best price they can.

B. Arsenault liked the plan to increase the Planner to three days a week because he thought that the Planning Board takes on too much responsibility with applicants and time spent on the Board.

**Coast Bus-Rad Nichols:**

D. Hebert said that he did an unofficial survey of employees at the mall and 17 of them said that they use the bus exclusively to get back and forth to work. The 2024 COAST ask of the town is \$36,823 which is \$2,000 less than 2023. There is a fixed route pick up at the Town Hall which means any resident within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from the Town Hall could call COAST and ask for a demand route pick up if they had a disability and couldn't get to the fixed route pick up point. There is an application process to get approved for a demand response pick up and requires a doctor certification. The Town will have information about this process for residents. Another demand service that is offered is for elderly residents but is limited to medical appointments only, it doesn't have the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile restriction.

B. Arsenault asked about the fixed route ridership number of \$10,900 for Newington. R. Nichols said that number represents boardings within town; an average over three years.

B. Arsenault asked how COAST comes up with the donation of 2.9% amount from Newington each year. R. Nichols said that it is a blended average of the percent of local direct response (DR) service miles at 1.15, the percent of total DR ridership at 1.25, the percent of total service miles at 2.68 for fixed route and the total of fixed route ridership at 4.11%. Then between demand response and fixed route, those are weighted depending on what percentage of the budget they make up. FR services are weighted at 78.8% and DR services are weighted at 21.2%. The total bottom line that COAST asks of communities is after applying all of the revenues that are available.

B. Arsenault asked how COAST has gotten their funding in 2024. R. Nichols said that the State will give them \$280,000 in 2024, the fares make up for 5.1% of the budget, ads make up 3.3%, interest and other income is .03%, local match from the communities is 17.1%, federal funding is 60%, other state and local assistance 5.5% and the call center is 8% of the budget. COAST has 65 employees.

Dover just approved moving forward with the new facility. COAST will be receiving grants from the federal government and plan on going out to bid in the fall of 2024. The budget for the new facility is between 17.3-20 million. They have raised 14.4 million so far. They are working with the NH Department of Transportation and seeking other grant funds. B. Arsenault mentioned that last year there was talk about communities contributing for the new facility. R. Nichols said that COAST is working hard to get the money it needs from other sources besides the communities. The new facility will mean we won't have to rent space for our administrative staff and the buses will be indoors and won't have to be cleaned off manually after each storm which will save \$70,000 per year.

B. Arsenault asked why we aren't using the funds as operating the actual service of it instead of building a new facility and understands that there are grants that are specific for improving the infrastructure, but there are also contributions that are not. R. Nichols said that is not the case. All of the 14.4 million that COAST has raised are public funds. There is some NHCDFA funding that they were awarded tax credits for about \$320,000.

**Chris Gallagher and Brian Gennaco-Fox Point Oyster Farmer Access:**

Chris and Brian have put together a proposal for the Selectmen to rehabilitate the use of the abandon pier parallel with the boat ramp at Fox Point for commercial shellfish farm use. The plan is to start with four to six farmers currently using the area around Fox Point. There is currently a three page wait list for a slip at Great Bay Marine in the summer. They do have slips at Great Bay Marine in the winter.

They propose to install three small docks, six feet wide and fifteen feet long each, that would be anchored to the existing piles. Installing a new ladder to the pier to get down onto the new docks and potentially installing a small battery powered crane to the existing pier capable of lifting 500 pounds. The crane would be used to load and unload gear and coolers onto the boats and the dock. They would also need one parking space per farm. The spaces could be anywhere that is convenient for the Town.

The farmers would be paying for all of the expenses to make this happen and they are proposing a \$1,000 fee be paid to the Town of Newington each year from each farmer using this new area.

B. Blonigen said that he liked the idea, but there will be a hurdle to get over. Fox Point is a recreation space for the town residents. A public hearing would have to be held so that residents could voice their concerns and have their questions answered and it would probably have to go to Town meeting for a vote.

The Town purchased Fox Point and the town voted that it was to be used as a recreation area for residents.

There is also a potential for Newington to include nitrogen credits from the farms towards the town's nitrogen discharges annually.

B. Arsenault said that he thought this proposal is a great use of Fox Point as long as the residents vote to do it.

B. Blonigen asked M. Roy to schedule a public hearing about this proposal.

### **Police Department Budget:**

M. Bilodeau said the big increase in his budget is the equipment purchases budget line that increased from \$12,000 in 2023 to \$14,000 in 2024. This increase is because Rockingham County dispatch is going to a different system because what they are using now is obsolete. Right now, the Police Department is working independently, they have their own IMC system. They are going to Central Square and there is a one-time fee for Newington of \$21,000. This new system means that Newington will no longer be independent, they will now go straight to dispatch. This means they won't pay for any maintenance of the system and Rockingham County will hold all Newington's records. The Police Department currently pays \$12,000 a year for IMC, but now they would only be paying around \$9,000 each year. One benefit is that right now the officers enter everything on the system themselves, when dispatch takes over, they will do it all.

B. Arsenault asked about how the new longevity plan had worked out this year. M. Bilodeau said that there wasn't a change to the longevity plan last year. M. Bilodeau said there was a wage change instead of a longevity change.

Discussion ensued about the outside detail budget line and how they came up with the number for 2024, an average of the last three years. This line has an offsetting revenue account. The purchasing of radios and the delays that are happening, the fuel prices in 2024 and the use of the new state shed in Newington. were also discussed.

### **Police Longevity Plan Discussion:**

M. Bilodeau thanked M. Roy for forwarding what other towns have for longevity plans. M. Bilodeau said that the results of that research show a need for a change in Newington. Other towns start to reward at 3-5 years and Newington starts at 10 years. Retaining officers and retaining the officers we have is a real issue. Some Police departments in the area are offering sign on bonuses between \$5,000-\$25,000. M. Bilodeau feels that if his department would be giving a sign-on bonus to a new certified officer, then a longevity bonus should be given to the current officers. The department is currently down three officers which is hard for a small department. They are currently working 12-hour work days with 4 hours of overtime built in. They can't do this forever. He is proposing to start longevity payments at 3 years of service.

B. Blonigen said that he thought this was needed because we have lost an officer because of money and we failed to sign another officer that was coming from another town because they gave them a last-minute bonus so they would stay. If Newington had the flexibility to give either one of these officers a sign on bonus or a longevity bonus we might not have lost them.

M. Bilodeau said the biggest issue now is retaining officers. It costs the Town \$40,000 to train an officer. It's important to retain the officers we have.

C. Wayss said that it looks like a solid plan for the retention of officers. The yearly cost is pretty low compared to training a new officer.

B. Arsenault asked what other steps the Police Department is taking to retain officers. M. Bilodeau said that they offer specialized training for anyone who is interested, they rotate the detective position every two years so officers have an opportunity to expand their knowledge of that position.

B. Arsenault said that he was disappointed because he thought that the Board had dealt with the issue of pay last year when they voted to increase the officers pay by 10% and now the issue is up for discussion again. B. Arsenault said that he doesn't believe that retention of officers is solely financial.

M. Bilodeau said that the Police Department is participating in a fund raiser for the Child Advocacy Center called Beards for Bucks and anyone can go to their website to donate.

#### **Police Cruiser Order:**

The United Auto Workers union is still on strike. There is concern that if the strike continues the 2024 cruiser orders will be delayed into 2025. M. Bilodeau said that a 2023 cruiser would cost \$42,615 and then with the outfitting the total cost would be is \$57,525. It would take three to four months to get it outfitted. M. Bilodeau would like to get the vehicle in 2023. C. Wayss said that if the Police Department has the funds in 2023 it would make sense to go under contract for the new cruiser and get a contract to get it outfitted. It would be the cruiser for 2024. **C. Wayss moved to go under contract for the vehicle and outfitting out of the 2023 budget for the 2024 cruiser purchase. B. Arsenault seconded the motion. All were in favor.**

#### **Emergency Management Budget:**

B. Blonigen asked if they were all up to date with equipment purchases. E. Hoyt said that they are and it has worked out well with the air show and road races. They will be adding a couple of new detour signs and banners.

#### **Event Permit Application:**

This new permit will be used for road races and bike races coming through town. M. Roy said that the town attorney reviewed the form and approved it. M. Bilodeau would like this form to be on the website and have it to be a fillable PDF that someone could fill out on the website and then send the all three departments; the Police, Fire and Town Hall.

**B. Arsenault moved to adopt the new event permit application as written. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor.**

**Public Hearing-Dept of Justice-COPS Grant Acceptance-\$170,000:**

This grant will be used to update the emergency operating center communication infrastructure. There is no match from the Town on this grant.

No member of the public commented on the acceptance of this grant.

**B. Arsenault moved to accept the COPS Office Technology and Equipment Program Grant -fiscal year 2023. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor.**

**Old Business:**

C. Wayss asked about any information about the sale of the 1996 Seagrave fire truck.

M. Roy said that they had found out that it is worth approximately \$35,000-\$45,000 and the fee to sell it is approximately 10%.

The new truck will be here by the end of October and in service by the beginning of December.

Discussion ensued about where the Seagrave could be housed while it is being sold, should the Town seek bids in addition to selling through Fenton Fire Equipment. M. Roy will check with L. Thomas to see if there is space at the Town Garage.

**USAF Well Siting Requests:**

The USAF has asked to have more well siting on Town property. One would be located in the cul-de-sac on Welch Cove, another is in a field at the corner of Fox Point and Old Post Road, another would be behind the Langdon Library and another at Dumping Cove cul-de-sac. B. Blonigen asked M. Roy to contact the residents on Welch Cove, Dumping, Fox Point and Old Post Road to let them know that the Selectmen are allowing the Air Force to drill a well, flush to the ground. B. Blonigen would like to table this until the residents are notified.

**COLA Update:**

Social Security COLA for 2024 is 3.2%. S. Bagley is preparing a report to show the impact to the budget of varying COLA percentage amounts.

**Health/Dental Insurance Update:**

M. Roy said that the NH Health Trust's quote (Blue Cross Blue Shield Network) had a 15.6% increase and the NHIT's Plan quote (Harvard Pilgrim Network) had a 7.7% increase. Cigna has not given the Town a quote yet, but will give us one by 11/1/23.

**Public Comment:**

There was no public comment.



Adjournment: B. Arsenault moved to adjourn at 8:46pm. C. Wayss seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Respectfully submitted, Eleanor Boy, Recorder