

ST. GEORGE SELECT BOARD & ASSESSORS

St. George Town Office

MEETING MINUTES

July 25, 2022 - 7p.m.

The Select Board meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. Present were Richard Bates (Chair), Select Persons: Randy Elwell, Van Thompson, Steve Cartwright, and Wayne Sawyer, Town Manager Richard Erb and Finance Director Irene Ames, Susy Ellis, Elizabeth Hupper, and Meg Rasmussen.

Present by Zoom: Loreen Myer and Sarah Hupper.

Public Comments

No public comments were made.

Adjustments to the agenda:

- Budget Committee end of year financial review
- Meg Rasmussen from Maine Midcoast Council of Governments

Budget Committee

Susan Ellis

By and large, revenue was high, expenses were low, and we have extra money in the general fund; everything is looking very good for the last fiscal year.

Bates

Any questions that we could put to Irene and the Budget Committee? Minutes are published in detail, which is good. And I did hear at the end of your meeting discussions about how we might think about reducing unassigned fund balances in the coming years. You had some ideas.

Susan Ellis

We have our fund balance, which is essentially a town savings account. They don't have any plan for that money, but we always like to keep two months of expenses available. We have a little over half a million dollars beyond two months of expenses. We could think about pulling \$125,000 or more from the fund balance into our budget as revenue so that we can reduce the mill rate; that would be one way to use that additional funding.

Bates

And then we could tackle some of the infrastructure issues that we have for the town office. For example, it clearly needs a coat of paint.

Erb

It does make sense to have a dedicated discussion because there are loads of different ways you could use it a lump expense that otherwise would cause a one-time bump in the mill rate. That would be a nice way to avoid that. This is a this is a topic that requires some consideration of options and discussion.

Bates

Excellent. By the end of the year, we should have some discussion with your committee, I think.

Susan Ellis

It would be in our letter of concerns at the end of the year before the budgeting process. Jared has done a great deal of work on the solar issue. And we're going to work more on that report and bring it to you. We are meeting next week. We're open to talk about the solar array, perhaps some of the greenhouse gas modeling and, and may want to feed some information into the ARPA committee. Those three things all seem to want to dovetail.

Bates

In fact, that is one of the things that Meg is going to talk about this evening, some potential state grants that we are eligible for to help with these issues. The state calls them Community Action grants for the Community Resilience Partnership and some of them are 100%, no match required.

Cartwright

It sounds like we're in a really good position. Would it make sense to invest it in some higher interest-bearing kinds of accounts?

Susan Ellis

You talked about that last year. I just moved some and wondering if we should move more.

Van Thompson

You're running into set limits; there are the guidelines, and we don't want to get flagged for that.

Erb

We need to decide when we would need the money and we need some discussion on how we plan to use it.

REGULAR SESSION

A motion was made by Elwell to approve the July 11, 2022 minutes as corrected, seconded by Thompson. A vote was made to approve the minutes 5-0, the motion carried.

Warrant

Bates

We have the warrant that Irene sent out this afternoon. Do we have any questions on that? I know when I came in, to sign this last week, there was \$141 marked for fireworks. We did have some donations that weren't assigned to fireworks.

Meg Rasmussen from Maine Midcoast Council of Governments

Bates

Thank you for coming back and advising us of MCOG's great plans and how we can benefit from working with you. You've hinted at things like resilience grants, comprehensive plan assistance and from your perspective you see what a lot of other towns do that we wouldn't otherwise be aware of. So, it seems like this is a great resource that we can all benefit from.

Meg Rasmussen

Thanks so much for your time. I really appreciate being able to talk with you and I have a little packet that goes into some detail about things that I'll be talking about. I thought I'd present an overview on the Midcoast Council of Governments, why I'm here, introduce a program called the Community Resilience Partnership, and explain what the benefits of that are. Then I'll review the enrollment process, and how I can help as a service professional. It's okay if you want to ask questions as we go along. I want to make this informative for you guys. So, we'll start with what we do. Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG) provides regional planning and economic development services to cities and towns in a three-county area, including Knox County, and it's one of eleven MCOGs as they call them. It is set up in the states Municipal Planning Assistance program. We offer a variety of services around regional planning, including grant assistance, technical regional planning, site plan review, and plan assistance. We do educational webinars for municipal staff, and elected officials and volunteers. We just did one on housing. We do micro loans for small business; there's a variety of things. If there's something that anyone is particularly interested in finding out more about, I can put you in touch with the right person. We're also launching a new sustainability and resilience program, which is why I joined them. What my focus is on right now is the Community Resilience Partnership Program. Basically, the partnership was set up so that the state could provide guidance and funding to communities who want to take action to make their communities more resilient and those are aligned with Maine's Climate Action Plan. So, as I said, the grants are between \$5,000 and \$50,000. There's no match for them. I'm also talking with four other groups who are very interested in enrolling as well and we could, if you were interested in joining, make a community effort, so that there could be information sharing and resource sharing and if groups decide to do collaborative projects, you can ask for \$100,000 and there are a lot of commonalities between various towns and that could be interesting to pursue. The grants can be used for short term cost savings, lighting, new insulation, and fixing windows to get a higher R value. Those sorts of things can be funded, as well as long term planning, vulnerabilities that you have on your radar, but you need more expert planning to assess.

Bates

There are two areas of interest. For example, one would be to reduce greenhouse gases in this building, by improving the insulation, changing the windows, etc. Second, an attempt to limit things in the longer term, including issues that we all recognize such as vulnerable roads at various places around town. It's probably going to cost several million dollars to fix, and the question is how to do that. There are various other roads around town which the modeling suggests won't be usable by 2050. It's not just nuisance flooding; it's twice daily flooding. How do we fix it? So that's another area where we'd like to have some guidance now. Could we have a grant with the South Thomaston group and perhaps get \$100,000 and then we could have one of our own? How does that work?

Meg Rasmussen

You prioritize what actions you want to take and then you can put together a project. You could fund improvements to a building and investigate longer-term studies, putting both into a project application combined, covering more than one thing under a single grant application. The application cycle is in the Fall and Spring, and you may apply for multiple grants over time. It's the Governor's Office of Innovation Goals who award the grants.

Bates

We know the previous governor was not a great fan. If things were to change in November, this could be swept away which suggests to me that the sooner we apply, the better.

Meg Rasmussen

We know that these issues are going to exist, regardless of who's in charge. Having some idea about how you want to start to address them as a community will go a long way in case there's ups and downs in government or if other funding sources you have are tied up. I'm going to talk about enrollment now. It's a process that must happen, although you can put in your application and complete your enrollment process at the same time.

Bates

That's what I'm hoping to encourage us to do

Meg Rasmussen

The process for fast tracking is listed on the handout, but I'll just go over it. So, the first thing is a town establishes a citizen working group or designates a staff person to be the person coordinating the work of the community. There are a couple of self-evaluations; they're not arduous and it's just collecting information on work that you've already completed. It's a snapshot. It really is for the community to see where you're at and where some gaps might be. The next thing is to review this list of community actions to see what you have already done. And what looks like it could be valuable to take on. And so, then the group would prioritize actions, you know, implement. And then there's a community input community, dialogue community for workshop process, to get input feedback, ideas to get engagement around that. And then, the town adopts a municipal climate resolution that basically says, we completed these steps, and we commit to the partnership. So, what MCOG could do is provide what's called a service provider to help with this enrollment process. The idea is that smaller communities don't have a lot of capacity and time to do it and so I could help facilitate this. And

what I would do is to put in a grant application for my time and that application is due August 29. There should be a quick turnaround on that. My background is in project management. So, we'll lay it all out, what needs to happen and when. I can give you perspectives on what other towns are doing successfully, and then hopefully get a community cohort together that can feed each other as they go along.

Bates

I'm just hoping that some of the work that we did around COVID time, regarding sea level rise could be included. We had meetings where we had committee discussion and efforts and the Sea Level Rise Committee, is now merging with the Conservation Commission, and I'm hoping some of those efforts would count towards this.

Meg Rasmussen

I would have to check on whether that kind of public outreach could be addressed.

Bates

I think we probably ought to do more than more than that. I mean, deeper in terms of citizen groups. Hopefully, on the committee side of things, we could check that box. But I think more community input is something we should do in August or Labor Day.

Susan Ellis

There are several outreaches that are happening right now that dovetail right into this.

Meg Rasmussen

All of that counts and puts you further along the way.

Cartwright

What is the total budget of money? I assume this is statewide.

Meg Rasmussen

I don't know the exact number. I believe roughly \$2.5 million. They're giving it out in rounds, but I'd have to check on that number.

Cartwright

We have a reasonable shot of getting a grant I'm assuming.

Meg Rasmussen

Oh, yes, definitely. And, you know, communities who have put in for grant funding have received money to help with planning efforts. They received money to help them with an electric school bus. There's such a wide range of things to apply for. I would like to move forward and work with you as a service provider. I just need to work out a scope of work with somebody based on your project and receive a letter of support.

Cartwright

Richard, this is informational, of course. But to me, very much worth looking into.

Bates

I absolutely agree. The town needs to review its Comprehensive Plan Development. Is that something that we would contract with MCOG and have them lead the process?

Meg Rasmussen

You know we can be involved however it makes sense.

Bates

In the past, in the previous Comprehensive Plan, Noel Mussen would attend meetings. In those days it was all in person or by remote conference call. He would listen to what was being discussed and then he would take away the notes and write it up. I don't know if that is that something you know of; the plan is basically Noel's writing, representing the thoughts of everyone on the committees.

Meg Rasmussen

Yes. collaborating with you, bringing his local planning expertise in, asking the questions, and getting to a process of what's important to the community to make sure that's an articulated development.

Bates

So, who's the contact person for that?

Meg Rasmussen

That would be Matt Eddie and his contact information is on the front.

Bates

The only problem right now is we don't have funds explicitly budgeted for that but since Meg is here, should we discuss this issue of the Community Resilience Partnership Program and whether we want to get involved? As Meg said, we need to write to the organization to request they be our service provider. And we also need to have some discussion about the items that we are going to include in the scope of work, is that right?

A motion was made by Sawyer, seconded by Elwell that the Select Board work with the Midcoast Council of Governments (MCOG) as our service provider on the Community Resilience Partnership Program. By a 5-0 vote, the motion carried.

Town Manager Report

Erb

I'd like to explain just a little bit more about the Drift Inn Rd. Back in January, we applied for a small grant from the Maine Energy Management to do design work for the drainage of Drift Inn Road. I'm sure you are familiar with the storm conditions when we lose access to the road. I didn't hear anything for quite a while but then a week or so ago, did hear back. It looks good and there are two pieces of information they need from us, and they mentioned we are in really good shape. So, I gave them what they needed but have not heard back. That was just within the last few days; it looks optimistic. This would be for a design project; it wouldn't be construction. This

would be a step before applying for construction funds themselves. So, I know this is something that others in the town, Tim Polky for one, had been eager for us to pursue because of the history of dealing with that road and the bad conditions so hopefully this will be a step in the right direction for that. Currently endorsed Gartley and Dorsky, the ones that would be doing the work on this if we get the money.

Regarding 10 Cold Storage Road, the Harbor Committee meets this week, on Thursday evening. Noel Mussen has submitted the Grant administration plan that went in on Monday this week and tomorrow, I'll put in our first quarterly budget report, which doesn't have a lot to report since we haven't done too much yet. But we are now in rotation where every quarter we must give an update so that will go in tomorrow.

You saw we have the draft audit report, a big step in the right direction. I've had a couple of conversations with Mike Felton. Cassie from the school board has been with us as well. We're going to talk again on Wednesday and are trying to make the next step towards getting the 2022 audit done on time for this year. There are choices to be made and we're working with the school on that, so we're not quite done with 2021 but frankly I've never seen anything change once the draft audit comes out. It would be very unusual circumstance that they would go back and make a change. So, I think what you see is what we'll get. I will follow up on comments that were made earlier. I would say it's been a strong year that we've had for fiscal year 2022 and from where we're starting, I'd be very surprised if we weren't over three months expenditures in our fund balance, so we really do have some serious discussions about how to use that. I guess the only other thing I have is I'll let you know that I have vacation next week. So hopefully a quiet week.

Randy Elwell

How is the paving going?

Erb

Stevie is finished with most of the cutting back and Alex going into the ditching. My plan at this point would be to do Harts Neck and Harrington Cove.

Randy Elwell

Are we on schedule?

Erb

Yes, and it's a little easier dealing with their performance. They're smaller and not spread nearly as thin as Hagar was. I'm not concerned at all.

Committee Reports

Bates

Appeals Board 7:00pm July 27 Meeting

The Appeals Board had their organizational meeting on Thursday July 27, 2022.

Steve Miller was voted Chair, Jane Conrad Vice-Chair and Secretary.

Planning Board 7:00pm July 12 Meeting

- The application for a residential building permit to reconstruct the property at 219 Otis Point Road previously destroyed by fire was accepted as complete and approved.
- There was further discussion on the application to update the zoning designation for the area around Jones Brook (Town Maps 232 & 236) from Resource Protection to Marine Residential; the board awaits guidance from a review by the Conservation Commission and Gartley & Dorsky.
- The application for a commercial building permit to create a 0.5-acre public parking area at 24 River Road (opposite The Happy Clam) was withdrawn.

Cartwright

I have a very brief report from the Conservation Committee which met yesterday. Ken Oelberger mentioned that they have received four bids on the bridge installation on the Fort Point Trail. Two of them are very competitive and two of them are out of running basically. They will come with a recommendation to our board at our next meeting. I think he was pleased to get four bids back. People are busy.

Budget – Items to be carried forward

Erb

After our meeting, Mike Smith approached me and mentioned two items that need to be carried forward. The larger one is for \$31,287.16 for personal equipment they held off on ordering until they were certain the money would still be there. Due to supply chain issues, the items have not been delivered yet. The second item is for the fire department, \$3,337.27 for property maintenance. At the Route 73 fire station, there was some trim board where there has been some rot that they needed to repair. And Irene thought of another item. You will recall the 2021 audit has not been completed, therefore we haven't paid for it yet. Since we will hopefully be paying for next year's audit in this year's budget, we should be carrying forward \$8,500 from the Town Office account.

Susan Ellis

Do we have a projected date for our town report to come out? I don't have a projected date for the audit yet.

Bates

As soon as it is received, it gets turned straight around and Tara prints it. We don't need to have the Select Board look at the audit before it goes out.

Elwell made a motion, seconded by Cartwright, to accept the three budget items to be carried forward to next year's budget. By a 5-0 vote, the motion carried.

Mill Rate

Bates

Megan, Van, Rick and I met last week to go through the numbers.

With what we expect to have from the state for municipal revenue sharing, and after going through all the numbers, we figure the prudent mill rate for next year is \$10.10 which is a 3.06% increase over last year's rate. You'll see in the table on note two I broke it out per Rick's suggestion. It's the difference, it's the 2.1% net difference between our increased needs and increased revenues.

Cartwright

How does that compare to previous years?

Bates

As you see, it was not as good as 2021. One thing that was significant, and I put it in note four, was that Wyeth paid property taxes on those islands at that time.

Erb

Eight million dollars in valuation...

Bates

Yes. So about \$8 million of town valuation went off the books, because the islands were transferred to Colby College and Colby has discussed making some compensatory payments, but we don't know for sure if that will happen. But there has been a great deal of building in town and so the value of the town properties has gone up; it's roughly equivalent. If you look at the very top line of the page, the one regarding the mill rate discussions, you can see that in FY2022, the town was valued at \$875,935,200. The town's valuation has gone down a little bit this year. The town has more property, but the loss of the islands made a big difference and hopefully next year this level of construction continues.

Erb

That may help us with county tax.

Bates

That's right. We will pay less. As you can see as you go through these numbers, we end up with an overlay of approximately \$61,000. The purpose of the overlay is to try and make a nice, relatively round number for the for the mill rate, an easier number for people to deal with. The \$61,000 overlay is a relatively small part, less than 1%.

A motion was made by Sawyer, seconded by Cartwright to approve the \$10.10 mill rate for the town. By a 5-0 vote, the motion carried.

Select Board Policy Manuals:

Bates

Part of the reason for going through this is just to remind us about all the things that we decided on previously, make sure we are adhering to them and to review policies that are no longer accurate. On page twenty, it mentions that we must make sure all the committees that we deal with, really work on the issue of meeting agendas, making sure that everyone gets one to the town office in time, to remind the committee members or the board or anyone who's interested. It's part of good communications. I think the way this policy is written is good but sometimes things slip by, and people don't always send the agendas in and the corresponding minutes. The minutes that Tammy makes for us are available in principle to people who want them, but the other committee minutes are not released to the public until after they meet. We've got to do this because it's public access, public right to know.

Another item to discuss is the remote participation policy. At the time the law was passed, it stated any committee or board that wanted to meet remotely had to pass their own policy. I know that the Select Board did this, as well as the Planning Board, the Appeals Board and the Conservation Commission. But what it meant was, any other group that wanted to meet remotely, could not unless they passed a policy. The laws changed this last spring. LD 1717-72. And now it turns out that they are all covered under our enrollment umbrella policy. So, if for example, the Harbor Committee needs to meet remotely in the winter, when people are away or traveling or whatever, the Harbor Committee can do that. As I looked at it, I thought, well, do we need to change this policy to make it more general? I think the answer is no. But I think one thing to remember is that anyone, any committee now is sort of covered by this umbrella policy for meeting.

Van Thompson

As a member of the board, I want to appreciate the amount of work done over the years to establish this. It's really very nice.

Cartwright

Particularly things like trust and thinking of who we represent, sort of common-sense things that we probably have in the back of our minds anyway, but it's a refresher. It's a reminder. I didn't really see anything that I thought was out of order.

Bates

Well, that's a compliment on all the previous Select Board members. So, let's try and aim to do the second half next time. We are all going to be here. And I think one of the things that we will want to change is the streetlight policy. We've had some discussions about how appropriate that is.

Cartwright

I think it's sort of an odd thing on page 42 where the Select Board members who are no longer here, have the authority to act. There shouldn't be any names listed; it should just refer to the current members of the Select Board.

Bates

That needs to be fixed.

Bates

One last item for this meeting is regarding board and committee assignments. I looked at the letter that Patty sent me and saw "re signing", and I thought Jamie McCaffrey wants to resign from the committee. So that's what I put in the agenda. But it turns out that she doesn't want to resign she wants to re-sign. So, she is not resigning she is staying on.

A motion was made by Elwell to approve the board assignments, seconded by Thompson. By a 5-0 vote, the motion carried.

Executive Session

Acquisition of Real Property or Economic Development - 1 M.R.S.A. § 405(6)(C)

Present: Richard Bates, Wayne Sawyer, Randall Elwell, Van Thompson, Steve Cartwright, Rick Erb, and Irene Ames.

Motion: To go into executive session pursuant to Title 1 M.R.S.A. § 405(6)(C) – Acquisition of real property or economic development.

- Prop: Elwell
- Sec: Cartwright
- Vote: 5-0
- Time: 8:20 pm

Returned to Regular Session at 8:54 pm

Motion: To adjourn

- Prop: Cartwright
- Sec: Elwell
- Vote: 5-0
- Time: 8:55 pm