

# **ST. GEORGE SELECT BOARD & ASSESSORS**

## **St. George Town Office**

### **MEETING MINUTES**

**October 17, 2022 - 7p.m.**

The Select Board meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Richard Bates (Chair), Randy Elwell, Steve Cartwright, Van Thompson, Wayne Sawyer, Irene Ames, Richard Erb, John Falla, Tim Polky, Tara Elwell, Amy Dyer Drinkwater, Kevin LeCaptain, Rob Kelley, and Alane Kennedy

Present by zoom: Loreen Meyer and Kate Hewlett were present.

#### **REGULAR SESSION**

##### **Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

##### **Adjustments to the agenda**

The East Wind has requested a liquor license.

##### **Ambulance Services**

###### **Bates**

I think it's pretty uncontroversial to say that the town has a first-class ambulance service and that for the last 80 years or so, this service has been provided by the St. George Volunteer Firefighters and Ambulance Association, not by the town. This makes St. George very different from the neighboring towns like South Thomaston and Thomaston. Patients have come to expect high levels of service and costs have gone up. Some staff have retired. There are insufficient providers in the state. There are fewer volunteers and donations have not kept up with the increasing costs. As a community, we have this challenge of continuing our first-class ambulance service. The association is justifiably proud of the traditions of volunteerism to serve their neighbors. The ambulance needs to become part of the municipality and Amy Drinkwater has been working with Tara who has come up with an estimate of the budget starting July 1 2023. Rick has released copies and maybe we should use that as a starting point. Tara, do you want to start off?

**Tara Elwell**

The numbers that you have before you are a compilation of budgets that Amy worked on for the Association for the upcoming year 2023, They are on a calendar year, January to December. The town however is on a fiscal year so this was prepared for when we take over, if we take over, and this will go from July to the following June. You can see that personnel is one of the biggest items on the list, as well as health insurance. I did not include health insurance with the regular budget because it's unpredictable. It's figured in two different ways. The minimal is just single coverage, and then it is figured as family coverage. The license and registration are under legal/professional services. We've already trimmed it by \$1850. What is not on here is the fact that the town already pays \$230,000 to the Association as a subsidy, so that technically could come under revenue or another line item because we already pay, that so it should come off the total budget along with the revenue items that are listed. In talking with Rick earlier, that brought the overall budget down to around \$500,000.

**Wayne Sawyer**

Tara What about director pay?

**Tara Elwell**

Director pay, or anything that has to do with association positions, will stay with the association. Amy has already put it in with the personnel numbers.

**Bates**

With these salaries and pay rates, will we still be able to hire the people that we need?

**Erb**

I think the question is whether the salary increase will be sufficient for the next eighteen months.

**Tara Elwell**

You're going to pay people from January through July. If the town takes over, that will go through the following June.

**Bates**

Town employees would normally get a raise July 1 of 23.

**Erb**

I would think that to some extent that would depend on what the wage pressures are and what the competition is. We don't know what it's going to be like, a year from now.

**Erb**

I admire you for holding on as long as you have, the way that it's funded. It's very impressive.

**Bates**

Donations are listed as \$1,000. In past years, donations and fund raisers were in the order of \$100,000. There will be some funds that will transfer over, at least the first year, if the ambulance becomes part of the town. Is that a fair way to think about it?

**John**

Probably. Our intention is to continue fundraising for capital items, but we can't guarantee how much we can raise, and I think we're going to see a drop in donations.

**Bates**

Getting through July 1st will be tough.

**Tara Elwell**

To clarify, anything that comes in specifically for the ambulance, such as cards or donations goes to the St George ambulance, and that's what that line item is there for.

**Bates**

In South Thomaston, and Thomaston, they've been successful in getting grants. Please talk about that and how regular it is.

**Amy Drinkwater**

Last year, we received a few grants, such as the King Grant which paid for our fly car. We've put in for certain grants, but there's more availability in this Valley Grant than there are for many nonprofits.

**Bates**

Can you make any estimate of what you think might come in as revenue?

**Amy Drinkwater**

It depends on what we want to put it towards. There's a big grant coming out for community paramedics; grants must be specified for certain things for the town.

**Bates**

I'm wondering with the plight of ambulance services across the state, whether there might be some state subsidies that might start appearing.

**Amy Drinkwater**

I spoke to the State Ambulance Association today, and he said they're trying to increase our reimbursement of Medicaid and Medicare. For grant funding, it just depends on what's out there and we've applied for the Safer Grant at times, but it usually goes to municipalities. I would say we will probably receive some grant money each year, but I can't tell you how much.

**Bates**

The billing at \$115,000 right now could go up.

**Amy Drinkwater**

They are looking at matching 180% of Medicaid and he is supposed to email me by Monday.

**Erb**

Compared to Medicare and private insurance, Medicaid is a fairly small payer.

**Erb**

This is going to be a challenging budget, but I do believe we have resources. The ARPA funds have been surprisingly loosened up to be used for basically any government function that we provide. Our unappropriated fund balance is significantly higher than it's been. Our target is to stay within two months of expenditures, and I suspect when the audit is complete, we're going to be much closer to three months of expenditures. It doesn't really solve anything in the long run, but it might allow us to phase in ambulance funding to soften the blow for a year or two.

**Bates**

Do you have any questions about these numbers?

**Cartwright**

I have a question. Would the association continue to be a department or the town?

**John**

It would be a part of the town. The Fireman's Association is continuing as a nonprofit organization and doing training, running the burn building training and things like that.

**Cartwright**

I agree with the Town Manager. It's amazing that we've gotten this far without making it a town department. It absolutely makes good sense. I think the townspeople will support it. Do we provide charity or free services to people unable to pay?

**Amy Drinkwater**

There is a way to apply for help. We don't ask for insurance when we get a call.

**Erb**

In any organization, there is a certain amount of bad debt.

**Bates**

In late January, some version of these numbers will be in Rick's budget for everyone to start thinking about but in the meantime we probably want to have some public meetings to start getting the message out to the community that this is the direction that the Board and the Association feel is the right way to go. How many public meetings do we need to have, just one in the beginning of January? Do we try and have a couple, maybe one in December and one in January? There's still some firming up with the numbers, so we don't want to jump into it right now.

**Tara Elwell**

Right. There could be significant changes in the numbers.

**Van Thompson**

Well, I think the idea is to present it and have a ballpark figure.

**John**

I would suggest having one public meeting and see how that goes. If we get a good turnout and get the point across, perhaps we won't need more.

**Tara Elwell**

Is that going to be enough time with voting around Thanksgiving? We should advertise it.

**Van Thompson**

We could just as well have it the first week in December. I think maybe that's more realistic

**Bates**

I propose Thursday, December 1<sup>st</sup>; Thursdays are good days. We're going to present this to the public, put notices out and each one of us will do our bit to spread the message that this is an important discussion to have so that people understand why this is necessary.

**Tara Elwell**

Other ambulance services are in the same boat and they're already part of a municipality. Staffing issues are challenging.

**Erb**

I assume there will be at least one vote taken to formally join the ambulance, and the town and for property to be transferred to the town's name. John, are you looking at any of that?

**John**

I think that the biggest question is will it be presented at the town meeting in May and how will it be presented. At a recent subcommittee meeting, we discussed first having an article to transfer the assets. Depending on that, we would need subsequent articles on the budget, etc.

**Erb**

That would be helpful for the December meeting.

**John**

Another question would be whether this will be a referendum with a vote at the ballot box or at a town meeting, or is this going to be a show of hands at an open town meeting; what would be better?

**Bates**

I feel we should have a public discussion on the Tuesday during the town meeting; that would be the most valuable way of doing it.

**John**

That's my feeling as well.

**Erb**

I'm sure people will be confused because they see an appropriation every year in the town budget for the ambulance like any other department and will be surprised to see that any type of vote needs to be taken.

**John**

If you look at the three different warrant articles; the first one would discuss receiving assets from the association; the next one would, assuming that goes through, discuss the budget for the ambulance department; and the third one, in case the first two fail, would discuss the necessary donation to the association to keep the service going. It may sound confusing, but it's necessary.

**John**

I think it's important to decide whether or not to create that department, before the association receives assets. I believe the charter does state that no departments can be created except by vote of the people.

**Bates**

We have a first-class service now. I think everyone wants to continue that and to also expect a paramedic when they dial 911. They expect a quick response.

**Rob Kelley**

It seems like a responsible choice. The numbers are the numbers. We must pay for what we're using.

**Randy Elwell**

Would we have to put a vehicle reserve in the budget for fire trucks? I didn't see it and am wondering.

**John**

I think it should be in the Fire Department budget.

**Erb**

I think the question might come up. Is that something that fundraising would continue to do?

**John**

Yes, I think you could do fundraising for that purpose. I still think that you should have a reserve. Just because you have money in that reserve doesn't mean you have to spend it. It's a flexible account for any vehicle.

**Bates**

You need to have something in that line item. Anything else you want to discuss on this?

**John**

You are going with December 1st for a Public Hearing?

**Bates**

I think that's a good day. 7:00p.m. here in the ambulance meeting room.

**Tara Elwell**

Would it be possible to get somebody to write something for the November newsletter?

**Erb**

I will do that.

**Wayne Sawyer**

Maybe you should include some of the history.

**John**

There will be an article in the upcoming Historical Society newsletter.

**Bates**

All right. Thank you very much for coming.

**Community Development Corp.****Bates**

Let's move on to the second thing that we're taking out of order, which is Rob Kelley discussing the CDC.

**Rob Kelley**

For several years running, the town has very generously supported our social service work. It primarily goes into what we consider to be our support line, which would include the Community Cupboard, our emergency fund available to families who find themselves with an emergency expense, and it would appeal to our fuel budget, which supports families who don't have heat. They were under incredibly heavy use during the pandemic; at one point, we were serving one hundred families a month. That significantly decreased though recently rising food prices and fuel prices have pushed the numbers back up. We're serving about 30 families a week right now. Many people seeking general assistance find that they don't qualify because you have to be so crushingly poor, that it's amazing. It doesn't deal with the other pieces that are often part of a family in crisis such as schools and social workers to make sure that families are getting the support that they need and a lot of times it's just referrals. Sadly, there aren't as many services available as we'd like. The pandemic, and the disruptions economically since the pandemic, have exhausted those services. Emergency housing is almost impossible for families who find themselves struggling. That work, thanks to Alane Kennedy, is done in an emergency as needed basis and while it's often a struggle, we have some lovely stories of families who we've been able to build a bridge for and get to the other side. I think it's no surprise to anybody in this room that this is a community with hugely diverse economic situations. We have many families who do struggle, and sometimes struggle intermittently. You may or may not know the anecdote that 40% of Americans could not raise \$400 in emergency. Often times, we're supporting families not with food; it's everything else that has gone wrong. The program is mature. That program has benefited greatly from the town's prior \$10,000 annual gift. We are mostly funded by private donations and some grant making. We look for grants where we can. It's sometimes challenging, especially the ones that are at the state and federal level, but our community has been very generous and committee members have been very generous not only with their money, but with their time. Our current number of active volunteers is around 25 volunteering in the food pantry or what Alaine has dubbed the Night Kitchen, making prepared food using Blueberry Cove's commercial safe kitchen to prepare our Thursday Food Pantry, which has been popular both for our clients and for folks who get to get out and do something cool with friends and make a meal. That work is the more visible work that we do. Many of you know, we championed and executed on getting broadband to every home in the peninsula of St. George. Every home will have available fully qualified broadband. That doesn't mean they have to buy it. We were able to negotiate with Spectrum to run those lines. It's under construction right now. That will obviously benefit workers from home, kids in school, and families who want to be better connected to the rest of the world. We are now on the radar of some of the other internet providers who are trying to figure out whether or not they want to penetrate this area and provide potentially higher service. Our next big push is around housing. We had a good turnout yesterday for a public discussion on that. Attendees included Anne Matlack, John Egan from the Genesis Fund and Rick presented. The Genesis fund is an amazing organization that fund complicated projects. Tia Anderson from Habitat for Humanity was present. They're doing a project for 40 Long Cove at St. George, with the

collaboration of the Select Board and “right pricing”, a tax acquired property. It was a good event, with many differing opinions, and people coming from different places. We want to have more events like it so that we're providing a lot of transparency. The Community Development Corporation has made a commitment that we will be developing workforce housing in the community. Exactly how that is going to happen, I can't tell you yet. It's based on funding, land availability, the availability of subcontractors and the cost of building materials. We're finding in Maine that a lot of the ordinances were made more for suburban America and don't work for the housing needs we have as Americans today. We have to be smarter about providing affordable housing for communities.

Other communities have done it well. And I think we can learn from them. You'll see us at public meetings, but behind the scenes, we're going to be doing fundraising for land acquisition. I am anxious to have a conversation about whether town owned land could be part of a solution like this. That requires research and getting community buy in. We continue working with the St. George Business Alliance. We run Summer in St. George, a web-based presence that gets visibility on what's going on in summer for businesses in town. We began a program for folks who could not afford or were not able to do basic repairs, things like ramps, railings, other safety issues, and also repairs related to heating and, and ventilation. We're doing it mostly with volunteer labor, and some donated money and supplies. We continue to run fiscal sponsorship for the St. George Municipal School Unit. That was big this year because of the CTE building and the fundraising there.

We continue to make some strides to provide community Dental in the community. We're collaborating with the school on that to make sure that the children will all have access to dental care, ideally, at least twice a year. That's an ongoing effort, and we've been relatively successful, but the organizations themselves are really struggling to provide continuity service. We have 30 plus people on our backlog waiting so we're looking at other solutions.

If a family comes to us with a need, we try to figure out how to put the pieces together. It's not acute care, but it's oftentimes struggling with their economic situation, their family situation, mental health abuse, and drug abuse. They're trying to keep their lives together, stay in the community, and keep their kids in school. I'm happy to answer any questions.

### **Randy Elwell**

Are the increasing costs of food and household items causing shortages?

### **Rob Kelley**

Food prices were very high during the pandemic; it's not as bad right now. No one will ever go hungry at that food pantry; that will never happen on our watch. We have people who donate cash. We have people who drop food off daily, we have people who dedicate a portion of their garden every summer to the food pantry. They're growing food for their friends and neighbors.

### **Alane Kennedy**

It's important to recognize that we do a lot of work with our seniors who live on fixed incomes in our community. Their incomes are not increasing at the rate that taxes, fuel and heating assistance are rising. They get sucked into a medical supplement payment, that's more than they even get for their current income. When we say families, it can also be seniors and adults that are on fixed incomes that need as much support as the family with the kids. And oftentimes, it's not just financial support, it's navigating the system.



**Bates**

The services that CDC provides to the community is invaluable. The town's contribution of \$10,000 is a small fraction of your budget.

**Rob Kelley**

If I'm remembering my numbers, it's about 8%. We run really lean. We get a lot of in-kind donations, which obviously offsets our cash needs. We have very generous donors in the community and have been able to build a bit of a reserve, but I would love the town donating more.

**Bates**

At the beginning, there was some hesitancy on the part of the Select Board, but over the years, especially during the pandemic, but continuing on, you've demonstrated that you run a very lean, effective organization. The challenges that you're working on such as housing are really important.

**Rob Kelley**

The money helps, especially with housing, but land use regulations, use of town owned properties, and tax acquired properties are also important.

**Bates**

Next meeting on the 31<sup>st</sup>, we plan to go through that list of properties.

**Rob Kelley**

We can't do projects like housing alone. We have the food pantry down. It's an incredibly well-run machine, and we've been able to find a rhythm that works in this community for the number of families we serve, but housing is going to be a much bigger project.

**Randy Elwell**

The economy is supposed to get worse before it gets better. Your donations will drop.

**Rob Kelley**

I'm seeing this with some other nonprofit work, small donations are decreasing. The economic structure of this community involves mostly large donors. I talk to the major donors on a regular basis. If somebody feels like they're not connected to the mission anymore, I want to know why. I think we're okay, for the foreseeable future. We don't know what's going to happen but during the pandemic, despite all the uncertainty, we've been able to build up a bit of reserve. You'll see this in the budget, a portion of our balance sheet that's designated as six months of reserves. Once you make the community commitment to a quality service, you can't just stop.

**Cartwright**

Has the amount the town contributes increased or has it been fixed?

**Rob Kelley**

The first year, we asked for \$10,000 and received \$5,000 but for several years it's been \$10,000, which seems like a fair allocation. Our budget, surprisingly, has not gone up that much. Our costs are salaries and food. Everything else is volunteer labor, including the broadband project and the money we required to match Spectrum was all donated from the community.

**Cartwright**

It says a lot about our town. In terms of a town contribution, if it went up even incrementally it would be a sign of support.

**Rob Kelley**

I would love a cost-of-living increase and we should ask for that in January.

**Alane Kennedy**

And to clarify, we received \$10,000 for the broadband project from the town on top of our regular \$10,000. An additional \$10,000 of funding for housing was removed because we weren't working on housing projects at the time.

**Erb**

Maybe the base contribution should stay at \$10,000 and if there are other needs, we increase it.

**Bates**

There was the housing study that you did.

**Rob Kelley**

\$5000 had been allocated, and then the pandemic happened. There is a group of Mid Coast communities who are collaborating on creating a housing trust, that would be the underlying structure for a lot of this workforce housing and there is an expert on the Camden Rotary who volunteered his time.

**Bates**

I think it will be useful as we get into some discussions about the possible use of Town land.

**Rob Kelley**

It's a clear, well written report and I think some of the data is convincing.

**Randy Elwell**

I don't think the town has that much land.

**Rob Kelley**

There's the parcel by Kinney Woods Road.

**Randy Elwell**

I thought that the deed didn't allow it to be developed.

**Bates**

Wasn't it going to be used for the high school?

**Randy Elwell**

They wanted to build something there if I remember correctly, when it was determined that nothing could be developed.

**Rob Kelley**

I didn't know that either. It will likely have to be private purchases.

**Bates**

So that's a discussion for the next few months. Thank you. Great job. Thank you for your service.

**Minutes**

A motion was made by Elwell, seconded by Thompson, to accept the October 3, 2022 minutes as corrected. By unanimous vote, the motion passed.

**Communications****Bates**

A couple hand delivered a nice thank-you letter from Waldo Community Action Partners for the donation the town made and then we had an extremely nice, thank you letter from Bonnie and Dave Percival. Do we have any other messages?

**Warrant****Irene Ames**

There was the monthly payment to the school, and the annual payment for maintenance on the elevator. Nothing else is out of the ordinary.

**Bates**

Thank you and now we have the Town Manager's report.

**Town Manager Report****Erb**

We had a nice visit with Eva Cushman on Friday afternoon. Thank you all for joining me and being there. As Rob Kelley said, we did have a good meeting yesterday regarding housing. About forty people joined. There is a lot of frustration and desire for the town to take a more active leadership role on the issue. There's definitely interest in what property the town already owns, which I think is pretty limited.

**Erb**

Richard, did you send something on the Knox County budget?

**Bates**

I did send an email, but it was not about the budget. I emailed Andrew Hart's secretary. Could you discuss what was reported to the press?

**Erb**

It's always a little dangerous to use the reporter's version instead of the actual budget. Everyone knows the budget will be reduced. Right now, it would be a 25% increase for the town. We are definitely being

hit by the increase in state valuation. I did some quick calculations of a few of the towns, and it looks like we had the highest percentage increase of all of them. A couple other things. I think you might have heard us talk about Colby College. Their President, President Green, said he would welcome the opportunity to partner with the town, and he will be meeting with Mike Felton, Jennifer Garrett, Richard and I next week. The purpose is to discuss where we might have some common interests. They have resources. Mike has some idea for the schools. We met last week and talked about where we might go with this, and we'll follow up on that.

There's been some emails back and forth with the Harbor Committee. I heard from Noel Mussen today; he is still working with the engineer on specifications in more detail for the bid package. That will be sent to the EDA for them to look at so it's moving a little slower than expected but we did have a conference call with the EDA last week. They made it very clear that an extension for the start date will not be an issue. When the EDA people talked about deadlines, they didn't discuss a two-year deadline but stated it must be done in five years.

**Sawyer**

How many years has it been now?

**Bates**

It's been going since 2015.

**Committee reports**

**Bates**

**Planning Board 7:00pm October 11 Meeting**

- The application for a change of use for the non-conforming building at 14 Vannah Road was accepted as complete; meeting the 12-C-1 standard in the Shoreland Zoning ordinance, it was approved.
- The application to renovate the dwelling at 78 (68) Main Street (Granite Gallery) and add a generator, propane tank and heat pumps was accepted as complete; meeting the standards of the Shoreland Zoning ordinance, it was approved.
- As the applicant was not present, the review of the July 12, 2022 Finding of Facts at 13 River Road (The Happy Clam) was tabled.
- The after-the-fact application to replace the siding at 4 Main Street (Kinney-Melquist Post 34) was accepted as complete; meeting the requirements of the Site Plan Review ordinance, it was approved.

**Bates**

The Resilience Committee met on October 13 and the effort was mostly to assign members to lead various projects, and also brainstorm about new ideas, including a community newsletter. Related to that, the National Science Foundation announced today the award of Civic Innovation Challenge Grants for a project which involves the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, with St. George as a partner. This grant project, similar to the tide gauge, is through the NSF, and is titled, Co-developing Local Flood Thresholds and High Tide Flooding Predictions with Community Science and Innovative Technology.

**Bates**

It's a preliminary one and it is a six-month project. The hope is that there'll be more funding that will come from that. It connects with St. George in as much as it will be a flood gauge on Southern Island on Jamie Wyeth's property. The data will be interesting.

**Thompson**

The funding is a million dollars.

**Bates**

Moving ahead to business discussion items. Rick is going to talk about the economic study of Drift Inn Road. The engineering study of Drift Inn Rd. which is a grant that Rick acquired for us. Tell us about that.

**Erb**

Funding is through FEMA money which comes through the state. We've been working with Gartley and Dorsky, specifically, Bill Lane. He is one of their engineers and we have funding to study and design, which would hopefully lead us to a larger grant for construction. If you're familiar with the culvert there, it is a three foot by four-foot stone box culvert, generally considered to be insufficiently sized for what it has to do. The area is subject to frequent storm damage and debris accumulation. Over the years, there have been recommendations to raise the road level and also increase the size of the culvert. The span will be roughly seven feet. The work that would be done will include surveying planning, design, and permitting. We have an estimate from Gartley and Dorsky, that the work can be done for \$18,650. We have a little bit more than that to work with, just in case. \$21,000 is the size of the grant, and we will have to come up with \$5250 as our 25% Share. But in talking to people more familiar with the area than I am, it's considered to be a priority. When Tim was finishing up as Town Manager, he really encouraged me to push ahead with this grant funding. With his help, we submitted the application and heard a couple of months ago that it was approved, It wasn't clear if we could move ahead with Gartley and Dorsky but then heard last week that we can, based on the size of the grant. There is not going to be a formal bid requirement. We're much happier working with someone who's already familiar with the project. It's not a very big project. Bill Lane will come to our next meeting and talk with us. He's looking for feedback for those who have been here longer than I to determine recollections of that area and what has changed. I asked Steve Jarrett to come to the meeting, because he's the one that gets stuck having to clean out the culvert when it flows. He knows he's doing it more often than he used to. We're excited about the project and look forward to the meeting on October 31st.

## **East Wind Inn**

### **Bates**

Okay, a new business action item is a liquor license for the East Wind Inn. Is there any need for discussion on this? We have on the record that there have been no complaints.

A motion was made by Elwell, seconded by Thompson, to approve the requested liquor license for the East Wind Inn. By unanimous vote, the motion passed.

### **Bates**

Anyone who can attend the GRISMO meeting tomorrow will be appreciated.

### **Sawyer**

I told Tara that I'd be willing to go back on. I'll be here tomorrow night.

### **Bates**

Ryan assures us that from his discussion with the state, we can mostly help by making sure they get to see all the paperwork.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Sawyer and was seconded by Cartwright and by unanimous vote, the motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 8:20p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tammy Taylor

Recording Secretary

Town of St. George