

ST. GEORGE SELECT BOARD & ASSESSORS
St. George Town Office
MEETING MINUTES
July 10, 2023

The Select Board meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Present were Steve Cartwright, Rick Erb, Wendy Carr, Jane Conrad, Chair Van Thompson, Randy Elwell, Irene Ames, Conservation Committee Chair Ken Oelberger, Chuck Paine, Debby Wheelock, and Betsy Welch.

Via Zoom: Present were Betsy Johnson and Adele Welch.

Quorum

A quorum was present.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Adjustments to the Agenda

The Potential Acquisition of Real Estate Located at Old Woods Rd. was made the first agenda item. Tax Acquired Property and Affordable Housing was added as an additional agenda item. Innkeeper's Licenses for Mill Pond B&B at 43 Port Clyde Rd., East Wind Hospitality and Long Cove Cottages were added as additional agenda items.

The Potential Acquisition of Real Estate Located at Old Woods Rd.

Erb

I think the Board is aware that there have been ongoing discussions about what was intended by the Planning Board when the Old Woods Farm Subdivision was approved. The land included lot eleven, which according to the Planning Board Minutes, would be put into a conservation land trust. There are issues about what was on the signed plan. There is now a new owner of lot eleven, and although we have not had a lot of direct discussion with the owner, I did speak with him this past week. The town, through

the Board, has indicated that they are interested in doing what they can to both preserve the property, provide public access and live up to what the Planning Board required for the property. Our own Conservation Commission has spoken up for acquisition of the property and development of nature trails and public access. That's where we are right now. I'm not sure how much more there is to say at this point. I did have a discussion this week with the owner of lot eleven and I am open to anyone else's description of where we're at. We do have people here that are interested in the property.

Conrad

I think it's worth stating in our public meeting that we have received a letter from the town's attorney confirming that lot eleven would not be a buildable lot because of the condition placed on the subdivision plan approval by the Planning Board in 2006. It's our understanding that the town's prior attorney also provided that same opinion. I'm certainly in favor of sharing the attorney's letter to the Board with the owner if he wants to see what's forming the basis of our understanding that it must be conserved, since that may affect the sale price if he's willing to consider selling it. We've also discussed in Executive Session, the fact that a number of parties are interested in the conservation of the property and potentially contributing money to the potential purchase, so I think the Select Board has been willing to consider a purchase because of the fact that there are a number of possible contributors to make that happen.

Erb

Not the least of which would be the potential for grant funding, although that's going to take some time.

Thompson

There were caveats though, that this might involve litigation.

Conrad

Right, and I'm assuming all of us would like to avoid the town being involved in litigation, I know the neighbors are already involved in litigation and that certainly affects the amount everybody is willing to contribute. It's better to ensure the conservation of that parcel, rather than spend money on legal fees, but it is very annoying to me as a representative of taxpayers that any legal fees are having to be spent, when since 2006, it should have been conserved.

Thompson

Any comments from the public?

Betsy Welch

I agree with Jane. Her recap is correct. All of us on Old Woods Road purchased property with the expectation that that land would be conserved, and that there would not be a through road, past our homes, to an additional development. All of us were under the impression that this was supposed to happen.

Cartwright

Are you comfortable with the idea that there might be some light use of people hiking, going in there and using the land?

Betsy Welch

Absolutely. I think that's what we expected, from the very beginning. Whether or not the access would be through Old Woods Road or not, we all expected that it was going to be conservation land, for the enjoyment of folks who live in this area. We always thought George's River Land Trust (Inaudible) and it would be available for public use. That's where we've always been.

Cartwright

I certainly hope it is still possible. I'm not speaking for the Board, but speaking for myself, I think it would be a tremendous asset for the town to have that property. It is good for the water district and it's a beautiful place. I have been on the Select Board in Waldoboro, and I've never heard a town complain that they preserved too much land. I've heard the opposite, that they wished they'd preserved more.

Betsy Welch

We're behind the idea of the town owning and conserving this land and we are happy to assist however we can.

Conrad

So that the record shows, you own property in that subdivision, right?

Betsy Welch

Yes. I own two lots. I was the original buyer back in 2008 when I purchased my lot.

Chuck Paine

I suppose we're here, Debbie and I, because we own a lot there and we are still friends with Jan, who was the developer. I never considered buying a lot there, but I loved her vision. She wanted to preserve that land back there and told us that apparently, she'd never finished the paperwork or something. She had a vision for it that I share, that it should be forever wild and accessible to people to hunt, birdwatch or whatever, and that was part of the reason I bought my lot. I agree with her. This is what this town is about. It has some very desirable land there near the water but inland is some undeveloped, or unspoiled is perhaps a better word land. I did a calculation today. If it went off the tax rolls, and we had to contribute the lost revenue from the taxes on that land, everybody in town would have to pay 33 cents a year to make up for the loss taxes on that land. Just the oxygen we get from the trees is worth 33 cents a year to my lungs. It's what this town is about, some wild land. That was Jan's vision. I've spoken to Malcolm and (Inaudible), although I understand that he sometimes speaks in different ways. He told me that he had the same vision, and that he was friends with Jan and wanted to see it that way, too. Now, that was a while ago. I know he's said some other things to other people, but I think if we handle this

right, everybody agrees what that land ought to be. I would hate to see litigation about this. I don't know. I can't speak for him, but I think he would be as happy to see that land kept the way it is partly because with a bridge or culvert in there, there's no way he could make any money developing that land. I think there's a positive outcome in this if it's handled right, without litigation, or at least I hope so.

Thompson

I appreciate your opinion. Unless there's further discussion by the Board, we will proceed further in Executive Session.

Conrad

The reason that additional discussion will happen in the Executive Session is related to price negotiations because the town could potentially be at a disadvantage of discussions about money if it happened in a public session. Any further discussion about that would be an issue.

Betsy Welch

Why are we here today?

Erb

We thought it was important to talk, to the extent that we could stay away from price, for people to understand the information that we have and the direction we're going in, and the fact that I did finally have a conversation with Mr. Willard, this past week. It is the first time I've spoken to him. There was a little bit to report, and we had gone through several meetings entirely in Executive Session. I think there was some discomfort with continuing to have nothing to say in public session, knowing that we can't talk about everything.

Conrad

Also, we have been soliciting our lawyer's advice because presumably, the restriction on the property affects its value. Now that we have that advice, it makes sense to share that.

Cartwright

And we have been talking with George's River Land Trust. (Inaudible)

Erb

I certainly didn't want to give the impression that there was a momentous announcement that would be made but we thought that it was important.

Betsy Welch

I appreciate the opportunity to come and say that the homeowner's association wholeheartedly supports the idea of public access to a town owned property adjacent to our subdivision which was the intention of living in it.

Thompson

That's good. We appreciate it is on the record.

Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest.

Minutes

A motion was made by Cartwright to approve the June 26, 2023 Select Board Meeting Minutes, as corrected, seconded by Conrad, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried.

Communications

There were no communications made to the Board.

Warrant**Irene Ames**

Jane Conrad asked me to explain the payments. There is the department summary and then there was one I added later, the warrant recap, and if you total all those together, that's where the invoice is selected for payment. It's just the sum total of all the accounts payable that an individual Select Board Member reviewed and signed off on.

Thompson

It looks fairly straightforward. It is just a matter of how much is remaining, and we will have further discussion on that.

Town Manager Report**Erb**

Bob Gingras, the Assessor's Agent, has completed his work for the town valuation as of April 1st, so we are very close to being able to set the tax rate for the coming year. We are on schedule for that, and I noticed last year we discussed the actual setting of the rate at the second meeting in July and I suspect that's exactly what we'll be doing this time as well. The first numbers that I see look like it is as we expected, about \$1 per \$1000, increased to a tax rate of \$10.10 per \$1000 last year. There's a range that we will be working with, but it looks like it's going to be about \$1 for that, so it's just a hair under a 10% increase in a tough year. You'll see more information on that. Van will be assisting, and I asked Richard Bates if he would sit in with us as well as he has a lot of experience with this. If anyone is interested, I'm happy to share any of the information. It is pretty straightforward.

Another thing, just to let people know, St George day is coming up and there will be fireworks on Saturday night. We do set a rain date, although it's hard to believe that rain would be an issue this year but just on the off chance, the rain date will be Sunday evening, the same time. They would want to know if we are going to postpone by midday on Friday, which is hard, but you can understand why they need notice. What I saw for a prediction was clouds and sun, with a chance of thunder showers. We'll probably have a better idea, but it is never a sure thing. We'll see what happens.

Cartwright

There is a 5k run on Drift Inn Beach and so I expect you all to be out there.

Conrad

And there is the parade on Saturday.

Oelberger

They are asking Neighbor to Neighbor to meet at eight o'clock down at the church.

Erb

Last year they worked that out and there were no issues and I think they're probably following the same schedule. I just remember the same question coming up and it seemed to work out.

I saw in the media that the state budget has included funding of \$31 million for ambulances. The Study Commission had been looking for something like \$70 million and \$31 million was what passed. Sixty percent is to go towards long term fixes to the problem and forty percent is for some immediate relief to the communities. But there are two issues. One, it did not have the two thirds supermajority, so it will not take effect for ninety days but that's probably how much time they're going to need to establish the rules for how it's going to be distributed, which has not been made public at this point. We will certainly hope for some relief. It's something that would have been helpful if we'd known at budget time but that wasn't going to happen. It's still good news as far as I'm concerned.

Thompson

Have you had any thoughts about working with the Midcoast Council of Government and how those monies might be distributed if you had a group type of approach?

Erb

I don't know yet.

Conrad

The discussions that I heard that came out of the Blue Ribbon Commission Panel were that most of the money was likely to go to communities where their ambulance service was at risk of ending altogether. My sense is we're not going to be at the front of the line but if we get something, that would be helpful.

Certainly, the Midcoast Council of Government might be involved in these long-term solutions because there is a lot of discussion about how throughout the state, we can change the infrastructure of emergency response so that it isn't so siloed in every little community.

Erb

In some news articles that talked about this, there is a particular concern with towns that would be more than thirty minutes away from ambulance service, and we're obviously well within that with an ambulance that is based within St. George. If we were in Rockland, by the time you get to Port Clyde, it's pretty close. I would like to think that towns that stepped up and appropriated additional funds would not be penalized for that. We will have to watch for that.

I also want to point out something we talked about right before the meeting started. The Route 73 State project has started. The large culvert near Route 131 and Route 73 has been removed and Maine DOT tells me their expectations are for a twenty-one day project. If they can do it faster than that, they will but it's budgeted for twenty-one days.

Conrad

Where are we in the 21 days?

Erb

Today is day one.

Thompson

Where are we on the budget and is it being reviewed as of the end of the weekend?

Erb

Yes.

Committee Reports

Planning Board - Carr

Carr

At the last meeting, there was a public hearing for a float on Clark Island Road and there were no attendees at the public hearing, so the meeting was closed, the application was found to be complete, and the application was granted. There's an application pending for a seasonal pier in Watts Cove. That's a sensitive bird habitat, so there's going to be a site visit. I'm not quite sure where that's going but that's pending. The only other interesting one was supposed to be an applicant from a cell service company about a new cell tower on Walston Rd. I think it is on private property, because it's not on the water district property and I don't think it's on town property, but that person never showed up. I don't know

what the status is, but I find it personally curious that there's going to be another tower because I know the town was approached last year about putting a tower at the transfer station. Apparently, it's across the street but who knows if it's going forward. On the application there were several names. There was a business entity and then there was somebody else who owned the property. I did make a comment that those companies are always a little bit on the shady side. We just have to be sure who the true applicant is before it is granted.

Conrad

Has the town granted applications for cell towers on private property in the past?

Carr

Not that I know of. There's only one tower and it's on water district property, which is quasi-State property.

Conrad

I'm just wondering if we don't have an ordinance that addresses this.

Carr

I don't think so.

Elwell

The only part of the ordinance I recall when they approached us before was the height requirement. For the similar project near the Port Clyde fire station, there were stipulations to have a percentage in case it fell. The only thing I can remember is the high tide of the tower.

Thompson

Height of the tower, plus a percentage, if I recall. I don't remember the height limit.

Elwell

No, there was no height limit.

Erb

There's some discussion about technology causing the tower to collapse inward on itself, but I don't have a lot of details.

Elwell

If it's the same company as the one in Port Clyde, like the one on the water district property, it would be on a pedestal or pole versus a tower.

Conrad

I know some towns, when approving a cell tower application, include a requirement that if the company abandons use or ceases to use it, they have to take it down.

Thompson

I think that is in our ordinance.

Carr

That's usually in the contracts with the landowner.

Cartwright

Is anyone aware of whether we need another cell tower?

Elwell

When the company itself puts the tower up, they lease the space. This tower is Verizon, but they can lease it out to other companies. The biggest problem with the towers is (Inaudible). Trees grow and the towers don't so why would you put another one up? It's a line-of-sight issue.

Comprehensive Planning - Conrad

Conrad

We are still looking for one full member and one associate member to have a full complement. Rick, you told us that we should have committee members hold off on being sworn in and filling out their paperwork until you are ready for them, are you?

Erb

We will be after we sign off.

Conrad

I figured until all of that had happened, we shouldn't be scheduling meetings but hopefully soon. The Comprehensive Plan Committee can start to meet. Van and I attended the annual Midcoast Council of Governments meeting last week, and our membership that we pay toward that organization will result in our getting some free consultation time for helping us with our Comprehensive Plan and then we can get a quote from them on what they would charge to help us for the rest of the work that we need for consulting. It was nice to learn that there are a number of hours that go with our membership.

Thompson

For both of us, it was an eye-opening experience because we really didn't realize how much MCOG was doing, and they have kind of reinvented themselves in the last year and a half or so.

Conrad

It's really a great resource for things like housing issues and anything where you can benefit from other people in the region and what they've been doing.

Thompson

They end up with the funding that's provided and predominately used for the seed money required by many of the grants or in-kind contributions, so that's where most of our money is going and it comes back to the greater council but it's something that will be to our advantage in time. So, it is pretty positive in that regard, and they've been quite successful in terms of their funding applications. I'm looking at some of the things we may need to do with mitigation strategies, in particular with sea level rise. That might be very useful as we're kind of the demonstration project with our work with Sebago Technics in terms of doing something, we need to look into funding opportunities.

Conrad

It's great to know that they're tracking all of these grant opportunities, because obviously Rick and the Maine Municipal Association, and all of us occasionally hear about grant opportunities, but that's their (MCOG) whole mission. To be able to access that by being plugged in, is great.

Conservation Commission - Cartwright**Cartwright**

I like to defer to Ken who is here. Of course, the archaeological work, prior to putting the trail all the way through, as I understand from Dale Pierson, may be completed by tomorrow morning. I volunteered in the morning because by afternoon, there may be nothing to do.

Oelberger

We made really good progress and had a lot of good volunteers. We had four volunteers in the morning and five volunteers in the afternoon. Two archaeologists came out and the trail route that we've picked out for the updated trail on the state property is about 1000 feet long, and every ten meters, they put a marker along the trail that we've cleared. We weed whacked it over the weekend so it would be easy to work at because it's all well grown up there. At each of those ten-meter marks, we take out a fifty centimeter by fifty centimeter square and then dig down to the layers of soil. The top layer is mostly organic material. They call it an A layer, a B layer and a C layer and they tell by the color of the soil at those levels, how far down we have to go. For some of those test holes, we had to go down thirty-six inches. For a couple of others, we only had to go down fifteen or sixteen inches based on the swell. It's interesting too, because if you're down where we come into the point and a lot of the topsoil has flowed down from rain to that area, the top layer is much thicker than it is on the other side. So, as you're digging out, and we're working in teams of two, you have a screen. You dump it into the screen, and look for possible artifacts. They are mostly looking for little flicks and pieces that may have been there for tool making because when the indigenous people made a tool, they get little flecks of stone with

sharp edges. Some holes didn't have anything. Some holes had a half dozen of those flecks. They weren't positive. The amateurs would look at things, think it's nothing and throw it away. As a result of that, I think we may have gotten through twenty of the test pits today. I think there's only seven more to do tomorrow. They talked about doing a couple of optional kits, where they were interested just from an archaeological standpoint. They might look at areas where there's a depression in the soil, where there may have been a building or something in the past.

Cartwright

How about an update on the actual trail.

Oelberger

At the last meeting, you told everyone that the bridge was completed and they're starting to work on clearing the route all the way up to the state property. They are ready to start putting in the gravel, and then the surface material. They had two loads of surface material delivered last week. They chose not to work today. They thought there was going to be too much rain to bring equipment down there. The other thing we did, and Rick is aware of this, we got the contract from the State last Thursday for the additional work on the state property and the bill from the archaeologists. We were hoping we get that done for free, but as you were mentioning, we had to send in two different plans. The work could either be free or we would pay the Historic Preservation Commission for the work for the people who have come in today. Apparently, that didn't get passed in time or by this two thirds majority. The email I looked at today said if we could wait ninety days, we might get it for free, but I can't wait ninety days. So that's where that stands. The next thing is we still have to sign a contract with the subcontractor to do the work on the point now that we have the state issue. That was what happened at the last meeting. We were going to have an invasive event down behind the tennis courts in August, but we decided to put that off. We have enough other things going on right now. We might push that into the fall. We were going to take out some of the invasives and have an event where people could see how to take that out and what they could replace it because there are things in the town significantly detrimental to the native plants. I think those were the main things. We haven't discussed Old Woods Farm and the public meetings.

Budget Committee - Thompson

The Budget Committee has not met but we will be meeting soon because on July 24th, we will review the first quarter budget results and discuss a little bit about where we are from last year. I will not be here for the meeting. I will be in Boston.

Solid Waste – Erb

Erb

We have not met.

Thompson

Anything on that contract?

Erb

I have a draft of the request proposals.

Cemetery Committee – Carr

Carr

They have not met but I've heard talk it is going to be any day now.

Conrad

Does that relate only to the Seaside Cemetery?

Carr

No, but there are apparently people who are interested in the other cemeteries as a pending. Clark Hill Cemetery which is across from Harts Neck Rd. So apparently it deals with all of them.

Thompson

I just mentioned the Resiliency Committee meeting this Thursday down in S. Portland. We're going to carpool. The other thing to be aware of is there's going to be a green energy tour on August 12th. It is open to the town with various places open and there will be some vendors associated with solar and we are still working on heat pumps. We can tour various homes that are net zero at this point. We have a meeting on Wednesday evening to going over it.

Oelberger

I think I've talked before about the Knox County Conservation Commission Group. There are six different Conservation Commissions that decided to meet together to cooperate and hold events like this and not have everyone do their own thing all the time. We decided we would meet once a quarter. Everybody is busy and didn't need more meetings to go to and we decided that different committees would spearhead some type of activity and that other people could tag on to it and invite people from other communities to it. When I mentioned this green energy event, people were interested in coming to that and just using it as a model for what may be done on a broader scale and so I was going to invite the members of these other Conservation Commissions.

Thompson

Personally, I think that is fine. My suggestion is to wait until Wednesday evening to confirm that, but I do not think it is a problem. Let me talk to the Resiliency Committee. I appreciate that. Are we leading again?

Oelberger

It seems like it.

Cartwright

It could be a public event.

Thompson

It is a public event. My first thought was it was a local thing that we're doing for everybody, but it would certainly help us get some people representing some companies who are a little recalcitrant in terms of coming out if they thought it would potentially represent Knox County.

Oelberger

You can tell them there are five other Conservation Commissions that are interested.

Thompson

That will carry a lot of weight. So okay. I'll bring that up as well.

Affordable Housing – Cartwright

Thompson

We were sent a nice picture of what is going on at Long Cove.

Cartwright

I haven't talked with anybody. I know (Inaudible) is interested in this topic. Regarding the Kinney Woods project, I still want to go out and see that. Rick and I are going to drive out there sometime and check it out. I need to get in touch with Rob Kelly and Elliot and see what's happening with that. I have nothing to report on that.

Thompson

Jane, did you send that article to everybody?

Conrad

No. There was an article in the Bangor paper today. I think I just sent it. It had to do with the legislative actions on housing funding and I don't know whether any of that's going to be relevant to us.

Erb

From what I could see, some is and some not so much. It's a lot of money. I think it's \$100 million.

Board and Committee Appointments

A motion was made by Conrad, seconded by Elwell, to approve Greg Soutiea as a full member and Philip Reinhardt as the new alternate member of the Budget Committee, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried.

Conrad

Rick, is that Google doc of committee members updated and available to look at?

Erb

I'll have to check.

Proposed Workshop Meeting with Town Attorney

Thompson

Will the meeting work for him on July 20th?

Erb

He has it in his calendar for that date at 7p.m. I am just confirming the date and time and checking to see if there are suggestions for topics. If anybody has any thoughts on specifics that you're looking for let me know. This will not be a Zoom meeting.

Port Clyde Landing Project

Thompson

Anything new on Port Clyde?

Erb

No decision yet. There are two issues that are being decided. One is the selection of the appropriate hoist to purchase and the other is on the cost and benefits of bringing in three phase power. But the committee is working on that. I suspect both will be resolved quickly.

Thompson

My personal opinion is, given the opportunity to get three phase power, we should do it now.

Erb

That certainly seems to be the consensus. Apparently, the first time it went out to bid there wasn't enough funding available and we opted against it.

Conrad

I don't know what that is.

Elwell

Most side roads are two phase. Three phase is just basically more power. The school has three phase because they use so much power.

Thompson

I only see increased usage with time in most areas of the world.

Elwell

Running three phase to Ten Cold Storage is only going to benefit the businesses around there.

Erb

If we had a charging station there, we could use it for automobiles.

Cartwright

That could also be used for electric lobster boats.

Erb

As far as the project goes, things are moving along. There has been a lot of steel delivered and quite a bit of it has been driven. They will be doing cut offs. They drive the scale to resistance. They were all the same length going in but now you see this very irregular pattern. The deliveries have gone fairly smoothly. There was one instance where there was a Coca Cola truck delivering to the General Store and that backed things up but if we knew in advance, then the steel delivery truck would stop further up. The problem is the foreman doesn't always know the schedule, and is coming from Pennsylvania and doesn't always have the same driver. That was the worst. So far, it seems to have gone prettywell. Dan Vino is the foreman on the job there and some of you might have met him because he did part of the presentation. He is very well liked, great with the public, professional and polite. We're really happy with what CPM has done so far. There is a lot of work left to go obviously but they seem to have it together and I'm very impressed with Dan.

Elwell

They seem to be staying on schedule.

Cartwright

You haven't had any complaints?

Erb

I have not.

As far as the parking spaces that we acquired are concerned, they are all marked now. I've been down there several times to keep an eye on what's happening. I have yet to see it full, but I've seen more than half of the spaces taken. I was there on Sunday. I noticed that just about half of them are out of state plates and that might be what I would want to see as it's not really intended for either but for people that can do their business within two hours. It seems to be used appropriately. I'm sure we've got some hard days ahead, but so far, it's been smoother than people expected.

Conrad

Has there been any announcement posted on the town website that tells people what those spots are for and where they are?

Erb

Yes, there was something in the newsletter that went out. Typically, Tara puts those up. I'll see if it's there. Since I didn't have a signed agreement with Andy by the deadline, I chose my words carefully about what we were working on and what would be happening, so I'll get to that.

Conrad

I was thinking if we put it on the St. George Message Board, on Facebook and on the website, then we can direct people. And the business alliance can let people know that are frequenting their businesses.

Carry Forward Amounts from the FY 2022-23 Budget

Erb

There's not much this year which is fine with me.

Conrad

Can you explain to the new members what we're looking at?

Erb

Sure. If you look at the DRM figures for expenditures, you'll see that most items do have a positive balance. Those will lapse to the fund balance, sometimes referred to as surplus, unless the Board takes action to carry that figure over into the next year. For the most part, any excess funds will lapse to surplus. The Fire Department does have a few items that are being worked on. Property maintenance is similar with Route 73 There's also some work being done on radio communication.

Elwell

The repeater has been messed up. They found out when they did the testing on the new LED lights. That is a fire department radio. Right now, they're working on possibly putting the system on the Route 73 station to help carry our radios signal to the dead spots in town.

Thompson

Another problem is the ballasts systems, and the LED lights give a lot of interference. It's very expensive to get the proper type of ballast.

Erb

As far as the generator goes, that is an ongoing need. We would prefer to purchase it with grant money which becomes available from time to time through Maine Emergency Management.

Conrad

Are these the amounts that were allocated in the budget but weren't used last year?

Erb

These are the balances that were left. Nothing was spent on generators. The others were larger appropriations, but this is the unspent amount. The other one I have listed is solid waste. We have been putting money into the compacter building every year. It hasn't been enough to do what we need to do. I would ask to carry that forward. Hopefully this is the year we can get it done. Irene had a thought about the generator. We've been appropriating money every year and carrying it forward. What this really needs is a reserve account. I think we should vote to carry it forward this year and place it into a reserve account, which is probably what we should have done right away. We were hopeful that there was going to be State grant money available, and we wouldn't need to have a reserve account because we'd have enough but that hasn't panned out for us.

Oelberger

I thought we were going to carry forward the balance in the Conservation Commission account because we planned to use some of that money for any issues we had with the Fort Point Trail. I think our current balance is \$13,395.56.

Ames

I thought some of that was grant money.

Oelberger

No that's all money to extend the basic account.

Conrad

Was that in that town's budget?

Oelberger

It's in the budget.

A motion was made by Elwell, seconded by Cartwright, to carry forward the town's budget accounts into the next budget year, as requested by the Town Manager, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried.

Innkeeper's License for Linda Bean d/b/a Seaside Inn

Conrad

What are the criteria for this?

Erb

It is a state law that we have to approve and issue licenses to innkeepers. It used to be that we also had to issue licenses for prepared food. They repealed that several years ago.

A motion was made by Elwell, seconded by Conrad, to approve the Innkeeper's License for Linda Bean d/b/a Seaside Inn, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried.

Innkeeper's License for Linda Bean d/b/a Historic Port Clyde Ocean House

Conrad

Is that really an inn now? I thought she was just using that for housing for her workers.

Carr

There are no workers there. The workers are upstairs at the General Store. I heard one family is renting the entire building.

Erb

I was thinking she wishes to continue her license. There's no reason not to grant it.

Conrad

But she's not operating it as that kind of business. I just don't understand.

Elwell

I didn't think she had a septic system.

Cartwright

It seems odd to approve an inclusive license. Don't we have to approve these if there's no compelling reason not to?

Conrad

Randy said there was a question about the septic.

Thompson

That is a Code Enforcement Officer issue.

Conrad

Maybe that's why they discontinued having a restaurant.

Elwell

A long time ago, we had a fire alarm go off there. They didn't want us to reset the alarm. There were Asian girls there and they weren't supposed to be in the apartment. There was an issue going on.

Conrad

Did she request a license?

Erb

Yes. I assumed Veronica (Inaudible).

Conrad

By giving a license are we making any kind of determination about things like septic adequacy?

Erb

It would be a backdoor way to regulate.

Conrad

I think if there has been a question about that, I would like that answered before I vote.

Thompson

This was how long ago?

Elwell

Quite a while ago.

Thompson

If somebody comes forward to say there's a problem, then it's brought before us, but I hesitate from a hearsay point of view.

Conrad

Should we be requiring people who come before the Select Board to request a license to provide us with certain information, such as affirming they are operating this business a certain way or planning to, and have met certain requirements, such as septic?

Thompson

The question is, do you want this done on a yearly basis? This is essentially on a yearly basis we do this.

Conrad

Why not? That's how regulation works. If somebody wants to run a business, they state that they are meeting the required criteria to run a business, and then it can be pro forma if every year they still meet the criteria.

Thompson

Yes, but who's evaluating the criteria? This is not new. This is ongoing.

Conrad

I'm new and I feel on behalf of members of the community that we should be requiring people who want an innkeeper license or a tavern license to provide us with certain information that they're going to responsibly operate that kind of business here.

Ames

Do they need a state license?

Erb

They do.

Conrad

Do we know that?

Erb

That's my recollection, but I can confirm that. I know for certain one of the reasons that they stopped having the Victuallers License was that it was issued by the State, and they actually have inspections. I believe the same is true for innkeepers. I'm sure that's where things like fire and safety regulations are enforced.

Conrad

The only one I have real questions about is The Ocean House because we all know that's not operating as an inn now. The Seaside and the Craginair are operating as inns. I would feel more comfortable voting on the Ocean House two weeks from now, so we knew what they have to provide to the town when they fill out their application, and information on their license from the state, so that we're not just voting out of the blue.

Carr

And also know what the state empowers us to do. There may be a state law that transcends all of this and requires the towns to issue the licenses.

Elwell

Terry should know whether there's an issue with septic. I'm just saying I recollect an issue quite a long while ago.

Conrad

It has been a number of years since it has operated as an inn.

Erb

I can recall working in a town that had zoning with areas where inns and restaurants could not be allowed, and keeping track of where the businesses were operating. That's not the case here. I'm sure we can put this off two weeks. Is the question whether they operate as an inn?

Conrad

And are they planning on operating an inn? I would like to know what the application process is, see what the state's expectations are for the towns for issuing licenses and if there are areas that we're supposed to be looking at.

Erb

If you look at the application form, there's basically no information there. It does not say how many rooms. It doesn't say anything.

Conrad

It doesn't say that they have septic or smoke alarms or anything.

Erb

No. And that's where I feel certain that the state comes in.

Conrad

It would just be helpful for us to know that, especially for something that's not operating now.

To take up an Innkeeper's License for Greg Soutiea d/b/a The Cragnair Inn

A motion was made by Conrad, seconded by Elwell, to approve the Innkeeper's License for Greg Soutiea d/b/a The Cragnair Inn, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried.

To take up an Innkeeper's License for Mill Pond B&B at 43 Port Clyde Rd., East Wind Hospitality and Long Cove Cottages

A motion was made by Elwell, seconded by Cartwright, to approve the Innkeeper's License for Mill Pond B&B at 43 Port Clyde Rd., East Wind Hospitality and Long Cove Cottages, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried.

To discuss Board priorities for 2023-2024

Cartwright

We have these tax acquired properties. Some are more desirable than others, and maybe some are unusable. Thinking about our need for housing that people could actually afford to buy or build on, I wonder if any of the tax required properties might be suitable for affordable housing. Under the new law, we're not going to make money selling them. We can only keep the back taxes. That's not very much so there might be much more value in creating a place for those who couldn't afford to be in this community otherwise. There is one thing I really liked about this. I really get uneasy segregating people by income or age. That just seems unfortunate. I know it's not intentional when we create affordable housing units, but you can see it in Rockland, and you can see it in other places. It's a "you're from the projects" kind of thing. If people live amongst others, and it's a neighborhood, it's more organic, and there's less of that stigma of lower income people versus higher income people. In our society, you can see that anyway, but if you're in a mixed neighborhood, it just seems healthier, so that might be more possible. If any of these properties were suitable for affordable housing projects, whether it's through Habitat for Humanity or our local CDC or whatever, that was my thought.

Thompson

I think it's something we can take into consideration moving forward. The question would be if we should be working with a real estate agent because we're laying those (properties) out at the moment. It'd be a matter of the town wanting to identify these and then see how we negotiate this.

Cartwright

If there are some that are suitable for this, we can take them off the listing.

Erb

There has been some discussion on this. It's come up before the Board in the past, and there's been some discussion with Rob Kelly from CDC. They were just a little uncomfortable being involved in taking land but still very interested in whether there was land available for affordable housing. They wanted to be part of it. They just had to think it through. This was something that they were comfortable with.

Elwell

Certain areas that we have on the list are low-income housing. We end up getting back homes because they couldn't pay the taxes. The north has always been the cheaper area.

Thompson

We could identify potential properties at the federal level for assisting with housing and partnering with the town. We could investigate with the housing group and maybe look into that a little bit.

Conrad

What is the timing? We picked a realtor last time. I was assuming we were ready to have those properties listed and if we were going to pick one or more that we were not going to make available to the general public, we'd have to do that sooner rather than later. It's not an easy decision.

Ames

We need to wait on one because there are a lot of issues. We need the assessor to figure out what the penalties are going to be. We just don't know what all the costs are going to be, and we can't sell it with all of that still hanging over it. We're required to get in touch with the owner and sometimes they are dead. My understanding is that we have to sell it for retail value and can't just give it away.

Erb

Now, the proceeds go back to the former owner.

Ames

We have that responsibility.

Conrad

I think we'd basically have to try to come up with the fair market value of a property.

Carr

The town would have to pay above what the taxes are. You have a duty to give it back to the owner. The town will have to pay that cost at fair market value.

Ames

If fair market value is \$100,000, and they owe us \$5000, we would have to come up with \$95,000 and we're not really in a financial position to do that.

Conrad

But there are these grants from the State for \$100 million. If there are some that aren't ready to be sold anyway and this is going to be something that'll happen in the future, maybe we should figure out a protocol for whether we could do this, where there'd be funding, and how it would work, so that we could really be able to do it if we want to do it.

Ames

There are some that are landlocked and would not be appropriate for that. We can still move forward with selling those and getting the money to the former owners, but your suggestions are good as far as finding a way to solve the affordable housing issue. It's worth looking into.

Thompson

From what I've heard from the MCOG, I would look to see if they have any initiatives to look for federal funds. This might be a good approach.

Conrad

They might be aware of other towns that are trying to do the same thing and we could replicate what others are doing.

Erb

Well, I think the problem is if we're going to dispose of it and repay the former owner, it has to be fair market value.

Conrad

I think maybe the way it would work is that you'd list it and then let's say you think the fair market value is \$100K but the highest bid is \$35K, then the town could buy it for \$36K.

Carr

You would have to be careful with that. A certain amount of time would have to pass.

Conrad

It would have to be a regular process.

Erb

I think this is spelled out in legislation. All of this sounds very familiar. There has to be a required number of months, and then things change.

Conrad

It's kind of like when banks foreclose on property, and they put it on the market.

Board priorities for 2023-2024

Erb

We did this last year, although they called it the Select Boards Action Plan. It was at this time that it was on the agenda. The areas discussed were improved communication with citizens, better and stronger working relationships with the St George Business Alliance, affordable housing, partnerships, and more open communication with the school board. That's where there was some discussion about having a

Select Board member attend school board meetings which we ended up deciding we would not do. At the time, we were still trying to figure out what we were going to be doing with ARPA. I think affordable housing is probably going to be on there again.

Thompson

Certainly, the Comprehensive Plan must be a major thing that comes up, as well as continuation with the housing issue. There are a number of priorities there between businesses and other interests. I think the other thing I mentioned was the co-op mitigation. What are we going to do with co-op at the next big storm. It is going to fall apart. What are we going to do to look after our community. (Inaudible). We need to work on communications for sure.

Conrad

Maybe we could get a report at the next meeting about what has been done to improve communications.

Thompson

And where we are with that software. The ARPA funds have been committed towards trying to lower our tax rate.

Cartwright

A big improvement to our communications that we discussed was rebuilding an area for meetings.

Thompson

That has been turned over to me. We are going to be using a new screen where we meet now which is better for seeing what people look like on screen. The idea is to have a slightly larger screen than that downstairs and we will refurbish the room down there as well. I have not jumped into that yet but within the next two months.

Conrad

I think that now that the Emergency Service is a department of the town, having a committee or some way to hear updates about that would be helpful.

Oelberger

I want to make a comment to Van on the new tasks that he took on. I think the key thing we hear from people in meetings is when we do a zoom meeting, they can't hear people in the audience. I think that should be a key part of whatever you're addressing.

Elwell

Some towns have podiums with a microphone and elevated chairs.

Oelberger

Now when somebody in the audience has a comment or a question, you have to have the person answering the questions repeat the question, so people on Zoom can hear it. Just take that into account when doing upgrades.

Conrad

Maybe we can talk more at the next meeting about the priorities. People can be thinking about it.

Executive Session

On a motion by Elwell, seconded by Conrad, the Board entered into executive session at 8:38p.m. to discuss legal advice regarding real estate and potential litigation regarding the Old Woods Farm property as allowed under Title 1 Section 405, 6c of the Maine Revised Statutes:

“Discussion or consideration of the condition, acquisition, or the use of real or personal property permanently attached to real property or interests therein or disposition of publicly held property or economic development only if premature disclosures of the information would prejudice the competitive bargaining position of the body or agency.”

The board entered executive session at 8:41 pm.

The Board voted to end the Executive Session at 9:10 pm and the public meeting was re-opened for the purpose of adjourning.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Steve Cartwright, seconded by Randy Elwell, to adjourn the Select Board meeting, and by a unanimous roll call vote, the motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Tammy Taylor
Recording Secretary
Town of St. George, Maine