

ST. GEORGE SELECT BOARD & ASSESSORS

St. George Town Office

MEETING MINUTES

January 22, 2024

The Select Board meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. Select Board members present were Steve Cartwright, Rick Erb, Wendy Carr, Randy Elwell, Irene Ames, Jane Conrad, and Chair Van Thompson. Also present were Nat Lyon, Ben Norton, Chris Caffrey, Greg Soutiea, Scott Vaitones and Veronika Carlson.

Via Zoom: Present were Loreen Meyer, Jonathan Coggeshall, Adele Welch, Louis Bacarisse, Katarina Mesarovich, Carol Arness and Ken Oelberger.

Quorum

A quorum was present.

Public Comments

Ben Norton

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to read this letter tonight about the Port Clyde Landing Project and have it entered in the minutes, an idea I've had for a while about the Port Clyde landing project. I've had a few informal conversations with some of you about this idea, and members of the Harbor Committee and the Town Manager. I know the town is going through some very trying times with the construction, Rick's retirement and the recent storms, however, I don't think we should miss an opportunity when it presents itself.

The opportunity would be for the town to purchase the property adjacent to 10 Cold Storage Rd., Lot #102-83.

It's a very old house in poor repair. The town needs to purchase the property and restore the building for preservation. This would make a good site for public bathrooms and a future harbormaster's office.

My thought would be for the town to contact the owner to see if there is a possibility for purchase and then appoint an ad hoc committee to explore the options of restoration, funding and design.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely yours,
Ben Norton

Ben Norton

I have since written a letter to the owner, just as a person of interest. I have no interest in purchasing it myself, but I think if there's an opportunity, then we should look into it.

Thompson

It came up before. I should look into it. I haven't taken time to actually write to somebody about it.

Ben Norton

Let's see what happens and see if there is any interest. Anything I find out on my own, I'll pass along.

Thompson

It would benefit the area and it was pointed out to me it's one of the oldest structures in Port Clyde.

Ben

It would be wonderful to restore it.

Adjustments to the Agenda

Accommodation of a Temporary Relocation of the Port Clyde General Store Including a Potential Shoreland Zone Amendment was moved forward in the agenda to accommodate the attendees.

Accommodation of a Temporary Relocation of the Port Clyde General Store Including a Potential Shoreland Zone Amendment

Thompson

They came to the Select Board, and we've subsequently sought legal advice and gone back into the various minutes of the Planning Board. My understanding from the town's attorney is we believe there's no doubt the retail space, as defined for the Monhegan Boat Line, would apply to the move of The Port Clyde General Store, potentially to that space, but it really should go through the Planning Board. What would happen then is really up to the Planning Board and I understand that they are meeting tomorrow night for a preliminary discussion of general plans, and perhaps looking at an application.

Erb

I have more details. It wasn't that long ago that the Monhegan Boat Line went through the site review for their new building, and at that time, there were fairly extensive records in the minutes and in their

findings of fact, about continuing certain retail activities inside the building, not exactly the same as the general store, but some things are the same, and the town's attorney has given the opinion that there is a strong case to be made that this would be continuing a non-conforming use, but it would be grandfathered. That's his opinion that he gave to the Code Enforcement Officer and me. Our understanding is that the application should now go through the Code Enforcement Officer, and it is likely it will require a site review from the Planning Board. Up until now, we had been thinking that it was going to require some kind of a Shoreland Zoning amendment. The town attorney gave an opinion that would counter that. That's where we stand right now.

Conrad

Just to clarify, if it is going through the Code Enforcement Officer and the Planning Board, the Select Board is not being asked to submit a warrant to the public to put a vote about a possible amendment of the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance.

Erb

That would be correct.

Conrad

So, we don't need to do anything because other people will take care of this.

Erb

We were trying to expedite the process, so we were going to go directly to the Select Board because we knew that ultimately, they would be the ones that would have to send it to a town meeting under the other scenario. It was not the case, though.

Conflicts of Interest

There were no conflicts of interest.

Minutes

A motion was made by Elwell, seconded by Conrad, to approve the January 8, 2024 Select Board Minutes, as revised, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried.

Warrant

Irene Ames

Did anybody have any questions?

Thompson

No. They were fairly straightforward.

The warrant was signed.

Town Manager Report**Erb**

I have a couple items. I did reach out to David Barrett at the Maine Municipal Association and made a couple of edits to the ad that was written that a couple of you commented on. I've told him at this point to go ahead. I could still pull that back if you have any other suggestions, but at this point, I told him we were ready to go. We have signed the contract with Maine Municipal Association to assist and I think you saw the schedule that he had put together. That is moving forward.

Just a couple other things. As you know, we have been eager to have the audit conducted and there is at least progress on that. One of the issues that we ran into is because we are a school department instead of a school district, they need to do them together. They can't just audit the town's books without also doing the schools. It makes more sense to do the school first. There were a few delays with the school, in part because they changed their accounting software, but I understand now that the school's audit is well underway. When I spoke with Fred Brewer, the auditor that we both use, he indicated sometime soon after this week he expects he will be here. We've been waiting a long time, but I will hope for the best.

Conrad

Rick, since this is my first time through this process, how if at all, does that impact our budgeting process?

Erb

One of the things that we will be talking about will be appropriations from the town's fund balance. Sometimes that's referred to as an unappropriated surplus. It is better to have audited books at that point and to get that number directly from the auditor because I was a little uneasy moving ahead without that. I did meet with Fred. He reviewed our books and gave us a rough estimate. He forecast an increase in our fund balance. We talked a little bit about that number. I can probably get that for you. It would be better if we had a full set of audited books at this point but there is a tremendous shortage of people in that field right now. We're not alone, but it is sort of surprising that it takes as long as it does. I have other items that I will bring up under individual agenda items.

Committee Reports

Planning Board - Carr

Carr

I have a couple of things. For the Roth pier in Port Clyde, the application was found to be complete. There's a cottage on the Bracy property on Hart's neck. It's being moved back ten feet, so the house itself will be out of the Shoreland Zone but the deck is still in the Shoreland Zone. It's going to be put on piers and that application has been approved. The final plan for the subdivision at Atwoods Quarry has been approved and tomorrow night after the meeting there's going to be a workshop on the Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance change, to bring our ordinances in line with the state laws.

Thompson

Has Michael Jordan been working on that?

Carr

Yes, and he has given us drafts.

Harbor Committee - Elwell

Elwell

They meet on Thursday night. I couldn't make it last week because we were here.

Budget Committee – Thompson

Thompson

The Budget Committee will be meeting, besides being here.

Resiliency Committee – Thompson

Thompson

We haven't had a meeting so there's nothing to report other than the posting on the commission's portion of the website, where you can look up the areas that are anticipated, and you can see what levels of flooding there would be with various levels of sea rise. That's something you all can refer to if you choose.

Comprehensive Planning - Conrad

Conrad

We had a workshop on Saturday for three hours to review those survey results and start identifying the top priorities that emerged from that. Essentially the committee is proceeding with an outline of those priority topics so that they can work on gathering additional information about each of those topics as they go forward. The committee will be reaching out to different town committees like the Harbor Committee, the Conservation Commission, and the Budget Committee, about different priority areas going forward.

Conservation Commission – Cartwright

Cartwright

Ken is here on Zoom. I don't really know of anything new other than going by Wileys Corner seeing that trail is being used a lot and I hear people are enjoying it. It sounds great. This is a little off topic, but I wanted to mention that the fisheries program at the Odd Fellows Hall last Thursday was a panel discussion that was really excellent. The whole resilience concept was certainly in play there.

Thompson

It would have been very nice to have had that recorded because it was very good.

Cartwright

A really good discussion with lots of points of view and some optimism amid all the scary stuff that's happening, which had just happened. The storms were certainly on everyone's mind.

Shellfish Committee - Elwell

Elwell

I was at the meeting here, so I didn't attend.

Solid Waste – Erb

Erb

There was no meeting.

Cemetery Committee – Carr

Carr

There was no meeting.

Affordable Housing - Cartwright

Cartwright

Rob Kelley hopes to come to the next Select Board meeting and discuss the Kinney Woods project.

Update on the Port Clyde Landing Project

Erb

As was mentioned earlier, the Harbor Committee will be meeting on Thursday. They hope to wrap up their recommendations at that meeting. They've just taken a whole lot more public comment and so that sort of pushed them back a little bit but according to their chairman, they hope to finish up on Thursday. On the site itself, I will tell you that they have hit more obstructions driving steel. We are working with CPM now to figure out the next steps on that.

Thompson

Is this hitting boulders or ledge?

Erb

Boulders. We should know more about that in the next few days.

Thompson

The Ice Age has done us in a little bit.

Erb

It certainly could be.

Cartwright

Do they have to move the boulders?

Erb

They do.

Cartwright

Then they put the steel down where the boulders were, down to the ledge?

Erb

Yes. Essentially the idea is they're supposed to be driving it until they hit resistance, which should be ledge. Instead, they're hitting boulders.

Cartwright

Are we still within budget on that project?

Erb

As of now, yes.

Thompson

Fairly well within budget.

Erb

Are we going to hear more about the Port Clyde General Store tonight or is that on another night?

Thompson

That would be on another night. I think that's more of the purview with the Planning Board, not us at this point. I look forward to you talking to them about what the overall plan is and what you'd like to do.

Veronika Carlson

Do you feel it will be that because it's really the DEP. So, would it be the Select Board that needs to approve for you to go to the DEP about our sidewalk concerns?

Conrad

Is it the Department of Transportation or the DEP?

Veronika Carlson

The DEP because we're going further over the ocean.

Erb

They are within the Shoreland Zone setback.

Cartwright

Maybe there could be a future communication where you come in and just tell us what the plans are, not because we have to act on them, but just to keep the Board informed.

Veronika Carlson

The DEP is going to tell us we can't do it. I need the town's support to go to the DEP and say we, as the town, want this and really, I think that would be Rick and Rick wants the Select Board's support before he does that.

Conrad

I would agree with Van given that the Planning Board usually first considers plans.

Veronika Carlson

The permit would be with the Planning Board.

Conrad

Right. I understand that but the rest of your project is going to the Planning Board, so this relates to that. It makes sense once they've weighed in on your initial site plan. I realize you're not at the approval stage with fine-tuned drawings or whatever. Then we would be asked.

Thompson

I think we are in a position for the Planning Board to be at the point where they've approved what you'd like to go forward with. Then we would go ahead and look at our approach to it.

Conrad

Or even if it's connected. Obviously, they go together, where the road is and where the buildings are going. It would be helpful to hear from them because they have a lot more expertise on land use. This group doesn't usually do anything about land use.

Veronika Carlson

The Planning Board isn't going to vote on that. We can put the building exactly back where it was, but we'd like to push it back five feet, and put in a pedestrian sidewalk in there to help the issues that we had in Port Clyde. In order to do that, though, we would have to go before the Planning Board. The Planning Board can't vote on that, so they're never going to see that piece. That is DEP.

Speaker

If you're concerned about it being circular and who gets to decide, if you're going to the Planning Board, they really don't get to decide. You're going to need somebody else to weigh in. At some point, maybe somebody needs to interject something into that circle.

Veronika Carlson

Rick has to go to the DEP and bring a public safety concern to the state that we'd like to resolve at the same time that we're rebuilding the store. That's really what it is, simultaneous. We wouldn't get permitted and then move our building back five feet.

Thompson

We understand it is part of the process. I'd still like you first to go to the Planning Board.

Veronika Carlson

Sure. I'll be there tomorrow.

Public Communications and the Town Website

Thompson

Our concern is twofold. We would like to more broadly be able to get communications out to the public. You run into the problem we have in the community where some people are on Facebook, some people only look at emails and some people don't look at any of that. The question is, what can we put in place software wise and how to update the website to make it more friendly to find information. That's the beginning of a discussion on this. I know Jane has some concerns.

Conrad

There are a couple of concerns. One is making sure that whatever website we have is kept up to date. A number of people in the comprehensive planning process have submitted comments that they feel the website could be improved. I certainly have been frustrated on occasion trying to find things on there. It particularly makes sense for us to review the website in connection with the decision we made at our last meeting to have an emergency communication vehicle so that people could sign up to get either a text or an email or a letter in the mail. I don't know if that's one of the options but by whatever means people could get emergency communications and it makes sense to me to look at the website platform we have now and what changes would people like to see there. Do we need to look at a different vendor or is the one that we have fine but just needs to be improved, and whether it could connect to the Civic Ready Program if that's the one we're going with for emergency needs, so that you could have them linked. If people sign up for the Harbor Committee, they get a notice when a meeting is going to happen, and they can click on a link and see the agenda or whatever. We need to have people look at what can be interconnected and most effective in communicating with the community and the input we've heard is that particularly younger members of the community who are more likely to rely on social media might be more easily engaged with the town if we improve these things. That's really the thinking.

Thompson

Historically the town has not been involved in anything like a Facebook page. The only Facebook page around in general is the one run by the CDC.

Conrad

The Business Alliance.

Thompson

I'm sorry. The Business Alliance, not the CDC. The CDC sends out a lot of information which is very good. The question that needs some discussion is do we want something like that. In the past we didn't. It's something I want you all to think about because it's just a discussion item at the moment.

Conrad

Does it make sense to have some kind of working group looking at this to make recommendations back to the site?

Thompson

We talked about this last meeting and the question is, who should be on it and who would lead that group?

Conrad

I'm certainly willing to be on it and obviously Rick and whomever he has on his staff. There may be other people in the community with this sort of expertise that we would be happy to hear from.

Greg Soutiea

For the minutes, I just wanted to make a note that when we were talking about the Comprehensive Plan Committee, you had said that the younger community members are more likely to use technology, not necessarily just Facebook. I am just making that distinction.

Conrad

For social media in general and technology in general but we do still have a significant number of people in town who are going to want to get a newsletter in their P.O. Box. It's covering everybody. That's the challenge we have, but times change quickly with respect to technology. Even though I know the town did look at this question in the past about having a Facebook page, it's clear that the community has coopted the Business Alliance Facebook page, and so it makes sense to think about that again, as well as these other issues.

Thompson

Do you think you could get together with Rick and try to put together a committee on that.

Conrad

I think we could get input from people with this sort of expertise you may be aware of other people in the community who would be interested in participating.

Thompson

I don't know who was involved historically.

Conrad

Richard Bates and I have talked to Richard about this because he was instrumental in the creation of the website that we have now. I'm not clear whether he's interested in working on this.

Susan Ellis

I just wondered if you approached the school to get a couple of eighth graders.

Elwell

Jeff Boulet is a good one. He has a home business. Bill Batty is also a good one.

Storm Damage**Erb**

I think everyone is aware that a couple of roads in particular took the brunt from both storms, Drift Inn Road and Marshall Point Road in particular. I sent around a picture of the finished product or finished for now product anyway. At Marshall Point, we're making big progress on Drift Inn Road as well. In both cases, there is a lot of undermining of the road. Particularly on Drift Inn Road, we're having to try to find out how bad the undermining is to know if we have to rip up more. Even though the road may look pretty good on the surface, there's a real concern about its strength and the ability to hold up. We're working on that now and making good progress.

Other areas that were damaged include the Marshall Point Lighthouse and Factory Road, another area where there was quite a bit of undermining that we're having to address. So, we have put in our very rough estimates to Maine Emergency Management, and it is being totaled with everyone else's. This is one of those cases where it was obvious that the State would qualify for federal funds. There are other smaller emergencies where they're scrambling to try to put together enough; not an issue for this one. It was obvious from the outset. So that's where that stands right now. There obviously is a lot of private property damage as well. The Department of Marine Resources is collecting that information. It first went out erroneously that you should submit those to your town, which would probably not have been a good idea at all to have all four-hundred towns in Maine doing it. DMR has taken that on.

Another thing I wanted to let you know, I've communicated with Bill Lane, who you might remember came from Gartley & Dorsky with a presentation on Drift Inn Road. I asked him if he would come back down and reevaluate following the major storm that we received, and he agreed it would be a good idea. I'll meet with him. I think it's on Thursday we are going to get together. He wanted to take a look at what saw before but now after the storm, and recommendations on what we might want to think about possibly changing. That's the next step on that.

Cartwright

Would that include the possibility of closing the road on both sides?

Erb

I think that's always an option. As you saw, we focused first on Marshall Point Road. One major reason for that was that is a dead-end road. They were more concerned about maintaining access there. They had their tenant living in the lighthouse and it was totally impassable. We address that one first and then move on to other areas.

Presentation on the Proposed 2025 Municipal Budget

Erb

It is budget season, and you will see in the handout that I just gave you there is a schedule on the first page, just basically two nights plus an opportunity to finalize the budget after that. As always, the budget is sort of a work in progress by the time it gets to you.

Susan Ellis

Rick, do you have your assumptions written anywhere?

Erb

No. I have some ready to talk about tonight. For instance, the assumption is, according to our policy, we use the CPI as our cost-of-living adjustment. I used 3.2% for this year. We are not the only town that does that. I actually saw, from various town managers, that was the most common of the standards that were being used. You can see that the overall increase in the proposed budget is 6.8%. It will be a slightly larger increase than that, according to this proposal, in the amount that would be raised by taxes. We still have some funds available from ARPA to use; we used \$150,000 last year.

Susan Ellis

What's left in ARPA?

Erb

\$22,170.

Erb

Some of you might remember they relaxed the standards on how ARPA funds could be used. Essentially anything that provides a town service is now eligible. We used it essentially to help keep the tax rate down last year with the idea that we would use some last year, and a slightly lesser amount this year. Of course, then it's gone at that point. Revenues are relatively flat. There was one area where we managed an increase and that was in the revenues on the very last page.

Susan Ellis

What was the exception?

Erb

The exception was the investment funds largely because of increased interest rates for the last few years. Also, I want to give Irene credit; she manages the funds very well.

Elwell

Thank you, Irene.

Erb

If you want to see the area where much of the increases lay, much of it is capital items. There is \$75,000 put towards ambulance replacement. There's also funding to replace the town truck that Steve Jarrett uses and there's a push to try to move the harbormaster's boat along. It's had such a small amount dedicated to it every year, that we're just not making progress on it so we're trying to bump that up as well.

The county tax has already been decided. They actually operate on a calendar year. The increase for St. George for the county tax was \$137,000 and an additional \$14,000 for dispatch fees. So, we are looking at roughly, as far as a tax increase in the rate, the county tax alone will increase the tax rate by 18 cents per \$1000. What you see before you for a town proposal would be another 30 cents per \$1000. So, as you look at it, we do not have the school's budget yet. I've had some conversations with Mike, but we don't have a number from them yet. Between the town and the county we were talking about roughly 48 cents per \$1000 for a home that is worth \$300,000. That would be \$144 more in taxes. We can spend a lot more time on that later but just to give you an idea of where we are, that's what I came up with.

Cartwright

How would you characterize that? Would you call it a kind of conservative budget?

Erb

My target really was to try and keep it within 5%. Looking at what I understood the priorities were from the Select Board, I was unable to do it. That was as close as I could get but I think you know we do have some decisions to be made in the next month or so.

Susan Ellis

Do you feel competent in your projections for the ambulance? Do we have enough history?

Erb

Much more than last year? We didn't have any of our own numbers to work with last year. I think one area that's still a question in my mind is the collections on the ambulance. We don't have enough history

with that at this point and it comes slower than I expected. It's still pretty hard to tell you what percentage our collection rate is going to be.

Cartwright

Does that mean insurance payments?

Erb

The biggest single payment is Medicare.

Elwell

They drag their feet.

Erb

That's what we found.

Susan Ellis

What else do you have in here that you're concerned about?

Erb

That we're using the last of the ARPA money right now. We're proposing to take another \$250,000 out of the fund balance and it is questionable to me if that is sustainable. These are the things that give me cause for concern.

Conrad

I had a question about two things that we've discussed at the Select Board in the last couple of months that I'm not seeing on here, one of which is the Comprehensive Plan Committee's request for \$20,000.

Erb

It's under Planning.

Conrad

Okay. Is that also where the Resiliency money would be should there be a request for proposal for additional work for a vulnerability action plan?

Erb

I don't have that at this point. I didn't know what to put in.

Susan Ellis

Are there any savings in here replacing or augmenting what we've been saving for the solar panels, or did that line go away?

Irene Ames

Tara and I were looking at it. I'm not sure if we are purchasing it outright in April or May. The way it's worded is, "after six full years from the time it went into service". We have \$83,000 in reserve to pay for it. Between the \$80,000 that we set aside, and then the \$3,000 that it has earned in interest over the years. The purchase price is a little less than \$80,000, so we have enough money to purchase it outright this year. Then we're not going to be paying Revision for the electricity, and it would simply be a matter of taking the money that we typically budget to pay Revision and putting that in reserve for the maintenance and replacement.

Susan Ellis

What about the resilience of St. George. We are going to continue to need dollars to pay for planners or projects.

Irene Ames

You know you need solar panels to generate electricity. They're going to need maintenance, and they're going to need replacement eventually. Why not take the money that you're currently budgeting to spend to pay for the electricity and put that in reserve to pay for that?

Susan Ellis

I'm fine with that. I just want to continue, is there any number in here to continue to save for resilience for the town?

Erb

There is still \$10,000 in the budget, after doing the solar panels that could be used for other things if we don't need it.

Thompson

If the electricity helps offset.

Erb

My understanding, from what Irene and I talked about this afternoon, is we do have enough money now to pay for the solar panels so I suppose you could look at that \$10,000 being available for other purposes.

Susan Ellis

I would even augment that dollar number, but we can talk about that.

Erb

I don't really have a feel for what people think is an acceptable tax rate. That makes it a little hard for me to know where to go with the budget. I pretty much use my own judgment. My target was 5%.

Scott Vaitones

Your point Rick about what the rate is set at, for all of us over age 65 that took advantage of the state reduction, I'm looking to have to make that up. I have an \$800 -\$900 deduct from my taxes, which I'm very grateful for, but I've got to make that up. Plus, now (Inaudible).

Erb

That next year is going to be tough.

Scott Vaitones

It's going to be 13%. I'm obviously not alone in that group.

Conrad

There weren't that many people in that category though, because the legislature changed that, right?

Susan Ellis

Do we know how many people did that?

Irene Ames

I don't know the exact number anymore. There were between 300 and 325 people. I think there were a lot of people in town that were eligible that just didn't understand it and didn't apply.

Scott Vaitones

And those were also probably higher end properties (Inaudible).

Irene Ames

There were. There was one property that had their property taxes double because of an addition they put on and the state paid that.

Susan Ellis

Have we already received the money from the state?

Irene Ames

No.

Erb

As far as I know, no towns have received their full payment.

Greg Soutiea

One thing that stood out talking about the solar panels and the purchase, I was just curious where you were seeing a big utility spike. Not that that's a huge part of the budget, but it looked like it went up quite a bit.

Erb

If we did, it was more likely to be on fuel oil. We're just starting to see the new Central Maine Power bill where there is a reduction in the purchase power cost. It's the first month of that but from what I can tell even our streetlights will be affected by that. I'll know more in about a month.

Dave Percival

Your goal was 5%. You're at 6.9%. It looks like you can't do it, so if the Select Board tells you you've got to get to 5%, where do you find that?

Erb

I probably couldn't answer right this minute. It's not apparent or it would have been there by now.

Elwell

One of the big increases was accounting.

Susan Ellis

Is the 6.9% just the town's expense?

Erb

Yes. The county has not done us any favors for the last couple of years now.

Conrad

I noticed that you have a decrease in the Social and Community Services line on page two.

Erb

There could be at least one organization whose request hasn't come in. I would still consider them if they did. There are a couple of small ones we didn't hear from of approximately \$100. I'm not sure. I doubt we were a very important part of their campaign. One of them we always had requests from, and I saw it in other towns way back when, was Maine Public Broadcasting I didn't get anything from them. They used to always send a request and I did not see one this year.

Conrad

So that's how that works, since again, this is my first time. Do people submit a request to you for a certain amount from the CDC or the library, etc?

Thompson

We ask for justification based upon the services they provide.

Elwell

The big one for us are the nurses, the local Nurses Association. They come and give us a spiel.

Susan Ellis

And all those letters are available for us for review.

Erb

When we get to that one, I'm happy to give you a folder with them if that would help.

Greg Soutiea

What is the name of the nursing association?

Conrad

Rockland District Nursing

Thompson

I'm going to suggest that each of you take some time and review it (the proposed budget), and then come back with concerns and things you would like to see. This is a lot at one point and we're just getting it now.

Elwell

What's the salary increase, 3.2%?

Erb

3.2% is the CPI. There would be some other minor adjustments besides that, but the basic increase is 3.2%.

Conrad

And the Civic Ready Business, where does that fall?

Erb

I think I put that under Communications, under General Government, and there the price they just quoted me actually has gone down from last year. I think it was around \$2,500.

Conrad

It does make sense to talk to Mike Felton to see if we can piggyback or somehow use the same thing. For the two meetings you have on here, will we be going through these topics in more detail?

Erb

That's right. In most cases, there'll be either an agency or department head here as well.

Thompson

I will forewarn you. I will not be here in person on March 11th but I'll be on Zoom.

Conrad

I won't be here, either via Zoom or in person on March 11th. I'll make sure I pass along any notes.

Erb

One thing I will say is the Town of St. George uses fewer budget meetings than other communities.

Thompson

You put a lot of effort into it. I want to say how much it's appreciated.

Marshall Point Lighthouse and Museum Parking Lot

Nat Lyon

Rick asked me to bring you up to date on the conditions at the lighthouse. As you know, the campus incurred extensive damage from the storm. Part of the access road was completely washed out and destroyed, trees down, and our parking lot surface damaged. The Fisherman's Memorial, as well as several of the memorial benches, are not where they were. The line in front of the flagpole is strewn with boulders that got washed up during the storm. More importantly, we lost about four feet of shoreline, and the walkway, which you see pictures of, has suffered significant structural damage. I've had Gartley & Dorsky come out for a structural engineer. She will be giving us a report which I will give to Rick. I have also told Rick and Terry that we as the Lighthouse Committee will work with the town to do whatever we have to do to get it restored.

Elwell

Does the government have anything to do with that?

Nat Lyon

The Coast Guard only does the light and the foghorn.

Erb

We do not know yet about the Maine Municipal Association's insurance, property and casualty.

Conrad

What it might cover?

Nat Lyon

Right. The transfer from the Coast Guard to the town was the entire property which includes the lighthouse and the walkway. However, over the years, the committee has taken care of the maintenance and upkeep of the lighthouse and the walkway. But now we're into structure. If you look at the picture, and you look at the beginning of the walkway, you'll see this big piece of granite that supports it. It eroded underneath here, and that piece of granite is tilted. If you move forward and see the first pier, you see the gap between the walkways. That was the piece of granite that got washed out. As you move forward, the next pier, that's tilted some because the water got underneath the pier itself. So, if you kind of follow along, you can see a white pipe sticking up over to your left. That's part of the four-foot shoreline that we lost and that is a drainpipe from the roof. My fear is that if we get any more erosion on this big first piece of granite, the walkway is going to come down and whether or not it will break, whether or not it will split, I don't know. Chris Palfrey is my Vice Chair of Buildings and Grounds. We are going to try to get a piece of plank or something to put under this gap to try and help us.

Elwell

Would you be better off to have it removed safety wise?

Nat Lyon

What we've done is we blockaded the entrance, but that doesn't stop the curious.

Elwell

We could get more storms and it could be a while until you can get situated to get it fixed.

Nat Lyon

Rick and I need to find out whose dime it is going to be? If the town decides that's what they want to do with the walkway until we can get it reconstructed, that's fine with us.

Elwell

Do we have to get special permission from the Coast Guard to do that?

Nat Lyon

No. The town owns the property.

Elwell

If we remove a historical lighthouse, do we run into problems?

Nat Lyon

The problem might be the electricity that goes out to the lighthouse to keep the light going and you can't see it. It's on the other side, right along the walkway underneath and into the tower itself and that could be a problem.

Speaker

Those power feeds are exposed on the other side of that view that was presenting. You can see the power lines exposed there and conduits (Inaudible). Remove that, and you take away the electricity.

Nat Lyon

One of the only things I could think of is to get some riprap up there to support the whole thing, and at least to take the pressure off.

Elwell

Is that something we can do Rick?

Erb

We've talked to him about that.

Elwell

My big thing is the safety concern.

Nat Lyon

The other thing in the back of my mind too is that if we lose any more shoreline, we may have to fence that to keep people out of it because there is no safe way of getting down there now and unfortunately, or fortunately, there are a myriad of wires that we have no idea what they belong to that are trailing here and there. It's a concern, but as Rick asked, I wanted to bring you up to date on the more important damages that have occurred. As I said, as soon as I get the report from Gartley & Dorsky, the structural engineer, etc.

Thompson

Considering that it's a working lighthouse, the Coast Guard has to get power to it. I wonder if that doesn't fall into their purview.

Nat Lyon

It's my impression that the Coast Guard does not want to have anything to do with lighthouses anymore. We were fortunate this summer when we got hit by lightning, that they were able to replace the light and the foghorn and do all that stuff. But they really don't want to do it.

Cartwright

They consider them obsolete. Everyone has high tech direction finders.

Nat Lyon

Anyways, that's where we stand with the damage to the lighthouse.

Conrad

With respect to Randy's question about safety and doing everything we can to make sure people won't be injured there, tell us what you have done so far, and if there's anything else you think we ought to authorize.

Nat Lyon

Chris and I have built a barricade so that no one can get up to the front of the mobile walkway. I have a sign coming, "Danger-Unsafe-Keep Off". Generally, people are pretty good about that. However, there are always a few that are going to push the envelope. Until we get the report from Gartley & Dorsky that actually will detail how bad it is, I think we just have to wait. A couple of loads of riprap in that corner pending another storm, which we hope won't affect the power, is the best we can do.

Chris Caffrey

We have added it to our website to warn people not to use the walkway and the rocks.

Nat Lyon

I put it on the CDC for everybody on Facebook.

Elwell

I feel that we should help you guys do what you need to do to make it safe so someone doesn't get hurt or even washed away. It'd be a good idea to try to get a hold of someone in the federal government to find out if we cut power to that lighthouse, what happens. It would be worth a shot. If we cut the power to it, they are obviously going to come down.

Elwell

It isn't that long before your season opening and it's going to take a while to get this fixed.

Cartwright

If the walkway itself in reasonably good shape other than the underpinnings, you can save the walkway.

Nat Lyon

Yes. We just had it painted and taken care of this summer. There's a board that popped up which obviously could be put back down. The concern obviously is if this first piece of granite ever moves and that flops down, then what's going to happen. I would say that because the Coast Guard is paying for the

power to the light, if we were going to do anything with the electrical lines, we would have to talk to Southwest Harbor and see what they want to do.

Conrad

It may be an avenue for getting some financial federal money to help shore it up.

Elwell

They are working on grants from the feds right now.

Erb

With the disaster designation, we should be getting 75% reimbursement on everything. There are different rules for private property, but this is the town.

Conrad

We should put on the town website that it's unsafe.

Carr

Nat, can you come along the beach and get under it, if you go down the side trail?

Nat Lyon

If you're agile enough, you can get down underneath it.

Carr

Do you have concerns about that, people coming down along the beach and under it?

Elwell

I was thinking about young people who want to see the damage.

Nat Lyon

If the damage was more spectacular. This is not crashed, burned, broken or splintered and is kind of hidden. Given the time of year, we're not getting that many visitors. I'm curious. I think most people are respectful of what we've done, and they understand what's going on. I think if we can get some riprap in there and then follow up with the Coast Guard with a structural evaluation, that would tell us what we need to do. As I said, we as a committee will work with the town to do whatever we need to do to get it back to where we need it including fundraising if we have to.

You should all have a copy of the proposed expansion of the parking lot, and I know this comes up at not a very especially good time. However, since the summer of 2022, especially on Open Maine Lighthouse Day, it was quite apparent that the Marshall Point Lighthouse and Museum's parking lot needed to be expanded. Access is limited to one car at a time as you well know. Obviously, we have no

control over the volume of traffic or the visitors. In 2023 we had a record number 23,339 visitors to our museum from 51 states, DC and 31 countries. We indeed have become an international destination. I can also tell you that the total number of people who visit the campus in a years' time is another 20,000-40,000 people per year. We have 22 visitor parking spaces, plus three for our volunteer staff and one for our tenant. Per the agreement with the town through the Historical Society, the town insures the property and buildings, and plows and mows the campus. The Light House committee financially underwrites other maintenance and improvements. Since 2011, we have spent \$287,000 to preserve and enhance the lighthouse property and museum for the benefit of the public. The site plan in front of you is from our engineers, Gartley & Dorsky, whom we have hired to professionally assist us in this project. We have come to the point where we cannot go forward with the project as you, the Town of St. George own the property. We, the Marshall Point Lighthouse Committee, ask you to vote to give us permission to proceed with this vital project. The timeline will be determined. I'm happy to answer any and all questions.

Elwell

How many spaces is that?

Nat Lyon

They're saying 22. I'll be happy with 24. The deal is to take it from the existing parking lot and go behind the barn. The barn is the closest building there and then there's a generator. They proposed initially to come down through but with people coming out it would be a nightmare and probably kill more people. In order to be able to expand it, this is the best scenario for us.

Carr

You're going to lose a trail back in there, right?

Nat Lyon

It's going to lose a bit of it, but not a lot of it.

Thompson

What's the width of the connecting roadway there?

Ken Oelberger

16 feet.

Thompson

I think the connection between the parking lot is a little narrow for two-way traffic. I'd be concerned.

Nat Lyon

He has got it so we can go both ways.

Conrad

Is this something that goes to the Planning Board?

Nat Lyon

It will go to the Planning Board if you give us permission to continue on with the project. My hands are tied. I've done what I need to do to get a site plan. I've done what I need to do to bring this to you. We as a committee can't do anything further because you own the property. In order for us to continue on, we need your permission to do so, and then we will have to follow, just like we did with the berm with the Planning Board and have the whole site taken care of.

Cartwright

I'd like to comment. You brought this to us before and I know you really want this to happen. I want to go on record. I really think this is the wrong way to go. We don't want that many people down there at one time. Land trust properties will make a small parking lot so that it isn't overrun with people. It's a different way of looking at it. I love this place too, and I love to go down there. I think using the example of Open Lighthouse Day is a little misleading because that's one day out of the year and of course it's overrun at that point. You have all kinds of people. I've been down there in the summer a lot and haven't had a problem finding a place to park. The other argument to bring up is maybe if the parking lot is full, people just come back another time. I don't really want to see busloads of people coming down there. Where does it end? What if this parking lot fills up? Do we try to make more parking spaces? I think there's a limit to growth that we have to think about. And it's a beautiful, natural area now. I hate to see it paved over and turned into a parking lot. I appreciate all the work you do down there, and the museum is fantastic. I love it but I think it functions, the way it is now, adequately.

Nat Lyon

I would take exception to that because I'm probably there more than you are. We have no control over the number of people who come. You get a good day, and that parking lot can fill up like that. What happens is they start parking along the road. It's bad enough now. In the middle of a summer, and it may happen, if someone either falls down or gets hurt, you're not going to get an ambulance. You're not going to get a fire truck. I think that to serve the best interests of the lighthouse and the increasing number of people who are continually going to come, in order to take the pressure off Marshall Point Road is to give them more access to parking.

Elwell

Are you keeping the spaces near the bell?

Nat Lyon

Yes. The other 20 would give us a full capacity of about 38, close to 40 if you use the three or four that are in front of the bell. We have three that are for our volunteers who are at an age where they need to be closer to the museum.

Greg Soutiea

I think Steve was saying he noticed, starting at that Open Lighthouse Day if I'm correct, at that point there was a huge increase year over year. That's not just one day, right. My other comment is that I think we need to take into consideration how big of a factor this lighthouse is in the tourism for the entire peninsula. If you get people that are coming in their car, to go down there, they stop and walk around for a bit, walk over to the new Dip Net and general store, check out the museum and grab a bite to eat. If they don't get out of the car, if they go down and there's nowhere to park, they're going to go right back up to Route One. I think having an ample amount of parking and ample amount of space there for people to get out and see what's down here brings 40,000 people to the very end of our peninsula. It's the biggest draw besides the boat line. I think that needs to weigh heavily on this.

Elwell

If they parked there and walked to say the village, it isn't like stepping through the door and being there. By the time they do that, that car is going to sit there for two or three hours.

Gred Soutiea

I'm not suggesting that people would walk from the parking lot to the village I'm suggesting that once they're there, they are going to spend more time there.

Nat Lyon

We also do not allow buses or campers there. There's not a turnaround area adequate for them and for travel mobile homes.

Dave Percival

I'd like to say that not only visitors from away go to the lighthouse but people from the town go down there as well. So, you have that on a nice day, that's where you have a full traffic parking lot. Second, the volunteers are often asked about a good place to stay in town or a good restaurant. I can't tell you how many times we make reference to community, restaurants or places to stay. There's a benefit right there.

Speaker

I would like to go back to the safety issue. As school head, the first thing to worry about is safety. It has been spoken eloquently of the concerns about getting fire trucks down and people parking on the side there. I've been down there with people parking on the side of the road. How do you get in and out? It's not conducive to safety. You guys do a great job; it is not your fault.

Carr

Do you envision doing fundraising, as the committee, to at least defray some of the costs?

Conrad

You're not asking us to expend money today.

Nat Lyon

We are asking you to let us go pursue a project.

Carr

Would you, if you go forward, pursue funding grants?

Nat Lyon

Yes.

Thompson

How much consideration have you given for the longer term twenty years from now because the road and getting in there is going to be a major problem.

Nat Lyon

Right, I understand that, but I also look at what we have left for usable property. Once this parking lot expansion is done, if it goes forward. Otherwise, we've got to go to the right and as I understand it, that has a lot of problems with drainage and all that other stuff. This is why we put it where we put it. Twenty years from now, I probably won't be here so don't have to worry but to provide the space now to try to alleviate what we know is going to be a continuing visitation is what we were charged to do.

Thompson

We know in a good period of time from now we're going to have to have a different road that goes in there.

Speaker

It might be possible to consider using that as sort of an overflow water reservoir as the storms are most often in the winter, when you're not going to have very many parking there. I don't know how to do this. This is just hypothetical. In Holland they had dikes. They organized water in such a way that they can manage influx and outflow, maybe for Gartley & Dorsky there's a way to think about that as they're putting in the parking lot because parking lots can be an overflow.

Nat Lyon

To answer Wendy's question, obviously the first concern is getting the walkway squared away. So, if we have to fundraise for that in conjunction with the town, we're more than willing to do that. We will undertake to take care of the parking lot as best we can. If we feel that we would like a contribution from the town at some time, we will bring that forward. I think right now, the concern is the walkway, but we want the ability to go forward with this project so that we can bring forth fruition in a future period of time.

Ben Norton

For the Harbor Committee, as most of you know, in the early part of the Port Clyde Landing Project, there was a big argument with a lot of pushback from the local residents. We added 9000 square feet of increased area down there and the biggest reason for that was to create a parking area for safety in the village. We all know what happens down there and what has happened in the village safety wise. I worked there for eight years. A lot of bagging and filling, turn around the launching ramp, the present town landing and the whole concept. I think Randy will bear me out on this one. For that project from the beginning was (Inaudible) safety in the village and a lot of pushback in the beginning for most residents thinking if we add on more parking spaces it is going to bring more people in. People are going to come. It's proven. Adding 20 parking spaces here or there is not going to bring more people in. It's going to make a safer environment for people who want to come.

Thompson

Support local.

On a motion from Conrad, seconded by Elwell, to authorize the Lighthouse Committee to move forward with seeking planning approval and then coming back to us with next required steps, and by a 4-1 vote the motion carried (Cartwright voted against the motion).

Cartwright

I guess I'm a minority of one in opposing it and I wanted to say I still appreciate all that you do and you have a wonderful museum. I just think there is a school of thought that if you don't add too many parking spaces, it does actually keep the numbers of people that come to a place down. It is a small museum, and you can only fit so many people in the museum, and you can only fit so many people on the grassy area around the lightkeeper's house. The character and the experience for people changes if there's a huge crowd. If it's a smaller number of people, it's more special.

Ben Norton

There's not a sign up here on Creek Hill that says the parking lot is full for people coming down Route 131 on this peninsula. If you put him up there telling people not to come down because the parking lot is full, they're still going to come down. The best you can do is try to control it a little bit once they are down here.

Nat Lyon

Add people that use the boat line and now we're talking 80,000 people a year. I know they have their upper parking lot, but the lighthouse and the Monhegan Boat Line are the biggest draws on this peninsula.

Other Business

Erb

I need some signatures. I have a supplemental tax warrant for a piece of property that had a computer error, I think. They did not receive a bill. That's \$510.60 and does require your signatures as Town's Assessors. Also, two abatements. One is a mobile home that was moved off premises so that is now zero tax dollars. The other one is the Assessor's Agent agreed with some people who appealed the value of their property and so you will see a slight reduction.

The tax warrant was signed.

Thompson

While I'm signing this, do we plan to put some riprap along the shore and as needed just to protect what you have?

Conrad

I won't be here or on Zoom on March 11th. If that's going to be a really important day and you're going to be out of town, should we think about having a different meeting?

Elwell

Rick could run the meeting.

Erb

Are we talking about the finalizing budget?

Conrad

Right. Do you think we should move that to a different day so we're all here or at least four of us are?

Elwell

We have to have a quorum to do it.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Conrad, seconded by Cartwright, to adjourn the Select Board meeting, and by a unanimous vote, the motion carried, and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Tammy Taylor
Recording Secretary
Town of St. George, Maine