

Select Board Meeting

March 2, 2022

6:01 pm meeting called to order by Neil Oleson.

Select Board members present: Mike Bedini, Terry Green, Neil Oleson

Select board members absent: None

Others present: Jim White, Christine Dobbert, Vicki Winchell, Pam White, Brenda Church, Kevin Poirot, Al Bedini, Kirby Thwing Jr., Janet Bartlett, Tim Bartlett, Stephanie Pare

Mike Bedini made a motion to approve the minutes from the 2/16/22 meeting. Terry Green seconded. Unanimous.

Selectmen:

- Brenda Church, Building Inspector and Code Enforcement Officer, attended the meeting at the request of the Selectboard to discuss residents having difficulty reaching Brenda for permits and various other needs. Brenda responded that she has difficulty with her cell phone receiving voicemail. If she is in a bad service area and she's received messages with no name or contact information she then cannot get a phone number because the message came in when she did not have service. She has recommended the best way for people to make contact would be to text her or email her at bchurch123@gmail.com.
- Mike also asked Brenda what sort of recourse the town has against homes that go against the town bylaw of having unregistered junk vehicles on their property. Brenda said it is a tough area to enforce. As the Building Inspector she has no authority, only as the Code Enforcement Officer. She can issue a fine to the resident that accumulates daily until they fix the problem. When they don't pay the fine, the town can then get a lien put on the property. To issue the fine she would need to have a detailed letter of complaint from an abutter. It cannot be done simply because a Selectboard member notices a property. She can then take that letter, along with the town bylaws to a judge. The judge has the final decision. She has seen this work only 50% of the time and even then, it does not mean the homeowner will pay the fines. She does not know what the answer is. It is an issue in practically every town and there is little that can be done.
- The Certificate of Compliance for Wi-Valley completion of phase 4B was presented to the Selectmen for signing. Kirby Thwing Jr. attended to answer questions regarding Wi-Valley.
 - Kevin Poirot asked what are the benchmarks for completion? Kirby answered there were four phases and phase 4 was split into phase 4A and 4B. Once phase 4B hit a completion of 50 homes it was agreed Wi-Valley would be paid. Stephanie Pare asked if the 50 need to be actually working or only connected? Kirby said they should be consistently working. Kevin Poirot requested to see the data showing the homes working. Kirby said he would get him that report.
 - Kirby stated there were 337 customers actively using Wi-Valley, 80 of which were in the Town of Florida. They are trying to determine where customers cannot be connected. If there are any issues contact Kirby at (413) 339-0124 or via email at kthwingjr@gmail.com and he would contact Wi-Valley or Otelco to get help.

Selectmen (continued):

- Kevin asked if there was any thought by the board of “cutting their losses” and starting fresh with a new internet service? The board replied yes, they are in the process of researching options. Christine informed him one company she looked into estimated a cost to the town of approximately \$2-\$2.5 million, which does not include bringing the service to the residents homes. Kevin said he has a contact at Wirewest and he will pass along the information to Christine.
- Kirby requested the board sign the Certificate so that Wi-Valley could receive their funds. Neil asked if this would help with service getting better? It was made clear the payment of this phase is for benchmarks already met and this funding would not help the current service. However not signing the certificate would dissolve the towns membership in the four-district town agreement, and Wi-Valley would still get their money anyways through the state eventually. This could potentially leave the current Wi-Valley customers without customer service, moving them down to less importance if they need help with any issues. Terry understood this will put money in Wi-Valley’s pocket but was concerned about all the residents who have paid their money for a subpar service. Mike agreed it was a lot of money for something that does not work well. After much discussion the board agreed to sign the certificate allowing Wi-Valley to receive their next payment since the project is completely grant funded and there would be no way for the town to use that grant for anything else.
- Mike Bedini made a motion to sign the Certificate of Compliance for Phase 4B for Wi-Valley. Terry Green Seconded. Unanimous.
- Kevin Poirot asked if there was any interest in starting a volunteer Broadband Committee. Mike asked how many people he felt it should be. Kevin thought 3 would be good. They instructed Kevin to attend the next meeting, bringing 2 other volunteers and they would then be appointed.
- Pam White requested the next two or possibly three meetings be held at the Senior Center due to the size of the crowd that would be attending as there are several boards coming to review budgets. The board agreed.
- Jim White presented his letter of resignation from the Memorial Committee.
 - Terry Green made a motion to accept the resignation of Jim White from the Memorial Committee. Mike Bedini seconded. Unanimous.
- Terry has been looking into various funding options. She has met with Rebecca Novac from Recap Solutions. They help small towns, through the USDA, who need buildings for various reasons. One of their grants is 75/25 funding. Terry thinks maybe they could help with funding for engineering studies that would be needed. Christine said they had researched some a while ago that didn’t go anywhere due to the restrictions and requirements. Terry thought there could possibly be other grants that would help with the 25% balance. The service of Recap Solutions is completely free. Terry would like to move forward with meeting with them to discuss the possibilities further. She was discussing a larger sized multipurpose building possibly combining the FD, Town Hall and Library into one. Neil asked if they would need to be all in one or can they do three separates building? Terry will look into it further. Christine asked if the company could come here and speak the entire board? Terry said possibly but preferred to do a small group at first to see if this company can even meet their needs.

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Selectmen (continued):

- Terry discussed another grant, MVP. Christine said she had looked into that previously. One of the requirements had been that the state would tell specific property owners they have to purchase flood insurance. Doing all the requirements would only offer the town the opportunity to apply for their grants but did not guarantee they would get any. Neil felt it didn't hurt to look into it again. Terry will continue to check into it.
- A stove has been purchased for the Senior Center from webrestaurant.com for \$1349.00 and is being delivered on March 3, 2022. HA George will be coming up next week to install it.
- Terry was reviewing the town website and found errors she wanted to discuss. One of which was the posting of executive session selectboard minutes. She contacted the Attorney General's office to clarify how they should be posted. Any minutes with personnel information (not including the contract negotiations) should not be posted for public viewing as all personnel issues are protected by law. She also found no employee policies, segregation of duties or employee handbooks. These should be completed to protect the town. Several bylaws are very outdated as well. Christine said the planning board would need to be the one to review the bylaws.
- Terry brought up that Christine doubled as the dog officer during the day and didn't feel it was fair for Christine to have to use her personal vehicle to pick up animals and it poses as a liability to the town. It was recently discussed that the highway personnel should not be using personal vehicles or equipment. Neil said they could designate a highway department vehicle to use.
- Stephanie Pare thanked the board for allowing cross training to happen. Ericka Oleson has recently gone out on maternity leave and it was very helpful that Stephanie was cross trained.

Jim White, Highway Department Supervisor:

- Cleaning up snow and ice.
- Servicing trucks
- Accumulated 8 yards of free scrap fire wood for the garage.
- Still no issues with anyone taking excessive amounts of sand
- Called Rick Leclair in to help plow during the last storm since they are down one person
- Truck 1 is back.
- Sand was recently delivered. Salt coming this week and 2 more loads coming next week. Well below budget for the season so far.
- Mike asked Jim to check into North County Road, near Danny Clark's house and down. There used to be a ditch there that the water ran through. After the road was redone they took the ditch out. Now there is several inches of ice build up every winter along the road. Jim will address it this summer.

Christine Dobbert, Town Administrator:

- Christine gave the Selectmen information for the Selectmen's Association meeting that would cost \$35 each. There is also a free breakfast meeting being hosted by the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition that anyone can attend.
- Vision rates are going down. The vision is 100% employee funded.

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Christine Dobbert, Town Administrator (continued):

- Three applications received for the open Highway Department position: Mike Hubby, Kurt LeClair and Mike Gleason. Interviews will take place at the next meeting on Wednesday, March 16, 2022 starting at 4:30 pm.

Mike Gleason, Fire Chief:

- The toilet at the FD cannot flush. The board told him to pump it out again. If that does not help, to reach out to A-1 Septic to order a Port-a-Potty for the time being.

Public Comment:

- Tim Bartlett mentioned the highway department has not bought a new truck in several years, only older used trucks. He was wondering if there were any plans in the future to purchase a new vehicle as it would also be good for the town to more man hours doing work versus fixing older trucks. The board informed Tim that Jim is in the process of researching one now for next fiscal year.

7:58 pm Terry Green made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Bedini seconded. Unanimous.