



TOWN OF WARNER

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Faith Minton
Allan N Brown
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Diane Ricciardelli,
Town Administrator
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SELECT BOARD MEETING DRAFT MINUTES

November 21, 2023 6:30 pm
Lower Meeting Room Warner Town Hall 5 E Main St

1. Open the Meeting & Roll Call

Chair Seidel opened the meeting at 6:31pm.

Present were Harry Seidel (Chair), Faith Minton (via Zoom), Allan Brown, Georgia Flanders, and Butch Burbank, interim Town Administrator

Others Present: Michele Courser (Town Clerk), Clyde Carson (Finance Officer), Judy Newman-Rogers, (Selectboard Admin Asst), Police Chief Chandler, Ed Mical (EM Director), John Leavitt

2. Review of Minutes

October 10, 2023

Page 2

Bottom of page should read "that process"

Under first paragraph: should say they would "ask for" not "get" an easement at Town Meeting

Next paragraph: Seidel said "the owner" not "the builder"

Same paragraph: "up to the owner" not "the builder"

Sprinkler and alarm "fire suppression" company, not "fire company"

Page 3

Faith re-wrote the paragraph about the Block Grant. It would be cut and pasted into the minutes. She felt the minutes were inaccurate in this section.

Chair Seidel said in the second paragraph, "The sale of the property will get the Town's tax dollars back. It wasn't important to him to sell it as a more expensive lot."

After the motion: "scope of work and suggested to do the minimum needed to bring the building up to code."
"They must protect the egress assemblies in the building."

Page 4 – Discussion about the cell tower: option #3. Add "10 years."

Chair Seidel said with regard to the non-compete clause and the \$20,000 sign-on bonus, should the motion add this additional amount to the total? Butch said that there may be a window, but the legal team is shipping

the final documents to the Town for signature. They will have to see if the \$20,000 was added. They still have time to negotiate this.

Page 5 – Chair Seidel said he meant that: “a motion *could* be filed by the Storches for a rehearing” instead of “would need to.”

It was moved by Allan Brown and seconded by Faith Minton to approve the October 10, 2023 minutes with corrections. The motion was approved unanimously.

Minutes of November 2, 2023

Page 3 – there were some blanks due to technological issues with the recording. It was suggested to add “inaudible” in those sections where the blanks or question marks were.

Page 4 – Other Business, #3 should be funded “at their”...

It was moved by Faith Minton and seconded by to approve the minutes of November 2, 2023 as amended. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Appointments

There were none.

4. Old Business

Mr. Allan said the contract for the assessor needed to be signed by the end of December. Butch said that the assessor the Town has had, Mr. Marzoff, has declined the offer to do the Town’s assessing as he does not have the staff to enable him to do the work. He was happy to come speak with the Town to provide some advice on how to move forward. Butch added that Elizabeth Labbe, Assessing Clerk, is getting estimates from Vision and Avatar for the 2024/2025 Town Assessment.

Allan said it is important to get the new software and get people trained on it prior to the assessment. Butch said this task has moved to his #1 priority.

Allan cautioned his colleagues that every year, funds need to be put in the Capital Reserve to make sure they have enough to pay for the assessment. He saw blank spaces for future Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), and he was worried that this would result in not enough funding. Somewhere along the line, not enough funds were appropriated and so they are short for this upcoming assessment. Butch agreed that funds should be put aside each year for this expense, which they can easily plan for since they will know the total and the deadline.

5. New Business

A. Debit Card

It was moved by Harry Seidel to request that Ginger Marsh obtain a Sugar River Bank debit card issued to the Town with a \$1,000 limit. The motion was approved unanimously.

B. Rachel Lair Taxes

This individual sent her taxes to the physical address of the Tax Collector’s office and not the PO Box. Interest of a little over \$67 was accrued. It was thought that this may be a common problem and that Ms. Lair should be refunded the interest accrued.

It was moved by Allan Brown and seconded by Faith Minton to refund Rachel Lair the amount of \$67.76. The motion was approved unanimously.

C. Town Report

Judy said an email was sent to the Town by R.C. Brayshaw Printing Company to ask if the Town would use them again for the printing of the Town Report. There was no estimate provided. Clyde recalled that other than Brayshaw, the State prison printers printed the report once. Chair Seidel said he didn't mind going with Brayshaw as they have always done a good job and they are a local business. Others agreed.

It was moved by Allan Brown and seconded by Faith Minton to continue having R.C. Brayshaw print the Warner Town Report. The motion was approved unanimously.

D. 2024 Budget – Employee Wages

Butch said Diane had plugged in a 5% increase throughout the budget as a placeholder. He has talked with Clyde about the Northeast Index increase for COLA being 3.2% and perhaps that would be an appropriate wage increase to explore. Butch thought the Board could ask Clyde to put together sample increases from 1% to 5% increase, to show how they affect the budget. Last year the Town gave the employees full health and dental benefits, including family plans. It would be good to see what each percentage does to the budget.

Allan said he spoke with all the departments himself, and he saw the cost of the insurance increases. He asked department heads how they felt the employees would feel if for this upcoming year, they got just a COLA increase. The main feeling was that if the employees got to keep their insurance, they would be ok with a COLA increase.

Chair Seidel said he thought 5% sounded great in the beginning of the budget process, but seeing how things are going, it looks like there is going to be an increase in taxes. He then felt that perhaps maybe they could just do a 1% or 2% increase, but didn't feel this was appropriate. Chair Seidel said what sounded best to him would be to provide a COLA increase.

Allan said that COLA shouldn't be ignored and the employees shouldn't be shorted on that.

Chief Chandler said his staff is very appreciative of the medical and dental and have no issue with the proposal of a 3.2% increase for COLA.

It was moved by Harry Seidel and seconded by Allan Brown to direct Clyde Carson to include a 3.2% COLA adjustment in the budget. The motion was approved unanimously.

It was discussed as to whether the COLA would be given retroactively after Town Meeting, from January 1, 2024. Clyde said that he recalled the Town started providing the adjustments in January so they didn't need a retroactive payment. Butch said doing it this way is good for the employees but they could hear complaints across the board because they haven't passed the budget yet at Town Meeting. It was noted that the Town functions using deficit spending anyway.

Chair Seidel said the Transfer Station budget would hopefully be reviewed at the next meeting.

E. Schedule Remaining Budget Discussions

Butch said they are going to meet once/week (on Tuesdays) at 5pm going through January (and possibly into February if necessary) so they can pull the budget together. He suggested posting each Tuesday as a meeting, but the Board has an option as to whether or not comments will be taken from the public. Work sessions do not require that public comment be taken. He added that there are some budgets that the Board has yet to hear, so those will need to happen soon.

Chair Seidel said that Michael Cutting, Chair of the Budget Committee, asked that if possible, the Selectmen could provide the budgets by December 7th instead of the 14th to allow the Budget Committee ample time to review the information. Butch said that this was not an impossible task, but they would need to keep on schedule and work efficiently to get the information together by that time.

F. 2023 Vacation Carry-Over

Chief Chandler said that they aren't generally allowed to carry over more than the 80 hours of vacation and one personal day allowed, into the next year. This request is to allow employees, who for some reason, were not able to take their vacation time within that year, to carry over more time than allowed.

Butch said that he understands this request, but they should be cautioned that this could eventually catch up with them; the vacation time could be carried over to the next year and they would be paid at a higher rate of pay. Chief Chandler said that the understanding was that the employees had to take those extra carry-over hours within the next fiscal year. Butch said that would be fine, but he stressed that those hours need to be tracked carefully.

G. Encumbrances

Judy said she put this item on the agenda because it was informational and there was an upcoming deadline, year end, whereby Department Heads need to inform the Town that they would be encumbering 2023 funds into the next year. There was some discussion about encumbering funds and that it is a common practice, especially with Public Works. It was noted by John Leavitt that the Town is supposed to have an invoice and an obligation to pay in order to encumber funds. He felt this practice had been abused by the Town of Warner for years.

G. Appointments

Laura Russell – Warner River Management Advisory Committee

This is a re-appointment and Judy believed it was for a three-year term.

It was moved by Harry Seidel and seconded by Faith Minton to reappoint Laura Russell to the Warner River Management Advisory Committee. The motion was approved unanimously.

Sarah Johnson – Economic Development Committee

Chair Seidel said Sarah has been coming regularly to the Economic Development Committee meetings and would like to join.

It was moved by Faith Minton and seconded by Allan Brown to appoint Sarah Johnson to the Warner Economic Development Committee. The motion was approved unanimously.

H. Job Expectations of the New Town Administrator

Judy said she put this item on the agenda at the request of Chair Seidel. Chair Seidel did not recall asking for this.

Butch said he spent about two hours that day looking for the Personnel Policy and job descriptions for the Town. The most recent job descriptions were from 2012. He thought that this should be updated and he could begin working on this task. Butch thought that Department Heads should be involved. He commented that the Safety Committee did a great job in 2022 with their Joint Loss Management Committee (JLMC), which should be part of the Personnel Policy for the Town.

Chair Seidel said Diane (previous TA) did a lot of IT and Communications things. He hoped that the next town administrator could also do these sorts of things. Butch opined that Diane was an anomaly; she came from an IT background so it may be difficult to find someone with these skills for the TA position. This is why towns hire an IT person, and he thought this should be done in Warner as well.

Marianne said the job descriptions are listed on the Town's website in the section about documents. Butch said this was not a complete list. He thought all of the descriptions should be pulled together.

I. Fire Budget

Chair Seidel said that 75% of the Town's fire calls are medical calls, and a great amount of those calls are coming from Pine Rock Manor, a for-profit business, in Town. Pine Rock is using the Town's resources and it is costing the Town to subsidize those calls. He thought the Town needed to talk about this. Pine Rock may want to hire someone there to manage those types of calls so the Town doesn't have to do it.

Allan said he has seen private ambulance services there to transport. They get paid by the insurance company and through Pine Rock. He wasn't sure if the Town could charge for their services, as the people who live there are citizens of the Town. If the citizens are transported privately, they will pay that service. Chair Seidel suggested charging the business for calls and then maybe they will decide to hire their own person to work there and handle those calls. It was noted by Allan that Pine Rock Manor pays taxes and may have a problem with being charged for using the services available in the Town.

6. Public Comment

John Leavitt said he recently attended the CIP meeting with the Budget Committee. The requests for this year are up over \$800,000. What was missing from the CIP was the Selectmen's intention of putting in a warrant article for the Community Center. If they put in the number they were discussing at an earlier meeting, that would bring the CIP up to about a million dollars. John said that perhaps the Town will need to cut some services to be able to afford the increases in the CIP.

Allan thought maybe the equipment would need to be kept longer, to drop some amounts in other capital reserve accounts. He understood that later on that could cost the Town money as well. But they can't keep paying the tax increases they did this year. John said that he has seen this problem coming, as the Selectmen kept making cuts and "kicking the can down the road" with several items, such as the Community Center. In previous years, the Selectmen would keep the CIP requests down to \$500,000 - \$600,000. Allan agreed. He added that the taxpayers can't afford to keep paying these increases.

John said that he didn't believe the Community Center needed to be "brought up to code." All they need to do is what they "have to do" for safety issues. Allan said he agreed, but even the safety issues are expensive to fix.

Ed Mical asked if the Selectmen's meetings are going to be held at 5pm normally now, or was this just for budgeting season. He said the Board skipped over this change and he thought it was important, as it may be difficult for the public to get to meetings at that time.

Allan said the meetings of the Selectmen are meant for doing the public business and as far as he was concerned, 5pm was fine to start. Chair Seidel said the meetings are long and they prefer to meet at 5pm. Butch said the time of the meetings is a board decision. The Selectmen all agreed they'd like to continue starting the meetings at 5pm.

7. Town Administrator's Report

Butch reiterated that job descriptions and personnel policies need to be updated and pulled together.

The calendar he provided to the Board shows the 5pm meetings, beginning December 1st.

There was some discussion about the website and noticing of meetings. Butch said the Town needs to address bringing the website in-house; the current method of being allowed to only have one PDF on the site at a time to show an upcoming meeting is ridiculous. Butch thought there was plenty of talent in-house at the Town Office to better manage the site. He thought two people on staff should be able to update the site and it shouldn't be subject to a third party. This should be done sooner than later.

Butch said they also need to understand that the law is that the meeting has to be posted in two public places, typically Town Hall and the Post Office, which is being done. Now people are used to technology and they go to the website to look for meeting information. The Town has been posting meetings appropriately. He understood that the website was initially created by a town committee and then someone gave the management of the site to a third party that won't allow for posting as needed. Butch said that the Town must own the website. He would continue to determine how this can change.

(Harry asked if a motion was needed but no motion was made. He started one earlier in the discussion but it was not completed or seconded.)

Manifest

Motion for the Select Board to approve the following previously signed manifests:

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- Accounts Payable check numbers 7740 through 7758, dated 11/9/2023, in the amount of \$43556.35.
- Accounts Payable check numbers 7759 through 7760, dated 11/14/2023, in the amount of \$40,854.68 for the November 16th bi-weekly payroll and federal tax deposits.
- Bi-weekly payroll checks numbers 3510 through 3519 and direct deposit check numbers E01217 through E01241 dated 11/16/2023 for a net payroll of \$40,854.68.
- Accounts Payable check numbers 7761 through 7774, dated 11/16/2023, in the amount of \$19,905.95.

Motion to authorize the Select Board to approve and order the Treasurer to sign the following manifest:

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- Accounts Payable check numbers 7775 through 7797, dated 11-22/2023, in the amount of \$70,457.97.

Voice Vote to approve, followed by a second. Voice vote all in favor.

With no other business, Chair Seidel called for a motion to adjourn.

It was moved by Allan Brown and seconded by Faith Minton to adjourn the selectmen's meeting of November 21, 2023. The motion was approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of Warner
Edits, Judy Newman-Rogers,
Selectboard Administrative Assistant