

**TOWN OF ACTON SELECT BOARD MEETING**

**January 29, 2025**

**6:00pm**

- 1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- 2. WARRANTS/BILLS - Signed**
- 3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

**Norwood made a motion to approve the agenda for January 29, 2025; Walsh seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.**

**MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

**Denekamp made a motion to approve the minutes for January 8 and 15, 2025; Walsh seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.**

**4. TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WEEKLY UPDATE**

- A. Dennis from O'Donnell's was in last week to do some field work; he reviewed a few properties on West Shore Drive with an appeal and a few other miscellaneous building issues plus picked up all the homestead exemptions we had for him. A general catch up.
- B. A conversation was held with Joe Lenkowski today because he is currently handling a couple of things:
  - At special town meeting, the voters approved the land on Young's Ridge Road. Apparently, the property has been in a mortgage since the beginning for which the town was not aware of, but the property owner is working to try and get the mortgage released, just on that section. At this point, it is still pending. A couple of extensions have been signed with the Board's authorization allowing another 30 to 60 days before he comes and asked the Select Board on what they want him to do. The mortgage company is requesting some very financially expensive things from the property owner such as an assessment, survey and misc. other items. The property owner is trying to decide as they are holding a deposit of \$1,000.
  - Sebago Tech dropped off a large map which basically shows the property lines to now include the monuments. Lenkowski is working with Ted Wright from Sebago to write up the easement for the church, draft some documents which we can then meet with them to review.
  - Lenkowski is also dealing with a small roof issue; there was a roof extension added many years ago for which the town agreed with certain circumstances unless the property was sold. The property has changed ownership to immediate family. Mr. Lenkowski is working on whether or not the Town can at least recoup the fees that were filed at the registry.
- C. Friday, January 31, 2025 is the last day for dog license registrations to be completed without a late fee of \$25.00 per dog.

## 5. LIAISON UPDATE

McGurty: Municipal Finance, Warrant & Finance Committee, APAT

- The auditors have reported that they have completed their fieldwork to prepare the statements; they are still in a review process whereas they go through various processes of review. Expectation is audit will be released shortly but no date has been given as of yet. An extension with the state has been filed; extension pushes date until the end of March.
- Requested through Town Administrator to have Mark Roy work on developing a capital budget for the town. This is something the Select Board should take action on tonight to make sure that the whole Board is in agreement. There has been a lot of discussions about reserves and what they should be used for; at town meeting there was a motion for them to be used for tax relief. This has been done, however, what's missing from the discussion, is an understanding of what our capital needs are and the only source we have is the surplus or undesignated reserves. The thought was to have a capital budget done reflecting 5 to 7 years (not 10) and an understanding of why these items are needed. The work that the Capital Improvement Committee will be used as a beginning basis as they have already reached out to all the department heads to develop a funding plan. Considering the undesignated reserves as our funding source, it will need to be determined what the tolerance is to be going lower than the levels set in policy. Once all the capital needs are determined, consideration of what the impact would be on the tax rate if we were actually committed to develop the funding for those capital items over a set period of time. Not knowing what the outcome will be, we will be able to at least have intelligent discussions around reserve tax relief. If we continue to just support tax relief, we will not be able to support capital improvement needs.

Town Administrator indicated that Mr. Roy was contacted and would also like to review the policy related to this. These go hand in hand and there may be a piece missing from the policy which should be included. He will work on a draft to be presented next week in regards to the number to be used if the Board supports the work.

The Town Administrator also informed the Select Board that \$300,000 was moved from Wisdom Tree to Partners based on the School Warrant, Accounts Payable and Payroll. McGurty thanked her for the information and noted he also gets notifications when these acts are done. Town Administrator responded she wanted the public know this was being spent down but meanwhile it is earning better interest. Discussion ensued. The Board agreed.

Walsh: Transfer Station, Mary Grant Committee, Animal Control Officer

- Transfer Station hauling bids are out.
- The Transfer Station budget has been worked on and is being nailed down. Worked with W & F liaison, department head, Town Administrator and Treasurer making appropriate changes but it is ready for the Board and will be on next week's agenda.
- Mary Grant – no update
- ACO – Busy as ever. Had a brief conversation with him last night and there is a lot going on in Acton alone; he also serves Shapleigh

Norwood: Fire Department, Recreation Committee, Conservation Forest Committee

- Had monthly meeting with the Fire Chief and also met with the Warrant & Finance liaison to go over the budget last Monday.
- Had a weekly meeting with the Rec Director. Received updates; looking into Baseball as it is coming up soon.
- Conservation Forrestry Committee's next meeting is February 11, 2025 and that there was business later on the agenda.

The Town Administrator asked Norwood if in the future, could there be some conversations regarding the Forrester and whether that position will be a stipend or not; use on call like electrician and plumber as needed, or if going to leave it the way it is; a warrant article may need to be considered.

Denekamp: School Department, Planning Board/Land Use, Cemetery Committee

- Attended the second round of the School Department's budget meetings last Thursday night.
- Planning Board – The CEO has received two payments of the three fines levied; the other property owners will probably appeal.
- The Cemetery Committee had a meeting on Friday night and shared an interesting piece of information which has been passed on to the Town Administrator. The Cemetery Committee would like to have all the cemeteries in town put on the GIS tax maps. The Town Administrator has already provided copies of the maps to the committee when this came up a few months ago for them to mark the maps where every cemetery was located to be sent to the cartographer. Friday, Google made a presentation regarding cemeteries marked on Google maps. Where each cemetery is denoted, you would click on the marker and all the information available will appear in the side bar as well as the ability to fly over the point. The Town Administrator provided the information for Google to update.

Winchell Jr.: Roads & Road Committee, Municipal Grounds

- Tried to contact Mr. Ward regarding Article 43 to see how the process was coming. Further discussions will need to be had regarding funding the program or not.
- Winchell indicated he needed to speak with Grondon as the Town's electrical bill went up a bit plus another issue which surfaced when the Town suffered from a power outage last Wednesday. When the power outage occurred, the generator worked for a while but then it started kicking off. What was realized was, with the mini split that was put in, the addition of the trailer, it drew 60 amps. The furnace took 60 amps to run which was too much for the generator and kept kicking it off. Winchell indicated he would have to get reimbursement for some power and try to see if they can set up their own meter if possible. If not, an agreement will need to be reached. Also, if power is lost again, a plan will need to be developed to see if the generator can be disconnected from the trailer. Talking with the electrician, he thinks we need to upgrade the size of the generator because with the load size we have here, it is maxed out.

Discussion ensued regarding mini splits, options for upgrades, other uses for replaced generator and Grondon discussions to be had regarding disconnecting.

**6. DEPARTMENT HEAD / COMMITTEE CHAIR UPDATES - None**

**7. OLD BUSINESS - None**

**8. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Budget Presentation – Fire Chief**

Board had a copy of the Fire Chief's presentation. McGurty asked that the presentation be focused on the largest increase/decreases and loop back to the other detail if needed.

- Operating Budget:
  - Salary lines – 3.5% as recommended by the Board
  - The 45% down on the Fire Department insurance was restructured as an employee was not using it.
  - Employee benefits – these are required and go up every year. Included is Retirement, Maine PERs, unemployment, etc. McGurty indicated this was a large increase and asked why. Town Administrator explained that the 2024 actuals (\$468), the Fire Department MEPEERS has been paid out of Municipal Government. So that is the error. The \$35,000 is accurate as employees stay with us longer, their benefits increase. That is accurate based on his staff now. McGurty asked if the 2025 budget was going to be adequate to cover the 2025 expense. Response was yes. McGurty then stated there was a 25% increase from \$28,000 to \$35,000 and what was that all about? Town Administrator responded that the \$28,000 was not calculated properly; the \$35,000 is accurate.
  - The SCBA line was reduced to keep in line with the last couple of years of spending. It was not all cut but an assessment will be redone next year to see where it lies; especially with the new SCBA fill station.
  - Protective Equipment (turnout gear) – a third set was added to this item line. The Chief explained he had been trying for a few years to get a third set and they were behind in purchasing turnout gear. This budget has been to maintain equipment on hand; originally gear was bought in 2017 and expires in 2027, that is why the reoccurring attempt to buy three sets. McGurty asked if this was a safety issue to be where expected. Response was not yet. McGurty urged that if it became a safety issue for the Fire Chief to bring it to the Board. The Chief explained they were going through data inspections right now for the next 2 months and will have better data when those inspections are complete. He is also looking into what to do when the gear expires in 2027.
  - Dues of membership was cut completely. Items drawn from that are now contracted services and rarely used so he decided to cut it entirely.
  - Telephone – Out of his control but with talking to the Treasurer our rates have gone up thus the \$1,000 increase to cover. McGurty asked the Town Administrator if this was being seen across the departments; Town Administrator responded yes.

- Equipment repair and maintenance – Reduced to keep in line with past spending. Strictly used for all loose equipment; if it is strictly related to vehicles, it comes out of the vehicle maintenance.
  - Miscellaneous- When we get to restructuring it, at some point, it should say uniform allowances because that is what we buy. The full timers get uniforms, boots, the stuff required to run; the Fire Chief’s uniforms are also included here. There is an increase in these items and thus he made the line increase by \$500. Practice is to frontload a lot of the stuff here in the spring so that it is good all year; that’s why the account doesn’t show a lot expended right now.
- Special Project Budgets
    - Requesting to order another ambulance. The current ambulance is a 2017 with 80,000 miles on it and there is a 3-year wait for a new one. The Fire Chief doesn’t want to wait until the current ambulance is deteriorated so bad that we can’t use it for extended service times when it’s broken down. The goal is to (if we can get a new one soon enough) the current ambulance becomes backline and possibly stretch a few more years out of it by not using it as an everyday truck. But, on those days where there are multiple calls back to back or the ambulance is on another call, there is another truck to perform those services. Right now, the town has to rely on Mutual Aid responses to assist and those calls are going up.

Winchell responded that the Board knew this was coming and talked about it. Discussion ensued. Chief Ham indicated when this truck was purchased they would also need to purchase all the equipment needed on it to transport. High ticket items included stretcher, cardiac monitors, CBR device, and stair chair. These are built into the price being presented. Price was listed at \$650,000 so that when it went out to bid, the amount wouldn’t be short changed.

McGurty asked about if this equipment will be customized or off the rack. The Fire Chief explained that the entire piece would be customized; it will be an exact match to what we already have in place; just a new platform. McGurty stated that he assumed the standard one that they sell must be certified for this purpose and if so, what would that unit cost? Fire Chief explained that there was no standard one because everybody’s needs are different, so they build them custom to order. They have built demo units, but did not know what those availabilities are, time frames and cost. His goal was to buy something almost exactly what we have to reduce the training needed.

Walsh commented that he could see that reasoning with a fire engine but believed with an ambulance you could do a stock price which will get the price down and receive it a lot quicker.

Winchell indicated that what the Fire Chief should do, was to give the Select Board some options so that they could get a better idea of costs and what the pros and cons were; example why you are interested in the unit that you are over stock options. There is no doubt that what you want is what we should probably ought to have but the standard one is only \$450,000. A basically in the box commercial chassie and if there is not a lot of difference, it should be considered. The Fire Chief responded that with that, the greatest thing he has seen in his career while working on an ambulance frequently is that the truck fails in a shorter amount of time. This happened in Sanford. The brand didn't meet the needs required because it was a stock unit; compartments are smaller, things don't fit right, etc. He will explore as requested.

McGurty asked when the need arises to use the second ambulance if the staffing was available. The Fire Chief responded, yes every time; off duty staff comes in. McGurty further pursued whether the Fire Chief had any goals to bring on a second staff. The Fire Chief responded that all along it has been his goal to have eight full timers (2 people per day; currently at four ); currently we are meeting the need as the department is lucky to have dedicated on-call personnel.

McGurty asked about looking into grants for this equipment. The Fire Chief responded that the success of getting a grant for this type of equipment was based on replacing equipment not adding equipment. The Fire Chief and Deputy Fire Chief just applied for that same grant being discussed to replace Fire Engine 1 which is approaching it's life expectancy. Grant parameters were discussed.

McGurty asked if the equipment was ordered now, could we request a pay and delivery date in 3 years. The Fire Chief responded until they know with whom they will go with, those details are not available. Payment details and options were discussed to receive in 3 years; not sooner and how to place on the warrant for the next town meeting and how and what to explain to the public. McGurty stated the Board should be able to tell the public based on the reserves today, whatever is out there that we need to do, if this is done, is the Board going to come back and ask for tax increases or not because there will also be other capital purchases. It is just not an item but should be put into context with the Town's overall capital spending and the tax rate. A plan needs to be put in place. The biggest ticket item to go up against will be roads. Fire Chief agreed, but reiterated he just did not want to be placed in a predicament where there was no backup and they were out of service.

The Board agreed that a plan needed to be developed, the Fire Chief needed to provide options on ambulance cost and then they would go from there. Further discussion were held regarding reserves which help keep the tax rate down, but if the Board finds that they can't do that any more, that means the tax rate is going to go up and want to make sure the resident's understand that. There is only one pot of money and the Board wants to be transparent with the people about it. All

agree the equipment is needed, just need to work on the logistics on how to fund it.

- The next project is a carryover from last year, the generator at the training building. Cost is \$12,800. When they built that building, it was done to code, but to do this work, it will need to be up to current codes.

Walsh asked if by any chance did the Fire Department have any money left over in this year's budget to cover this expense. The Fire Chief indicated he did not know. He should be able to make an educated guess by April.

Winchell asked what the \$12,000 included. The price includes the dirt work done by Road Commissioner Will Langley to dig it all up and the Town's electrician Craig Norman to do his work. The power comes in on the front of that building, so we need to dig down the side under the stairs or around the stairs to the back of the building where it comes in is an electrical panel, a conduit, probably a new electrical panel, and meter box to bring the quick disconnect up to code. Discussion ensued regarding costs.

- The Staircase on the training building needs to be repaired; it is currently decommissioned as the priority is for the generator over the staircase. The second floor is used for storage and sometimes training; no one goes up there for any length of time. This is the only egress and the stairs are rotted. No actual cost is known until it goes out to bid but an estimate for discussion purposes is between \$13,000 and \$15,000 for a new set of stairs and along with that purchase, three sides with a framed out window so that he can throw a ladder against with out damaging the siding and a roof over the top of the landing at the top; this project changes the dimension from a 5x5 to an 8x8 and allows there to be room for instruction and the people training to come through that window.

The Board discussed placing all three projects on separate warrants and the need to have definitive numbers for costs and how to obtain those numbers. Bids would be worded contingent on approval at town meeting and work to be done later in the year. The Town Administrator with the Fire Chiefs assistance will draft and put out.

## B. Fire Department Grant

The Fire Department received another grant; this is the first one for 2025. With the grant money, the Fire Chief purchased 25 Forestry shirts to protect staff which cost \$4,200 and we will get reimbursed for 50%; this item was budgeted for and with the reimbursement will leave a balance in the budget.

The Fire Chief related that last year he received \$78,000 in grants and will continue to seek out more grants this year. Currently for this year he has applied to grants for the Fire Engine #1

replacement and the exhaust removal system because if the new mandate goes through it will be required.

C. Appointments

**McGurty made a motion to appoint Nancy Ruma to the Zoning Board of Appeals with a term ending June 30, 2028; Walsh seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.**

**McGurty made a motion to appoint Ryan White to the Conservation Forestry Committee with a term ending June 30, 2025; Norwood seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.**

**McGurty made a motion to appoint Steve Pioke as an Alternate Member of the Warrant & Finance Committee with a term ending June 30, 2025; Denekamp seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.**

9. **PENDING**

10. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Norwood commented that with the earthquake last week, he got notifications on the RAVE App that he signed up for last week. Winchell mentioned it also informed when snow squalls were coming through. This was anew program that the town's FEMA Director encouraged folks to use and if you haven't signed up for it, go to the Town's website and register.

11. **MEMBERS PRESENT - David Winchell, Jr., Chair, Dan Norwood, Ed Walsh, Jon Denekamp and Jennifer Roux, Town Administrator. Tom McGurty was absent.**

12. **ATTENDANCE – Dennis Long, Leslie Berlan, Wayne Ham, Joe Ruma, Kathy Dobson and Robin Ham**

**Norwood made a motion to adjourn at 6:59 pm; Denekamp seconded. All in favor. Motion carried.**