

Approved Minutes
MAIDSTONE SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING
Monday, January 16, 2023, 7.00 pm
Hybrid Meeting, both in person and by Zoom Video Conference

Selectboard Members Present in Town Hall (in-person): Scott Lovell, Bruno McKenzie, Brad McVetty

Town Officials Present in Town Hall (in-person): Town Treasurer, Delinquent Tax Collector, Planning Commission and Zoning Board member Bob Champagne-Willis; Emergency Management Coordinator and Fire Warden Bill Sanborn

Also Present in Town Hall: Andy Champagne-Willis

Town Officials and Staff Present (via Zoom): Town Clerk and Lister Amy Pear; Assistant Town Clerk Suzy Irwin; Zoning Board and Planning Commission member Bruce Barker; Auditor, Zoning Board and Planning Commission Chair Chris von Alt; Health Officer and Lister Sandy Gray; Administrative Assistant Mary von Alt

Also present via Zoom: Burt and Carol Kline; Laurie and Bob Snowman; Dave Kamins, Bonnie Lovell; Jim Bennett

Chairman Scott Lovell called the meeting to order at 7.01 pm.

Discuss and Set Budget for 2023:

Brad said that he would like to skip the discussion of salaries, because of the confusion we had last year with the Treasurer's. He felt that he was misled by the paperwork that Doug Lord gave him. He said he thinks we ought to skip the salaries for now until Bruno and Scott can get caught up with what actually happened. Brad said he had brought copies of "the paperwork that Doug presented to us last year about the Treasurer's part", and handed copies to Bruno and Scott. Brad said he had gone back through the minutes and had the March minutes with him, but he was not able to find the January and February minutes online. After a brief discussion, Brad clarified that he was talking about actions and minutes for meetings in 2021, which he said set the budget for 2022. It was clarified a bit later in the meeting that it was the budget for 2021, not for 2022, that was under discussion at the meetings in January and February 2021. Amy explained that minutes for nearly two years are kept posted online.

Brad pointed out that although the figures on the paperwork were labeled as "Total Taxes Collected", he decided to look into it himself and confirmed with the Treasurer that the figures actually were Total Taxes Billed. The Treasurer can be paid a percentage of Total Taxes Collected up to one percent; for the Maidstone Treasurer, Brad said the Selectboard had settled on 0.5 percent of the Total Taxes Collected, based on the figures provided that were labeled Total Taxes Collected, which the Selectboard members did not realize were actually Total Taxes Billed. He asked Bob Champagne-Willis to confirm that the 0.5 percent of Total Taxes Collected was the policy, but Bob Champagne-Willis's recollected that the 0.5 percent policy was discussed, but never voted on.

Brad said he never found out what the difference was between the Total Taxes Billed and the Total Taxes Collected. He would like to look into that. Brad said the Selectboard settled on the salary that Doug had proposed, which was \$6,500.00; he said that 0.5% of Total Taxes Collected came to \$5,329.00, with a total of \$11,829.00 for the Treasurer's compensation. But Brad said that some place in the meantime, we must have used different figures or something, because we ended up with \$12,100 in the budget. A brief discussion with Bob Champagne-Willis clarified that the \$11,829 was the Treasurer's compensation in the 2021 budget; the \$12,100 was the Treasurer's compensation decided upon for the 2022 budget at the Selectboard meeting in January 2022, which included consideration of the compensation study done by Chris von Alt. That study included an examination of compensation rates in other towns and the suggested application of a cost of living percentage. The Selectboard did not have copies of that 2021 study at this meeting, Mary explained, as she did not realize that study would be a topic of discussion at tonight's meeting.

Bob Champagne-Willis made duplicates of his copy of the study and gave them to the Selectboard. The 2022 compensation for the Town Clerk and the Treasurer recommended in the compensation study reflected a 2.7% Cost of Living increase above the 2021 salaries. The larger percentage increase for the Assistant Town Clerk was suggested in recognition of the fact that her pay had not met minimum wage levels in the past. The compensation recommended for the Selectboard and ultimately decided upon by the Auditors reflected a larger percentage increase than the 2.7% Cost of Living, as their pay had not been adjusted for a number of years.

The discussion returned to the formula of a base salary plus 0.5% of the Total Taxes Collected that Brad said was passed by the Selectboard; Bob Champagne-Willis said he recollected that the Selectboard adopted a number, but not the policy. Brad said he thought that formula would be found in the February 2021 meeting minutes to have been motioned and adopted. He said he found in the March 2021 minutes a record that he had asked Doug to rescind that, but that the Selectboard decided not to do it. (NOTE: Quoted from the March 10, 2021 minutes, "Brad requested that the last motion on the issue be rescinded until the issues are resolved, however, the Selectboard decided to wait.") According to Brad, in the March 29, 2021 minutes, Chris von Alt said that the Town should pay it because the Town had okayed that figure. However, the way Brad looks at it, the Selectboard did not come up with that figure the right way according to State law, and that is what he thinks needs to be addressed.

(NOTE: Quoted from the March 29, 2021 minutes: COMPENSATION FOR TOWN CLERK, TOWN TREASURER, & DELINQUENT TAX COLLECTOR: The Chair stated after performing significant research he determined that the language of the salaries have not been done correctly in Maidstone for years. He sought guidance from VLCT and recommends that since the salaries were voted on by the Selectboard and subsequently voted on and approved by the town the salaries should be paid. The correction of the salary language for all three positions will be done in March at the next annual meeting, through the warrant articles. Chris Von Alt weighed in as a member of the Audit Committee stating he reviewed 24 VSA 932 and agreed that the town should in fact pay the salaries that was voted on in the budget by the towns people. There was discussion and questions raised by Bob Champagne-Willis, Amy Pear, Mary von Alt, and Linwood Mixer. The discussion ended with the board members agreeing the budgeted salaries, approved by the voters, should be paid effective Jan 1st, 2021.)

Bob Champagne-Willis responded that the Selectboard can set the pay at anything. The State law says that the Town Treasurer is the Collector of Taxes; Bob referenced the State Statute 32 V.S.A. § 1672. Town treasurer's fee for receiving taxes that states: "Town treasurers shall be allowed one percent on all sums paid by the taxpayers to them, computed on actual cash receipts after deduction of discounts taken, unless the town by vote fixes their compensation otherwise."

Scott asked Brad what he was thinking, did he want to keep it the same? Brad replied that he would "keep the price the same, but the way it is figured." Scott said, "with the cost of living increase or just in general the 0.5 %?" Brad said what he was thinking was "drop the percentage and just pay the salary; that way there would be no confusion about how it's done." He continued, "That's something to think on and do a little bit more research."

Scott asked how to proceed. Bob Champagne-Willis replied that at the end of the meeting, we could recess and continue the meeting at a later date, but that there is a very short window before the Town Meeting Warning must be posted, according to State Statute. The Town Meeting Warning includes all warrant articles that must be voted on at Town Meeting, including articles related to the 2023 Budget being discussed at this meeting. The last date on which the Town Meeting Warning can be posted according to State Statute is February 5th, said Amy. The last date on which warrant articles can be received from the public by the Town Clerk is Thursday, January 19, 2023. After the Town Meeting Warning is posted, all paperwork related to Town Meeting must be sent to the printer.

The Selectboard then moved on to discuss the line items in the Budget Worksheet for 2023, skipping over the Town Clerk's and Town Treasurer's Wages, and starting with the Cleaning Wages. For each line

item, consideration was given to the amount allocated in the 2022 Budget, the amount of money actually spent in 2022, the projected amount needed for 2023 and the factors that influenced the amounts projected, and, for pay-related items, the need to ensure that minimum wage laws were not violated. Some line items required further information and therefore were set aside to be decided upon at the next Budget meeting. The dollar amount for each item to be listed in the Budget for 2023 was decided upon and communicated to Bob Champagne-Willis, who recorded that information. Such decisions do not require that motions be made, seconded, and voted upon, said Brad. Discussion included, but was not limited to the following:

- The minimum wage in Vermont increased on January 1, 2023 from \$12.55/hour to \$13.18/hour;
- Bob reminded the Selectboard that he is a lister and therefore is just providing information about lister pay, not making a recommendation. Lister wages are currently \$15/hour; by comparison, the Zoning Administrator is paid \$20/hour. During 2022, lister hours were 376. Due to the State-mandated statistical reappraisal that will begin this coming summer, Bob is projecting an increase in hours to 425. Scott said that at \$20/hour for 425 hours, the amount would be \$8500. The Selectboard then stipulated the amount of \$8500 for Lister Wages in the 2023 Budget.
- Selectboard wages are recommended by the Auditors and cannot be changed by the Selectboard itself. The full amount budgeted for 2022 was not spent, due to the resignations of two Selectboard members and the lapse in time before new Selectboard members were elected.
- The cost of living this year is between 6 and 7 percent, Bob replied when asked. Bob Snowman suggested that the Selectboard should consider a Cost of Living increase for everyone this year, including the Selectboard.
- Brad expressed the desire, and the others concurred, to keep the overall budget increase for 2023 as low as possible, given the fact that property taxes will increase. The 2022 amount for Ballot Clerk Wages reflected the two anticipated elections in 2022; the overage is due to the unplanned third election, which was to fill the vacancies on the Selectboard. Only one election is anticipated in 2023, therefore the amount in the 2023 budget can be reduced.
- In setting the 2022 Budget, the Selectboard anticipated having office hours each week for the Zoning Administrator (ZA) and paying for those, divorcing the Town from the permit fee as the means of paying the ZA. The \$720 actually spent in 2022 came from the permit fees; the plan to have office hours never came to fruition. The current pay method is to pay the permit fee, plus an hourly rate for work in addition to that associated with permit applications.
- With the resumption of in-person training, both mileage reimbursement and training expenses increased; that increased amount will probably continue this year as in-person training will continue. Bill Sanborn hopes to be able to participate in Emergency Management Coordinator training.
- Advertising costs exceeded the budgeted amount due to the State mandate that local newspaper advertising be utilized for required public announcements of Town actions such as the snowmobile ordinance amendment. Increased advertising costs will continue this year, as revisions to the Town Plan and to the Zoning Bylaws will require advertising. Bill Sanborn suggested that advertising might be required for the trailer bids, but Brad said those bids can be sent to a selected list of companies, as is done for road bid requests. In response to Jim Bennett's question about which newspapers are used, Bob and Brad said the Town uses the Caledonia Record and the Coos County Democrat.
- In the Town Hall Software category, the Town pays \$5000/year for maintaining the Grand List.
- Postage increased this past July.
- Fuel oil costs increased in 2022; much of a decrease is not anticipated in 2023.
- Town Hall needs significant maintenance, including repair of floor tiles, roof work, and power washing. ARPA funds can be used for some of this work; the Town currently has nearly \$57,000 available in ARPA funds. There is some flexibility in how use of the Funds is attributed within the budget and in the timeframe of that use; Bob suggests that the Town arrange for the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) to come explain this issue to the Selectboard. The Selectboard decided to keep this Town Hall Repair and Maintenance line item at \$6000 in the 2023 Budget and use ARPA funds as allowed.
- Waste pickup charges will probably go up this year.
- The Town can no longer order its usual small number of trash bags; the minimum order is now for 100 cases, at a cost of \$7450 with our regular provider. Other options are stickers instead of trash bags, like

Guildhall does. NVDA did not recommend stickers when the Town originally started using the purple trash bags, as they can be too easily duplicated at home. Brunswick bought 30 gallon trash cans for everyone in town to use, another possibility. The Selectboard decided to go with \$7500 to cover 100 cases for now, and discuss the issue again at a future time.

- Groveton Ambulance has given the Town a contract that increases the amount to \$6000.
- Bill Sanborn said the Selectboard has to decide whether to stay with Groveton Fire Department or go to Lancaster Fire Department. At present, we have a patchwork arrangement that carries the Town through to the end of March, an arrangement in which, if Groveton cannot respond, Lancaster will. Bill said that Groveton Fire Department changed to a new Fire Chief this past November; since that time, the Department appears to be doing better at responding to need, heading in a good direction. Maidstone does not have a new contract from Groveton Fire; Bill will phone the new Chief to find out if the 2022 contract fee of \$3000 will be a good figure for our budgeting. This item will be skipped for now.
- North Stratford's Fire Department Chief told Bill Sanborn that their contract fee will increase from \$2000 to \$3000.
- The Assessor Contract should cost less this year, as once the Town starts paying for the reappraisal in July, the Town will not have to pay for the Assessor Contract on top of that. For the work that the Town needs the Assessor to do prior to that, Bob estimates a cost of \$1300.
- The Essex County Natural Resource Conservation District (ECNRCD) is increasing the amount it is requesting from \$300 to \$1000. Brad says the ECNRCD has helped him a lot doing the road work, looking at it and seeing what needs to be done, and with the Better Roads Grant. He recommends going with the \$1000.
- Direct fire expenses are no longer listed separately in the budget, but are drawn from the Reserve Fund. Bill Sanborn said the fire departments charge a flat fee through their contracts, but can also charge an hourly rate for expenses incurred in responding to a call, though they usually do not, but it is in the contracts. He is concerned that the Town not allow Reserve Funds to get too low, in case a demand for such fire funds occurs.
- Typically the Highway Expense line item goes into the budget itself. This line item covers year-round maintenance; the amount has been fine lately because the Town has had a lot of grant money. Bob says the Town has \$20,000 in carryover highway funds, plus another \$41,000 in State highway money. This is for Town roads, not State roads.
- The next 5 Appropriations - Highway Rebuild, Maidstone Lake Association, Grand List Fund, Reserve Fund, and Cemetery Fund - are all individual warrant articles, through which we build up any of our funds, if we so choose.
- The box culvert cost is around \$175,000. The Town has to have money to cover that plus any other expenses. The Highway Rebuild Fund right has a balance of \$248,000, said Bob. There will be a replenishment of \$40,000 for the work done on the Lake Road. Brad says the \$20,000 in the Highway Rebuild Fund in the budget will be plenty.
- The Town must set aside money each year to build up our Grand List Fund to cover costs for reappraisal. Our Grand List Fund currently has \$51,000 in it; we have just sent a contract for \$27,000 or \$28,000 to do the statistical reappraisal, about half its cost. Brad suggested increasing the contribution to the Grand List Fund to \$3000; that will help to replenish the fund.
- The Reserve Fund was created when we moved to splitting tax payments into two parts. It has \$56,000 in it; it's a cushion. At present, the only thing that comes out of it is the Essex County Sheriff's fees, contracted for \$5000 each year, but not typically billed for that. Use of these funds is at the discretion of the Selectboard.
- The Cemetery Fund would be used for the McDade Cemetery work of filling the hole that has been discussed at previous Selectboard meetings. This is not pressing work, said Brad; it relates to Scott's family's lot, and he is not in favor of doing that work. The Taylor Cemetery work may cost about \$2500-\$3000; that's a guess, said Brad. Bob said \$3164.00 remains in the Cemetery Fund. Scott said he had been told that there may be stones that need to be fixed. Amy asked if it was new damage done since the repairs were completed this past summer; she said the company that did the repair work was not able to repair some stones. The decision was made to increase the amount of this line item to \$3000.

- The Direct Fire Support Fund currently has a balance of \$2,229. The Selectboard decided on an Appropriation amount of \$3000. This will be a warrant article.

Having reached the end of the list of items on the Budget Worksheet for 2023, Bob said the following line items had been left blank and need to be discussed at the next 2023 Budget meeting:

- Groveton Fire Department
- Landfill Transport
- Town Clerk and Town Treasurer wages

Scott asked about the Town Clerk wages. Brad said what gets him is that he doesn't see anything in the paperwork in front of him about the Towns around Maidstone. Mary said that paperwork included pages she had copied out of the VLCT report in which Maidstone participated, so that the Selectboard could see how the Town wages compared with the State averages, but that much more information by Town is in the report, which is available in the Town Clerk's office.

Brad said he knows what Guildhall's Treasurer and Town Clerk get; Guildhall puts \$10,000 in its budget for each of those positions. Bruno suggested looking at the population, too. Brad said the topic would be considered at the next meeting, since they were coming back anyway. Sandy Gray asked if the Selectboard would be looking at the job descriptions as well as wages, because the Town Clerk and Treasurer have different duties in different towns. Scott agreed that the Selectboard should also look at job descriptions and led into the discussion of when the next meeting should be scheduled. Bob said the Selectboard could set their warrant articles after the 19th, the due date for submission of warrant articles by the public.

Jim Bennett asked if the Town Clerk and the Assistant Town Clerk work the same hours on the same days, because it seemed very odd to him that there is a big difference between the wages for the two positions. Bob explained that the Assistant Town Clerk typically works from 2 to 5 hours, depending on need, and that there has always been a difference in the positions' wages. Amy added that there is a very big difference in the jobs that the two positions do as well. Suzy explained that she works from 10 - 3 on Thursdays, sometimes less, unless Amy is on vacation, and she mostly does recordings. The Town Clerk does all the grant work and everything else pretty much. Suzy said that she has much less responsibility.

Brad said he needs information on total taxes collected, what went delinquent, and two Selectboard meeting minutes, which he cannot get until Thursday. After discussion, the Selectboard decided to schedule the next Special Meeting on Monday, January 23, 2023. Because the next meeting will have more on the agenda than tonight's meeting, this meeting must be adjourned, and a new Special Meeting scheduled to set the Budget and the warrant articles, so must be a separate meeting. Brad asked if what the Selectboard should put in for warrant articles is pretty much the same as last year. Bob said it was pretty much the same as far as finances go; there are five appropriations plus the very first article, which is the collecting of the taxes, and any citizens' petitions, and anything the Selectboard wants on there. Brad said that in the minutes last year, it said we were supposed to straighten this out through a warrant article. He then referred to the minutes from the Selectboard meeting on March 29, 2021, saying, "This is what was on March 29th; this section here said it would be straightened out in March. Scott asked if he should read it; Brad pointed out that the minutes are available online. (NOTE: Quoted from the March 29, 2021 minutes: "The correction of the salary language for all three positions will be done in March at the next annual meeting, through the warrant articles.")

The business of the meeting concluded, Brad made a motion to adjourn; Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8.51 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary von Alt