

Approved Minutes
MAIDSTONE SELECTBOARD MEETING

Monday, January 8, 2024

7:00 pm

Hybrid Meeting, both in person at Town Hall and by Zoom Video Conference

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

Town Official Present in Town Hall (in-person): Emergency Management Coordinator Bill Sanborn

Town Officials and Staff Present via Zoom: Town Clerk and Lister Amy Pear; Assistant Town Clerk Suzy Irwin; Treasurer, Delinquent Tax Collector, Lister, Zoning Board and Planning Commission member Bob Champagne-Willis; Zoning Administrator Mike Otis; Zoning Board and Planning Commission member Bruce Barker; Zoning Board and Planning Commission Chair Chris von Alt; Lister, Auditor, and Health Officer Sandra Gray; Selectboard Administrative Assistant Mary von Alt

Also Present via Zoom: Lin Mixer, Andy Champagne-Willis, Jan Barker, Burt and Carol Kline, Sam and Carol Gorham, Bonnie Lovell, Jim Bennett, Jesse Noone of NVDA

Chairman Scott Lovell called the meeting to order at 6:59 pm. He reminded all in attendance of the Rules of Participation.

APPROVE MINUTES:

Brad made a motion to accept the minutes of the November 27, 2023 meeting; Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Brad pointed out two corrections to be made in the minutes for the December 4, 2023 meeting: on page 2, State route should be changed to State right-of-way, and Route 2 should be changed to Route 102. Bruno made a motion to accept the amended minutes for the December 4th meeting; Brad seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

NVDA REPRESENTATIVE:

Jesse Noone of the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA) spoke about the Municipal Technical Assistance Program (MTAP), a program “loosely designed to help build technical assistance and capacity to pursue funding for projects.” The State has expanded the list of projects that might be considered for this program, a list that includes wastewater projects, housing, climate resilience, and community development. The floods that Vermont experienced this year have slowed the rollout of this new program. NVDA is learning as they go, said Jesse. More information is available on three websites for which Jesse shared links:

- (1) The Agency of Administration, Department of Finance and Management’s [Municipal Technical Assistance](#)
- (2) VLCT’s [Vermont Municipal Technical Assistance Program](#)
- (3) Northwest Regional Planning Commission’s [Municipal Technical Assistance Program](#)

REPORT OF THE ROAD COMMISSIONER:

Brad said there was nothing to report. In another month or two he expects that work will start on the box culvert project to make sure it’s ready to go again. He does not think there will be any issue with the permit or two that need to be renewed or applied for. Bob added that he has worked with Brad on the successful extension of two applicable grants that were expiring.

REPORT FROM THE TOWN CLERK:

Amy reported on the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) legislative update in which she participated via a web chat today. Two items of interest to the Town were discussed. The State is considering the current temporary amendment of the Open Meeting Law that has allowed public bodies to hold fully remote public meetings with no physical meeting location for public participation required; no final decision has yet been made. The Vermont legislature is considering a bill that would apply the same ethics rules to municipal officers that currently apply to State Representatives.

The new Assistant Town Clerk, Sam Graham, is in the process of being trained by Suzy Irwin. Suzy said Sam is learning quickly and doing well.

The letters to the surrounding Selectboards were placed on the Signing Desk on December 14, 2023.

The Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) expired on December 30, 2023, but Maidstone was able to get one last extension that covered the work just done. That grant will be wrapped up soon.

The Town Clerk's office is moving forward on preparing the Annual Report, and is busy preparing for Town Meeting and the elections upcoming in March.

Jack Donnelly, Maidstone's NEK Broadband Representative, provided an email update saying that Maidstone is still on NEK Broadband's work schedule for the end of 2024 or beginning of 2025. It appears that some of the backbone work is being performed now by the NEK Broadband workers recently present in the Town Hall parking lot.

According to the update provided to Maidstone by State Senator Russ Ingalls, the Peaslee Bridge rehabilitation plans were in the final design stage just before Christmas. He said, "The current schedule is to have the construction work begin by the end of January and completed by the end of February at which time we will be able to reopen the bridge to traffic."

Three trainings by VLCT are upcoming for which approval of participation by the Town Clerk and Treasurer is required: (1) "Town Meeting Warning and Model Articles", (2) "Town Meeting Australian Ballot Voting: Legal Requirements Overview", and (3) "Town Meeting Tune-Up". Bob plans to attend the first, while Amy will attend the other two. All are online, allowing remote participation. Bruno made a motion to approve the upcoming VLCT trainings through Zoom; Brad seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Bruno thanked Amy and Bob for putting their time into these trainings.

REPORT FROM THE TREASURER:

- **Budget to Actual:** There is nothing extraordinary to report, said Bob. The Budget to Actual for 2023 is complete. The information in the Expense column for the entire year is the information that will be used in the upcoming budget discussions. The number for PACIF, our Town insurance policy, is high. In the past, we paid an annual bill, but the bills are now quarterly. In this particular year, because of the way that PACIF structured the billing, Maidstone paid for five quarters - four 2023 quarters plus the first quarter of 2024. In 2024, the Town will be back on track, paying for four quarters, the second through fourth quarter of 2024 plus the first quarter of 2025.

Bruno asked about the Website costs, wondering if we were over budget on that. Bob explained that part of the website plan that Amy presented is a monthly maintenance fee. The website costs are part of the software budget line item. The overall issue, he explained, is that the software budget line item was not enough to cover expenses this year, as he has warned the Town at prior Selectboard meetings. That line item is a catchall for everything to do with software. Bob plans to break it down into its various parts, so that the costs are as transparent as possible, making the line item more easily understood. The largest portion, approaching \$6000, is the maintenance fee that the Town pays New England Municipal Resource Center (NEMRC) for its maintenance of the Grand List. Unexpected expenses this year came from Quickbooks, which now charges an annual fee that is higher than its previous once every three year fee. Quickbooks charges an annual fee for our accounting software as well as for payroll, plus a monthly payroll charge that is dependent on how many checks the Town issues. All of these expenses will be listed separately in the breakdown of the software line item that Bob will begin work on this Thursday. He will talk with Amy to make sure that he has all of the information regarding website costs to include in the budget.

- **Selectboard Warrant:** The Selectboard Warrant is on the Signing Desk.

The Auditors have been given all of the Town's financial reports and will be meeting a week from Thursday.

The Agenda for that meeting is on the website.

REPORT OF THE DELINQUENT TAX COLLECTOR:

There has been small progress on the Delinquent Taxes, which are 2021 and 2022 taxes. Three parties remain on the Delinquent Tax Report. The Late Taxes are those that were due in October 2023. Those taxes will be considered delinquent only if they have still not been paid after the April 2024 due date for all 2023 taxes.

REPORT FROM THE LISTERS:

Properties in Maidstone continue to sell for amounts that greatly exceed the property values on the Grand List. That is the reason Maidstone hired NEMRC to conduct the current ongoing statistical reappraisal for the Town, which will result in new property valuations as of April 1, 2024 on the 2024 Grand List. The Listers continue to maintain the Grand List as properties change hands and addresses change, but they are not involved in the reappraisal at this point.

The 2023 CLA (Common Level of Appraisal) for Maidstone is 67.84; CLAs below 100 indicate that properties are selling for more than the Grand List value. The CLA is not a trigger for reappraisal, but it is used in calculating the County and State taxes, most importantly the Education Tax. The CLA is also used in the School Budget Report to calculate Maidstone's potential homestead tax rate. However, by the time the State is calculating the Homestead rates, our new valuations will be in place resulting in a new CLA that should be much closer to 100. That new CLA will have a different impact on the Homestead Tax rate than the current CLA.

The COD (Coefficient of Dispersal) measures the uniformity of property appraisals, indicating how inequitable the Grant List values are. The 2023 COD for Maidstone is 23.23. A COD above 20 automatically triggers a reappraisal order from the State; because Maidstone is already doing a reappraisal, Bob does not think that such an order will be issued.

REPORT OF THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR:

Bill reminded everyone that the EMPG grant to which Amy referred in her Town Clerk Report included the generator and the radio for the Emergency Operations Center at Town Hall. The radio was installed last week and is up and working. Bill was a bit disappointed about how the workers left the inside of Town Hall, as was Brad, but he thinks that can be remedied easily. The invoices are not all in yet, but will be soon; the grant will then be closed out.

Giving a heads up to the Town, Bill said that the ambulance service is going to cost more this year, if the Selectboard decides to sign the contract. Bruno asked why the cost is increasing, to which Bill responded that part of the problem is that there have been so many calls for ambulance service for which the person then refused to be transported. The ambulance service is paying for its equipment and staff to respond to the call for service, but no charges can be levied if a person refuses to be transported. Bill said that the ambulance service charge used to be based on a per capita assessment, but now, as the population has been going down, the number of calls has been increasing. The way that Towns are charged has changed, but he does not know exactly how the charges are now determined.

Bruno said he thinks the problem is that 911 does not specify whether an ambulance is needed; when there is an emergency, there are fire trucks there, EMS is there, it's an overkill. Bill said he understands, but the Town is not being charged any more for that, because both fire and ambulance are paid a set figure. Although the ability to charge more per hour when on a service call is in the contracts, they have not done that for a number of years. At this point, it does not cost the Town any more money for extra equipment. In response to Scott's question, Bill said that there were 18 ambulance service calls this year, and not more than a half dozen fire service calls; some years are more.

Bruno asked what Lancaster charges. Bill responded that he did not know, nor does he know if Lancaster has the manpower and equipment to take on another town. Lancaster does respond if Groveton is tied up with other calls and contacts Lancaster to cover for them.

Amy added that she has put the contract on the Signing Desk for the Selectboard to review, although it is not yet time for the contract to be signed. A list of the calls received for service is attached to the contract.

REPORT FROM THE PLANNING COMMISSION:

- **Update about approval of the Municipal Planning Grant application:** Chris von Alt, Planning Commission Chair, reported that the Town has been awarded the Municipal Planning Grant for the total amount requested on the application, \$8,720. The Town is required to supply a ten percent match, i.e., \$872, with the State awarding the Town the remainder, i.e., \$7,848. That money will be used to pay for the creation of maps needed to fulfill State requirements and for help from NVDA with research and writing the Town Plan itself, in order to assure compliance with the 12 State-mandated Required Elements as well as with the 14 various State goals that the Town has to address.

Bruno asked about the section in the Draft Minutes of the Planning Commission meeting held on Sunday, January 7, 2024, that referred to the changing picture of agriculture in Maidstone, and said, "You guys aren't thinking of getting rid of agricultural on 102," apparently referring to the members of the Planning Commission. Chris responded, "No," adding that the Planning Commission reacts to what the Town wants. He said, "What came out of the Survey, more than anything else, is that there is tremendous support in the Town for retaining the agricultural and forestry aspects of the community. The community feels that's extremely important." Mary clarified that the minutes were intended to reflect the discussion about the changing picture of agriculture and expanding that picture from what we used to think of as just the big dairy farms to include smaller operations, such as Ed Tully's (the minutes referred to a comment from Ed Tully at an earlier Planning Commission meeting); as Bruce had said at the meeting, agriculture is not just going on in the agricultural district.

In response to Scott's question about money available to cover the Town's costs associated with this grant, Bob explained that at an earlier meeting the Selectboard had already approved use of up to \$1500 from the Planning and Zoning Fund; of that \$1500, the Planning Commission has spent about \$400 on doing the survey, so there is still money to cover the Town's \$872 in matching funds for the grant. Brad then made a motion to accept the grant for the Planning Commission; Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Scott asked about the need for signing the grant. Chris explained that he will sign in to his GEARS account (Grant Electronic Application & Reporting System) to accept the Grant. Scott and Brad, as the Municipal Authorizing Official (M/AO) and Alternate M/AO will each receive an email requesting that either the M/AO or Alternate M/AO sign into his GEARS account and sign the Grant Agreement.

- **Update about the January 17th Planning Commission meeting: "Presentation and Discussion About the 2023 Maidstone Town Survey":** Chris explained that the meeting to which the public is invited on the 17th will include a short presentation about the Town Survey by the Planning Commission going through the results of the Survey and discussing the "why" behind the questions. It will then go on to an open discussion with the public about the Survey. Public participation is very important to the process of writing the Town Plan, something that happens only once every 8 years and for which the Survey is a big part of the foundation. The Town Plan, once approved, is used for the subsequent updating of the Town Bylaws. The meeting will be a hybrid meeting, beginning at 7:00pm, held both in-person at Town Hall and by Zoom.

One outcome of the Survey that the Selectboard should be made aware of because it could have impact on the Town Budget is the response to question #17, "The Town of Maidstone typically donates \$1,000 to the Maidstone Lake Association's Aquatic Nuisance Prevention Program each year. The Town should expand its support of efforts to preserve the quality of water in Maidstone Lake and keep it free of invasive species." Of the 138 responses to this question, 84.8% were "Agree". The Lake Association's Prevention Program consists of the Greeter Program, through which a person is paid to be at the State's Access Area to greet people bringing a boat to launch into the Lake and inspect boats and trailers for invasive species, primarily milfoil. That Greeter Program is paid for through a grant from the State of Vermont, through which the State now pays about 30% of the total cost of the Program (historically, the State paid a higher percentage, and by law, could pay as much as 70%). The Town donates \$1000 to

the Lake Association for use in the Aquatic Nuisance Prevention Program each year, which uses that donation and its own funds to pay the rest. In 2023, the Treasurer said, the State kicked in \$3654 of the overall \$8125 expense, and the Lake Association paid for the rest, using the \$1000 donation from the Town and \$3471 of Lake Association funds. The amount of State funding is now in question, because the source for that funding has been an additional State fee added to the motor boat registration fee that is charged by the Coast Guard. However, the federal government recently informed the State that the additional fee is not legal. The State is considering legislation that would raise funds to support the Greeter Program through selling stickers required for all boats on Vermont waterways, including kayaks and canoes. The Selectboard discussed this topic, but did not make a decision; the topic will be considered in deciding what will be included in the Town Warrant.

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Update about Maidstone's proposed meeting of the Selectboards of the 7 towns directly impacted by the Twin States Clean Energy Link proposal:** As Brad pointed out, the letters that Amy put on the Signing Desk on December 14 were never signed, so they were not sent out. Only Bloomfield received a copy of the letter by email, which Amy explained was because the Town Clerk, in response to Amy's contact to verify the address to which the letter should be sent, asked for a copy of the information so that it could be included on the Agenda for the upcoming Selectboard meeting. The Selectboard discussed how to handle this proposed meeting and decided to schedule it for March 11, 2024. Mary and Amy will work on revising the letter to reflect that decision, to include each of the Selectboard members' names and contact information, and to require the signatures of the three members of the Selectboard rather than just the Chair's signature.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Discuss and take action as necessary on Zoning Permit Application Fees: consider increasing the general Zoning Permit Application Fee and/or increasing the Zoning Permit Application Fee for late permit applications submitted after the construction process has begun:** Scott began by stating that he thinks the Town should do away with the \$20/hour and go to one flat rate. Mary pointed out that the topic on the Agenda that was published and people were notified about is zoning permit application fees, not the structure of the Zoning Administrator's pay. Scott said that (the Zoning Administrator's pay) could be discussed with the budget and moved the meeting to the next topic on the Agenda, with the consensus of the other members of the Selectboard.
- **Discuss and take action on the new State payroll tax and whether to deduct 1/4 of the new tax from employees:** Bob explained that Vermont has established a new payroll tax, effective July 1, 2024, a childcare contribution tax of 0.44% on employee wages. Employers can withhold from employees' pay up to a quarter of the 0.44% payroll tax, or 0.11%. The only anecdotal response to this of which Bob is aware is that Canaan School is paying the whole 0.44%. After a brief discussion by the Selectboard, Brad made a motion for the Town to deduct 1/4 of the new childcare financial assistance program tax from employees' pay (0.11%); Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor.
- **Discuss and take action as necessary on a Local Option Tax:** Bob brought this up at the August 2023 Selectboard meeting, at which time both Bruno and Brad said they would like to think about it. The Local Option Tax is a way for towns in Vermont to raise additional revenue by levying a 1% Local Option Tax on Sales, Meals, Alcoholic Beverages, and/or Rooms. If the legislative body, i.e., the Selectboard, recommends the Local Option Tax, it can be put on the Town Warning for the Annual Meeting, explained Bob. The full 1% does not come to the Town(s), as there are administrative charges that the State deducts. What the Local Option Tax offers is a way to collect revenue from another source to offset the municipal tax burden, thus offsetting the impact of the school taxes that are considerably higher for some communities. Bruno asked if Bob had been able to obtain any data from the State Park regarding campsite rental revenues, to which Bob replied that he had not and recognized that in the absence of data, the Town did not know what amount of revenue might be raised by a Local Option Tax. Bruno asked, given that the State Park would be the source of the much of the revenue, and other than that there was Bruno's Pizza open two nights a week and some rentals, is it worth opening up a can of worms for that? He would like to know what amount of money might be expected from the State campground. Bob said that anyone renting through Air BnB or other such entities would have the Local

Option Tax collected through those organizations. There would be no additional burden on the Town for doing this, said Bob, as the work is done at the State level. Unless we implement a Local Option Tax, we will not know what level of revenue it might raise. Bob recommends going ahead with the Local Option Tax. Bruno said he thinks Maidstone should wait to see how much revenue other towns raise from this. Brad and Scott agreed. Discussion of this topic ended.

- **Schedule the meeting for the Selectboard's budget discussion:** Two more meetings are needed to complete the work for the budget and the Town Meeting. For the time being, the Selectboard decided to set the budget meeting for the 15th of January, leaving options later in January to finish the warrant articles. Brad made a motion to set the budget meeting for January 15th at 7:00 pm; Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Amy thanked everybody for participating in the survey. The final number of respondents is 145.

ADJOURN:

Brad made a motion to adjourn the meeting; Bruno seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mary von Alt