

Special Town Meeting – October 19, 2021

Electors and others qualified to vote at town meeting in the Town of Bolton met at the Bolton Town Hall, 222 Bolton Center Road, Bolton, CT on October 19, 2021, for a special town meeting. Present were: First Selectman Sandra Pierog, and Selectmen Robert Morra and Michael Eremita. Also present were several members of the public and Fire Department.

Town Meeting Moderator Catherine Peterson called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M. and then read the call of the meeting, the return of notice and the resolution to be voted upon.

Item #1

RESOLVED: To Consider and act upon a resolution to appropriate \$810,000 for the purchase of an engine tanker for the Bolton Volunteer Fire Department and authorize the issuance of \$630,000 bonds and notes to finance, in part, the appropriation?

This appropriation, if approved by Town Meeting, be sent to referendum in conjunction with the Municipal Election to be held on November 2, 2021.

Motion: Sandra Pierog motioned to conduct the vote by paper ballot.

Second: John B. Toomey, Jr

Discussion: None

Vote: Motion Carried

A vote to consider the question was then conducted.

Motion: Robert Morra

Second: Pam Sawyer

Discussion:

Emily Bradley then asked whether the estimate put forth could go out for competitive bid and could it come in less than what was estimated. Chief Dixon answered that it can.

Thomas Crockett asked about the delivery of the truck considering all the shortages of materials and such. Chief Dixon answered that it would be about 12 to 14 months.

Adam Teller asked would the truck cost the town less in a year and would we lose the grant if we waited. Chief Dixon stated it would not, and per a couple of suppliers, there would be a 5% increase at that time. He also answered that the FEMA grant couldn't be applied to the purchase of the truck. He related several of examples of replacing equipment using FEMA grants.

Emily Bradley asked why the truck needed to be replaced and is it still useful. John Morianos answered that this truck was a replacement for an older truck and is now their main response vehicle. Because it's the main vehicle it needs replacing because there is rust and rot underneath in spite of the outside appearance. Chief Dixon also mentioned that the truck is their main response truck and related that it has a lot of corrosion issues and has lost water at an emergency and that a company wouldn't touch it to do the repair. Various other companies are not able to do the multitudes of repairs needed on the truck. The engine and radiator were recently replaced for a cost of \$43,000. At this point the engine will be fine, but the pump will not, due to the corrosion.

Robert Morra added a comment about the use of chemicals that the DOT use for winter roads that contribute to the corrosion on all vehicles as well as the truck and its components. Over time that deterioration continues to build up and get worse. He also mentioned that those chemicals cost many other towns a lot of money to replace vehicles due to these chemical compounds. Chief Dixon cited several other examples to corroborate Mr. Morra's point.

Richard Treat thanked the Fire Chief and volunteers for all that they do in their service to the Town. He then cited the last few purchases for the Fire Department. The ladder truck in 2008 for \$740,000; the rescue truck in 2013 for \$840,000; the tanker truck in 2017 for \$498,000; and the brush truck which has not yet been delivered for \$120,000. He mentioned that some of this was done with grant money but Mr. Treat pointed out that the money comes from taxpayers. He went on to mention that the truck up for replacement went for a previous rebuild costing \$67,000 and the current engine rebuild for \$43,000. He would like to see it get more use and asked the assembly to join him in voting against the purchase.

Peter Morra mentioned that the truck is 30 years old and that it has old equipment that is not up to date. That the delaying of the purchase would cost more. Chief Dixon went on to add that the newer trucks are outfitted with more advanced technologies that provide a lot more safety features to protect the truck and the responders.

Rod Fournier asked a question regarding the resale value of the current truck and is it equivalent to \$100,000. Chief Dixon responded that the typical resale value is anywhere from \$1,000 - \$5,000 and that they usually get sold to farmers as manure spreaders or rural fire departments in other states. Mr. Fournier then asked why this meeting was taking place 2 weeks before the election and not before the ballots were put out. Mrs. Pierog answered the question stating that the Charter says that we must have this meeting no more than 21 days a referendum. The Town Clerk was required to submit the ballot to the Secretary of the State by September 9th. So, there was no way under our Charter that the Board of Selectmen could have that meeting and meet the Charter requirements. So the ballot is out and if the question doesn't get approved tonight it won't be counted, per the Registrars, on the ballot. Should it be approved tonight, then the vote on that question will count and will be binding on the Town to purchase or not purchase.

Andrew Hall wanted clarification regarding the purpose of this meeting and his concern that others not in attendance wouldn't have the opportunity to vote. The Town Meeting moderator, Mrs. Peterson explained that the purpose of this meeting was whether or not to advance this question to the ballot.

Richard Tuthill stated that as a Mechanical Engineer, when you have a major piece of machinery fail along with major subsystems, that it is time to replace that piece of machinery. He plans to support the motion.

Kristen Gourley asked if there is any discussion as to possibly renting the truck that we have which is still functional to offset the cost of the new one. Chief Dixon mentioned that there was some discussion and he then asked Mrs. Pierog to elaborate on those discussions. She stated the Fire Department, through the Fire Commission has reached out to the Board of Selectman that they would like to retain the current truck after it is replaced. The Board of Selectmen have not yet acted on that request because it depends on tonight's decision and the result at the election should the question go to referendum. Mrs. Pierog is in support of the motion. Pending the results, conversations will continue about the future of the current truck. Chief Dixon did mention interest from other towns in the current truck.

John Morianos asked the assembly to consider moving the question to the November ballot so that everyone has a chance to make a decision and that they have time to become informed.

Chief Dixon mentioned that the town has already put funds towards this replacement in the amount of \$180,000 and because the town can make this down payment, there would be a discount of approximately \$23,000 on the cost of the truck.

Mike Eremita talked about the discussions around renting and resale costs. He mentioned that 5 different manufacturers were approached about the new truck and that he spoke with 2 of them regarding the trade-in value of the current truck. One of the manufacturers came back with an estimate of \$1,000 - \$5,000 and the 2nd estimated as much as \$5,000. When asking the 2nd manufacturer what would be the fate of the truck after trade-in they said that they would crush it. The 1st manufacturer said that they would scrap it because it has no value to anyone. Mike also stated that it wouldn't pass certification again. If they did a pump test on it, he stated that he was almost positive that it would fail because the pressure that they would put it under would likely blow something. He further stated that the truck only has value to us as a spare and not as a primary truck. He also stated his past experience in East Hartford, having purchased 5 trucks that they aren't getting cheaper to purchase. He went on to state that in 2040 the estimated replacement cost would be approximately \$2.1 million.

Dave Bowne mentioned that in arriving here tonight that he noticed that most of the cars parked outside were probably under 10 years old. So he asked the audience how many of them would be willing to make the drive to work in a 1991 model car. He feels that most would say that would be risky and then related that in an emergency it would pose an even higher risk. He stated that when time is of the essence and life and death are on the line, he would be in support of the measure.

Sandra Pierog moved the question and Robert Morra 2nd

Town meeting moderator, Catherine Peterson, said that the vote we will be taking now is to close debate and then proceed with the voting. Chief Dixon mentioned that one more member of the audience wanted to speak, but since debate was closed the moderator wouldn't permit anymore discussion. Mrs. Peterson then posed the question for closing the debate. She then instructed the audience to vote against it if you didn't want to close the debate or vote for it if you did. She then asked the audience that all those in favor of closing the debate please say Aye and those that were opposed say Nay. Mrs. Peterson stated that the Aye's had it. She then asked if there was a challenge to the vote results. With no challenge the debate was closed.

Mrs. Peterson then asked for the Registrars to explain the process for the vote. Voting commenced. Once voting was finished the Town Clerk emptied the ballot box and handed the ballots to the Registrars. She showed the audience the empty box to confirm that none were left inside.

The votes were then tallied. Registrar, Jim Dwire announced the totals:

Yes: 51 No: 3

Vote: Motion Passed.

Town Meeting Moderator, Catherine Peterson, then requested a motion to adjourn the meeting.

On a motion by Ed Steele, seconded by Robert Morra, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth C. Waters

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Town Clerk