

**BOLTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING BUDGET WORKSHOP
7:00 PM, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2023
BOLTON TOWN HALL, 222 BOLTON CENTER ROAD
In-Person and Virtual (Hybrid Format)**

MINUTES

Board of Selectmen Members Present In-Person: First Selectman Pamela Sawyer, Adam Teller (7:14 p.m.)

Board of Selectmen Members Present Via Zoom: Deputy First Selectman Robert Morra, Michael Eremita, Robert DePietro

Staff Present In-Person: Interim Administrative Officer James Rupert

Staff Present Via Zoom: Chief Financial Officer Jill Collins, Recording Secretary Linda H. McDonald

Others Present Via Zoom: Mather Clarke, Amanda Gordon

Others Present in-Person: Gwen Marrion

1. Call to Order: P. Sawyer called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.
2. Consider and Act on Trails Grant:

J. Rupert thanked G. Marrion and Joe Dillon for all their efforts put forward on this grant project. He said the hope is that the board will vote to go forward on this grant application. The due date for the grant application is close of business tomorrow.

G. Marrion explained the project is for a parking area, just north of the Munson's employee parking lot, to serve the 153 acres at the Nathan Hale Corridor. One area by Bolton Collision on Route 6 was considered, but it was determined the site lines were not adequate. She said it would be a rustic gravel parking lot, similar to the trails parking lot on Steeles Crossing lot. Vegetation to be removed are vines and broken limbs as this was a former house site that has grown in since the house was removed. G. Marrion said not much earth moving will be required.

G. Marrion noted this project fits in nicely with three plans the town has undertaken; the feasibility study saying that a trail would be a great option to put on this property, the Four Town Vitality Report that highly encouraged passive use there and resources for recreation and that infrastructure would be need to bring people there, and the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) that says one of the goals of the town would be to create open spaces and connect parcels along Route 6. She said this is a natural next step to implement the recommendations in those plans.

G. Marrion explained this is a matching grant and the town is required to come up with 20%. The total amount for constructing this is \$104,400. Eighty percent of this that the town can apply for is \$83, 520. The town's 20% percent match can be a combination of cash, in-kind services by the town and volunteer time.

Discussion followed. G. Marrion said the project will not affect any re-design of the Route 6 intersection by the State.

J. Rupert said he had a conversation with Jim Florence, Vice President of Munson's Chocolates, and promised to share his comments and concerns with the board. J. Florence is concerned that this could attract unwanted attention and it may be a place for people to hang out. J. Rupert told him it could be the kind of place on regular patrol by the state trooper. J. Florence was also concerned that people could stray from the greenway onto his property. J. Rupert said there is quite a slope between his parking area and this parking area and is highly vegetated with brambles that would be a deterrent from that happening. He said the town would post the area as private property and making sure that the trailhead from the parking lot was as far away as possible from the property line and well-defined.

P. Sawyer said the addition of a closure gate for sunset has also been discussed.

A. Teller stated as Munson's has expressed opposition, he will disqualify himself from voting.

R. DePietro MOVED accept the proposal trails grant request as presented by Gwen Marrion and Jim Rupert. M. Eremita SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED 4:0:1 with A. Teller abstaining.

3. Consider and Act on Allowing Fire Department and/or J. Rupert to apply for Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, Recruitment and Retention (Safer) Grant:

J. Rupert explained the due date for the town to submit the grant is March 17th. He said there is some work to do in order to be able to apply for the grant. His concern is that the town does not have the information it needs to apply for the grant because the town has not done the research, how many positions, what the pay rate is. One of the strategies discussed prior is perhaps the town applies for the grant and iron out the details while the town waits to see if it is awarded the grant. He said the risk is, if the town does not apply, it is not known when the grant would open again.

Members of the Personnel Subcommittee, who discussed this at their last meeting, addressed the issue.

R. DePietro said the town could apply but, if awarded the grant, town does not necessarily have to take it.

M. Eremita commented there is lots of ongoing work that needs to be done on a daily basis to make sure all the equipment is ready and the department has people that are qualified to drive all the pieces of equipment the fire department has. He said the biggest concern the department has is daytime Monday through Friday where there is the least number of people and the oldest people. The department is not getting a lot of younger people to apply and the ones who do apply are not necessarily looking for the additional responsibility of being the truck engineers and the responsibility of maintaining everything. M. Eremita said the Safer grant could give the town the chance to step into this gradually.

A. Teller said if the board voted to apply for a grant like this, it sends a message and could confuse the public that the town has made a decision to go to a partially paid or hybrid department. He said the fire department needs a strategic plan to cover the next five or ten years and needs to come back with its best proposals about how its going to meet the needs of

the fire service and public safety in the town over that time. He said he does not feel comfortable voting to apply for a grant that the town really does not have a plan for.

P. Sawyer said from the subcommittee meeting she found it impactful in the difference in the amount of course work that is required and it made an impression on her the professionalism that is expected of the volunteers.

R. Morra suggested applying for the grant and focusing it on recruitment and retention as a good start to maintain the volunteers.

J. Rupert said he does not know what the grant would say regarding recruitment and retention. When asked his thoughts on applying for the grant, J. Rupert said he would prefer to go into a grant application with a strategic plan in place.

M. Eremita MOVED to table consideration and action on allowing the Fire Department and/or J. Rupert to apply for Staffing for the Adequate Fire and Emergency Response, Recruitment and Retention (Safer) Grant to the next BOS regular meeting. P. Sawyer said this motion is not debatable. MOTION CARRIED 5:0:0.

4. Discussion on Budgets:

The board continued their review and discussion on the proposed FY2024 Town Proper budgets.

- J. Rupert reported the anticipated increase in the State insurance plan has been reduced to 7.1%, a savings of \$33,660. This would reduce the total proposed FY2024 Personnel Services budget to \$1, 067,440. Discussion followed on the chance the State, as has happened in the past, would raise their insurance plan percentage increase.

R. Morra MOVED to reduce the FY2024 Personnel budget by \$30,000. R. DePietro SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED 4:1:0 with M. Eremita opposed.

- J. Rupert said he is comfortable with a reduction can be made in the salary line item in the Building and Land Use budget.

J. Collins reported the reduction would be \$5,721.

R. Morra MOVED to reduce the FY2024 Building and Land Use Department payroll category by \$5,721. A. Teller SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED 5:0:0.

- J. Rupert reported there is money set aside in an account for economic development for a little over \$5,000 that would fund the request by the Four-Town consortium (Connecticut Countryside) committee if the board chooses to do so and that could be reduced from the budget.

J. Collins explained the Economic Development Commission had money set aside in an account which is not part of the General Fund money. Because there is no Economic Development Commission anymore, the Board of Selectmen (BOS) can say what they want to use that money for or put it into the General Fund.

Discussion followed on using the money in the Economic Development account to fund the Four-Town consortium request. At discussion end, the board decided not to use this money to fund the request.

Discussion followed regarding the monetary participation of the other towns in the consortium and funding the request.

R. Morra MOVED to reduce the ask in the FY2024 Economic Development budget to \$2,500. A. Teller SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED 5:0:0.

J. Collins summarized the total of reductions stands at \$192,396. The FY2024 Town Proper budget is a 5.31% increase over last year.

J. Rupert said the town has not seen the Board of Education (BOE), but has seen the superintendent's proposed budget that will go or has gone to the BOE is an increase of 6.8%. J. Collins said the proposed increase is 6.88%.

J. Rupert said the cost of fuel and salt are still unknowns. Discussion followed.

R. DePietro asked if the town could be missing any revenue possibilities from the State. J. Rupert responded the town has accounted for every revenue stream it is aware of.

P. Sawyer asked the members if they had any changes they would like to see in the budget or would they stay at the 5.31% increase.

A. Teller commented he would stay with the budget as the board has developed.

R. Morra said he would go forward with what we have.

R. DePietro agree with A. Teller's and R. Morra's comments.

M. Eremita thinks the board has set a budget that is fair.

P. Sawyer said due to inflation, wage increases, and some insurance cost increases that the town has no control over, this is a sound place to start.

P. Sawyer said there is consensus of the board members to go forward with the current proposed budget. Staff will create the budget document for BOS vote at the next regular meeting.

5. Adjournment: A. Teller MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:36 p.m. R. DePietro SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED 5:0:0.

Respectfully submitted by Linda H. McDonald

Linda H. McDonald

Please see the minutes of subsequent meetings for the approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.