Town of Colrain

Select Board Meeting/MLP

Highway Garage

9 Jacksonville Road

4:30 P.M.

# MINUTES OF JANUARY 11, 2022

**Present** Joe Kurland, Mike Slowinski, Thom Griffin

**Others Present** Howard Phelps, Jane Johnson, Janet Sinclair, David Greenberg, Jamie Jefferson, Jennifer Smith, Josh Slysz, Josh Hall, Dawn Brown, Ben Eastman, Kaliegh Brown, Kellie Smith, Donnie Brown, Jr., Donald Brown, Sr., Ellen Weeks, Lee Wheeler, Nate Gilbert, Scott Sullivan, Highway Superintendent; Doug MacLeay, Finance Committee; Paula Harrison, Treasurer/Collector, Betsy Shuipis, Administrative Assistant; Kevin Fox, Town Administrator.

The meeting was called to order by Joe Kurland, Chair, at 4:36 p.m.

**Appointments Janet Sinclair - Informational presentation regarding a case being heard by the Massachusetts Supreme Court related to solar bylaws**

Ms. Sinclair spoke of cases where developers have taken towns to land court over local solar bylaws, and they are winning. The Supreme Judicial Court decided to take on a case with pro bono attorneys who will defend a town’s right to regulate by-laws. Towns can sign on to a brief when it’s completed and can contact Meg Sheehan if interested. The Board wants the Planning and Zoning Boards to review the brief before a decision is made. David Greenberg will attend tomorrow night’s Planning Board meeting. Kevin Fox will contact both boards.

**Scott Sullivan, Highway Department Superintendent – Highway Department personnel wage proposal**

Mr. Sullivan talked about wage compression – the difference in pay between team members despite their knowledge, experience and longevity. Employee morale is low in the department and they do not feel appreciated. Mr. Sullivan confirmed that morale was good before the new employee was hired. Employees with 10 years + experience find they are paid only slightly more than the new hire, which Mr. Sullivan feels is a “slap in the face” to long-term employees who have “10 times the knowledge and experience.” Mr. Sullivan reminded the Select Board that he warned them that this dissatisfaction would happen when deciding the new hire’s salary.

Mr. Slowinski noted that making mid-year salary adjustments is bad precedent. Chair Kurland advised Mr. Sullivan that the wage proposal should be brought to the finance committee for their input on how this increase would affect the budget. Mr. Slowinski noted that our highway department wages are higher than any other town in Franklin County except for Rowe and Erving so a 10 or 20% raise now is a lot to ask of our taxpayers. Mr. Griffin noted that compression often occurs in both state and municipal jobs.

Doug MacLeay, Finance Committee – the appropriate way to deal with a salary increase is for Mr. Sullivan to put it in the department’s budget request for next year. Mr. MacLeay recommended looking into adding performance reviews for employees along with the possibility of a merit raise. Ellen Weeks, Personnel Committee, suggested a longevity bonus: an annual bonus that recognizes service and expertise without raising hourly rate.

**New Business None**

**Old Business Continuation of Public Hearing to consider a request by Jamie Hall for a special permit for the purpose of storing more than 2 unregistered vehicles on property located at 5 River Rd**

Mr. Jaime Hall was unable to make this meeting.

The public hearing was opened at 5:51 p.m.

**MOVED:** Thom Griffin moved to continue the hearing January 25 at 5:00 p.m.

Mike Slowinski seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

**Treasurer/Collector Contract**

**MOVED:** Mike Slowinski moved to approve the Treasurer/Collector contract as written

Thom Griffin seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

**Director of Assessing Contract**

**MOVED:** Mike Slowinski moved to approve the Director of Assessing contract as written.

Thom Griffin seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

**FCTSD Enrollment**

Discussion moved to the next Select Board meeting.

**MLP Management transition**

Mike Slowinski will serve as the Town’s MLP manager without salary.

**MOVED: J**oe Kurland moved to appoint Mike Slowinski as MLP manager and gratefully accept his offer to do so without pay. Thom Griffin seconded. Mike Slowinski abstained.

**MOVED:** Joe Kurland moved to accept Kevin Fox’s resignation as co-manager of MLP and gratefully accept his willingness to continue helping out during the transition. Thom Griffin seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

**Unanticipated** Helna Sumner, Heath Town Coordinator, asked the Town of Colrain Select Board to meet with the Town of Heath Select Board to reach an agreement regarding capital expenses that may arise due to Heath students attending Colrain Central School. Kevin Fox will ask to meet 1/25/22 at 4 p.m.

Westfield Gas & Electric wants to know if Colrain wants to opt-in to charge customers are delinquent 30 days - 59 days. The $30 fee would go directly to Colrain. If we opt out then the town will pay the cost.

**MOVED:** Thom Griffin moved to approve the opt-in for the $30 reconnect fee for Whip City Fiber. Mike Slowinski seconded. **Voted unanimously.**

Rolling Shutoffs notice from Eversourcesent out warning towns that there may be serious low fuel shortages, which will happen without warning. Public safety is covered in Colrain.

Jane Johnson, 26 Greenfield Road, reported there is a flag hanging from a house across from the elementary school that is obscene and inappropriate. Can anything be done about this situation? The town cannot restrict speech.

EBB (Emergency Broadband Benefit) will change March 1 and become ACP, a permanent benefit of $30/month instead of $50/month. Those that qualify under EBB (97%) will qualify under ACP. Additionally, there will be expanded criteria so that more people in Colrain will quality for ACP.

The Colrain/Charlemont redundancy connection along Colrain Rd. in Charlemont and Charlemont Rd. in Colrain has one feed to the hut on Main Rd. The goal is having alternate paths. There is a connection to Leyden, a connection to Charlemont and neither have been activated. Our cost would be $14,000 to get a third way. A contract is involved and when it’s ready the MLP can vote on it.

In addition, we get all our service from MBI. We’re trying to get a second company, Crown Castle, who can give 5 towns 10 gigs of service for $3,100 a month. We are proposing to allocate 3 ½ gigs to Colrain, which would allow us growth. This will come out of the enterprise fund. This cost needs to be given to Michael Shuipis for the FY23 budget.

**Minutes of Select Board Meeting 12/14/21 and 12/28/21.**

**MOVED:** Thom Griffin moved to approve the minutes of 12/14/21 and 12/28/21. Mike Slowinski seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

**Town Administrator**

**Updates** The Select Board would like to have a cost of living discussion at their next meeting.

**MOVED:** Mike Slowinski moved to dissolve the meeting at 6:22 p.m. Thom Griffin seconded. **Approved unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted, Accepted by the Select Board

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Betsy Shuipis Joe Kurland - Chair

Administrative Assistant

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Mike Slowinski

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Thom Griffin

Documents

Select Board Meeting Notes

Email from Janet Sinclair to Town Administrator dated 12/22/21 re: Supreme Court Case related to solar bylaws

Email from the Highway Superintendent to the Town Administrator dated 1/4/22 re: wages for the Highway employees

Draft Employment Agreement between Town of Colrain and Treasurer/Collector

Draft Employment Agreement between Town of Colrain and Director of Assessment

Unregistered Vehicle Progress Update from Glenda Wood as transcribed via phone call by Betsy Shuipis, 1/10/22, for the Select Board meeting, 1/11/22