

Minutes
CONWAY SELECT BOARD
Town Office, 32 Main Street
May 8, 2017, 6:00 p.m.

Select Board members present: Robert Baker, Bob Armstrong; John O'Rourke

Others present: Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Lisa Turowsky, Assistant to the TA; Alyssa Tan, FCAT; Chris Collins, FCAT; Ruah Donnelly, Resident; Jacob Macko, W.D. Cows, Inc.; Heidi Flanders, Resident

John O'Rourke called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM

Minutes

- **On a motion from Robert Baker to accept the minutes of May 1, 2017, seconded by Bob Armstrong, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Meetings Attended by Selectboard Members

All three Selectboard Members attended pre-Town meeting and the meeting with Town Counsel regarding UCC church post-tornado process. Also, they attended an FCAT meeting in its new space in Sunderland Town Hall.

Citizens' Concerns

None.

Old Business

None.

New Business –

Permission for Cows to pass over town-owned land

Jacob Macko spoke about Cowl's Pease lot which is set back off of Cricket Hill Road and which impacts State. - owned and Conway-owned property. Cows is pursuing access to its property that was damaged in the February tornado. They seek to remove debris across Town property to Cricket Hill Road. Cows is also asking the State for access. John O'Rourke confirmed that Cows will leave the property in the condition in which it was found, or better. Ron Sweet said the snowmobile club maintains some of this property. Bob Armstrong likes the Amherst Agreement that Cows brought to the meeting.

- **On a motion from John O'Rourke to permit Cows to gain access to the Pease lot through Town Farm Road, seconded by Robert Baker, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant proposal

Tom Hutcheson attended an informational meeting Wednesday on the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant, and is working on an application partnership with Ashfield in order to increase our chances of being funded, as there is only \$500,000 available for 30-50 municipalities or partnerships.

There is already a considerable amount of work that has been done on the South River in this area, which makes Ashfield a potentially useful partner, as well as work we have done in our Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan. The FRCOG is being trained to act as a resource for this, and would also act as the grant administrator.

Tom Hutcheson is going to solicit participation from potential team members in town, including the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee, Agriculture Commission, and EMD, and will need a letter from the Select Board approving the proposal. I plan to have this as a joint letter with the Ashfield Board of Selectmen.

Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting *None.*

Town Administrator Update (moved up I the agenda)

Departments

Dogs: I received another complaint about the dogs residing at 651 Graves Road, with an accompanying photograph of the dogs near the intersection with Boyden Road, a considerable distance from their residence. The Dog Officer is also

informed on this incident. As of Friday, all of the dogs are registered (and vaccinated for rabies), two under Mr. Moriarty's name and one under Ms. Graves' name.

Tornado update: I made a site visit to the Fournier property on Tuesday with representatives from DCR and Natural Heritage. There are two areas of damage, one major one near the front of the property (more or less bordering the field) and a smaller area further back. It looks as though we won't be able to create a cutting plan and complete the work by the end of June, though we might be able to by the time we set the tax rate for next year—since we're deficit spending, the costs need to be made up in next year's taxes. I'm working with Alison Wright-Hunter on how to create the cutting plan, which needs to be cleared by Natural Heritage before we start working. It is quite possible we'll have to hire a consulting forester to work on the cutting plan, as Alison's duties as a service forester of DCR are circumscribed, but that part shouldn't be too expensive.

Treasurer: I have an item tentatively scheduled for May 15: discussing the process requested by Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust to allow changing the plan's co-pays (really, any aspect of the health-care plan). The Treasurer will be in to explain the situation. The process involves prior notice to the teachers' and instructional assistants' unions of a Select Board meeting to discuss and vote on accepting a particular statutory provision, and then a second meeting to make any proposed change in the plan under the newly accepted process (which will be proposed by the HCGIT).

A conservation restriction for the Sheehan property off Maple Street is set for the first meeting after May 15.

Town Meeting

The Administrative Assessor has informed me that if all the spending items in this Town Meeting's warrant are approved, and if we assume there is no change in the taxable land base, next year's tax rate would be about \$18.45, or a rise of \$0.70 from this year. With any rise in the taxable land base, the increase will be less. Of course, state aid final figures are not in yet, so this is a preliminary figure. Assessor also provided the comparison of regional tax rates to Tom H, which has tax rate comparison chart updated for FY17; Conway is above the halfway line but not too much. Tom H will send electronic version of this chart to anyone who wants it. Other charts have average single-family tax bill; Conway is second-highest in the region. Well below average in statewide chart which includes eastern part of the state. There is finally a comparison dating back to 2008, looking at single-family homes in Conway, in which Conway is almost exactly in the middle. These are ways to get a handle on how things have been changing. Rising tax rate is directly correlated with decrease on State aid. In next four or five years, some towns will get close to \$25 cap, requiring cutting services.

Proposal to plant trees on Pumpkin Hollow common (new business, continued)

Ruah Donnelly reported that Helen Baker asked about how to recover from tornado damage in Pumpkin Hollow. A lot of trees are down on the common. Ruah considers the two locust trees to be weed trees; they are too close to maples. Maybe this is a good time to get rid of them. Also, there are a lot of stumps in the area. This is a perfect time to plant trees (no water, e.g.) It would be nice to clean this area up before the 250th. Ruah Donnelly has a lot of lists of good street trees, and recommends planting large shade trees, or "noble trees." Maples are not a good choice, they are not salt tolerant and are slow-growing. Elms are available from local growers and are noble trees that grow eight to 10 feet a year. Also tulip trees and sycamores are good choices. If stumps come out and if the locust trees come out, even more trees can be planted. Ron Sweet says he has equipment he can use to take out stumps. New trees would be further back from the road. Maybe four or five trees can be planted depending on canopies. Ruah Donnelly suggested that it would be good to take a look at the whole green; Whately Road is a busy road but there's no road-green buffer. Buffer planting with low ornamental trees would be attractive. Ruah Donnelly wants to move fast to take advantage of the current planting opportunity. Finally, Mrs. Held of Pumpkin Hollow found historical evidence about chestnuts on the common as a meeting place and feels strongly about there being American Chestnuts on the green. The American Chestnut Foundation has volunteered to donate some trees. Mrs. Held wants to get some chestnut trees here and plant them after the 250th. Ruah Donnelly explained that chestnuts used to be 30% of the canopy, but they are invasive and a "crappy" tree. Maybe they aren't so historic, maybe they got to the Pumpkin Hollow common because they're invasive. Ruah Donnelly and Heidi Flanders will talk further with Mrs. Held. After the tornado, there was a donation from a town in Massachusetts to Conway of \$500 to buy trees for the Hollow. Ruah Donnelly would like to take the \$500 and get what they can before the 250th. This would require stumping. Ron Sweet thinks it's in the Town's best interest to plant trees that don't require a lot of maintenance. Ron Sweet recommends taking down locusts and said he would take care of stumping.

- **On motion by John O'Rourke to grant permission to take down the locust trees, get stumps out, and plant elms in accordance with plans that Ruah Donnelly develops, seconded by Robert Baker, the vote was unanimous in favor.**

Right of first refusal of Gregory Rose's property

There are about two acres. Tom Hutcheson has heard differing opinions about the age of the house. Robert Baker says the house is in very poor shape. The Town's focus would be the land. If the house is a historic structure it would need to be appraised. Mr. Rose was not at the meeting so this item will be on the agenda at a later meeting.

Concerns of the Selectmen

As a result of a power outage in the common area where Whately Road starts, a power line came down and turned the soil into glass. Robert Baker requested the Highway Department dig it out. Ron Sweet said there are two projects that need to be done by end of June, based on FY17 bids in connection with Chapter 90 funds. He will do what he can to help but he has to make sure his Chapter 90 projects are completed. He has been having trouble with scheduling East Guinea Road and South Ashfield Road especially in light of recent rain. Robert Baker says this job would take less than one day. Robert Baker also mentioned that the wrought iron poles at the Town Hall are rusty and need and need painting. Ron Sweet agreed he could do that soon.

Mail

None.

Announcements

Phil Kantor got an article in American Art Review for June 2017 about the Stevens exhibition which will take place the weekend of the 250th.

Documents and Other Exhibits Used at the Meeting

W.D. Cows, Inc. "Pease Lot" Access

Property Card: 40 Fournier Road

Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Grant Program (MVP) FY17

Comparison of regional tax rates

Amherst Massachusetts Access Agreement

Next meeting scheduled for Monday, May 15, 2017 at 6:00 p.m. at the Town Office, 32 Main Street

- **On a motion from Joh O'Rourke, seconded by Robert Baker, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Baker, Clerk