

Minutes of the Board of Selectmen Meeting

This meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 12:30PM on Wednesday, September 13, 2023 at the Police Department.

Mr. Petraitis explained the Board would be meeting with Department heads a few a time. He explained the financial situation, we are still in the red \$125,000.00 that we need to makeup. The spending freeze isn't practical so we are trying to think of other ideas. He told Jason Benoit and Chief Joe Holway to plan on cutting 5%-10% of their budget and work within that limit. There will be no free cash in the fall, and Finance Committee will not be able to help in the Spring. Next year will be worse.

Jason Benoit asked if the Board was asking for budget cuts, if possible, Mr. Petraitis said yes. Jason said his budget has already taken cuts, tree money went from \$20,000.00 to \$10,000.00, and line painting was cut significantly. Mrs. Canada said that is true for all departments.

Joe Trentacosta said the Finance Committee budget was cut by a third, they won't have the flexibility as past years so they must be very conservative. Jason Benoit said he's not frequent visitor to Fin Comm, except for fuel. Mr. Petraitis said fuel will be worse this year, you have to find ways to make cuts and make it work.

Chet suggested going 50/50 with sand and salt as opposed to just salt. Jason said he's happy to discuss it, but the first year he worked in North Brookfield the trucks got converted to computers for salt only. It cost about \$15,000.00 but paid for itself in half a winter. He said even if salt prices double the town won't save \$1, they will have to convert the trucks back. Mr. Petraitis asked how that works. Jason said the computer puts out a metered amount of salt, before then it was guess work. It is labor intensive to mix sand and salt, and he doesn't have the storage capacity to accommodate sand, salt, and a mix. He also said it would take months in the Spring for street sweeping, as opposed to only a couple weeks now. Jason also said the drainage systems are working much better with salt, he doesn't agree with Chet that using sand will save the town money. Tara Hayes asked if the computers can handle sand. Jason said no, they'd have to go back to conventional controls.

Jason said the trucks should be recalibrated, about one or two a year. They can do it themselves but they need a refresher. He said they do mix variable amounts of salt and sand, depending on driver and storage capacity. He said they do use sand on ice and dirt roads. Chet asked if they have any trucks that can do sand, Jason said just a small one.

Chet asked about having two solid yellow lines vs one on the roads. Jason said there's no money for line painting and DOT dictates the lines. He said it could get ugly with passing zones. Additionally, not painting edge lines could be bad, because it's a good visual aid. Bob Locatelli said the value of the yellow line on secondary roads is underrated, especially on hilly/curvy. He knows there's no money now but we should look forward to doing some of these side roads.

Joe Trentacosta asked how many miles of roads there are in North Brookfield. Jason said 71 plus some private roads. Joe asked if the state handles state roads, Jason said there are no state roads in Town, we take care of everything. Jason said New Braintree and Barre were going to return Rt 67 to the state but it never got off the ground, but North Brookfield could look into it. Mr. Tripp asked if the town is responsible for Rt 67 and Rt 148, Jason said yes. Ashley asked if the state took over those routes, would

the parking on North Main Street be eliminated. Jason said North Brookfield could continue to maintain the downtown area but we could get the state to pave those roads.

Jason said he's anticipating an issue with the gas station, last year all the snow was pushed out into the street. Mr. Tripp told Jason to talk to the owner.

Chet said 10% of roads could be state roads, that would be a cost savings.

Jason said there was a study done about 10 years, before he was hired that touched upon that. He also said for the 10 years prior to his hire the snow and ice account was consistently \$150,000-\$250,000 in the red. Jason said his first year, started in February, it went into the red \$50,000, the following year was \$30,000, after that he broke even. He's got a strategy that is consistent and much more efficient. Small storms are costly, big storms are less costly.

Kathy Crevier asked if each department head could be looking for grant money. Mr. Petraitis said he thinks they're all diligent in that, but all departments have minimal staff and work extra to find grants. Tara Hayes said we have a lot of people in town that are successful grant writers, maybe we can put the word out and get volunteers. Chet said that Brooke Canada has a great plan, Mrs. Canada said she wants a grant committee and she's creating a spreadsheet of available grants. The One Stop grant will be available in December.

Chief Joe Holway said he's been very successful with grants; his process is to print everything out then breakdown each part and get information from the appropriate department. He can put it back together, but working in sections is more manageable and he's had more success that way. He said he attended a legislative breakfast and there could be monies earmarked for North Brookfield in March, he's looking to get cruisers. He said the 2-million-dollar bond bill is dead, but the legislature is looking to provide municipal building funding.

Mrs. Canada said that herself, Tara, and Ashley are taking a grant writing webinar.

Chief Holway said he applies for every possible grant and he's received just under a million dollars. Darin Anderson said there's a VFA grant award tomorrow at 10am, Chief Holway said it's a small event but there will be representatives there.

Chief Holway wanted to confirm the BOS is not looking for direct cuts right now, Mr. Petraitis said to be clever. Chief said he's got a little extra in line items, he may be able to use it for gear or gas etc. Mr. Tripp said departments can't come back at the end of the year for more money. Mr. Petraitis agreed, this is a big issue, we won't have money.

Kathy Crevier asked about the \$124,000.00 deficit. Ashley explained that at the AATM a balance budget was voted, but we didn't have the final cherry sheet numbers. Once those came in the Special Education cost was much higher than anticipated, causing a deficit. Tara Hayes said we'll have to have an STM to rescind a portion of the budget, and that Free Cash will be used to replenish stabilization and health insurance.

Mr. Petraitis said this is not insurmountable, but it will be a trial.

There being no further business, at 1:07PM Mr. Tripp moved, and Mrs. Canada seconded, a motion to adjourn. So voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Barre