



Town of Rowe
Board of Selectmen Minutes
Tuesday, April 7, 2020 –6:30 p.m.
VIA TELECONFERENCE

This meeting will be held via video conference, consistent with Gov. Baker's temporary modifications to Open Meeting Law.

REMOTE PARTICIPATION INFORMATION:

Meeting Host: zoom.us
Meeting ID: 927-855-828
URL: <https://zoom.us/j/927855828>

Present: Chair Chuck Sokol, Ed Silva, Selectman and Executive Secretary Janice Boudreau
Absent: Vice-Chair Jennifer Morse
Audience: Finance Committee: Paul McLatchy III, C. Selmi Hyytinen, Loretta Dionne, Laurie Pike
Joanne Semanie

- I. 4/7/2020 Agenda
- II. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Chair Sokol at 6:31 p.m. via remote participation.
Roll call vote to call to order:
Chair Sokol: Yes
Selectman Silva: Yes
- III. Announcement of recording devices: one
- IV. Appointment: Meeting with Finance Committee to discuss FY21 Budget:

Road Paving: Mr. McLatchy had sent the Board of Selectmen the long-term highway plan (which has not yet been adopted). For the coming year, the highway superintendent is looking to do some overlay on Pond Road without any grinding. Some concerns were initially raised about not doing the grinding as it is better for the roads long-term. However, there is a significant cost associated with doing this. Selectman Silva noted that a few other roads in town had been done with just overlay, and they seem to be holding up quite well and has saved the town money.

Town Administrator: Chair Sokol updated the Finance Committee on the Town Administrator reorganization process. At this point, they are not prepared to propose a number for the budget, as they have not yet completed job descriptions.

Selectmen Budget Review: Chair Sokol reported that the Board of Selectmen had reviewed the suggested changes/comments from the Finance Committee at their last meeting. On the whole they are willing to consider the changes, but felt differently about the new fire personnel. This proposed position is supposedly going to be employed by Charlemont as well, resulting in nearly 40 hours per week between the two towns. The Board raised concerns about the level of response during the day.

Mr. McLatchy questioned the role of the Police Department in responding to calls. Mr. Hyytinen (who is a police officer) answered that the two officers respond to calls when they are on duty. The Police Chief responds to all calls whether she is working at the time or not. He pointed out that there may be changes in the future to certification levels which the police officers might not have at this time. Questions were raised about how this person would be scheduled to not overlap with the police department (as otherwise it wouldn't be an increase in coverage hours, just in the number of people who would respond).

Ms. Pike asked how many calls we typically get during the day (versus in the evening/at night), and Mr. McLatchy followed this question up with another about how many calls haven't been responded to by a towns person in the last year. This information would need to be obtained from dispatch. Mr. McLatchy reiterated his previously-expressed feelings about the culture of the town and how its distance and remoteness might mean that not all services will be available at all times.

Fire Chief Dennis Annear will be invited to attend the next Finance Committee meeting to answer questions and present a job description.

Stipend Article: The Planning Board requested a stipend of \$1,000 per member (\$5,000 total) for a second time. The Finance Committee wanted to conduct a study of stipends in general before approving any new amounts, but due to conflicts of interest were unable to do so.

A proposal was presented by Mr. McLatchy for addition to the Annual Town Meeting warrant. This article would direct the moderator to appoint a committee of three or five voters to study stipends and make recommendations. Originally the proposal included barring individuals related by marriage from serving, but after discussion was expanded to include all relations under the conflict of interest laws. The text of the article is as follows:

"Article X: To see if the town will vote to authorize and direct the Moderator to appoint a Stipend Study Committee of three (3) or five (5) voters to study stipends for elected town committees. For the purpose of this study, "committee" shall be defined as a public body consisting of three or more people elected for a defined term. No member of this committee shall hold an elected office, or be related (parents, children, siblings, spouse, and spouse's parents, children, and siblings) to an individual that serves on an elected committee. This committee will be responsible for compiling a report and making recommendations on matters related to stipends including, but not limited to, the following:

- The definition of a stipend for the purpose of paying committee members
- An objective method for determining whether a committee should receive a stipend or not.
- Which committees should or should not receive a stipend, and how to ensure that all committees are valued for their contribution to the town's wellbeing.
- An objective method of determining how much a committee should receive and the reasons for the amount.
- If a committee should receive a stipend, how much should they receive
- Whether officers of a committee should receive more than other members, or receive a stipend if the committee as a whole is not recommended to receive one.
- Recommendations on how to address increases/changes to stipends in the future
- Recommendations for which person or body/bodies should be responsible for reviewing stipend-related matters in the future.

This committee shall submit a report to the members of all elected committees no later than January 31, 2021."

Legal Counsel Line: The Board of Selectmen reported that the legal line is running a bit short this year, and may not be sufficient next year. This has been due to the higher use of counsel and a higher rate due to switching firms. Chair Sokol felt that town counsel has been very responsive and great to work with, but the funding was never changed when the new firm was selected. After discussion, the Board felt that \$8,000 was an appropriate amount to request.

Bylaw Amendment: Mr. McLatchy brought forward a bylaw amendment that had been suggested by the Bylaw Review Committee. The suggestion includes eliminating the words “omnibus article at the” from Article III, §4 of the Bylaws regarding the Finance Committee. This would result in the following sentence: “The Finance Committee shall have the powers and duties delegated to it by said Section 16 and other applicable laws including the duty of submitting a budget for the annual Town Meeting...”

Mr. McLatchy explained that this would result in the Finance Committee being the authority on the budget. In the event of a disagreement between the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee, the Finance Committee’s suggestions couldn’t be dismissed. The Board of Selectmen would still have the authority to add additional/alternate articles, but the budget submitted by the Finance Committee would have to be added to the warrant.

Members agreed that the working relationship with the Board of Selectmen has been very positive the last three years. However, it has not always been this way. There were times where the Finance Committee was barely involved with the budget, acting almost as a “rubber stamp” for the Board of Selectmen. Historically there were also difficulties in finding members. With the change in the bylaw allowing for more people to serve, the Finance Committee has been able to retain membership for the last few years.

Override: Selectman Morse (who was not present) had suggested at the last Board of Selectmen meeting that perhaps an override could be held to pay for some larger projects like the DPW’s front loader, and then pay for paving out of capital stabilization. Mr. McLatchy pointed out that with the excess capacity still available in the levy there would be no need to at this time. The last day to submit ballot questions is April 11th.

Treasurer: The Finance Committee recommended this line be kept level-funded and not given the 2.5% COLA as the individual hadn’t been employed for a year yet. This was agreed to by the Board.

Town Clerk Stipend: The town clerk requested a reduction in stipend, which the Finance Committee agreed to. The Board still wants to see this level funded.

Grasshoppers: No number has been decided on for this yet. Selectman Silva said he’d like to see the number of applications received. Because the town meeting is likely to be delayed, it is possible to do that this year. Vice-Chair Dionne asked if the town was looking at hiring a contractor versus hiring youth. Selectman Silva responded by saying the Board hasn’t decided what the program is actually for. The highway superintendent wasn’t sure that a contractor would even come up to Rowe, or it could be prohibitively expensive. There were concerns about how long the COVID-19 pandemic might last and whether the program will still happen this year.

Employee Wages: Though not a Finance Committee matter, the Board of Selectmen agreed to discuss the topic of paying employees through the pandemic that aren’t able to do their usual work for one reason or another. The Board of Selectmen will likely be setting policy on this matter this week. A brief discussion followed about unemployment insurance concerns and how employees might be affected.

School Budget: Ms. Pike raised a question about why the principal was given a 3% raise whereas other town employees were given a 2.5% COLA. A great deal of discussion ensued regarding the school's budget. Selectman Silva reported that he had spoken with Jennifer Macksey, who is the business manager at the district. Rowe's wages/salaries are comparable to other towns. Members spoke about the level of growth, sustainability, and the number of higher salaries. Selectman Silva said that it has been difficult to obtain information from the school at times. Ms. Pike would like to see the student-teacher ratios at other schools before making any decisions.

- V. Unforeseen Business (within preceding 48 hours)
- VI. Adjournment 8PM or thereabout: Chair Sokol made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:08 p.m. Selectman Silva seconded the motion.

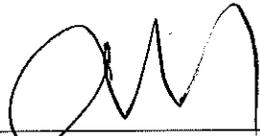
Roll call vote to adjourn the meeting:

<u>Chair Sokol:</u>	<u>Yes</u>
<u>Selectman Silva:</u>	<u>Yes</u>

Respectfully Submitted,

Janice Boudreau, Executive Secretary

Approval Date: *APRIL 23, 2020*
Approved:



Chuck Sokol, Chair

Selectman Jennifer Morse, Vice-Chair



Selectman Ed Silva

Documents:

1. Agenda 04/07/2020
2. FY21 Budget Worksheet