



Town of Rowe
**Joint Meeting - Board of Selectmen
and School Committee Minutes**
Thursday, October 26, 2023 – 6:00 p.m.

Board of Selectmen: Chair Charles Sokol, Vice-Chair Joanne Semanie
Absent: Selectmen Silva
Present: Town Administrator, Brooke Shulda
School Committee: Chair Susie Zavotka, Matt Crowningshield
Absent: Mary Paige
School Officials: Principal Bill Knittle
Zoom Audience: Super Intendent John Franzoni, Lisa Blackmer (could not hear meeting via zoom)
Audience: Julie Shippee

Call to Order: Chair Sokol called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

Announcement of recording devices: NONE

Noteworthy Announcements: NONE

School Committee Discussion:

School Committee Chair, Susie Zavotka, and Principal Bill Knittle took lead in the school discussion held with the board of Selectmen. There were two main components of this meeting that was discussed, the school budget and the continued educational strides to assist with the success of the Rowe Elementary students.

Budget Discussion, Briefed: Mrs. Zavotka explained the three components of the School budget; 1. Rowe Elementary School (grades k-6), 2. High School Education Tuition (grades 7-12) and 3. Bus Transportation.

1. **Rowe Elementary School:** Ms. Zavotka and Mr. Knittle explained the various services that are provided by the NBSU to the Rowe Elementary school ranging from administrative services to physical, occupational and speech services. Both Ms. Zavotka and Mr. Knittle expressed that these services are a significant part of the Elementary school budget expense. Ms. Zavotka stated the current teacher contracts are set until June of 2026 and will be receiving a 2.5% increase along with the increase with their step. It was also stated that there are 4 paraprofessionals, one that assists with each classroom.
2. **High School Education Tuition:** At a previous non formal meeting, Superintendent John Franzoni discussed a law that will soon be in effect, the possibility of Town's being responsible for the tuition costs of any choice students attending a school outside of their district when moving onto high school. School Committee and Selectmen briefly discussed the possibility of rejoining the Mohawk Trail Regional School District. This could help avoid any additional educational costs for the Town as a majority of the Rowe Elementary School students are choice students. It was noted that Rowe will most likely not run into such issue but there is still question and concern regarding the facts of the topic, which will be a continued discussion.
3. **Bus Transportation:** Ms. Zavotka reviewed the bus transportation costs, explaining the Town contracts with Kuzmeskus and pays \$96,480.00 for the last three years under contract. This figure includes K-6 (\$38,415.00), 7-12 (\$38,415.00), and late bus (\$19,650.00) transportation. As the Town of Rowe pays the full contract price of the late bus but transports students to Charlemont and Heath along the way, Ms. Zavotka sent letters to both, the Town of Charlemont and Heath, requesting if they would be willing to split the late bus costs between the three towns. Ms. Zavotka has gotten some positive feedback and will inform Selectmen on both Town's decision.

Educational Structure and Goals: Principal Knittle began by describing how the classrooms and grades intergrade and are grouped together within the school and throughout the school day. He explained the student to teacher ratio and how one teacher specializes in ELA and Math education who assists in all classrooms and all students K-6. Last year's MCAS scores and attendance were reviewed and compared to the prior year's scores and attendance have significantly shifted in a positive direction. Though Rowe has a low percentage of high school graduates in local middle and high schools, Mr. Knittle pointed out how Rowe students have been "disproportionately overrepresented" on the honor roll over the past several years. The Elementary School curriculum was designed to support students academically as well as to support students in social and emotional growth. An increase of community events have been held at the Elementary school with intentions of continuing.

School Committee Adjourned Meeting at 7:08pm

Board of Selectmen Meeting - Continued

New Business:

1. Police Chief – Streetlights

Police Chief, Julie Shippee raised concern regarding the streetlights remaining *off* along Zoar Road. Chief Shippee is requesting streetlights get turned back on beginning at the top of the hill on Zoar Road by the Town Library as it is a difficult place to see not only for drivers but for the DPW workers that are required to plow or work in the town roads. Selectmen were in complete agreeance with Chief Shippee's request as safety to Town residents and employees are a top priority. Selectmen request Town Administrator to contact National Grid to place a work order to reactivate streetlights.

2. 2008 Polaris Ranger – 4 Bids

On Saturday October 14, 2023, Town Administrator collected all bids at the Rowe Town Hall on behalf of the 2008 Polaris Ranger. 4 Bids were received. On Thursday October 26, 2023, Vice-Chair Semanie opened all four bids and with the highest bidder being Kyle Shippee at \$2,000.00.

MOTION TO ACCEPT BID: Vice-Chair Semanie made a motion to accept the bid of \$2,000.00 that was submitted by Kyle Shippee on behalf of the 2008 Polaris Ranger. The motion, seconded by Chair Sokol was accepted. (vote: 2-0-0)

3. Pontoon Boat – 1 Bid

On Saturday October 14, 2023, Town Administrator collected all bids at the Rowe Town Hall on behalf of the Pontoon Boat. 1 bid was received. Chair Sokol opened the Pontoon Boat bid that was submitted by Jay Williams bidding \$50.00.

MOTION TO ACCEPT BID: Chair Sokol made a motion to accept the bid of \$50.00 that was submitted by Jay Williams on behalf of the Pontoon Boat. The motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Semanie was accepted. (vote: 2-0-0)

4. Open Space and Recreation Plan:

Selectmen reviewed the open space and recreation plans provided by park commissioner Laurie Pike regarding the 3-year Forestry plan. Vice'-Chair Semanie requested Town Administrator invite Ms. Pike to the next Selectboard meeting (November 09, 2023) to further discuss the responsibility required by the Selectboard and Planning board in continuance with this plan.

Old Business:

1. Police Chief Succession Plan – TABLED
2. Ground Lease Agreement – Avery Fountain

There is no record of a legal lease agreement on behalf of the Avery Fountain at the Rowe Community Church and the Town of Rowe when the agreement was made. K.P Law provided the Town with a lease agreement between the Town of Rowe and the Rowe Community Church. Selectmen reviewed the lease provided and were in favor of executing the document. Due to not having a public notary available, Chair Sokol agreed to execute the document the following week in the presence of a notary. Though the document was unable to be signed, Selectmen voted on behalf of this agreement.

MOTION TO APPROVE AGREEMENT: Chair Sokol made a motion to approve the lease agreement provided by K.P Law on behalf of the Avery Fountain agreement between the Rowe community Church and the Town of Rowe. Seconded by Vice-Chair Semanie the lease agreement was approved. (vote: 2-0-0)

3. FRCOG – Regional Planning Assistance Agreement

FRCOG Planning Program is offering partnering member Town's professional and technical assistance for municipal energy planning and assisting in the Green Communities annual reporting requirements. This comes with no cost to the Town and will ensure the required documentation is filed and submitted in a timely manner.

MOTION TO APPROVE AGREEMENT: Chair Sokol made a motion to approve and sign the FRCOG Planning Programs, Regional Planning Assistance Agreement on behalf of municipal energy planning with the Town of Rowe. The motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Semanie was approved. (vote: 2-0-0)

4. PV Squared/Bill Ashley - Solar Panel Donation Proposal

PV Squared has partnered with a local resident (of Franklin County) Bill Ashley, in regard to the donation and installation of \$35,000.00 worth of solar panels for the Town of Rowe. The installation of the panels will be incorporated in the \$35,000.00 being donated by Bill Ashley.

MOTION TO SIGN PROPOSAL: Vice- Chair Semanie made a motion to approve and sign the Solar Panel Donation and installation proposal between the Town of Rowe and PV Squared. The motion, seconded by Chair Sokol was approved. (vote: 2-0-0)

5. Ford Hill Road – Change order

A change order was requested by Davenport Trucking LLC., due to heavy rain washing out the slope. The request called for an additional \$6,300.00 to stabilize the slope using a "blanket". Selectmen Semanie noticed an inconsistency with the total amount that was being requested, as the letter request states \$6,300.00 of funds are needed, but the change order states \$6,400.00 of funds are needed. Selectmen denied the change order request and requested Town Administrator to gather more details on the "blanket" and if it is the best course of action to stabilize the slope.

MOTION TO DENY CHANGE ORDER: Vice-Chair Semanie made a motion to deny the Change Order request submitted by Davenport Trucking LLC until the funds requested are confirmed and slope plan is further explained. The motion, seconded by Chair Sokol was accepted. (vote: 2-0-0)

Ongoing Projects:

Road/Bridge Projects -

Yankee Road: Received (2) Award Letters. Town Administrator informed Selectmen of the (2) awards letters that the Town has been awarded grant funds in the amounts of \$300,000.00 and \$450,000.00 towards the repair of Yankee

Road. Town Administrator is awaiting decision from MassWorks on the extension request for the on behalf the original \$600,000.00 in funds that was applied for back in 2018.

Cyrus Stage Bridge: Awaiting Final Plans from Mass DOT. No new items to discuss.

Ford Hill Bridge: Awaiting final pole relocation installation – if work is not complete by 12/31/2023 Town Administrator will be required to file for an extension request of funding with the Small Town Bridge Grant Coordinator.

Tunnel Road Bridge: K.P. Law opinion in que – no further updates from K.P. Law at this time.

Warrants/Contracts:

1. Vice-Chair Semanie reviewed, FY2024 Vendor & Payroll Warrants #10
2. Avery Fountain Lease Agreement
3. FRCOG Regional Planning Assistance Agreement
4. PV Squared/Bill Ashley Solar Panel Proposal Agreement

Minutes:

1. Board of Selectmen Minutes October 12, 2023

MOTION TO APPROVE MINUTES: Vice-Chair Semanie made a motion to approve the Board of Selectmen’s minutes as written from the October 12, 2023, meeting. Seconded by Chair Sokol the minutes were accepted. (vote: 2-0-0)

Future Meetings:

Thursday, November 09, 2023, at 6:00pm

Thursday, December 07, 2023, at 6:00pm

Thursday, December 21, 2023, at 6:00pm

Adjournment: 8:01pm

MOTION TO ADJOURN: Chair Sokol made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:01pm. The motion, seconded by Vice-Chair Semanie, was unanimously accepted. (vote: 2-0-0)

Respectfully Submitted,

Brooke Shulda, Town Administrator

Approval Date:

Approved:



Chuck Sokol, Chair

Ed Silva, Selectman



Joanne Semanie, Vice-Chair

Documents:

1. Agenda for October 12, 2023
2. Board of Selectmen Minutes September 28, 2023
3. National Grid – Ford Hill Pole Petition and Orders
4. 2005 – Unfinished Business
5. Town Administrator Office Updates