

Town of Freedom Select Board Minutes  
January 11, 2021

Present: Cindy Abbott, Steve Bennett, Travis Price, Ron Price, Elaine Higgins, Jim Waterman, Alyssa Brugger, Anne-Marie Adamson, Phil Bloomstein, April Turner, Dylan Turner, Meredith Coffin, Nathan McCann and Amanda Jamison

Ron called the meeting to order at 6:01pm.

Solid Waste Report: Phil Bloomstein wanted to clarify that the Unity Area Regional Recycling Center will still take tin cans and aluminum and all the metals that they were taking before.

FVFD: Jim Waterman let Alyssa Brugger know that Beauregards has not received a check that was sent out Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>. Alyssa will check the bank to see if it has been cleared. Jim received a thank you letter from the Unity United Methodist Church in regards to the Freedom Volunteer Fire Department responding to the structure fire. There was a structure fire in Freedom this past week on Hardwood Lane. Jim reported that the fire department has a business meeting tonight, and there will be an election of officers.

Elaine made a motion to accept minutes as presented, Steve 2<sup>nd</sup>, Unanimous.

Citizen's Issues: Nathan let Select Board know that he is upset about the decision to require two trash stickers on 55 gallon bags. Nathan asked the Select Board if there is opposition to opening the Select Board meetings with a prayer? Steve did not remember that opening the meetings with a prayer had been a part of the tradition. Ron concurred with that. Elaine said that the Select Board could get back to Nathan next week about this question.

Treasurer's Report: Alyssa presented the Payroll Warrant in the amount of \$4,684.51 and the AP Warrant in the amount of \$17,320.51. The ending checkbook balance is \$330,714.57. The Town received the USPS December rent check.

Steve inquired about a cell phone bill being put in the Public Works accounting line. Ron said there is one cell phone that is supposed to be carried with the trash truck driver. Ron continued to say that expense should be in the trash budget. Discussion continued about how to differentiate the expenses for Montville's solid waste disposal and Freedom's solid waste disposal. One way that expense is tracked is that Alyssa splits the tipping fee expense between Montville and Freedom lines. Steve felt that Montville solid waste expenses should be separate from Freedom solid waste expenses. Ron said the only two things able to keep track of are fuel and labor. Steve explained that currently there are five lines in the Chart of Accounts for the Montville contract: labor, tipping fees, fuel, maintenance costs, and a separate line for miscellaneous expenses. Steve said that at the next Budget Committee meeting this can be figured out, how to split up costs. Travis suggested that he would charge them in the Chart of Accounts, 5 gallons of fuel and Joe's hours to pick up their trash in order to keep track of expenses versus income.

Elaine made a motion to pay the Payroll Warrant in the amount of \$4,684.51 and the AP Warrant in the amount of \$17,320.51, Ron 2<sup>nd</sup>. Unanimous.

Public Works: Travis reported on the information he has gathered for the Public Works garage addition. He met with a man named Scott, that lives in Freedom in regards to sheetrock. Travis needs to ask Jacki Robbins what needs to be put on the walls to meet code.

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Travis asked if the expense for the walkway installed at the Town Office would come out of the new line, in the Chart of Accounts, building maintenance?

Bob Price approached Travis about assisting with cleanup of the maple trees that were cut down at Pleasant Hill Cemetery. It was clarified that this is the Town's cemetery but it is owned by a nonprofit. Ron mentioned that the town crew and town equipment are not covered by the town's insurance to be on private property. Steve said this would need to be cleared through MMA management. Ron suggested Todd Nelson could maybe do the work. Ron suggested that Travis find someone else to do the work and let Bob Price know that the town would support the removal of the trees, in some way with road signs, but the Town is not in a position to do this kind of work.

Elaine sent an email to the Department of Transportation (DOT) in regards to what a town can do when people park cars and leave them on the side of the road. Travis understood from DOT's response that as long as the town has a winter parking ban and an ordinance, that the town could have cars towed at the owner's expense. Travis said there are two places where cars are parked on the road. Steve didn't feel like this warranted a serious reaction from the town with just two different individuals parking in the road.

Ron asked about a mailbox in town, whether it is in the right place? Steve said it is difficult to tell how far it is into the travel surface. Steve would rather wait until the snow is gone and measure the road and look at Select Board policy on mailboxes and what the USPS recommends.

Cindy wanted to thank Travis for installing the walkway to the window at the town office. She said it looks really good.

Town Clerk: Cindy sent end of year reports to the board. Steve said there are things worth noting in regards to taking an historical look at amount of property taxes unpaid year to year. In 2001, 20% of property taxes were not paid and fluctuated around 20% until 2018, when it went down to 14%. In 2020, it was 11.7% of property taxes not paid. Steve felt like this was remarkable that people have worked hard to get these taxes paid, especially after such a difficult year, which allows the town to run when residents pay their property taxes.

Steve noted that the amount of excise tax collected for 2020 was \$133,500. Excise tax collected in 2019 was \$179,000.

Cindy let Ron know the Maine flag is not looking so good. Ron will put up a new one tomorrow.

Cindy noted that Nathan McCann and Steve Bennett have turned in their nomination papers. April Turner has taken nomination papers out, but has not turned them in yet. Cindy said that for the Treasurer position, Brandy Kimble and Diane Anderson have taken out papers. Cindy will turn her papers in tomorrow.

#### Committee Reports:

Historical Society: Ron said the Historical Society made a request to have the wifi upgraded in the election hall. At the back of the election hall, where they work, the wifi runs slowly and sometimes doesn't run at all. Ryan Fines suggested a hardwire needs to be run to the election hall. Ryan said he has wire needed, and he would charge by the foot for the amount of wire needed. Once the wire is

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installed, Ryan would hook up the internet. Ron said there will need to be some electrical work done at the Town Office and maybe the electrician can run the wire. Ron thinks it is a good idea to install the hardwire and doesn't think it will be costly. A motion was made to authorize Ron to be able to talk with the electrician and Ryan to get the wire run to the election hall, Unanimous. Then Ron will come back to the Select Board with the cost.

Recreation Committee: Cathy Cunningham won the lighting contest. April Turner reported that the prize was a \$25 gift certificate to Freedom General.

Cindy said once nomination papers are in, a mailing should be sent out to let people know who is running and when absentee ballots will be available. Election of Officers will be March 12, 2021. Elaine asked if the town should include a referendum question that gives the town the ability to run the town until the town can have a Covid safe Town Meeting to pass the 2021 budget. Cindy said absentee ballots have to be printed and ready by Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>. Town Reports will be available March 12<sup>th</sup>. Steve thinks budget will be done this week, therefore he imagines that by Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> the budget and warrant will be ready.

Old Business: Steve talked with John Chapin at the Post Office about the leak in the roof and the certified letter from Emcore. John did not know why the Select Board received that letter. John said Steve should let Emcore know that the roof is fixed and there are no problems.

Steve talked with Gail at Bill Kelly's office. Gail said that the Attorney is very busy. Steve will keep trying to get in touch with him.

New Business: Ron received an email from MMA regarding the Governor's new budget. He felt the letter was encouraging, that she has proposed to the legislature that school money subsidy would stay the same or increase a little, homestead exemption would stay the same and municipal revenue sharing would stay the same.

Steve spoke about the Skidgell land and the hope to have a solar farm there to the right of the driveway. Freedom is tied into Thorndike substation. There is a solar farm going in on Peter Curra's land in Thorndike. That solar farm will use up all the available capacity at the Thorndike substation. In addition, there are five other projects in line after Peter Curra's. *Please refer to correspondence with Revision Energy on Page 4.*

Steve talked about Community Solar Production, which allows for the purchase of credits for any one, business or homeowners. Therefore, people could purchase credits from solar arrays. This may be an incentive for a business to build on the Skidgell lot and purchase credits. In addition, Freedom does not have a business tax which could be in the town's favor to entice a business here.

Steve spoke with the USDA Director of Community for Rural Development. There are grants and low interest loans available to small towns. *Please refer to Steve's notes on Page 5, entitled "Notes from call with Nathan Persinger, Community Program Director: Jan 5, 2020"*

Ron made a Motion to adjourn at 7:38pm. Steve 2<sup>nd</sup>.

January 5, 2021

Hi Steve –

I've spoken to our land development expert, Holly Noyes, who's confirmed the serving sub-station in Unity is over-subscribed and has 5 projects currently in the development queue. She has included the Town of Freedom on our active development list and will reach out to you as more details become available and utility upgrades are planned.

Steve, I would like to review the discount Net Energy Billing (NEB) Credit and off-site solar opportunity with you and the town. I'd be pleased to present an introductory overview to the Select Board or whatever works best. In addition, I would welcome an introduction to Mr. Brown at RSU 3 and hope we can all partner on an exciting renewable energy project locally. Please let me know your thoughts and what your recommendation would be to reach out –

Thanks again for your interest and consideration. We look forward to partnering with the town and community. Regards, Kurt

Kurt Penney | Employee-Owner | Commercial Solar Consultant  
ReVision Energy, a Certified B Corp



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**Notes from call with Nathan Persinger, Community Program Director: Jan 5, 2020**

- USDA Rural Development Grants and low interest loans are available for smaller towns with populations under 5,000, 12,000, or under 20,000. The smaller the population, the better the eligibility. The other criteria are the median income of town citizens. The town's median income has to be lower than the median income of the state non-metropolitan median household income. The lower the median income, as a ration of the state non-metropolitan household income, the greater the eligibility.
- USDA will grant and provide low interest loans for community development projects such as medical facilities, fire departments, public safety, town halls, food security, etc.)
- Grants are more difficult to obtain but not impossible.
- Grants depend upon the town's financial condition. He was looking at our 2019 audit online as were talking and stated that our balance sheet was very strong. The better your financial condition, the lower the chances of receiving a grant. Towns that haven't done a good job of saving money are more likely to receive grants.
- Loans are at a 2.125% fixed rate for up to 30 years.
- There are a lot of requirements and lots of filings necessary on the front end, but any and all costs are covered. Closing costs are not required, but a general obligation bond is required (also covered by the loan).
- The town must have a Town Charter, which Freedom doesn't. So we would have to develop a town charter.
- Any project must be in full compliance with ADA and ABA codes