

TOWN OF LITCHFIELD BOARD OF SELECTMEN

February 23, 2015

Selectmen's Meeting

Members Present: John R. Brunelle, Chairman
Kevin Bourque
Steve Perry

Members Absent: Frank Byron, Vice Chair (excused)
Brent Lemire (excused)

5:00 p.m. Paperwork Review

6:00 p.m. Call to order

Pledge of Allegiance

Selectman John Brunelle read aloud the Items for Consent

Review of Items for Consent

1. Minutes of February 18, 2015
2. Account Payable Manifest (\$64,105.71)
3. Payroll Manifest (\$46,944.54)

Approval of Consent Items

Selectman K. Bourque **motioned** to approve the items for consent. Selectman S. Perry **seconded** the motion. The motion carried **3-0-0**.

Request for Items - Other Business

None

Laura Gandia re: Pat Jewett Volunteer Appreciation Day

Laura Gandia came in front of the Board to give an update for the Pat Jewett Appreciation day. It is scheduled for March 1st at the High School at 4:00. There will be a presentation and awards ceremony starting at 4:00 immediately followed by a dinner which is being catered by Naticook Fish and Grill. The awards ceremony is free and open to the public. They have sent out emails to all town volunteers. All town volunteers will be recognized at this ceremony, whether they are present or not and they will receive a certificate and be called to the stage. Laura stated that they are encouraging all town volunteers to attend the event, even if they don't want to go to the dinner, we still ask that they come to the awards

presentation ceremony. Laura stated that it is the first time they are having this event, so a lot of it is going to be focused on Pat Jewett, she will be the guest of honor and will be receiving the first Pat Jewett Volunteer Appreciation award. During that time there are various speakers on her behalf. Some of the speakers include Bo Schlichter from GMS, they have a lot of the school faculty and administration that want to speak. Laura believes there is one member from each school of the schools that will be speaking, there is a family member who will be speaking, some of her friends will be speaking. They also conducted a letters to Pat drive, that will be conducted until Friday. We are asking member of the community to write thank you notes to Pat for her 50+ years service to the town, that will be presented to her as well during the ceremony. Tickets are \$30. It is a full dinner, a very nice dinner catered by Naticook, drinks and desserts are included. It is also Pat's birthday, which is one of the reasons they chose March 1st to be the day to celebrate her, so they will be celebrating her birthday as well. Laura mentioned that every year going forward, the Town plans on having this event. What they intend on doing is having an awards committee people can submit a nominee to be the volunteer of the year, and then do something similar. We would like to recognize all of our Town volunteers. Mr. Brunelle asked Laura if she had a count for people coming to dinner. Laura stated that her count (not people that actually purchased) is a little over 50. The caterer did want the deadline to be Wednesday, but Laura explained to him that people usually come at the last minute to buy tickets, so she is trying to extend that until Friday. Tickets can be purchased at the Town Hall or contact Laura and she can pick up the money and whatever is necessary to ensure you are in attendance.

Mr. Brunelle thanked Laura for doing all this work. This all started last year, there was a presentation on Memorial day. This is a lot more and John stated that he really appreciates it and knows Pat will appreciate. Laura stated that she is well deserving of it. Laura mentioned it was this coming Sunday at 4:00. Dinner will be immediately following the presentation ceremony. Laura mentioned that it is also a day to recognize all the volunteers in town.

DRA - 2015 Assessment Review

Mr. Keith Gagnon from DRA gave the Board a few handouts on what he was going to be talking about this evening. Keith explained that the reason he was here is to advise the Board that there is a lot going on this year as far as assessing goes, not only the assessment but the Town is also going through a reevaluation. The department will be involved in not only the reevaluation but conducting the assessment review audit. As far as the reevaluation goes, the department will do various things, but the most important this is that they will obtain a sample of the sales properties that Avitar will be using to update the values. Keith stated that he will go out in the field and just verify the information that is on the property record cards. Keith mentioned that as far as assessment and review goes there is also a lot of field work involved with that. Between the reevaluation and the assessment review, Keith stated he will probably look at north of 50 - 60 properties this year. Keith stated that it is really important to

inform the Board that under no conditions will he go to any property without the homeowners permission, they will get a postcard first advising that he intends to come out and there is an opt out box. The postcard is bright yellow. As far as the re-val goes Keith will be working closely with Avitar as far as looking at the sales analysis and ultimately writing the final report on the reevaluation that he will get to the Board. For assessment review, there are various things that are involved with assessing, it is not just assigning value to properties, it is a bunch of things like the administration of current use, land use change tax, religious, charitable, education exemption, elderly and veterans credits and things like that so there is quite a bit involved and that is what is on the chart handed out earlier. The chart tells you exactly the records Keith will be viewing and gives the RSA that supports that. Keith also mentioned that he has a booklet that he will leave with the Board, not only does it quote the RSA, but it actually has the RSA's and some case law that sort of led up to this assessment review.

Mr. Brunelle stated that this was not the first time Keith has done this, he has done spot checks in the past. Keith stated that what Avitar does is they will inspect properties on a reciprocal basis in Town and He monitors that for the folks at Avitar. Selectman Perry asked when this was scheduled to start. Keith stated not for the next couple of weeks. As far as the sales goes, he will be starting on that pretty soon, because he knows Avitar is already involved in that. When everything is entered, Keith can get the property cards and check them. Mr. Perry stated that currently our equalization ratio is at 96.2%. Keith stated that as far as the median ratios goes, yes. Jason stated that we are still within the safe range, but we are trending away from, which is why we go through this cycle every five years and why we spend a sizable amount of money over the five year period for Avitar to do the ciprocal pickups and this last year to do that full sales report. When DRA comes in it is like the seal of approval, they go and verify and make sure we got our monies worth and the data is accurate. Every five years we begin it again, 2016 we start back over at zero and put together a new five year plan. Keith stated that the median ratio is overall ratio, it doesn't cover all the various stragglers in town. Mr. Brunelle asked how long it takes them to do this work. Keith stated that it takes pretty much all year, only because he has several other Towns. Mr. Brunelle asked Keith how many homes he was going to do. Keith said understand, there is monitoring of the sales properties, there is the data action check and there is also something called revised inventory where he actually checks building permits. Building permits can be around 25, the data actually checks about 35 and will probably look at around 12 to 15 sales. Jason mentioned to do your sales report, you have to have enough sales to break out enough data points to build a meaningful model to assign to all of the different housing types. Jason stated that is hard to do with a few sales, so he thinks this is going to be a relatively tricky one for them to build. Keith stated they may consider three years of sales and trend the old sales forward so that they make sense when you do the sales analysis today. Keith stated that the sales that he chooses will be random.

Old Business

Pipeline Updates

Jason mentioned that Kinder Morgan had an open house on Thursday in Londonderry, some of our residents went on Wednesday (in Hudson) when we were meeting. Selectman Byron tried to pin down the representatives for a meeting in Litchfield and was also unsuccessful, more disconcertingly, the public affairs representatives appear to have made representations about their interactions with the Town that did not match his experience. Frank and a local report who had observed found a certain disconnect between Jason's comments and the comments of the Public Relations representatives from Kinder Morgan. The next day, one of the same PR reps also had a different recollection of the conversation at the Londonderry meeting with Selectman Byron. They have tentatively agreed to a meeting here on March 23rd at 6 pm. HOWEVER, before we begin promoting it, Jason stated that he would wait for some additional confirmation. This came from a telephone conversation Friday afternoon - inadvertent, no less, as he had called the phone number provided for Alan Fore who is the lead PR rep, but ended up speaking with Matt Abdifar who had not been in contact with me since Jan. 29. Jason stated that he thinks we may be closer to having a meeting, so when we finally have it confirmed because we are hearing from residents who are looking for some additional information and the residents he spoke with who had attended the Hudson open house were still left with additional questions after attending that open house. Mr. Brunelle asked if the board as a whole should take a stance on the whole situation. Right now the community thinks that we are doing nothing, John stated that he can see how it looks that way on the surface, we have been trying to get a meeting with these folks since we first heard about it, we have been collecting data, we've been publishing it to the public so that the people know what we know, they have been unavailable to us at this point, the Board has not had any initial conversation with them. The Town Administrator has had a conversation in the very beginning, to try to set up some of these meeting and that has gone nowhere, do we take a stance and say at this point we don't support it until we hear further information. Jason stated that if you go to the next item he shared, which was published prior to Friday afternoon conversation. Last week what John just outline is the approach that Pelham took. Pelham's approach was that their Selectmen said they are going to state that they do not support the project at this time due to limited information provided to the community. The Board further discussed this. John stated that he is open for suggestions, they are not meeting again until the 23rd of March, this is not necessarily a community meeting, but people can come in and listen to what the conversation is and bring up stuff during public input, but there is not going to be an opportunity for the public to ask those folks questions, unless they are willing to take the questions off the floor. Jason stated that it would be his intention to design it for as much public interaction as possible, because the public has not had a chance to ask questions. Mr. Brunelle asked if this is going to be the facility we are going to be able to do it in. Jason stated that when he confirms this is real and we get a better feel for what is happening in terms of public interest, then we will adjust accordingly. The Board decided to publish the tentative meeting for the 23rd, on social media (Facebook, Town website and Calendar).

Jason mentioned at their last meeting, several of the impacted towns are considering the

benefits of shared legal counsel, rather than individual counsel. Everyone is waiting until Town Meeting to get a better handle on their financial position. Some with traditional town meeting are considering raising additional money for this purpose. Right now, the approach would be through an inter-municipal agreement. Jason has attached a draft. As a group, we are trying to identify the best ways to control the cost of legal services and to share information and resources between ourselves. The structure would be through an intermunicipal agreement. The challenge is that we are still looking at real money, if we were to full freight (which Jason does not think we will be looking at doing), one of the numbers thrown out was half a million dollars for a legal challenge. Jason stated that obviously we would not be doing this ourselves, this is why you would work collectively. Having a shared resource and splitting it a couple of ways makes a lot more sense.

Jason mentioned that they have received a hand delivered survey request. Although, it is not entirely clear where the lots are that they intend to survey. Based on the guidance shared, I would recommend not granting permission at this time. State law outlines a more formal process for access. Again, at such time as they choose to meet with Litchfield officials and residents and we obtain more information, you may grant access to survey or have them follow the legal process accordingly. Jason stated it is his intention not to sign the survey request until they meet with them.

Avitar - Revelation update

Loren Martin from Avitar came in front of the Board to be proactive, within the past 5 or so years Loren has found requests from DRA during this update process to come in for a start up meeting in June or July and believes the last time through it was in 2010 when they did it; DRA asked for a start up meeting and we were here doing hearing, so it is a little late in the game, they were a little behind with where they were with their contract, so Loren stated she really tried over the last couple of years to get into towns early, start the process and scheduling the start up meeting so that all players, Board, DRA and Avitar are all on the same page. Loren stated that they have a contract which allows them to do their work, they have to do the monitoring of that work, so it has just made it a little bit easier for a little more proactive with the start up. Loren stated that they have already started doing some measuring and listing of sales, the snow has made things a little bit difficult with the measuring and listing process, although their guys are out there for the most part measuring and listing right now. They are getting some positive response from taxpayers because they feel really bad for these guys that have to walk around the houses in the snow. Loren stated that over the next few months they will be out still working on this, it will take a little bit longer than normal because of the snow. Loren stated that she has already started working on some time trend analysis, the ratio for the Town that the State just finalized came in at 96.2% for 2014. For the first time in many years, you are actually below 100% of market value again. For this update they are trying to determine based on the sales that have occurred already, it looks like the are overall seeing some appreciation which we have not seen in quite a long time, which is positive. Loren stated that it makes more work for them, because when values go up

taxpayers come in enraged to discuss their values during hearings and whatnot. From Loren's perspective, when your value goes down and they all of a sudden tell you that you have lost value in your property; you would think that would enrage taxpayers because their biggest asset is worth less, but because that correlates to what they are going to pay in taxes or the perception of what they are going to pay in taxes. Loren stated that she is working on the analysis and preliminary values right now. Litchfield has a fair number of sales in comparison to some of the smaller communities she works in. In Loren's schedule of updates, Litchfield is slated to be first. They will be sending out notices probably in May and be out field reviewing in March and April, finalizing those preliminary numbers and reporting them back to the Town, sending notices out in May with preliminary hearings to be held in June and goal to have everything done, wrapped up and turned over in August so that the Town can get the MS-1 done on time without an extension. Loren stated that when she turns that job over, it will be the live database, the full set of property record cards, the use report with the neighborhood map that has all the sales delineated on it. The state law says you do not have to turn that report over to January, but if we are turning values over that we intend to have to implement to send tax bills on, there should be a report here dictating and detailing how we arrived at those values so taxpayers can review it. Loren stated that they will give the Town the report on a cd in pdf format as well. Loren stated that they have tried to coordinate on getting the data, they had to run an update; Amy is still trying to work to make sure we can get that. A little bit different this phase, while we normally get the data out of here and leaving the town essentially cut off for months at a time, they have a mechanism now where they will have part of our data and the Town will still have part of the data, so the Town can still run reports, put in ownership, sales, permits etc., so they are not at a dead stop while they have the data out and they are maintaining the tables and the physical data on the properties.

Public Input

None

Old Business

Town Meeting Prep

Jason mentioned that the voter guide is prepped and at the printer right now. The inside is all sample ballot the outside is two sentence explanations about each article. This went to the printer on Friday and will be in the HLN weekend before Town Meeting.

Frank did a great job taking all the stuff from the Boards presentations and writing up some very concise letters in support of the different warrants; specifically the budget and town employee increase and others. Selectman Brunelle said he didn't see any reason why these can not be moved out. Mr. Brunelle stated that they are well constructed. Selectman Brunelle encouraged the rest of the Board putting in a letter in support of the general things would be nice. These have all come from the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Brunelle stated that he would like to get them out in social media as well as often and frequently as possible.

Other Items

Future Highway Block Grant

Jason suggest to the Board to read the legislative bulletins he puts up in the next couple of weeks. Jason stated that Representative Byron has passed along from the finance committee hearing that calculation of highway block grant to towns and cities appears to have not been calculated accurately per the constitutional requirement that came up in an audit this summer. Basically administration collection fees are supposed to be retained by the state before calculating the shared percentage. Based on the numbers Frank and Jason looked at, any increase the town expected to receive from the gas tax increase will be wiped out by this recalculation. DOT has some serious budget issues as well.

Updated Tax Maps

NRPC has updated our tax maps, we have moved away from the map sheet format that we tried last year. We are dealing with the fact that our old maps were not dealing in a logical grid. The revision looks great and we are all pleased with the results. Mr. Brunelle asked for the maps to be published on the website. Jason stated that when we contracted with them a couple of years ago to do our tax map updating, we paid a one time fee, we do not pay an annual update fee.

Winter Maintenance

Jason stated that at the last meeting the Board had asked how this was coming along. Through February 23rd, which includes this past weekend, we booked \$151,948.00 in 3 major winter maintenance lines (contractors, overtime and salt). We budgeted \$155,656.00, that also does not include salt deliveries pending or unbilled. Jason stated that a couple of things to know, one being that we still have salt deliveries pending so there is no guarantee that once that salt comes we may actually not have to use it to November, so its not like we will be starting from zero on that. Jason stated that what it shows him right now getting that warrant article that replenishes the trust fund for public works is vital because that is our small cushion to deal with this stuff. The second thing is it also shows another reason why (these are proposed budget numbers) we will struggle to accommodate this in a default budget situation. Jason had a conversation with Jack and told him that it is winter, you have to do what you need to do. These are very reasonable numbers, Jack runs a lean operation at the best of times.

Jason mentioned that there is no update yet on whether that very first storm is going to meet the FEMA threshold or not.

Mr. Perry asked what the average load of salt cost. Jason stated that figure we pay \$50 a ton, a truck load for us runs \$1,650. The problem is the truck is only delivering 33 tons. It cost \$5,000 a storm. Jason stated that if you break those lines down, between contractors, overtime and salt; salt is the one place we are under budget, but we are over in contractors

already and we are going to be over in overtime. The reserve fund (full freight) would get us 2 routine storms. Mr. Brunelle asked what is in there right now. Jason stated that what is in there right now will get us 2/3rds of a storm including labor. The basic snowstorm that we just had over the weekend was \$10,600 total cost. Right now the fund has \$8,000.

Selectman Brunelle asked Jason regarding Richard Husbands letter about Darrah Pond. There was a reference from the State saying that there was a plan and place and knows Jason came back and said, it was news to him John wanted to know if Jason was able to find anything else about this. Jason stated no. Jason mentioned that the Governor's office has requested that DES facilitate a water supply plan initiative. Jason is waiting for the contact from DES for how they want to do the study.

Waste water study

Jason stated that he opted to proceed with CMA Engineers. Jason stated that he gave the Board a copy of their price proposal. Steve and Frank have represented the Board on the committee and came back with that recommendation. Jason mentioned that he has worked with CMA in the past and is very pleased with their work.

Selectmen Reports

Selectman Brunelle started by saying that unfortunately, we have now had another house fire in town and just wanted to say to the family that our prayers are with them and to the folks that responded to the fire, Litchfield's fire department, all the surrounding communities; John wanted to say thank you, it was a miserable day out there, it was cold and they did the best that they could do. Unfortunately the house is a complete total. John also wanted to raise the fact that the community, the Town employees that helped; another example, they need a truck down there from the highway department, the highway department was their putting up roadblocks, bringing the backhoe in to help the crews get into the fire. Thank you to all the departments that chipped in and did all the things that they could do.

Selectman Perry stated that the Recreation Commission is meeting tomorrow night which is the first meeting since winterfest.

Items removed from Consent

No items removed

Other Business

None

Selectman S Perry **motioned** to Adjourn. Selectman K. Bourque **seconded** the motion. **The motion carried 3-0-0.**

The next Board of Selectmen meeting will be March 9, 2015 at 6:00 pm at Town Hall.

Town Meeting is March 10th. Poles are open from 7:00 am - 7:00 pm. Absentee Ballots are still available at the Clerk's office. 424-4045.

Approved March 9, 2015