

Town of Groton  
Select Board Work Session Minutes  
December 03, 2024

**In attendance: John Rescigno, Tony Albert, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Town Administrator)**

**John called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.**

***Tax Rate Information***

As of today, we are still waiting on the school to finalize their information so we can set the tax rate. We will probably have to have a meeting before the December 17<sup>th</sup> meeting to review the preliminary tax rate and to set the Towns rate.

***Budget Items***

Sara did a draft of what the overall operating budget looks like right now. We still do not have Hebron Fire Costs so it does not include that, which we know is going up, and a few other things. The changes that are included on the draft operating budget and the items that we need to discuss are as follows:

- We received the Lake Region Mutual Fire Aid costs for 2025 which are \$19,510.29 which is a 18.74% increase from last year.
- Draft of Operating Budget Total: After the first round of budget meetings, the operating budget is \$1,008,716 which is \$88,242 more than last year but that include the entire fire truck in one payment. We do not have the warrant articles yet since they are not due until 12/26/24.
- Revisit Highlighted budget items: Sara highlighted the items that the Select Board said they wanted to revisit. The Select Board reviewed this and it was agreed that we need to wait and see what is submitted for warrant articles and wait until the end of the year totals come in to make sure we didn't go over on any other lines and need to increase those. Sara went over what she knows we have for warrant articles at this time.
- Tony said that Hebron Fire will have an increase and he should have that information at the next meeting.

***Meeting with Kevin Dennis-MIT***

The Select Board requested to meet with MIT for an update on the driveway/road and the building. Kevin Dennis is the architect for the entire project, including the new building as well as the construction administration for the currently ongoing site work, so it was decided that he should meet with the Select Board. Currently they are only doing site work and they aim for 2025 for the new building but it may slip into 2026 depending on how long it takes them to find a builder and start the permit process with the Town.

The Select Board stated that there has been a lot of work going on at MIT on the road and there is a bridge there. They wanted to make sure the driveway/road is wide enough for an emergency vehicle/fire truck, that the bridge can handle the weight of a fire truck and it doesn't appear that there is an area for them to turn around near the building and this was a requirement. Tony asked how many people the new building will sleep and wanted to know if the plan was still to sleep close to fifty people. Kevin said it will be close to fifty, around the high forty something. Tony mentioned that the other building was smaller and was grandfathered but this new building is too big and will need better access. Emergency vehicles will also need year-round access. He asked if the road can stop before the building and make a turn around so they could turn a fire truck around there, like they had mentioned at a previous site visit. He said that with the new building and so many people sleeping there, we cannot count on UTV access only. Tony said that when the meetings first started, Hebron Fire Department was involved but then they were not involved anymore and it looked like Rumney Fire Department was the only one involved. It really should have been both departments involved. He said when the meetings first started, he

worked for Hebron Fire Department but was not the Hebron Fire Chief. He is the Hebron Fire Chief now. Kevin had stated that he had thought due to letter of code AHJ that they would need to get a fire truck up there but was then told that it would just be a UTV access. Tony had mentioned that there should be a meeting with the Fire Marshall as well. Kevin mentioned that they already have met with the Fire Marshall to complete the 13D variance regarding the sprinkler system. Tony was happy to hear this. Tony said that they are not trying to make things difficult, they just noticed a lot of work taking place and wanted to have this meeting to make sure it was the work that was recommended by the Select Board. Kevin wanted to make sure he is understanding what was being asked to be changed now.

Sara said that these are not actually changes. This is information that the Select Board had passed on to the Planning Board in an email on April 5, 2023 so that the Planning Board could have the information when they met with MIT at their April 26, 2023 meeting. These are not changes that the Select Board are coming up with now, it is work that they had recommended all along and now that the work is being done, they wanted to follow up on this to see why some of it is not being done. Sara had pulled the Planning Board minutes from April, May and June of 2023 and it appears there has been some confusion from the information that the Select Board passed on and the information that was actually given to MIT. Sara read the email to Kevin that the Select Board sent to the Planning Board. The Select Board emailed the Planning Board on April 5, 2023 which stated: *The Select Board reviewed the MIT plans for the driveway and new parking lot. They have the following recommendations:*

- *The road has to be big enough for emergency vehicles to fit, which it appears the plan is showing 10 feet wide which would be wide enough but we should confirm that width.*
- *There needs to be a turnaround at the end and the road so the emergency vehicles can turn around.*
- *The road will have to be plowed and maintained year-round.*
- *We should also ask what the weight rating is on the bridge and will need an engineer rating for it.*
- *They can put a gate up but the Town/emergency services would need a key.*

Sara mentioned that the Planning Board minutes from April 26, 2023 did not seem to reference this information anywhere and did state that the other issue of emergency access has been resolved with the Fire Chief and that MIT will construct a path wide enough for UTV access. It mentioned that this will stay on the Planning Board agenda until approved or disapproved so no decision was made at that meeting.

Sara mentioned that the Planning Board minutes from May 31, 2023 continued the hearing from the April Meeting and when they got to the part about constructing a path wide enough for UTV access that John Rescigno, the Select Board Chair, was there and questioned whether or not the driveway plans had received approval from the fire department. Sara read the following exactly from the Planning Board minutes: *“John was informed by the fire department they want to be able to get a fire truck in there with enough space to be able to turn around. Contractor states that was not his impression and that he was told the fire department needs to be able to access the property using a UTV. The gentleman that has been the main contact for MIT (David Lawrence) arrived late. Upon walking in he stated this was the first he was hearing about a fire truck needing access and that his understanding was they were looking for access using a UTV. It appears John and Mr. Lawrence may be talking about two different fire departments. Hebron Fire Dept, may respond to issues in this area, but Rumney is the primary Department for this area and the Fire Department MIT has been dealing with. PB deliberates. Concern over the outstanding issues remain, particularly the e access to the bunkhouses. It was agreed upon that MIT needs to connect with the fire department and the hearing will be continued until they have confirmed their plans and satisfy the requests of the fire department. Dave L moves to continue the hearing to future meetings, with the application staying on the PB Agenda until it is either approved or disapproved and acted on by the PB. Dave M seconds motion.”*

Sara then also referenced the Planning Board minutes from June 28, 2023 where they had another MIT Hearing. At this meeting it appears that the Planning Board accepted the application and subject to ZBA conditions, approved the plans as presented for access, parking and construction of another bunkhouse. She read the following minutes:

*"The MIT plans depict the revised access trail design, which complies with all Fish & Game and Wildlife Service regulations. The trail grading has been reduced and the culvert has been replaced with a bridge in order to avoid any wetlands impacts. In all other respects, these plans are unchanged from the ones that were presented and at previous PB meetings. Also presented is a letter from Mr. Lawrence to the Rumney Fire Chief dated 6-10-2023, and the Chiefs response, dated 6-12-2023. Deb J discusses with the PB the ruling by the ZBA dated Sept 4, 2020. She shares a letter from the NHMA that indicates "in the absence of a motion for rehearing and appeal to Superior Court, a ZBA approval of a special exception with conditions cannot be collaterally attacked ... Nevertheless, acting under its site review regulations the planning board can impose conditions of approval". She asks John if the select board discussed the access issue and asked the ZBA to reconsider its ruling. They had not nor was there an appeal to the courts. Further, Deb confirms that the PB took no action in 2020. Rather, the PB left the 6 conditions of the ZBA decision intact. Since the only issues preventing the PB from accepting the MIT Application for access and building a second bunkhouse have been resolved, there is nothing which prevents the PB from exercising jurisdiction. Deb moves to accept the MIT Application and subject to the ZBA conditions, to further approve the plans as presented for access, parking and construction of another bunkhouse. Russ seconds the motion. With no additional discussion, the PB unanimously approves."*

The Select Board and Kevin discussed this. It appears confusion was between the information that the Select Board provided the Planning Board not being passed on in these meetings and not being in the minutes anywhere. The other confusion seems to be between Hebron and Rumney Fire Departments since Hebron was involved at the beginning but then was not informed anymore once Rumney started being involved.

Kevin said he may not have been involved at the time of some of these meetings. However, he said the road is 10 feet wide so it is wide enough and the bridge will hold all vehicles. It appears the only concern right now is the turn around so they need to concentrate on that. Tony said they need to get close enough, maybe about 100 feet but then will need a turnaround big enough that a fire truck can turn around. Sara mentioned that if they need to have Tony go out and look at the turn around or show them what he is saying they need, they can contact Sara and she can set up a meeting for Tony to go out.

Kevin said that they are still raising money for the new building so it will be another year or two before that will be done. The other one is still there, and being used, but not for sleeping. Kevin asked if what is there for the driveway/road is okay for the existing building and then when they complete the new building they can complete the turnaround at that time. Tony agreed that what is there is okay for the existing building and that the turnaround be completed when the new building is completed. He wanted to state again that they cannot be sleeping in there for safety reasons. Tony said he can also contact the Rumney Fire Chief so that they are all on the same page and they can all meet if needed.

Everyone was in agreement of what needed to happen moving forward and thanked Kevin for meeting with the Select Board. Sara told Kevin to call her or email any time if he has any questions or concerns or if he would like to set up any meetings.

### ***Procurement Policy Update***

At the last meeting the Select Board discussed the changes to the Procurement Policy. Sara made these changes. **John motioned to adopt the procurement policy with the changes effective today December 3, 2024. Tony 2<sup>nd</sup>, so voted.**

### ***Winter Maintenance Ordinance***

At a previous meeting Bubba discussed with the Select Board making a winter ordinance. The Select Board agreed. Sara created this ordinance and sent it to Bubba. He agreed all looks good. Sara emailed to the Select Board and put it in the review folder. The Select Board reviewed this and agreed that it looks good. **John motioned to adopt the procurement policy with the changes effective today December 3, 2024. Tony 2<sup>nd</sup>, so voted. Ruth has to sign this as well since it is an ordinance.**

### ***USDA-Drinking Fountain Email for Public Works Building***

Tracy from RD was asking about the elimination of the drinking fountain. They said to please be aware that this is a plumbing code requirement and will be reflected as non-compliant on USDA certification at the completion of the project. Since the Town is effectively the building enforcement entity, this requirement can be waived, so they will need a letter from the Town indicating that this is acceptable to eliminate. Sara asked the Select Board if they would like to move forward with eliminating this and the letter. Sara had drafted a letter in case they agreed to go this route. The Select Board reviewed the letter. Tony said the water fountains get so dirty at a Highway garage and he wondered if we could do a bubbler like we have here instead. The Select Board asked Sara to check with USDA to see if a water bubbler with the 5-gallon jugs would counts instead of a water fountain. She will check with them and if that works, we will go that route. If not, we will revisit this letter.

### ***Update on Ethier- Emails from attorney, MRI, etc. regarding Ethier concerns***

Since the last meeting Sara emailed back to the attorney and to MRI. MRI emailed back that Audrey Cline, who currently handles our junkyard inspections and is our deputy health officer, has handled these issues in Durham and Wolfeboro, so she's pretty confident this wouldn't be a problem for her. She's not a "certified floodplain manager". She says if the excavation is either close to the edge of the floodplain (via eyeballing the FEMA maps) or there is a need for an "elevation certificate", those items would require a surveyor to verify. Audrey took a look at it and send her thoughts over to the Town. The Select Board reviewed this and agreed that we should hire her to move forward with this but due to the snow it will be difficult to see anything this time of year. We should put this on the schedule for first thing in the Spring now that we know she can assist with this. They also agreed that we should send this to the attorney to let her know our thoughts. Sara will email MRI and our attorney and let them know.

### ***Solid Waste Facility Contact Information***

We received an email that we need to review and make any updates to the Solid Waste Facility Contact information to DES by December 31, 2024. Currently they have Norman Willey listed as the contact person, which we agree this should be since he is the Supervisor. The contact email that they have is the Select Board email address since the Transfer Station never had email before. Sara asked Norm if he wanted to change this but also wanted to check with the Select Board on this. She is able to check the email every day so she didn't know if they wanted to keep this email or update it and change it to the Transfer Station email address. The Select Board agreed to keep the Select Board email address so we can view the emails right away and can contact Norm as needed. The Select Board agreed that the Select Board email address should be the primary contact email address and the Transfer Station email address will be the secondary if we can have two email addresses. If we can only have one then it should be the Select Board email address since Sara checks this every day and can let Norm know if there is something pressing.

### ***Sara's vacation time***

Sara explained that she has been trying to use her vacation time. That is why she took time off in November and December. It is hard to take more time off this time of year with budget season, end of year, etc. She asked permission to carry the rest of her vacation time over due to these reasons and with the plan that all carry over time will be used up in the first half of the year. The Select Board is okay with this.

***Evaluation Memo***

Sara mentioned that she emailed out, and handed out, the evaluation Memo along with the evaluation form last week. These are due back to the Select Board office by January 1<sup>st</sup>. She also put a copy in each of the Select Boards folders along with copies of the evaluations for the employees that they complete the evaluations for. Sara will email the evaluation form to John.

***State Plowing***

There were a lot of concerns about the plowing of the state road in Groton for the Thanksgiving storm. We had to help people who were stuck. We got a lot of snow up here and they should have been out more. We only saw them three times and they should have been out here a lot more than that. Bubba will talk to Dan to see if there was a reason for it and then we will watch the storms from here on out and see what happens.

**Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 6:59pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Smith  
Town Administrator