

Town of Blue Hill
Select Board Meeting
Monday, December 09, 2024
Minutes

Call to Order: 5:31 PM.

Attendance/Quorum

E. Best (Chair), S. Miller, B. Adams, J. Dow, J. Wootten, J. Atwell (Town Administrator), D. Goettler (Minute Taker), Z. Pulitzer (Minute Taker).

Public: Jeff Milliken

Approval of Minutes

S. Miller moved to approve the minutes of November 15, 2024, November 25, 2024, December 2, 2024, and December 5, 2024 as edited. B. Adams seconded; vote passed 5/0.

Public Comment

No public comments.

Business

1. GEI – Climate Vulnerability Assessment Certification

J. Dow moved to certify the Assessment. S. Miller seconded; vote passed 5/0. The Board thanked Allen Kratz for his and his team's work.

2. SeaLoft Update

Amy Houghton reported that she had caulked the leaky windows and that they are now mostly watertight. She added that, although the south-facing windows usually cause problems, the east-facing ones have been more troublesome recently, depending on the wind's direction. E. Best emphasized the scale of a potential window replacement and mentioned the possibility of adding plexiglass storm windows to the exterior instead of a full replacement. A. Houghton replied that the windowsills themselves are rotten. J. Wootten offered to visit the site with his thermal camera on Wednesday, December 11, 2024, during a predicted storm in order to assess areas of leakage, which the Board approved.

E. Best stated that finding an appropriate contractor to undertake the repair work was proving difficult. She expressed her love of the building but said that its continued care was beginning to become financially irresponsible. S. Miller suggested seeking quotes from more contractors and mentioned the roughly \$20,000-\$30,000 estimates received so far for individual aspects of the restoration. E. Best confirmed that the whole project would likely cost around \$100,000 and added that it is not the Town's mission to provide seasonal storefronts. J. Dow asked what else could be done with the building if it cannot be restored. Jeff Milliken (member of the public) asked whether the building could be moved; the Board agreed that such a plan was not financially feasible.

When J. Atwell mentioned that she thought A. Houghton's lease was set to expire on December 31, 2024, A. Houghton replied that, since she signed the lease in February of 2024, she thought that it would not expire until February of 2025. J. Wootten offered to

seek more contractors' quotes, which the Board approved. E. Best confirmed that selling the property would not be considered because of its waterfront location.

J. Dow asked A. Houghten whether she would like to renew her lease for 2025. She answered in the affirmative, and S. Miller proposed allowing it if she were willing to sign with the building in its current state. The Board agreed. S. Miller went on to affirm that the Town ought to maintain its core properties, but that SeaLoft is not core and is very expensive. A. Houghten mentioned that there is nowhere else in Blue Hill from which she could run her business, and that she needs to begin ordering inventory for the summer of 2025 shortly, so needs to know soon whether she needs to move. She agreed to look over her current lease and email J. Atwell with anything she needs changed, to be reviewed at the following Select Board Meeting.

3. Appointment (Road Commissioner & School)

J. Atwell reported that the Road Commissioner remains undecided and that she is not sure about the status of the School Committee. S. Miller stated that the Select Board has no control over School Committee membership, but that every year, it adopts a policy to allow the Committee to sign disbursement warrants within its Select Board-appropriated budget. J. Dow expressed hesitation at allowing the Committee to spend money without the Board's oversight; J. Atwell stated that she sees the spending because she transfers the money, but that the specifics are not the Town's concern.

S. Miller mentioned that, in the recent past, the policy has included a requirement that the Committee categorizes each transaction for ease of reference, and made it clear that the Committee, not the Select Board, is responsible for managing payments within appropriations. E. Best brought up the fact that the school budget is larger than the amount appropriated by the Town and that the Committee is free to spend any donations however it sees fit, though the Town Treasurer cannot transfer Town money if it will exceed the appropriated budget.

J. Dow moved to re-appoint J. Atwell as Road Commissioner. S. Miller seconded; vote passed 5/0.

4. Assessment of Personal Property Taxes

S. Miller reported that he had been in contact with the Town of Penobscot, which asks its citizens to self-report their personal property. He added that, since the cost of assessing personal property taxes tends to be roughly equivalent to the amount collected, several other towns do not collect at all. He reiterated that he is not comfortable remaining in noncompliance with State law, and has found a list of approximately 30 companies of assessor's agents in Maine. J. Dow agreed that the Board should reach out and J. Atwell agreed to distribute the list to the Board. J. Dow volunteered to contact a few companies and narrow down the possibilities. J. Milligan asked what types of property would be taxed. E. Best told him that anything that had already been charged excise tax would be exempt; S. Miller clarified that personal property tax applied only to business holdings and would not impact the average citizen. He added that, according to the Municipal Assessment Manual, the Board members act as agents of the State in enforcing tax law, and that the process is so expensive to the Town because the State requires very thorough assessing; all personal property is supposed to be physically inspected every ten years.

5. Tree Lighting Request

J. Atwell suggested that the tree lighting of the Bannister gift tree not be incorporated into annual practice. E. Best agreed that, while the lights are nice, she does not want to commit to repeating the practice every year. S. Miller proposed that the Town not light the tree this year but consider it in future years. E. Best added that the lighting would be easier to execute if the lights and/or labor were donated, noting the large size of the tree.

6. Bench Request

J. Wootten stated that the Town's current practice is to accept sponsorships for docks and floats but not benches. S. Miller mentioned the need for new benches around town and that the standard model does not have space to affix a plaque. He and J. Dow proposed a policy whereby anyone may pay to sponsor a consistent model of bench. E. Best stated that the Town would not be responsible for replacing the bench if it is destroyed and S. Miller added that the Town should still take reasonable steps to preserve the benches. J. Atwell agreed to email their decision to the person who had asked.

7. Maine Paid Family & Medical Leave

J. Atwell reported that a new state policy will require employers and employees to collectively pay 1% of each employee's compensation as a premium toward the state's paid leave fund. She added that the employer must pay at least 0.5% and can choose to either pay the other 0.5% or pass that along to the employees. E. Best stated that she was in favor of paying the full 1%. J. Dow asked for confirmation that the money goes to the State. S. Miller confirmed and clarified that, while the premiums will begin to be paid in 2025, employees will not be able to claim leave from the policy until 2026. He added that he is also in favor of paying the full 1% but would like to revisit the current town employee sick leave policy to ensure compatibility. J. Milliken asked whether the leave policy would cover maternity benefits; S. Miller answered that he was not sure, but since the policy is so broad, he considered it likely; he also asked whether the paid leave would be at the employee's full rate. J. Atwell answered that she thought it unlikely.

Other Business

E. Best brought up a request from Morgan Lawson to be reimbursed for the heat and power he spends while building the Town benches in his workshop. The request was for \$5 per hour in addition to the \$1,111.47 cost for the eight benches produced. J. Atwell added that she asked him to also perform a few jobs in the Town Hall and that he has already removed the water fountain as requested. J. Wootten proposed also having him address the poor insulation in the Town Hall's basement. J. Atwell mentioned that her office gets incredibly hot without the heating turned on and that she is unsure where the excess heat is coming from. The Board agreed to approve the \$5 per hour reimbursement request without a vote since it fits within the budget.

J. Dow stated that he received a phone call from an unhappy citizen who reported that someone named Lori had informed them that Seaside Cemetery required cremains to be deposited in a cement vault, when no such policy in fact exists. J. Dow advised the Town Office staff to pass all queries regarding the cemetery along to S. Lavalley, and E. Best cautioned the staff against trying to answer questions when uncertain about the information. A follow-up email from J. Dow to J. Atwell at 7:28 PM the same evening clarified that the Lori in question was the proprietor of a

funeral home unaffiliated with the town. J. Dow subsequently spoke with the funeral home and made clear the town policy.

S. Miller informed the Board that he had annotated the Healthy Ecosystems Ordinance draft with questions and returned it with the goal of making it clearer and more easily complied with. He wanted to schedule a time to sit down with the Board and look over it in more detail. J. Dow suggested that it would be more effective to require pesticides to be applied by licensed applicators than to simply limit those untrained homeowners were allowed to use. S. Miller stated that he had drafted an exemption to the policy wherein residents may use any pesticide legally purchased by a Blue Hill retailer, which would pass the responsibility for ensuring compliance from the resident to the retailer.

B. Adams asked the Board if there was an existing policy regarding which town officials had the authority to have illegally parked vehicles towed. S. Miller proposed granting the new Road Commissioner, the Select Board members, the Code Enforcement Officer, and Public Works Officers the authority to write warning tickets and order vehicles towed. J. Atwell specified that plow drivers should be included as Public Works Officers. E. Best stated that, since not all residents have reliable access to off-street parking, the Town should designate a place where they may safely park during snowstorms. She proposed the hockey rink as a fairly central but sufficiently out-of-the-way location. S. Miller added that the Town should post snow warnings on its website in order to alert residents to move their cars in a timely fashion. S. Miller moved to authorize the Road Commissioner, Code Enforcement Officer, and Public Works Officers to issue violation notices and tow vehicles. B. Adams seconded; vote passed 5/0. E. Best advised the use of heavy cardstock for the violation notices so that they would not be destroyed by snow. J. Atwell asked for clarification about the purpose of a violation notice; E. Best answered that it would inform the vehicle's owner that future violations could result in towing. J. Atwell asked B. Adams to make introductory calls to towing companies. S. Miller moved to authorize the Fire Chief to issue violation notices and tow vehicles. J. Dow seconded; vote passed 5/0. S. Miller looked up whether the Select Board members already had the authority by ordinance and discovered that they did not. S. Miller moved to authorize the Select Board members and officers of the Hancock County Sheriff to issue violation notices and tow vehicles. B. Adams seconded; vote passed 5/0.

Adjournment

S. Miller moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:53 PM subject to signing Disbursement Warrants. J. Wootten seconded; vote passed 5/0.

The Disbursement Warrants were signed.