



Selectmen's Meeting
Town Office
Wednesday, December 7, 2011

APPROVED Minutes

Present: Jed Brummer, Chair; Patricia Lang Barry; Samuel Seppala; Carlotta Pini

5:45 P.M. NON-PUBLIC SESSION PER RSA 91-A:3 II.(A) FOR PERSONNEL

6:00 P.M. CALL TO ORDER / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Approval of Minutes: November 22, 2011 – Pat Barry abstained since she wasn't at the last meeting, but Jed motioned to accept the November 22nd minutes and Sam seconded.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Holly Koski re: Elderly/Disabled Income Limits – This year, elderly citizens received the first cost of living increase from Social Security since 2009. The last time Rindge raised the income limit for its elderly/disabled tax exemption was in 2007 when the single exemption increased from \$18,940 to \$25,000, and the married exemption increased from \$27,072 to \$35,000. Holly said there are 572 people in Rindge over 65 years of age. In 2007, there were 51 elderly and 20 disabled; in 2010 there were 67 elderly and 27 disabled within the present income limits for the exemption. Low-to-moderate gross income is considered to be \$40,000, and many other towns in New Hampshire have higher income limits for the elderly/disabled exemptions than Rindge. The proposed warrant article would raise the income limits from \$25,000 to \$35,000 for a single person and \$35,000 to \$49,000 for married couples. The Select Board said it would take the article under advisement. No one knows how many more folks would take advantage of the credit as a result of the increased exemption—when Rindge raised the Veterans tax credit from \$100 to \$500, it significantly increased the tax rate.

Rindge Crime Watch – The Rindge Crime Watch would like to post crime watch signs at the Town borders and possibly at the entrance to Franklin Pierce University. Carlotta Pini, Town Administrator, said that addendum signs (added to primary signs) can cost about \$75.00. The tricky part of posting signs on the Massachusetts border is that the border is a state right-of-way. Legislators have to give special permission for signs to be posted there, and that can take a long time. Police Chief Mike Sielicki suggested that Crime Watch representatives attend the next Roadway Committee meeting. Selectman Pat Barry suggested that the sign issue also be on the next Town-Gown meeting agenda so that FPU can share their feedback. The Roadway Committee is meeting next Thursday, Dec. 15th at 12:30.

Request from Granite State Enforcers to Fundraise at Transfer Station – The Granite State Enforcers is a new Rindge hockey team for youth; they're trying to get this project off the ground and spread the word about the efforts and would like to hold a fundraiser at the Transfer Station Saturday, December 10th between 10:00am and 12:00pm.

MOTION: Pat Barry motioned to allow the Granite State Enforcers to have a fundraiser this Saturday, December 10th, from 10:00am-12:00pm. The Enforcers are aware that they need to park outside the transfer station. Selectman Sam Seppala seconded, and all were in favor.

2012 Budget

Library – The Library is asking for \$28,150, which this year does not include any revenue back to the Town. There was an increase in service contracts costs due to the need to renew the software maintenance agreement for the online database of the Library's collection. Because the Library purchased the initial 2-3 year service contract upfront, it wasn't in the budget these past two years but is now up for renewal. The original database, worth \$15,000, was donated to the Library and has been a great convenience for residents. Jed Brummer, Select Board Chair, said the Library had done a good job of keeping its budget down. Carlotta said there was some offsetting revenue to the town in 2010 due to the fact that the Library is able to accept donations as unanticipated revenue and either use it or put it into a fund; to get the money out, they need to request an appropriation. So, in those years, the Library's budget might be up \$3,000 but then they'll reimburse the Town from that fund to offset it. In 2011 we didn't get any revenue from the Library and there's none proposed in 2012. Sam Seppala asked

whether the Library could hold its budget to \$27,150. Bob Carney said they might have been able to if everything else hadn't gone up, including the cost of books and all the fixed costs that have increased.

Ambulance Service – For the non-profit Jaffrey/Rindge Ambulance Service, Rindge has traditionally included a stipend of \$16,000-\$24,000 in the annual budget. This year, the JRAS is asking for \$20,000. They do not get reimbursed for calls that they go to but which don't result in their transporting a patient to the hospital (normally, an ambulance ride costs \$500-\$1,000). Our stipend covers reimbursement for those calls. They respond to 900+ emergency calls per year, and Rindge accounts for about a third of those. Their situation is looking worse due to the uncertainty of Medicare/Medicaid funding and the need for increasingly highly specialized, high-tech equipment. Their crew was named Monadnock Hospital's EMS service unit of the year. In 2012, their proposed expense to serve Jaffrey and Rindge is over \$250,000, so our \$20,000 (Jaffrey also pays \$20,000) seems reasonable. Fire Chief Rick Donovan said that the Town of Rindge runs a medical rescue to all the calls, but the ambulance service (which doesn't provide medical help) transports patients to the hospital. Other ambulance service providers cost \$60,000-\$80,000, so this is a good bargain for the Town. JRAS can provide their services at this cost because they are reimbursed from the insurance companies. Rick said that we pay into the Fire Mutual Aid system so regional towns support each other and we're not billed by other towns when we call on them for assistance.

Zoning Board of Adjustment – The case load has been pretty consistent over the years; this year, there were 11 cases. Everything the ZBA does is mandated, so there are fixed costs that must be covered, such as advertising. The ZBA also sends new members to meetings to get them up to speed on the regulations. Sam Seppala asked what the ZBA's budget was this year for their secretarial/recording services, for which it had budgeted a few thousand in the past. Carlotta said that after Julie left for another job, they added the responsibilities of Clerk to the ZBA to the role of the new Administrative Assistant to the Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen, and Welfare Director.

Fire Department and Emergency Management – Fire Chief Rick Donovan explained that the Fire Department's budget (\$362,619) is just 10.1% of the Town's portion of the budget. Peterborough's budget for fire response, alone, is over \$500,000. The Town of Rindge answers an average of 700 fire/emergency calls per year, whereas Jaffrey averages 350 calls and Peterborough 500. Rindge's 24/7 fire protection costs \$132/year on a home worth \$200,000 or \$11/month. Rindge has a full-time Fire Chief (Rick), firefighter EMT (Casey), and a full-time EMT (Deb). Rick and Deb are shared between Building and Emergency Management--Rick is also the Town's Building Inspector and Deb is Deputy Emergency Management Director and Administrative Assistant. Casey performs life safety inspections, life safety compliance, and fire prevention programs in schools and businesses, and he helps Rick with building inspections. Rick said that he and Deb have been pretty successful in writing and receiving grants and have secured \$311,000 in grant funding since 2003.

Rindge is a member of the Southwest Mutual Aid District. Rindge does not have an aerial device (which would cost \$700,000 - \$1,000,000). And we don't have the ladder truck and ambulances that Peterborough has. But for a member fee, Mutual Aid gives the Town 24/7 paging and dispatch and calls other towns for the additional equipment and personnel we need for an event. A structure fire, for instance, can require 60-100 guys to extinguish. Currently, 79 towns involved with 93 agencies are covering Southwestern New Hampshire, Vermont, and some of Massachusetts. We're constantly looking at ways we can help each other and contain costs.

Our team responds to a much wider range of calls than in the past, including fire calls, alarms, vehicle fires, auto accidents, tree and wires down, hazmat calls, fuel spills, all medical calls, welfare checks, basement flooding, trench collapse, and search and rescue. New building codes have helped reduce the severity and frequency of fires, and we issue burn permits and maintain water supply cisterns to supplement the water supply when there's a fire.

Unfortunately, we're facing challenges with our aging equipment, and we need to do something with our buildings. The Fire Service recommends replacing trucks every 20 years. In 2009, Engine 2 was scheduled to be replaced but still hasn't been, and it's being used to do inspections. Engine 1 is scheduled to be replaced in 2016. Our old 1986 vehicle is mainly just used for water supply now. The command vehicle (2004 Ford F250) was due to be replaced and was on a warrant article last year. If the brush truck is out, people have to hook up a trailer and take equipment to the scene. The brush truck is also used to size up the scene and see what's needed.

Impact to residents: Whenever Rindge can't maintain a good ISO rating, residents' homeowner insurance increases. Insurance companies rate a Town according to its Fire Department, public safety facilities, equipment, the water available to pump, the personnel on call, response times, whether the Town has a Building Inspector, building codes and active code enforcement, etc. Engine 2 is hurting us because we can't put enough water on the scene and have it flow enough. The ISO ranges from 1-10, with higher numbers being worse. A one-point increase in the ISO rating means an 8% increase in residents' insurance bills.

In 2012, warrant articles may be proposed for a command vehicle (\$35,000), Engine 2's replacement (\$350,000), and repairs to the Fire Station, and Rick would like to see a warrant for a public safety building (\$4.5M). At the next meeting, the Safety Committee's recommendations will be presented, and Mike Cloutier will present the Town building budgets. Rick said that since we didn't have the money to maintain a generator, it broke and we had to spend a lot more than the annual maintenance cost to correct it. The equipment we used to get from the hospital, they're no longer supplying, and that's why those fees are going up. We have three cabinets of medical supplies in the Station but not enough to handle a mass event. We refill those cabinets by buying bulk supplies in the last quarter when our vendors have specials. Kim: Can you highlight the things that are mandated? And if the Town would lose grant monies by not doing something in particular, we need to know what that is.

Police Department – Police Chief Mike Sielicki said that the Department will lose one Officer soon, and more Officers have applications out. Also, the Prosecutor has asked for a raise, so her salary is up from \$53,300, to \$54,800. Carlotta said the consensus from the BOS and BAC is that there ought to be one cruiser in the operating budget rather than in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). They had considered getting a second cruiser this year but held off to see how the budget went, and it might be wise to consider contracting a second cruiser towards the end of this year and then reduce the fleet by one as outlined in the warrant before the budget failed. Having a new cruiser under warranty would reduce maintenance costs. Carlotta said that they also saved a considerable amount on the health insurance by upping the deductible. The NH Retirement System not only upped the percentage on the Police Officers, but the State stopped paying its share and has made the towns pick it up.

Animal Control – Larry Harris's cell phone expense should come out of the Technology Budget. Larry is very busy as there have been lots of animal calls this year—moose, dogs, cats, skunks, and beavers that need to be relocated. Larry tries very hard to find the lost animals homes before the State's deadline requires him to surrender them to the Humane Society.

Other Discussion – Several members of the Budget Advisory Committee were present. Tom Coneys wanted to know about employee contributions to the health insurance plan. Carlotta explained that the deductible amount has been increased for the past two years and employees pay part of the premium. An insurance pool, funded when employees do not exceed \$500 in deductibles, covers those employees who do. The savings to the Town realized by going with a higher deductible have been much greater than what was claimed from that pool. That line item in the insurance budget is listed as the health reimbursement account (HRA).

Dan Aho asked Police Chief Mike Sielicki why his budget is the largest yet is being increased by 12%. The Chief replied that overtime has gone up to cover the costs of employees that left. Sam Seppala asked why wages haven't gone down if people have left. The Chief replied that until they can be replaced, the Police Department is paying overtime for coverage.

Bruce Hall, also a member of the BAC, railed against the three raises given this year. Although the employees have not received raises for four years, residents voted down a warrant article last year requesting a one-time 2% raise and employees are becoming demoralized. Selectman Pat Barry said that when you're talking about the personnel who make the town run, to lose an individual and have to replace them costs money, so it's fiscally irresponsible not to try to hold onto them. She said that we put three people into a competitive range because their salaries were out of whack. We also looked at Police Officers who had the same amount of experience, time, etc. The Officers' replacement cost was three times more than the raises cost. Ultimately, it costs the Town more to neglect and replace its employees. Jed said that we want to keep qualified people here. Bruce said the Selectmen should consider whether any responsibilities are duplicated, and Pat agreed that those are exactly the things they're looking at.

Tom Coneys made more comments about raises. Pat replied, "I understand that and am asking people to have faith that these decisions were not arbitrary. For six years, I've sat on this Board and hoped that the hard work of the Personnel Committee and the warrant articles would be welcomed, and that hasn't happened. And as a Selectman, I have to try to make right what isn't right."

"The Town paid for the Bennett study on wages that made recommendations, but then the residents said, 'No we don't want to go with that.' Then, with changes to the Select Board, the study was pushed aside and the Personnel Committee was tasked with fixing the fallout. They met with the Department Heads and came up with a presentation to the Board, and it was tough. All the Department Heads were tasked with answering the question, 'How do we keep the revolving door down?' The problem is that last year the question of raises was put in a warrant article, but at the Town Meeting people almost cut our heads off."

Bruce: Sometimes you have to make cuts, so cut out our employees' benefits. Tom said there are needs of this Town that people are willing to support, but as far as the employees go, residents are more interested in addressing the Town's infrastructure.

Kim McCummings: You talked about the Bennett study, but as long as I've been on the Personnel Committee, every year we look at each position in the Town and at towns of similar size, and each year Rindge's positions are in the lowest quartile of the pay ranges. And every year we make recommendations to the BOS. But as the years have passed, nothing's been done. And despite four years of a default budget, there are things that must be done in order for the Town to continue to function. The bigger issue is the future of this Town. We have to break the cycle of default budget, and people have to put aside the anger to carry this Town forward. If we don't take care of our infrastructure, people won't be able to sell their properties in Rindge. But we need how to figure out how to make that happen—right now, bonds are the cheapest they've been.

Sam: If we don't come in with a level budget, the whole budget is in jeopardy. Kim: Even last year with a default budget, there were articles that passed—the cruiser and a dump truck, for instance, plus the Meeting House. Bruce said he wants the three raises rescinded. Pat said that if that were done, they would not be addressing the inequities at all.

Approve Refund toward William Seidman's Registration – Mr. Seidman submitted a letter to the Selectmen describing a miscommunication concerning his registration fee, and asked for a refund of the overpayment.

MOTION: Pat motioned to refund the amount requested (\$276.00), Sam seconded, and all were in favor.

Proposal to Reduce Transfer Sticker Fee for Remainder of Year – Mike Cloutier prepared a memo asking the Board to reduce the price of transfer station stickers for the remaining dump year to \$5 for those under 65 years old and to \$1 for seniors.

MOTION: Sam Seppala motioned to reduce the cost of a transfer station sticker from \$20 to \$5 for those under 65 years, and from \$5 to \$1 for seniors for the remaining dump year (till March 13, 2012). Pat seconded, and all were in favor.

Bids to Replace Police Station Roof – Mike reviewed bids and recommends awarding the bid to Pento & Sons, which was \$110 more than the lowest bid, but they included more services, more durable shingles and a longer warranty. Mike spoke with both Pento and JRK Builders about the need for insurance. The Board was asked to award the contract to Pento pending acceptable insurance with JRK as the backup. This project is to be funded with the available impact fees.

MOTION: Sam made a motion to award the project to Pento & Sons. Pat seconded, and all were in favor.

MOTION: Pat made a motion to approve the Payroll Manifest & Accounts Payable Manifest, Sam seconded, and all were in favor.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT

Ongoing Business
November Revenue/Expenditure Reports

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS / COMMUNICATION

Fire Mutual Aid Memo – detailed the change to their calculation of the billing which was discussed earlier.

Cheshire County Tax Bill Memo – explained the County's most recent tax bill to the Town of Rindge, which is \$1,821,672 and is payable by December 19th.

Notice from the Town of Greenfield – described their new cell tower application.

Roberta Oeser of the Budget Advisory Committee distributed minutes of the last two BAC meetings to the Board of Selectmen. The BAC's November 28th minutes state that the Committee "strongly recommends that the budget for 2012 be \$3,523,482." In light of the November 28th recommended budget figure, Selectman Pat Barry asked Tom Coneys whether the BAC is planning to come back to the BOS with specific recommendations on how to achieve their proposed budget reduction. Pat noted that there has been a lot of activity by the BAC but no recommendations except to cut the budget—without mention of what to cut/reduce to get to the proposed figure. In the past, the BAC presented line item recommendations to the BOS, but that hasn't happened for three years. Pat said that the Selectmen want specific recommendations from the Budget Advisory Committee this year.

MOTION: Jed motioned to leave Public Session and go to a Non-Public Session for Reputation, Pat seconded, and all were in favor.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION PER RSA 91-A:3 II.(C) FOR REPUTATION

MOTION: Jed motioned to go out of Non-Public for Reputation, seal the minutes, and go into Non-Public for Litigation. Pat seconded, and all were in favor.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION PER RSA 91-A:3 II.(E) FOR LITIGATION

MOTION: Jed motioned to go out of Non-Public Session for Litigation, seal the minutes, return to Public Session, and adjourn. Pat seconded, and all were in favor.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:13pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Linda Stonehill, Administrative Assistant.