

**TOWN OF DEERFIELD
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
December 4, 2023
MINUTES**

Call to Order

5:30 – Chairman Pitman called the meeting to order

Present: Chairman Richard Pitman, Vice Chairman Fred McGarry, Selectwoman Cynthia McHugh, Selectman Will Huebner, and Selectman Steve Barry.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

2023 Property Tax Rate

Chairman Pitman states they will be starting with citizens comments first and asks that the comments be kept to 3 minutes each and then gives the floor to Selectman Barry.

Selectman Barry makes a statement to the citizens about the 2023 tax rate impacting the citizens of Deerfield and explains why the tax is set to where it's at and provides some history behind the tax rate in Deerfield.

Selectman Huebner goes over the revaluation of property in 2020 and how and why the rate has changes. He lastly reminds the citizens that the Board members are tax paying citizens of the town as well.

Citizen's Comments on the 2023 Property Tax Rate

- Don Gorman. Mountain Road. Mr. Gorman bullet points the 3 areas he would like discuss. One, the review of representative government. Two, problems. Three, ideas of some remedies. He explains each one and the possible remedies.
- Stan Lupa. Holt Drive. Mr. Lupa explains how he feels about the tax rate increase and feeling that there should have been warning.
- Mike Farrelly. Lake View Lane. Mr. Farrelly states that this is his father's address and house and is here on his behalf. He thanks the Board for their work and time. He goes onto to explain his concerns for the tax rate going up and asks if there is any way to reduce costs.
- Amber Lagasse. Mountain Road. Ms. Lagasse questions why there are no surplus funds this year to buy down the tax rate and Selectman Barry and Selectman Huebner explain why the town does not have surplus funds this year to buy down the tax rate. Lastly, Ms. Lagasse asks about the increase on the education tax and the Board explains that the increase is less than what she believes it is so she goes on to ask what is causing the large increase and Selectman Barry and Selectman Huebner explain why and the warrant articles are a big part of the increase.
- Franceen Lupa. Holt Drive. Ms. Lupa feels a letter of explanation should have been sent out after the tax increase.
- Dick Boisvert. Church Street. would like to know why there was an increase from the first tax bill to the second tax bill this year. Selectman Barry explains that since the tax rate is set in October the 2023 tax bill will be paid in December of 2023 and in June of 2024. Mr. Harrington then explains that you pay half of what the rate is in June so with the rate set at \$22.66 citizens will pay approximately \$11.33 per thousand for the first half of the 2024 year. Selectman Huebner states that citizens should be able to calculate their own tax rate for June based on this knowledge that is available to the public. Selectman Barry states that more could be done with mailing information to the citizens. Lastly, Mr. Boisvert explains how differed maintenance can be issue and end up costing more later so it might not be a good idea to get rid of all warrant articles.

- Linda McNair-Perry. Range Road. Ms. McNair-Perry explains she was not surprised by the rate going up as she has been attending the BOS meetings but that she is disappointed the BOS did not communicate with the public because then social media took over. She would like to see the BOS take more of an opportunity at communicating better with the public.
- Sally Brown. North Road. Explains how she calculates her tax rate for June each year and the simplicity of it but with the rate going up so much the cut in half amount is still difficult for some people to pay in June. Selectman Huebner lets the citizens know that the BOS does not receive the tax rate amount until a few days before they have to approve it.
- Harriet Cady. Deerfield. Ms. Cady expresses her concerns about not receiving money back from the school and that the Board said they could not afford to buy down the tax rate. She then addresses the number of warrant articles that come out and asks if there is a way to add up the total dollar in warrant the articles and then calculate the affect the total will have on the tax rate. Lastly, Ms. Cady points out that very few citizens go to the town and school deliberative sessions which means people are voting uninformed.
- David VanHam. Bloomfield Road. Mr. VanHam explains what he feels he's hearing from the Board about the budget. He then speaks the very low percentage of people that actually vote which means it's a small group voting for the masses and the citizens need to be made aware of this. Lastly, Mr. VanHam speaks about the Board artificially lowering the tax rate with surplus funds and how he feels this could be irresponsible as most citizens are not aware that this is the reason why the tax rate is lower for a period of time. He would like to see better communication from the Board on how the entire process works. He then asks about raising revenue in the town if the Board has explored any options. Selectman Huebner touches on one revenue idea of bringing businesses to town but the community at large does not want business in town and he agrees that more people need to come out and vote. Selectman Barry explains the budget and that in end the budget needs to go up and it will cost money. Lastly, Mr. VanHam states that the tax bill is not going to go down and he would like to see the Board communicating better with the community. Selectman Huebner makes one last comment about how town council stated that the Board could add additional comments to the warrant articles.
- Erroll Rhodes. Church Street. Mr. Rhodes states that he agrees with others that the Board needs to do a better job communicating the community and he explains why. He goes on to explain why feels the budget is failing and it's because of SB2. Lastly, he encourages the Board to reverse this trend.

Selectman Barry states all the Boards in the town operate on the advice and consent of the voters and with SB2 they receive less advice and consent from the voters. Selectman Huebner explains all the opportunities citizens do have opportunities to participate with the budget process.

- Don Gorman provides his conclusion of the evening and his 2 biggest take away are, he would like to see the Board communicate better with the community and that he would like the Board to look more closely at why the town has had so many failed budgets.

The Board agree to work on their communication with the town.

Regular Business

Review of Outstanding Minutes 11/20/2023:

Motion: Selectman Huebner makes a motion to approve the outstanding minutes from 11/20/2023 as written.

Second: Selectwoman McHugh

Discussion:

Vote: Yea 5, Nay 0, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

Vouchers/Payroll Manifest/Accounts Payable Manifest:

- Payroll Manifest – No Payroll
- Accounts Payable – \$39,131.02

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to approve the accounts payable in the amount of \$39,131.02.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

Selectwoman McHugh asks about the cost of the GBW fence being fixed and Mr. Harrington explains where it's coming and why it doesn't affect the budget.

Chairman Pitman asks if there is any way to see what's going to be paid and Mr. Harrington states that this is what Pete Lemay sends out each week prior to the meeting and then he explains the process.

Selectwoman McHugh then asks about an Accounts Payable for rescue one being on the 11/17 AP and the 11/27 AP for the same amount and asks if it was duplicated. Mr. Harrington states he does not know and states it would be a good question for Pete Lemay and he could look it up immediately. Selectwoman McHugh then asks about the Porta Potties on the athletic fields and Mr. Harrington explains the ones we have and where the funds come from.

Vote: Yea 5, Nay 0, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

Mr. Harrington states that they can pull the rescue one invoices out of this AP and then get clarification from Pete Lemay for the next meeting.

Selectwoman McHugh then asks about the remote speaker mics that the fire department purchased and Mr. Harrington states she would need to ask the fire chief about the purchase.

Selectman Huebner asks about the purchasing policy and Mr. Harrington explains the purchasing policy. It is agreed that now they know the processes the Board can do their research prior to the meeting and know what they would like to have pulled, if anything, from the AP prior to approving it.

- Vouchers – No vouchers

Signatures/Correspondence:

- Signatures

— Report of Timber Cut. Tax Collect \$10,035.26.

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to approve the Timber Cut tax collection in the amount of \$10,035.26.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

Vote: Yea 5, Nay 0, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

— Member Group Coverage conformation. Dental Care Insurance through Health Trust for fulltime town employees.

1. Single - \$45.95
2. Two Person - \$88.95
3. Family - \$161.83

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion for the Chairman to sign the Dental agreement.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

Selectman Huebner asks if this is an increase. Mr. Harrington states this is the yearly agreement that gets signed to offer coverage to the employees. Selectman Huebner then asks how it's paid for if the budget doesn't pass and Mr. Harrington states they have the default budget rate amount to pay even though the rate has increased. They agree the remaining funds needed would then have to come out of some other fund.

Vote: Yea 5, Nay 0, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

— Oath of Office. Greg McHugh. Veasey Park Commission.

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to approve the oath of office for Greg McHugh and the Veasey Park Commission.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

It's clarified that Mr. McHugh is being appointed to the commission as a member and not the Chair.

Vote: Yea 4, Nay 0, Abstained 1 - Motion Carries

Selectman Huebner asks about the Veasey Park Chair platform and the buoys still being in the water. Mr. Harrington states that he has reached out to Glenda Smith, a newly appointed member of the commission, and she is well aware of the process and will be looking into it.

— Oath Request from the Library Board of Trustees. Anne Deely, Phyllis Yaffie and Carole Shelby. Mr. Harrington explains that when there is an opening on the Library Board of Trustees it is up to the Select Board to appoint a replacement until the following election in Mr. Harrington communicated with the Library Board of Trustees and he did not receive a recommendation.

Anne Meyers steps forward and lets the Board know that the trustees did recognize that Anne Deely has served on the Board before so she has experience but the other two people are very involved with the library and would also wonderful choices.

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to approve the appointment of Anne Deely to the Library Board of Trustees.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

Some of the Board do not feel they have enough information to make the right decision. Anne Meyers states that Anne Deely served for 10 years in the past and is willing to step in to help out for a time. She goes onto to say it could also be a good opportunity for someone who hasn't done this before to get in and try it out and decide if they want to run for the position in the next election.

Vote: Yea 3, Nay 2, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

Selectman Huebner states that the nay votes were no reflection on Anne.

— Ray Ellis. Septic Design. Mr. Ellis reached out to 5 people and received 2 quotes back.

1. Franklin and Associates. An estimated \$1,500.00 for the design and an extra \$200.00 if it needs to be filed with the state.
2. New Hampshire Land Consultants. \$2,300.00 for the design.

Selectman Barry is concerned that the Franklin and Associates quote could end up being more than NH Land Consultants because they do not spell anything out on the quote.

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to accept the quote from New Hampshire Land Consultants to get them to the point where they have a septic design.

Discussion:

Selectwoman McHugh asks if they have worked with either company before and Mr. Ellis states that they have worked with both.

Selectman Huebner points out that the NH Land Consultants is also an estimated cost.

Second: Selectwoman McHugh

Discussion:

Selectman Huebner would like to know Mr. Ellis can go back Franklin and Associates and get them to lock in the pricing and Mr. Ellis states he'd have to go back to both then and provides some reasons for why it might have to be an estimated price.

Selectman Barry does not feel the cost could be near \$1,500.00 based on personal experience. He also feels NH Land Consultants provided better detail of what this project will entail.

The Board goes back and forth on the two quotes and what would work best.

Vote: Yea 1, Nay 4, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries Fails

Motion: Selectman Huebner makes a motion to accept the quote from Franklin and Associates.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

Vote: Yea 5, Nay 0, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

- Correspondence -

Town Administrator's Report

John Harrington states he has 2 items.

1. He reached out to the Town Council about extending the tax late payment per the Boards request at the last meeting. Their recommendation was not to change any due dates associated with the property tax bills or changing any dates associated with the interest accrual. Should the tax payers need to request abatements, there is a process dictated in the statute to handle such a request. Selectman Barry agrees that they can forgive interest on a case-by-case basis and suggests maybe having a note out in the TC/TX offices letting tax payers know they can file for an abatement. The Board agrees that they will communicate the abatement option via the Town website and Facebook page.
2. Draft copy of the 2024 BOS meeting schedule. Mr. Harrington needs the Boards approval so it can be posted and the Board agrees to the schedule.

Unfinished Business/New Business/Other Business

- Unfinished Business -

1. Salary Review

Selectman Huebner states that Selectwoman McHugh has done research and that all the BOS members now have access to the municipal database and they can all research wages and salaries. He asks that no motions be made tonight on any wages or salaries until the salary review is complete.

Vice Chairman McGarry thanks Selectwoman McHugh for putting the information together but feels more information is needed.

The Board goes on to discuss the wage and salary research and what they would like to see at the end of it. They decide to not move forward with any wage or salary changes until the research is complete.

2. Community Power Committee. Vice Chairman McGarry reads a letter from the committee.

"December 1, 2023 Dear Select Board Members, Over the past several weeks, there have been comments made and questions asked before the Select Board regarding Deerfield's Community Power initiative, resulting in this board's decision on the 20th "to not move forward with Standard Power for community power and to do more homework on other options." We request that this letter be read into the minutes of the meeting. Homework is, indeed, in order.

History, The Municipal Power effort in Deerfield started seven years ago in cooperation with the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC), a governmental body working on behalf of citizens of the region and, throughout this period, our Town Planners. At that time, the Town wanted to reduce its electrical costs, and so chose to join a regional effort to lower the municipality's costs through a collective purchasing arrangement facilitated by SNHPC and operated by Standard Power, the most experienced of a small handful of players in that market.

Since 2016, this partnership with Standard Power has reduced the Town's costs by over \$50,000.

Two years ago, the Deerfield Select Board, pleased with its experience with Standard Power and desiring to offer the citizens of Deerfield the same benefits it had reaped as a municipality, unanimously agreed to enter into a memorandum of understanding with Standard Power to take advantage of the then-recently enacted legislation which extended the power of aggregated purchasing to the town's citizens and businesses.

The Deerfield Community Power Committee (DCPC) - formed by the Select Board - has, working with Standard Power over the past two years, convened numerous public meetings, surveyed townsfolk and held several public hearings, all duly noticed, to bring forward the Community Power Plan which has recently been adopted by the DCPC and is ready for submission to the NH Public Utility Commission (PUC) for approval, all according to and in conformity with the procedures required by the PUC. This plan had been publicly posted on the town's website for several months for comment and feedback. In short, the DCPC has done everything that the Deerfield Select Board has asked it to do.

Issues, the issues that have been raised in recent public comments fall into two categories: process and operations concerns.

The primary process issue that has been voiced involves choice - the choice of the 'vendor', the choice of the electricity supplier, and the choice of the source of the electricity.

The 'vendor choice' arguments suggest that the Select Board should treat this like any other vendor to the municipality and put it out to bid. This would be a persuasive argument if public expenditures - i.e., Town of Deerfield monies - were involved here. But that is not the case. The Town of Deerfield is not being asked to spend a penny. They are being asked to give the legislative body - the taxpayers of Deerfield - a choice to save money on their own electricity bills. It would seem that denying the voters this choice would constitute "government overreach" should the Community Power Plan not be presented to the voters.

The sole focus of the Community Power Plan is to offer Deerfield citizens the choice of purchasing electricity at better rates than are offered by the utilities, by using the mechanism of aggregating consumer demand. This mechanism broadens the choice of suppliers available to the consumers and also widens the choice of renewable sources of electricity, from the same as they have now (but at a lower cost) to a higher amount (at a higher cost). It is worth noting that over 60% of Deerfield DCPC survey responses voiced a preference for a higher level of renewable sources of electricity.

There is also the 'choice' matter of Opt-In v. Opt-out. New Hampshire's twenty-year experience with Opt-In has demonstrated the strategic weakness of that model in lowering consumer prices. Whether the recent efforts in Cheshire County and elsewhere will bear fruit remains to be seen, but the numerous examples of the effectiveness of the Opt-Out model

would certainly seem the more prudent choice to offer to the taxpayers. In any event, should it not be the voters who make that judgment, as it is their money at stake, not the Town's? On the operational front, the matter of local control is, quite simply, not an issue since that is a feature of a program offered by another broker and does not figure in Standard Power's business model. Deerfield will make its own choices without the representation issues which are a feature of the model offered by Community Power Coalition, an unrelated competitor. Similarly, the argument of 'administrative burden' just does not pertain to the Standard Power model.

As a final observation, one has to question how fair it would be to the taxpayers of Deerfield if the Town were to unwind a process that the Town has duly and diligently undertaken and pursued to deliver a cost-saving choice to its citizens just as that choice is about to be available to them. This would doubtless qualify as a fine example of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory when the savings to the community, based on existing rate benefits, would amount to over \$670,000 annually.

The Community Power Plan which the DCPC has adopted and which we ask you to place on the ballot as a warrant article is all about choice and savings for the taxpayers of Deerfield. We respectfully ask that you reconsider your decision of November 20th, based on the facts and on the benefits of the proposal you initiated and have, until the last few days, strongly supported.

Sincerely, Deerfield Community Power Committee"

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to reconsider his prior motion about holding off and looking into more vendors and move forward with putting this on the ballot.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

Selectman Barry cannot remember his exact motion. Mr. Harrington finds and reads his exact motion, "Selectman Barry makes a motion not to move forward with Standard Power for community power and do more homework on other options." Mr. Harrington states that the vote was 5 yea and 0 nay.

Selectman Barry states he would like to now vote that motion down as the committee has done all the homework over a six period.

Selectman Huebner does agree that they should move forward with this.

Selectwoman McHugh asks Erroll Rhodes if the committee spoke to other vendors. Mr. Rhodes explains what the committee has done and states 2 years ago the Board signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Standard Power to move forward with them. The Board and Mr. Rhodes discuss their concerns.

Selectman Barry reiterates his motion.

Vote: Yea 4, Nay 1, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to put the Standard Power proposal on the Warrant.

Second: Selectwoman McHugh

Discussion:

Selectman Huebner appeals to the selectman not move forward with this.

Vote: Yea 4, Nay 1, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

3. 2024 Draft Warrant Articles

The Board agrees to hold a meeting next Monday night to go over the 2024 draft warrant articles.

Selectman Huebner questions the wording on the Standard Power warrant article and Mr. Rhodes states it's based on other towns that have done the same thing and it's been vetted legally. The Board and Mr. Rhodes discuss the wording of the warrant article. Mr. Rhodes offers to work with Selectman Huebner on the wording of the article and Selectman Huebner would not like to do this and suggests that Mr. Rhodes take his comments and work on it and bring it back. Mr. Rhodes agrees to work on it and come back to the next meeting to discuss.

- New Business – No new business
- Other Business – No other business

Non-Public Session

No non-public

Citizen's Comments

- Debbie Boisvert. Church Street. Ms. Boisvert points out the timing of the meeting. She goes on to talk about all the places the abatement information can be posted for the community to see and asks about the possibility of notifying the Town that they can make monthly payments on their tax bill.
- Harriet Cady. Ms. Cady speaks to Selectman Barry's comment about town meetings and then gives her opinion on to talk about the community power topic.
- Kearsarge Energy. Battery Storage at the Transfer Station. A representative from Kearsarge Energy goes over logistics of the project and the benefits of the project. Selectman Huebner asks the Board would like to consider other companies as well. Mr. Harrington agrees to continue to work with Kearsarge Energy.
- Barbra Mathews. Candia Road. Community Power Committee. Ms. Mathews thanks the Board for moving forward with putting the committee's proposal on the warrant. She goes on to point out the benefits of community power and provides some information as to why they chose to go with Standard Power.

Adjournment

Motion: Selectman Barry makes a motion to adjourn at 8:05.

Second: Vice Chairman McGarry

Discussion:

Vote: Yea 5, Nay 0, Abstained 0 - Motion Carries

Next Meeting: December 11, 2023 at 5:30 pm

*The Minutes were transcribed and respectfully submitted by Randi Long, Recording Secretary
Pending approval by the Board of Selectmen*

*Corrected minutes submitted by John Harrington
As approved by the Board of Selectmen on 12.11.23*