

**MINUTES OF SELECT BOARD MEETING**  
**Hope Select Board**  
**March 12, 2024**  
**5:30 p.m.**  
**Hope Town Office**

**Board Members Present:**

- Sarah Ann Smith, Charlie Weidman, Mike Brown, and Wayne Luce

**Others Present:**

- Samantha Mank, Chelsea Summers, John Monroe, and Crystal Robinson

**Call to Order:**

- The meeting was called to order at 5:33 p.m. by Sarah.

**Agenda Adjustments/Approval:**

- Charlie made a motion to add maintenance to Flagpole Island in front of the South Hope Fire Station to Other Business. It was seconded by Wayne.

**Motion passed 4-0**

**Public Comment:**

- Crystal stated she had taken out nomination papers to serve on the Select Board and she was attending simply to learn more about the process and current issues.

**Minutes:**

- February 27, 2024: Charlie made a motion to approve the 2/27/24 minutes as written. It was seconded by Mike.

**Motion passed 4-0**

**Warrants 68, 69, 70, 71, and 72:**

- Charlie made a motion to approve and sign the Treasurers and Payroll warrants 68, 69, 70, 71, and 72. It was seconded by Wayne.

**Motion passed 4-0**

**New Business:**

- Purchase Town Solar Array Discussion: In 2019, the Town voted for a solar array to power municipal buildings. According to the contract with Hope Solar, LLC, the Town would lease the array for five (5) years and then be given the option to purchase it for \$48,000 in November 2025. The Town is required to give Hope Solar a 90-day notice of intention, which would be by August 1, 2025. During the 2019 Special Town Meeting, the voters gave the Select Board the authority to negotiate the contract. Things the Select Board may wish to consider are whether the Select Board at its discretion decides whether to purchase the solar array or if the voters will make the decision.

Each year, money has been set aside in a reserve account for the purchase. If it is decided to not purchase the solar array, the Town will continue to lease it from Hope Solar, LLC, and will be given the option on an annual basis to purchase it at the fair market value. In addition, each year the amount paid to Hope Solar, LLC increases per kilowatt hour. For example, currently the Town is paying \$.12 per kilowatt hour. Next year the cost will increase to \$.1342 per kilowatt hour and will increase every year until the 25<sup>th</sup> year. The Town pays according to how much power is generated not on how much is used.

The current rate for CMP is around \$.108 per kilowatt hour. The Town is able to hold credits in a “bank” up to 12 months of generated power before those credits begin to expire. Currently, the solar array is generating more electricity than the Town has been able to utilize. This causes a loss of money each year in expired credits. We are not allowed to add streetlights or residents on the solar array power system. In addition, we aren’t allowed to “gift” credits or use for General Assistance purposes.

The Town is obligated per the contract to lease it for 25 years if it is not purchased. As long as the Town is leasing, Hope Solar, LLC is responsible for all maintenance, upkeep, and or decommissioning when the time arises. If the Town purchases the array, it will assume all of the responsibilities for maintenance, upkeep, and decommissioning. We will have to continue to pay CMP, the basic charge for generation, which is currently averaging around \$31 a month per facility. However, there would no longer be a cost per kilowatt hour of generation to Hope Solar, LLC. Charlie made a motion to have the Town Attorney review the contract and provide insights on pros/cons of purchasing vs. leasing; to hire a 3<sup>rd</sup> party consultant to do a cost benefit analysis to include projected inflation costs of CMP rates, maintenance cost, and decommissioning. In addition, this decision should be decided by the voters of the Town and not solely at the discretion of the Select Board. It was seconded by Wayne.

**Motion passed 4-0**

- North East Mobile Health (Ambulance) Update: NEMHS sent a letter regarding the increase to the annual cost of providing ambulance service to the town. The cost is rising from \$53,220.60 to \$118,028.56. This is nearly 127%. increase above the current contract.

All indications at this point in time are that all four towns will be remaining with NEMHS until January 2025. At that time, it is expected that Rockport will leave and begin their own municipal ambulance service. The Town of Camden has pushed out the timing for developing their own municipal ambulance service until sometime in 2026. Because Pen-Bay is now using North Star for transfers, NEMHS must increase the amount it is charging the towns for the 911 services. They do have a contract with TOGUS VA, Medical Center, and are also exploring options with other neighboring towns. Ultimately, the voters will decide the Town budget. However, if the Town does not approve the increase NEMHS is giving notice that they will not be able to continue to provide 911 services.

- Dedication Town Report: The Select Board reviewed various options and made a choice regarding the dedication of the 2024 Town report.

- Roads Update & Budget Review for Special Town Meeting: Maine law allows for the roads budget to be overspent up to 15% of the total roads budget in any given fiscal year. Due to the increase of storms and the unplanned work that has been needed, in addition to the percentages that were not covered by FEMA, nor a part of any declared storms, the roads budget will be around \$5,980 shy of hitting that 15% mark. This means there will not be any more roadwork done without a Special Town Meeting. The Special Town Meeting would ask the voters to utilize \$224,000 from the undesignated fund balance. Charlie made a motion to call a Special Town Meeting at the earliest available time for roads. It was seconded by Mike.

**Motion passed 4-0**

- Town Website Hosting Proposals: Chelsea met with several hosting companies regarding updating the Town website. She also met with other Towns to see if they were happy with the services they were receiving. The current contract with Catalis, who bought GovOffice, expires later this year. Catalis is requiring an upgrade and a cost increase each year over the next several years. Revize will migrate all content to the new platform and has several other user-friendly features. The cost over the next four years of the contract is less than the current contract. Total 4-yr. contract costs are: Catalis - \$7,816; Revize - \$6,700; Civic Plus - \$17,271; and Town Web - \$8,430. Charlie made a motion to change the Town's web hosting to Revize and to change the domain from .org to .gov at the same time. It was seconded by Wayne.

**Motion passed 4-0**

#### **Old Business:**

- MMA Legal Response to Boerger Tree Cutting Complaint: The Select Board reviewed the legal opinion from MMA. Since the cable that Mr. Boerger connected to the tree was completely in the Town's right-of-way and the tree was cut in the regular performance of the Road Commissioner's duties, MMA does not see that the Town has any liability or responsibility for any damage to Mr. Boerger's deck. As such, giving Mr. Boerger any money or in-kind payments would constitute using public funds for private purposes, which is a violation of Maine statutes. Charlie made a motion to direct the Town Administrator to notify Mr. Boerger in writing that the Town is not liable for the damage to his deck and that state law prohibits the use of public funds for private purposes. It was seconded by Mike.

**Motion passed 4-0**

#### **Other Business:**

- Flagpole Island, South Hope: The flagpole at the memorial island in South Hope is leaning and is very rusty. It has been quite a long time since any maintenance or paint has been given to the flagpole. Charlie thinks there might be a possibility of getting the flagpole from the Rockport Rt. 90 fire station since they are putting in a new one. He is asking for up to \$3,000 for installation of a flagpole, tree and bush cutting and any additional incidental costs associated with the project. Wayne said he would be more comfortable with \$2,000. Charlie made a motion to approve expenses up to \$2,000 for restoration/replacement project for the flagpole island area in South Hope. It was seconded by Mike.

**Motion passed 4-0**

### **Town Administrator Report:**

- Received a letter from the Maine DEP regarding an investigation into Tier III PFAS contamination within the Town. The DEP has determined which properties will be investigated based on permit applications that used and/or spread sludge. The property owners are also being notified individually. The process will begin within the next few months.
- The FY23 annual audit is going to be delayed this year. According to the SU69 Superintendent, Kate Clark, 62% of the ESSER III grant has been submitted for reimbursement. There is still \$79,239.62 remaining to be invoiced. Although the deadline from the federal government for filing the reimbursements is September 2024, the Town's auditor will not begin the auditing until 100% of the spent grant has been invoiced and accepted. This is because of the potential cash flow problem this can cause the Town. In addition, it is spent money with no actual trail of a reimbursement process, so it appears unaccounted for if the government rejects the submissions. Although some of the invoices have been submitted, they have been sent back a couple of times to be redone. Kate stated that the process could take several months. Below is an excerpt from the Superintendent's March Report:

"We continue to invoice the '23 grants as requested by Brewer and Brewer and while we are closer to 100% invoiced, we have to be very careful to match the grant proposal to invoices and at times we have had to edit the grants to make sure we are invoicing correctly. Additionally, we need to gather very accurate records to back up the invoices. Finally, there is a rigorous approval process. The latest invoices we sent for ESSER III have been sent back to us twice for corrections so far. At this point, here is where the major '23 grants stand:

- *ESEA: Title I: October '22-June of '23 is invoiced, approved and reimbursement is in the works.*
- *July and August of '23: has been invoiced, but is not yet approved.*
- *Title V: has been invoiced and has gone through one set of approvals, we are still waiting on word that it has been finally approved. After that, it will be reimbursed. So, 100% of the '23 ESEA grant has been invoiced. As long as approvals go through, it should all be reimbursed shortly.*
- *ESSER III (ARP): This grant is 62% invoiced. There is \$79,239.62 left to be invoiced. That invoicing is underway, but we have had some setbacks with approvals. We will continue to move forward as quickly as we can.*

*The reasoning Brewer and Brewer gave us for this new requirement is that these funds have been expended and, understandably, slow reimbursement can cause a cash flow issue for the Town. Today I spoke with Sam and Chelsea at the Town Office about the impact of getting ESSER III invoiced vs. the impact of not having an audit. It was agreed that the audit is of paramount importance. I put in a call to Brewer and Brewer in order to have this discussion in hopes of setting a date of April 2nd for an audit visit. Unfortunately, Brewer and Brewer is not willing to begin the '23 audit until ESSER III is invoiced and approved, despite the fact that they are aware of the timeline for approvals and that the federal deadline for invoicing this grant is September of 2024. We will continue to work on this grant and move things along as quickly as possible."*

Charlie made a motion to postpone the budget process until the FY23 audit has been completed and to not set a date for the school's budget town meeting or the annual town

meeting without a proposed budget. It was seconded by Mike.

**Motion passed 4-0**

- I have reviewed several options for laptops/tablets. In addition, several municipalities were contacted regarding the use of laptops/tablets for the Select Board members. It was a mixed response as some of the Select Board members had a difficult time utilizing the devices and preferred paper copies. However, those towns that made the successful transition were pleased. Most of the municipalities purchased laptops between \$400 and \$500 each. I have included a spec sheet for the IdeaPad Slim 3i laptop. The cost is \$399 per machine. Charlie made a motion to purchase six laptops and carrying cases. It was seconded by Wayne.

**Motion passed 4-0**

- Michael and I had a meeting with Ben Cameron from Harbor Digital on Feb. 28<sup>th</sup> regarding the managed services the Town was receiving. Although, Harbor Digital provides good service, it may be more of a service than the Town actually needs. The Deputy Clerk surveyed several surrounding municipalities regarding their IT services and costs. Michael and I are planning on interviewing a few of them in order to determine if it is time for the Town to change providers to help control some of the costs as well as to get a service that is more in line with our actual needs.
- I have placed a notice in the paper and on the website advertising for the new winter maintenance contract for municipal facilities. This is for the snow/ice removal of the Town Office and both Fire Stations. The bid deadline is March 21<sup>st</sup>. The specifications are on the Town website.
- A Program Specialist for General Assistance from the State will be in Hope on March 19<sup>th</sup> to conduct an inspection/audit of the GA files. It has been over a decade since the last in person review happened in Hope.
- There were 2 building permits and 2 plumbing permits since the 2/27/24 Select Board meeting:
  - Jim Denman                      10 White Hart Ln              SFD w/ garage
  - Duane Wright                    566 Howe Hill Rd              Excavation for future garage project
- There are 944 RE accounts for 2024, totaling \$1,344,842.06. The second half is due on April 30, 2024.
- There are 15 RE accounts for 2023, totaling \$34,010.98. Unpaid 2023 real estate taxes will automatically foreclose on February 11, 2025, if the accounts are not paid in full.

**Adjournment:**

- Charlie made a motion to adjourn at 7:52 p.m. It was seconded by Mike.

**Motion Passed 4-0**