

MINUTES OF SELECT BOARD MEETING
Hope Select Board
September 10, 2024
5:30 p.m.
Hope Town Office

Board Members Present:

- Charlie Weidman, Wayne Luce and Crystal Robinson

Others Present:

- Samantha Mank, John Monroe, Beth Gindel, Raylen Hunt, Hope Angier, and Bruce Haffner

Call to Order:

- The meeting was called to order at 5:46 p.m. by Charlie.

Agenda Adjustments/Approval:

- Wayne made a motion to approve the agenda as written. It was seconded by Crystal.
Motion passed 3-0

Public Comment:

- Bruce Haffner introduced himself and stated that he spoke to several residents when he was going to run for another term on the Select Board. Many of the people he spoke with expressed concerns over how much their taxes had increased. In some instances, he said was as much as 20%. He asked why. The short answer in for the those getting the largest increases were also those who had participated in the FY 2024 property tax stabilization program. Those individuals did not see the same tax increase last year because they were enrolled in the program. Unfortunately, they faced two years of tax increases in a single year because the state discontinued the program after just one year.

Bruce also wanted to know what happened to the Roads Advisory Committee. He was told that the Jim Guerra provided a final report of the Committee's findings in April 2022 and then was disbanded after completing their designated purpose.

Minutes:

- August 27, 2024: Crystal made a motion to approve the 8/27/24 minutes as written. It was seconded by Wayne.
Motion passed 3-0

Warrants 17, 18, 19, 20, & 108:

- Crystal made a motion to approve and sign the Treasurers and Payroll warrants 17, 18, 19, 20, and 108. It was seconded by Wayne.
Motion passed 3-0

New Business:

- Morey Hill Cemetery Discussion and Concerns – Hope Angier: Hope read the following statement:

Did you have an opportunity to visit Morey Hill Cemetery prior to this meeting? Have you

read my correspondence with Beth Gindel from last May? It will help you to appreciate my perspective.

- 1. As we approach year 4, Morey Hill Cemetery looks like a construction site with no end in sight. It is disrespectful and insulting to the visual integrity of a closed, historic cemetery.*
- 2. 325 unmarked graves have been identified through dowsing and GPR and are marked with hundreds of white stakes and red flags.*
- 3. Each grave has been identified by a waypoint allowing each site to be plotted on a map for the town which you received last May. No more visible aids are necessary.*
- 4. Beth stated that it is illegal to remove those stakes unless they are replaced with "a more suitable memorial" and that until more funds are available to do a headstone, "the stakes will remain as they are."*
- 5. The town recently paid \$2,775.17 for 355 plot marker pins. However, as also stated by Beth, "the plot markers are not to replace the white stakes. The plot markers are to identify the grave on a spreadsheet with a set of numbers."*
- 6. Considering the extent and scope of this long-term and expensive project dependent on donations and volunteers, those white stakes and red flags could be there indefinitely. That is not acceptable to me and should not be acceptable to the town.*
- 7. I am asking the town to set an imminent and definite deadline to have the white stakes and red flags removed.*

I am positive that if today, Hope Grove Cemetery in the center of Hope looked like Morey Hill Cemetery, it would not be tolerated.

Beth responded to the statement by saying it is going to take time but we're going as fast as we can. Hope was quite upset and stated that she did not want to live next door to a construction site, it looks horrible. "I don't want to look at it for the rest of my life."

Wayne indicated that he had gone up to look at the area and that it did not look as bad as Hope was making it sound. Furthermore, he noted that there were tall trees acting as a boundary between Hope's house and the cemetery causing him to wonder about her actual view.

Hope wanted to know why the pin markers couldn't be used to replace the white sticks. Beth tried to explain the purpose of the pins, but Ms. Angier spoke over her. Charlie called the meeting back into order. He said he was inclined to give the Sexton as much time as she needed in order to get the project completed and to not set a deadline.

Beth said that they are working on some fundraising in hopes of obtaining 30-pound cobblestones to act as headstones at which time the white stakes would systematically be removed. The cost is around \$4,000.

Hope told Beth and the select Board that it was the responsibility of the families to take care of the graves and if their families didn't maintain them then we should just let them be.

She said that it could take the rest of her life before the white stakes and red flags are removed and that she finds this horribly disappointing.

Wayne suggested that Hope could assist with the fundraising efforts in order to help speed the process along. Hope refused all suggestions and abruptly left.

The Select Board did not take any action.

Old Business:

- None

Other Business:

- Wayne asked the Town could place a “School Bus Stop Ahead” sign on Pushaw Rd. John said he didn’t have any in stock but that he would order one. Charlie made a motion to purchase the sign and have it installed on Pushaw Rd. It was seconded by Crystal.

Motion passed 3-0

Town Administrator’s Report:

- Shani and I met with Kate Clark and Steph McBride from SU69. Steph submitted a report to the HES School Committee. I have included excerpts from her report outlining our meeting.
 - *I have requested a status update from the auditors but have not yet received it.*
 - *We are actively working on invoicing all of the FY24 grants and hope to have all reimbursements by the end of the calendar year.*
 - *We met with Sam and Shani from the Town Office last week and have established the following:*
 - *We can begin processing payments to A/P vendors via ACH/EFT. The approval process will remain the same, the only difference being that we can transfer funds directly from our account to our vendors’ accounts, which will be more secure and more efficient than mailing paper checks. We will begin to collect vendor bank account information so that we can transition as many vendors as possible to this form of payment.*
 - *Wet signatures are required, and electronic signatures will not be accepted for warrants until such time as Legislature changes.*
 - *I requested the option to make bank deposits and send a copy of the check along with the deposit slip to the town to increase efficiency for monies received in our office and school. The Town requires that all monies be deposited through/by them to reconcile their cash drawer to their deposits, so we will continue to give all monies to them. They will then send us a copy of the deposit slip so that we can receive the funds into our software, after they have been deposited in the bank.*
 - *We will continue to Scan and email P/R and A/P warrants and backup to the Town. They have requested that we send P/R warrants prior to receiving signatures. A/P will continue to be scanned and emailed AFTER the board has signed off on the warrant.*
 - *We will provide Sam and Shani View Only Access to the areas of AptaFund that they need – Cash Receipts, A/P and P/R – as we continue our transition to AptaFund, so that they may access and view any information they need outside of our monthly reports.*
- The Town’s insurance inspection survey was conducted on August 16th. The report shows some minor discrepancies at the South Hope Fire Station, True Park, Sand Shed, and Town Office.
- Joel indicated that he would be available to work on the sand shed roof, door, and possibly repair a piece of sheet metal on the sand shed next week.
- I am continuing to work through the process of getting the reimbursements from FEMA. The first of six anticipated payments was received on Monday.
- John and I are working with MCOG to see if the Town can qualify for any stream crossing grants to help offset the cost of culverts.
- Charlie and I met with Gabrian from Resilient Communities. The grant for the service provider is expected to open sometime in September. She anticipates that we’ll begin working with the community for the next grant sometime in January or February.

- The new general assistance maximums have been released to take effect on October 1st. During the September 24th Select Board meeting, there will be a public hearing for the ordinance change. The item will also be on the agenda for the Select Board to officially adopt.
- A resident has asked if the Town would post a permanent sign on the street side of the Town Office listing the hours of operation. Although the hours are posted on the website, Facebook page, and the door, he thinks it would better serve the public to be able to have the hours visible from the street and/or parking lot.
- There were 6 building permits, and 1 plumbing permit issued since the 8/27/24 Select Board meeting.
 - Marilyn Athearn 19 Rocky Cove Ln Tree Cutting in SZ
 - Alvena Buckingham 25 Laughing Waters Ln Tree Cutting in SZ
 - Wesley Butler 543 Barnestown Rd Accessory Structure
 - Chris Southworth 9 Birch Ln SFD/deck
 - John Power 46 Seacoast Rd Accessory Structure
 - Lori Van Dusen 137 Payson Path Tree Cutting in SZ
- The 2025 tax bills were mailed on August 28th. The first half is due October 1st.
- There are 1,184 RE accounts with remaining balances for FY2025, totaling \$3,773,785.55. The first half of taxes is due on October 1, 2024.
- There are 31 RE accounts with remaining balances for FY2024, totaling \$59,309.73. Unpaid 2024 real estate taxes will automatically be foreclosed on February 20, 2026, if those accounts are not paid in full.
- There are 9 RE accounts with remaining balances for FY2023, totaling \$24,150.45. Unpaid 2023 real estate taxes will automatically be foreclosed on February 1, 2025, if those accounts are not paid in full.

Executive Session:

- Pursuant to 1 M.R.S. §405 (6)(A)(1) - Personnel Matter: Charlie made a motion to enter executive session pursuant to 1 M.R.S. §405 (6)(A)(1) to discuss a personnel matter at 6:23 p.m. It was seconded by Crystal.
Motion passed 3-0
- Charlie made a motion to exit executive session at 7:46 p.m. It was seconded by Crystal.
Motion passed 3-0

Adjournment:

- Charlie made a motion to adjourn at 7:47 p.m. It was seconded by Crystal.
Motion Passed 3-0