

TOWN OF GROTON
SELECT BOARD MEETING
October 20, 2020

In Attendance: John Rescigno, Tony Albert, Ron Madan and Sara Smith (Administrative Assistant)

Audience Members Present

John called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

MINUTE APPROVAL

John motioned to approve the Work Session Meeting minutes of October 6, 2020 as written, Ron 2nd, so voted.

John motioned to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes of October 6, 2020 as written, Tony 2nd, so voted.

NEW BUSINESS:

Cemetery Trustees

Jim Gaffey introduced himself and thanked the Select Board for meeting with them. He also introduced Slim and Patti Bailey Harris who have helped him with the cemetery. Jim explained that they are here tonight to talk about the cemetery on River Road. waiting for a quote for work on River Road Cemetery. To give a little history there is a half-acre parcel that was acquired by the Town in 2012. It was purchased from Mrs. Bailey Harris for what he believes was for \$2,000.00 and 10 burial plots for Mrs. Bailey Harris. There can be no further burials in that cemetery as it is full. The time has come to plan the lay out for the cemetery. In the budget this year they had \$1,000.00 for River Road for landscaping and planting of trees but it became clear really quick that it was much more important to use that money to get the parcel layout done. They have had inquiries from residents who are interested in purchasing plots there. Also, Patti has three cremated remains that she is waiting to put there which cannot be done until this is properly laid out. He started to use the money to start this planning process. Initially he thought it would be a fairly easy process but it's much more involved than what he thought. There are many state regulations that need to be met along, approvals such as wetlands approvals, side line distances between neighbors, which are just a few that he can think of right now.

It quickly became clear this is over their head so he put out a request for help to the NH Graveside Association who set him up with a consulting group called Cemetery Helpful Solutions from Westwood, Massachusetts which do a lot of consulting in Massachusetts and New Hampshire for Planning Boards and so forth. They agreed to hire them for an initial site evaluation for \$259.00 which was very reasonable plus travel expenses. On October 14th they met with Tom who was very helpful. He met with them here first and then went to the River Road cemetery. He looked at the property and he raised some items that need to be discussed which were spacing between rows, the size of the burial plots, the number of burials per plot, the turning radius for vehicles and equipment, drainage and runoff of surface water, possible erosion due to the 10% grade of the property, placement of the roadway to accommodate digging equipment, hearses and funeral parking, and the size and placement of memorial stones. These are just a few things he saw in an hour or so visit. He made some recommendations. He recommended we dig 3-4 test pits, 4 feet deep, to check for soil compatibility and drainage for water issues. Part of the problem is that when the site was cleared most of the top soil was removed so there is just hard pan, you can see the hard clay, which will cause problems. Also, it levels out near the bottom towards the old part of the cemetery which could cause pooling problems, soggy conditions, headstones falling over and other issues. He is painting the worst-case scenario and isn't saying any of this will happen but these are things that could potentially happen. He also recommended doing a driveway in the

shape of a horse shoe. He recommended certain sections for cremation burials only that would be more difficult areas to do regular burials with headstones on the slope which could tip over in time. He also recommended we do survey mapping and topographic maps to facilitate the layout.

In addition to the site evaluation, he reviewed some of the cemetery documents like the purchase agreements for plots, rules and regulations for the cemeteries and he pointed out some potential problems. Right now, it is \$350 for a casket burial and \$75 for a cremation burial. Jim said since he has been a trustee there hasn't been any burials, besides cremation burials which the funeral home has taken care of, so he doesn't know who does the digging but it should be someone from the Town. Sara explained that in the past it was Glen that did it. Bubba said to be honest he said he wouldn't do it because he saw what Glen went through and he doesn't want to deal with that. There are no maps of exactly where people are buried or where all the graves are so he isn't interested in pulling up ones that shouldn't be or the other issues Glen faced in the past. Jim mentioned no one has been buried in the new part of the River Road Cemetery so that wouldn't be an issue. Bubba said this just shows that all cemeteries need to be laid out so everyone knows where everything is located. Another potential issue is that the current agreement doesn't say who can be buried in the plots which can cause disputes or lawsuits even for divorces, remarrying, blended families, future children etc. We are not in compliance as far as that goes. Other cemeteries, larger ones, which he doesn't feel pertains to Groton but the fees collected are usually placed in a separate fund, a perpetual care fund, and over time it becomes self-sustaining to cover the cost of perpetual care which we guarantee when we sell a plot. In Groton the money is drawn from the cemetery budget.

As you can see, this is more than what the trustees are capable of dealing with. Patti and Slim aren't even elected, they have just been volunteers to help out. Before it was Jim with Otto and Elizabeth but they have both moved. Tom from Cemetery Helpful Solutions gave an estimate of what it could cost for their professional services. Jim is not saying we should definitely do this but he wanted to present this to the Select Board so they are aware of what our needs are. The good news is if we do this properly now, this should take care of the town's burial needs for the next couple hundred years because there is that much room. The estimate is between \$2,500-\$3,000. As far as the administrative side it would cover the following: record keeping as required from state law, revise the Towns rules and regulations, revise the forms and documents used for grave purchases, consider a cemetery procedures and printed folder for the license holder, etc. As far as the development of the .5-acre lot it would cover a new town layout, additional research in soil, water, elevation and grave inventory, establish a number of burial lots for each grave, establish rules about placement of graves, establish the land development set aside for future grave sales, and review perpetual care funds for needs of grave sales. That is what they are offering.

When the lot was purchased by the Town there should have been a CAD (computer assisted drafting) Map showing the topography. Sara said that it isn't in the property file and Jim was given all of the cemetery items. Sara said the only map she could find when looking it up is the subdivision plan map, which is what Patti has. Jim said that Alan Barnard has a copy but he won't give it up. The Select Board asked Jim if they wanted Sara to contact Alan to see if this is something we can get and see if there is a cost. Jim said he would call him. Sara mentioned that she looked on what she has access to for Grafton County Registry of deeds and didn't see anything besides the subdivision plan. Sara told Jim that when he calls Alan, if they wont share the actual CAD, to ask him if there is a plan number or book and page for that information because it should have been recorded and then we can try to look it up or Jim could go to Grafton County Registry of Deeds to look for it.

The Select Board went over his budget last week and is okay with it. They recommend that the cemetery trustees submit a warrant article for this but they would want exact costs and information on what this would cover to present this to the Town. They could do the layout first and the road costs later. Bubba said it is best to figure out everything you need and submit it all together at once and get it done before other trustees take

it over and don't know what was agreed, etc. John said to confirm the cost and what it gets the Town, submit a warrant article which is due in December.

Patti wanted to share that she owns the farm near this cemetery. This cemetery was for the farm and for the Kidder farm which Dan Plumer now owns. She bought the property in 2004 it was not taken care of so her husband and her took care of it so she got interested in the cemetery and was on the cemetery committee in 2005 so she took care off all of the cemeteries. She went took courses on cemeteries but a lot has changed in 15 years and there are more rules and regulations. She loves this and is trying to work on this and wants this to be taken care of.

Jim mentioned that Patti has email correspondence with the Selectmen at the time that says that with the sale Patti will get 10 plots but the deed didn't say that so she is concerned that she won't get the plots. She has people waiting to be buried and wants to be sure this will still be in place. Pam was here then as the Administrative Assistant and Kyle was on the board. Patti presented the board with the emails and Sara took a copy of them. The Select Board said that if she was promised the plots then she will get them. They will look into this and Sara will draft a letter stating what is agreed and it will be signed at the next meeting.

Jim said one last thing that came up is that we may need to look at the costs as well for the plots as we are low compared to others and Tom thinks it is low but understands we are a small town and take costs out of budget. He thinks that maybe a \$50 increase would be good but it is something to look into.

Jim said that he will work on getting the costs and will submit a warrant article. Sara told Jim to let her know if he needs any help with the warrant article working. The warrant articles are due by December 31st. John said to try to get the entire package so when this is said and done so that entire section that is being done will be all set to use. Tony agreed that you want to make sure that when this is done it is all set to start doing burials. Tony said if he needs to meet with the Select Board about this again to let us know.

Omer mentioned that the corrections facility does have programs where they use their inmates to help clean cemeteries, paint town offices, etc.

Meet and Greet- Omer Ahern Jr.

Omer C. Ahern Jr. is running for Grafton County Commission for District 3 and requested to have a meet and greet with the residents. He thanked the Selectmen for their service. He explained that he is a Selectmen in Wentworth. He has been a Grafton County Commissioner for two other terms. He grew up in a county home in Unity, NH so he has learned a lot from that and has grown up in the county home environment. He knows how important the administrators, department heads and employees are. He has a certified tree farm and is also an attorney. He has been a state rep.

Omer said the main reason he's running is because the county taxes keep going up. In the last 3 years they have gone up over \$3.5 million which he doesn't feel is right. He doesn't feel they are taking advantage of their resources and they are not utilizing what they have to bring in more income. There is an active dairy farm with pigs and chickens, there is no reason the inmates can't eat off the farm. He said the tax payers spend close to \$200,000 to feed the inmates, which could be reduced. They bring in yogurt, cheese and milk that comes in on the Sisco truck but could be from the farm. The farm should be used for the inmates and the residents of nursing home. He's worried about the tax payers and that the county not using its resources. The next big issue is there is a waiting list for the nursing home because they do not have enough room. They need a new facility or another addition so where will they put it. He is thinking maybe put one in Plymouth/Holderness area. There is a hospital in Plymouth and there is a nursing program at PSU which could be used as interns at the county home which we could benefit from.

Omer said he is the only person running for County Commissioner that has the knowledge and the experience of county government. The commissioners propose budget but they don't approve it. The State Reps are the ones that ultimately approve the budget. He strongly suggests to elect other republicans for state reps as they are fiscal conservatives. There were things on the budget which are not necessary. He knows where some cuts can be made.

Another area he feels we could get some money is that Grafton County Corrections Facility has 350 beds but there are only about 66-68 inmates. Vermont has their inmates in other states which are farther away such as Mississippi. Family members cannot visit them when they are that far away. We could have the Vermont inmates use our facility to make some money which would be closer and charge per day. This has been looked at before but not to the extent it should be.

As a member of the Select Board he thinks the county can help the towns. He will invite the Select Board for tours and meetings so they know what is in their county buildings such as the corrections facility.

Omer handed out his flyer. He wants to be county commissioner to reduce taxes, reduce spending and bring in additional income. The last thing he wanted to say was "Hit a Homer! Vote for Omer!"

CARES Act reimbursement request #2

Becky from NHMA contacted Sara and told her that the Town could submit any Police and Fire payroll expenses from 9/1-10/15 for reimbursement as a part of the CARES act. She said this is new and not all Towns knew about this. Sara explained that she didn't know about this and thought it was just the cost of supplies for clean-up, etc. like we submitted last time and we have had everything donated to us since the first reimbursement request. Becky explained that last time that was all it was but this is new and the Town still has money left since we didn't use much after the first reimbursement request. Sara explained we only have the Police Chief for payroll expenses. Sara asked Becky if this is different from the First Responders that we have already submitted. Becky said it was different as that went back to the employee and this money is for the CARES Act and goes back to the Town. Sara filled out the spreadsheet for Police Payroll from 9/1-10/15 and for Gross pay was \$4,956.00. The Select Board has to sign the reimbursement request, which is our second request, and this needs to be submitted by 10/30/20. **John motioned to sign the CARES Act reimbursement request #2, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

MS-60W

This is a waiver request for the locally elected audit that allows towns, under population of 700, to request permission to complete sections 1 and 2 only for the audit. **John motioned to sign the MS-60W, Tony 2nd, so voted.**

October 2020 Municipal Aid

The Town received a municipal aid payment for \$9,351.40. This can only be used to as revenue to help reduce the taxes so it cannot be used to purchase anything like last year. It will show up on the MS-434 as revenue.

SELECT BOARD ITEMS:

NHEC Broadband

Tyner Lawrence met with the Select Board a few meetings ago about internet/broadband on Sculptured Rocks Road. He emailed today in case we were not already made aware, that he was happy to report that the NH Electric Co-op announced at their special board meeting this morning that the proposed amendment to the co-op's bylaws allowing the co-op to build a broadband network throughout their service area passed with 88% of the vote.

He wanted to know if it would be possible for the town to reach out to the co-op as early as possible to express the urgent need for adequate broadband among residents in portions of Groton where service meeting minimum broadband standards are not currently available? It sounds like the full build-out of their network is expected to take several years, but they have stated that they wish to begin by targeting unserved or underserved areas. He expects the co-op's network will also prove more reliable and more affordable than current options available to those already served by cable in Groton and should be an excellent improvement to quality of life and economic stability for the entire town. He provided the following takeaways:

- The Co-op is going to build a fiber optic network which will cover its entire service area. The Co-op's CEO has estimated four years, give-or-take, for the full build-out throughout its service area. The business model will be self-sustaining and they are proposing no increase in electricity rates to support the broadband subsidiary. Several independent fiber providers in Vermont have proved this to be a viable model.
- It was stated in the meeting that the build-out will first target areas that are completely unserved. His guess is that nowhere in Groton meets this standard, as well as areas that are currently underserved, or where internet speeds are less than the minimum definition for "broadband" service. Underserved areas in Groton would include Sculptured Rocks Road (and all side streets) beyond Beaver Pond Road and likely some other parts of the town served by the Co-op, probably along private roads.
- It was stated in the Board meeting that the Co-op has already been in discussions with several towns who were previously looking into options for improved internet. While Groton was not considering such an option independently, he thinks it would be beneficial for the Town to communicate with the Co-op as soon as possible. The Co-op should be informed that there are underserved residents in the areas mentioned above who would benefit immensely from the build-out of the Co-op's network in these areas as soon as possible.
- Some background: Fiber optic technology forms the backbone of the internet and provides the best possible connection with the highest standard of reliability. Cities and towns offering fiber have an advantage over those who do not and will increasingly enjoy stronger tax bases and improved standards of living relative to those without fiber as more and more aspects of our lives rely on internet connectivity. Fiber-to-the-premises internet is increasingly becoming the standard for "acceptable" service and is becoming a factor for businesses and families in deciding where to locate or buy a home.
- This is also good news for those in town who are not currently considered underserved by the definition above. Because the Co-op's business model will not demand financial returns at the same level as existing commercial entities providing antiquated services in our area (Spectrum and Consolidated), he would venture an educated guess that internet service through the Co-op will provide vastly improved service at a lower cost.

The Select Board is okay with Sara sending a letter on behalf of the Select Board to express the need for broadband in Groton.

DEPARTMENT ITEMS:

Police Department

- The two radar-controlled speed signs were ordered.

Highway Department

Bubba went over the following

- The Sculptured Rocks Road Project is moving forward.
- The new truck was used to plow the snow on Saturday.
- They have been busy preparing for winter.

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS:

There were no questions or comments from the audience.

Having no other business to conduct, John motioned to adjourn at 8:01pm, Tony 2nd, so voted.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Smith
Administrative Assistant