

ALTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
Meeting Minutes  
January 18, 2017  
6:00 PM  
1 Monument Square  
Alton, NH 03809

**Approved: February 6, 2017**

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Cydney Johnson convened the meeting at 6:00 PM and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag and a Moment of Silence. The following members and staff were present:

Cydney Johnson, Chairwoman  
Lou LaCourse, Vice Chairman  
Philip V. Wittmann, Selectman  
Virgil MacDonald, Selectman  
John Markland, Selectman  
Elizabeth Dionne, Town Administrator

**Approval of the Agenda**

Lou LaCourse made a motion to approve the agenda as presented and John Markland seconded with all in favor of the motion.

**Non-Public Session I:**

The Board vacated the meeting room for Non-Public Session to accommodate the attendees.

Cydney Johnson made a motion to enter into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) and (c) and John Markland seconded. The Board was polled in the affirmative with all in favor of the motion.

The Board returned from Non-Public Session at 6:34 PM.

**Announcements:** The next election will be held on March 14, 2017 from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM in the lower level of St. Katharine Drexel Church, 40 Hidden Spring Road.

Cydney Johnson expressed the Board's decision for moving the voting location from the Pearson Road Senior/Community Center location to the lower level of the St. Katharine Drexel Church. Noting that the Center was very successful with positive feedback after the last election. With the snow and the fact that we will be having numerous Warrant Articles for people to review. After looking at the many different options, it seems that St. Katharine Drexel offered to be the most suitable place for all to be served equally. It was the consensus of the Board that the Church addressed all aspects of concern that were previously voiced.

**Appointments:** David Hershey; General Assistance (Welfare) Discussion

David Hershey approached the Board to voice his concerns regarding the General Assistance Welfare process. While serving on the Budget Committee he has compared the State Statute

to the Town Statutes. A handout was provided to the Board. It appears that the State Statute reverts a provision of that back to the Town. Mr. Hershey read specific sections and stated from 165:1 an assisted person is defined; Local Responsibility - Any person in a town or city who is poor and unable to support himself shall be known as town or city assisted person, and shall be relieved and maintained at the expense of the town or city of residence. He obtained a copy of the definition of residence, striking him odd; residence is defined as: by a person wherever they say it is. It was his thought that this should be narrowed down by either a physical address or real estate owner etc. Based on this definition he felt that you could have a person go from town to town to town being entitled to assistance. There is a provision in the State under recovery from recipients, which reads: any town or city furnishing assistance to any person who is returned to an income status after receiving assistance, which enables him to reimburse the Town or City without financial hardship, may recover from such person the amount of the assistance provided. He further referred to Town section 9.4: Participants in the Town work program shall be credited for all hours actually worked in the amount paid (refers to a previous Step) credit for the same amount of pay per hour as a Town employee performing the same type of work. All wages attributable to such employment shall be used to reimburse the Town for current or previous assistance given. No recipient shall be required to work more than necessary to reimburse for aid rendered. Employment eligibility under this section must continue as long as it takes for the recipient to fully reimburse the Town for all General Assistance that was received. These questions came up during a Budget Committee meeting which brings up his question of what do we (the Town) have for a work program enabling people to reimburse the Town or work in kind to offset any assistance provided? It was his understanding that we don't really have a formal program in regards to that. Virgil MacDonald responded that we use to have a program however the insurance companies have basically put a stop to that. David Hershey continued with a provision within, the individuals performing services for the Town would be entitled to Workers Compensation. The Town seems to indicate in the guidelines that the individuals must be put to work. In his opinion if we have not been doing that then it would lend itself to an insurance claim for the town's insurer. It seems to be a breach of a Public Official's liability to the Town therefore covered under the Town's insurance. He continued and inquired about the Town's stance on medical marijuana and retail zoning. Cydney Johnson responded that this would be outside the scope of the Board.

**Public Input I (limited to 3 minutes per person; subject matter - agenda items only)**

None

**New Business:**

**Fire Association Proposal; New Snow Plow**

Patrick O'Brien approached the Board as a resident/taxpayer and President of the Alton Firemen's Association. At the December meeting of the membership a motion was made to approve and expend monies for a snow plow for a Fire Department vehicle based upon the Board of Selectmen's approval. Some issues that were highlighted were: several long driveways, approximately 23 draft sites that are not regularly maintained, a series of hydrant systems that do get maintained as time allows and to aid in cleanup at the Fire Stations to free time from the Highway Department. This will be for the Utility Vehicle. The Town

Mechanic has no issues with this. This will be for emergency purposes and not for maintenance purposes therefore there should not be any long term wear and tear on the vehicle. Virgil MacDonald questioned if this would be used to plow the cisterns on Route 28; that would be a decision of the Administration with the Department. It was clarified that it would be used in emergencies without having to call the Highway Department. Different cisterns were discussed.

Virgil MacDonald made a motion to accept the gift of the plow expressing many thanks to the Fire Association and Lou LaCourse seconded with all in favor of the motion.

#### NH Humane Society Contract Renewal

This is a standard contract; it is more expensive than last year. Virgil MacDonald asked if any additional fees were charged last year. Ryan Heath responded, “no everything was covered under the contract as outlined”. This contract covers the Town of Alton not just the Police Department. They take strays and runaways from all Town residents. We have been using NH Humane Society for the last 4/5 years; this is the first increase, which is \$200.00. On average they have taken care of approximately 25/30 animals for the Town. This is not unrealistic they do rabies, quarantines and extended care if necessary. In the review of the contract there is no difference in the language.

John Markland made a motion to accept the contract with the NH Humane Society and Virgil MacDonald seconded.

Lou LaCourse questioned the back charging of residents. Ryan Heath responded that it is his understanding that they try to recoup for any extended care costs if it is other than a drop off. For a typical dog being loose and picked up then they are not charged. Statistics were not available in regards to euthanization however, it was mentioned that it was believed to be a no kill shelter. We have not had any of those incidents to deal with.

The motion on the table held with all in favor of the motion.

Cydney Johnson made a motion to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the NH Humane Society contract and Phil Wittmann seconded with all in favor of the motion.

#### Key Policy Review and Approval

John Markland made a motion to accept the Key Policy for Town Properties as presented and Lou LaCourse seconded with all in favor of the motion.

#### **Old Business:**

#### Vote to Approve New Election Location - 40 Hidden Spring Road

Virgil MacDonald made a motion to approve the March 14, 2017 election location in the lower level of St. Katharine Drexel Church, 40 Hidden Spring Road, East Alton and Lou LaCourse seconded with all in favor of the motion.

## Fire Department Ambulance Billing Discussion and Set Public Hearing Date

Ryan Ridley, Fire Chief was called to the table to discuss the Ambulance billing and contract.

Cydney Johnson is looking for a bottom line recommendation from the Fire Chief. Ryan Ridley stated he has spoken with many Chiefs in the area and has been told that once notice is given that the Town is going to switch to a different company they tend to stop collecting. Currently there is over 150K in outstanding debt and he does not want to walk away from that. He would like to try to collect as much as possible. Totals for this year are 93K in collected funds through October. The billing process is months out with several steps in the billing process. We have had a record amount of calls in 2016 at 820 with 304 transports. Lou LaCourse questioned the item on page 6 Ambulance Service Costs not covered by the Ambulance Budget. Ryan explained that there are some significant costs to the Fire Department budget that you don't see in the Ambulance Service Budget. Ryan was again asked if he had a recommendation. He stated that if we stay with Comstar we need to do a new contract. If we put it out to bid then we could be walking away from what is outstanding. This cannot transfer to a new company. He called several departments in the area; residents and non-residents have to be billed the same. Gilmanton is the only department that doesn't send people to collections they collect what the insurance company covers and don't go after the rest. Almost every other town sends people to collections and reports them to a credit bureau if they don't pay. Some have a hardship policy and go by the welfare standards. Ryan felt it would not be his decision as he is not the governing body, to decide how to handle the issue. Cydney Johnson stated that he would make a recommendation then the Board would make their decision based on that. There is no record of any previous decisions that were made from over twenty (20) years ago. On page one (1) the following proposals were:

1. Sign new contract with Comstar for a three-year period. Comstar has proposed a 2% rate decrease from 7% to 5%. This proposal will be to continue with Comstar for one contract cycle for a period of time between 3 and 5 years. The proposed contract dates would need to be changed once the public hearing has occurred and a date has been agreed to between the town and Comstar. A proposed contract with Comstar is attached in Annex B.
2. Adopt new 2016/2017 rates for ambulance billing.
3. Collect Ambulance Transport Fee's from insurance carriers (Medicare, Medicaid, Private Insurance Companies).
4. Continue to send three invoices for ambulance transport services.
5. Send one Collection Notice
6. Option: Write off the balance for residents and/or non-residents.
7. Option: Adopt Hardship Policy for residents that cannot afford to pay for ambulance service (Sample Policy in Annex K.
8. Option: Send customer to Collection and report to Experien.
9. Option: Write off all debt that is older than 366 days, every three months/quarterly. This is to be signed off by the Fire Chief, Member of the Board of Selectmen or All Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

There are other companies (approximately 6) that do ambulance billing services most charge between 7% to 8%. Our current collection rate is about 87%. Enhanced charges 8%; in speaking with them they thought they could collect \$3,500 to \$4,000 more for the Town based on the number of transports. Ryan Ridley does not believe it is within his decision making to send someone to collections which is what was previously presented to the former Administrator. There was no hardship policy; he has put together an application. All the towns he spoke with send to collections and report to Experian except for Gilmanton. Some have hardship policies some don't. Virgil MacDonald and Phil Wittmann agreed that there is a need to hold a Public Hearing. In the 2016 the budget was 160K and in 2015 we collected 172K, we broke even. In our Ambulance Revenue account there is approximately 400K between checking and savings. We have collected through mid-October approximately 92K with another 3 months to go we should hopefully collect so with another 50 transports we should be in the same range. The current rate is \$1,130.00 for BLS with an average of \$1,352.00 (not all collectable); Medicare pays \$379.00, Medicaid pays around \$182.00. What we bill and what we collect are vastly different numbers. We are not in bad shape for what we have collected; we are covering our expenses for the year. Cydney Johnson stated that it should be across the board with everyone paying the same thing; it appears that nothing has been written off in a very long time, which shows with the outstanding debts dating back to 2010. Phil Wittmann voiced that he is in support of a Public Hearing due to the general feeling that nobody can seem to find a policy and if there seems to be a general feeling or consensus that there is this policy however nobody can find the policy. He continued with a Public Hearing facts could be laid out to people, we could get public input and the collections bother him. Cydney Johnson stated that there are people in Town that are paying that are being billed and others that are not paying; she is not sure that this is fair to those who are paying; there is no consequence for such. There are some people that potentially can't pay but there are others that can and don't. Lou LaCourse noted that if people don't pay, who is going to pay for it, it will raise the rates for everyone else. Virgil MacDonald still believes that we should have a Public Hearing. He further stated that we are still breaking even with funds by not having people pay. Lou LaCourse stated it is because so much of the Ambulance costs are being deferred to the Fire Department budget. At this time Justin Kantar requested to speak on behalf of the Fire Department. He stated that this is not happening in just this community alone. There is a lack of education from a community sense of understanding what your services actually pay for. This is our only chance as an emergency service to bring in revenue to offset what we pay as taxpayers. If you speak with anyone and ask them do they pay for ambulance services they say "No, I pay for it with my tax dollars". He compared it to going to the hospital with having health insurance, you still have to pay. We should not lose this opportunity to bill for services and should take every opportunity to collect the money that is rightfully deserved. Ryan Ridley continued, in 2013 we collected from residents 69% which in the ambulance industry is pretty good and for non-residents it is 58.8% with an average of about 70% of collections. For 2016, YTD we are at about 50% for residents and 30% for non-residents, the non-resident rates not so great. The people deserve to have a Public Hearing. This is a complicated issue. A quarterly report is received from Comstar which shows to either write it off, choose to send it to collections, send to the credit bureau but we have to physically sign off. People have called stating that they have gotten a collection notice however, no one is being reported. By law we have to bill everyone, we cannot bill Alton residents different than non-residents; it's illegal. How we choose to

send to collections is different. We need to have a hardship policy. We are submitting as accurate information as possible to Comstar. Ryan Ridley is not opposed to sending this out to bid but does not want to walk away from collecting the current debt on the books. There have not been any issues with Comstar, it has been a positive relationship, they want to enter in a 3 to 5 year contract, they are willing to cut the percentage from 7% to 5%; their collection rate is good. The two (2) most popular billing companies in this area are Comstar out of Massachusetts and Enhanced out of New York. There might be a company better than Comstar but the Chief does not want to just walk away from the outstanding 160K. Cydney Johnson asked for a breakdown of the amounts from year to year stating a spreadsheet would be very helpful. Further, Ryan stated we cannot write off Alton residents and bill non-residents it has to be the same across the board. It was noted that some out of state insurance companies send the check directly to the patient then they are supposed to send the check to us. This is an issue between the insurance company and their client. There is already a form that is signed each time a transport is done that references billing. We could sign a contract with Blue Cross they will guarantee us payment, they will give us \$500.00 per client and we have to agree to write off the rest of the money. In running the numbers it would not be worth signing a contract with them. We are collecting more now than we would if we signed a contract.

John Markland made a suggestion to hold a Public Hearing for the Ambulance Billing Services at the February 22, 2017 meeting with the Fire Chief's options and proposals as presented in 1 through 9. It was the consensus to hold a Public Hearing on February 22, 2017.

#### Police Department Skylight and Roof Repairs; Approval to move forward

There are two (2) parts to this request the first is to move forward with the work pertaining to the energy audit from J Meyers in conjunction with the NH Coop grant. The Coop brought J Meyers in to do the energy audit. Chief Heath is looking to move forward with the repairs and this grant has nothing to do with the roof. This is for the leaking damage, the skylights and the insulation issue. The second aspect is the roof itself; Ryan would like to move forward with that work. They are going to pull the skylights and sheath the roof with ice and water shield; the interior work will be done after that. Virgil MacDonald stated that they would need to shingle it, as it will peel right back once the warm weather hits it, it will begin to leak again. The roof is separate and the Chief is looking for the Board's decision on putting it out for bid or if the Board is satisfied with the original five (5) quotes that were previously brought forward. The amount encumbered was based on option "B" from Total Concepts for \$45,380 for the complete roof, going right over the top of the current roof. The roof is five (5) years old on the new portion and the older is pushing 20 years. The valley where the new and old building meets has issues; the water runs to the old side of the building. The sheetrock tape is all bubbled out and will lead to mold and health issues. The other quotes were much higher with a 25K price spread. The standing seam might cost more but is the better option.

John Markland made a motion to approve Chief Heath's memo dated January 10, 2017 and Lou LaCourse seconded with all in favor of the motion.

## **Town Administrator's Report and Updates** by Liz Dionne

### **Water Bandstand**

This item was addressed to Selectman Virgil MacDonald, which was in reference to him speaking with his brother regarding the work to be done on the Water Bandstand. He responded he had not spoken to him as of yet.

### **Workshop Date for Road Reconstruction**

Ken Roberts is looking to set a workshop date for Road Reconstruction. He was looking for a date between February 13<sup>th</sup> through February 17<sup>th</sup>. It was the consensus of the Board to have Ken come in during the regular meeting on February 6<sup>th</sup>.

### **Alton Housing for the Elderly; Payment in Lieu of Taxes**

Liz Dionne noted that this is an annual contract between the Town of Alton and the Housing for the Elderly, Inc.

John Markland made a motion to approve the agreement for Payment in Lieu of Taxes for the Alton Housing for the Elderly, Inc. and Cydney Johnson seconded with all in favor of the motion.

Virgil MacDonald asked why it is still being called Housing for the Elderly; it is Section 8 housing. He also questioned who owns the building and what their organization is all about. At this time, Mary Jarvis was asked to the to the table to add to the conversation. The building is run and believed to be owned by Community Action Program (CAP). The manager is Sabina Prescott out of Concord. The building is not housed by strictly elderly; it is somewhat geared to Section 8 housing. Ryan Heath joined the conversation knowing that it is the Belknap-Merrimack CAP Program that owns the building. They are under the Fair Housing act and believes that the Town adopted this under the housing statute and have to allow anyone in that is on disability or any other state assistance (SSI). It cannot be restricted.

### **Selectmen's Committee Report**

John Markland met with the Budget Committee for the Public Hearing. He mentioned that only one item that had changed and was voted on which was for the sidewalk and parking project in the Bay; initially it was recommended by a vote of 5-2 now it is not recommended by a vote of 5-2.

Lou LaCourse met with the Conservation Commission reviewed a number of requests to rebuild and repair existing docks and pilings. The Zoning Board granted one special exception for a garage as the main building on a lot.

### **Approval of Selectmen's Minutes:**

John Markland made a motion to accept the minutes of Public Session I, January 4, 2017 as written and Cydney Johnson seconded with all in favor of the motion.

John Markland made a motion to accept the minutes of Non-Public Session, January 4, 2017 opening #2 and #3 and Lou LaCourse seconded with all in favor of the motion.

John Markland made a motion to accept the minutes of Public Session II, January 4, 2017 as written and Lou LaCourse seconded with all in favor of the motion.

**Approval of Consent Agenda**

John Markland made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda dated January 4, 2017 as presented and Lou LaCourse seconded with all in favor of the motion.

**1. 2016 Timber Warrant**

|                       |                   |                                 |           |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Calligandes Peter     | Dudley Road       | Map 4 Lot 17-3                  | \$1004.18 |
| Smith David & Maureen | Rt 28/Hamwoods Rd | Map 5 Lot 28, 28-4 & 5-29, 29-1 | \$614.91  |

**2. 2016 Abatements \$562.00**

|                         |                 |                |          |
|-------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------|
| McAuliffe John & Elaine | Dudley Road     | Map 4 Lot 28-2 | \$163.00 |
| Lurvey Diane & Ken      | 27 Georges Road | Map 39 Lot 7   | \$399.00 |

**3. 2016 Administrative Abatement**

|                   |                         |                   |          |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Aiello Lisa       | 1439 Wolfeboro Hwy # 63 | Map 19 Lot 8-2-63 | \$125.00 |
| Tothill William M | 347 Coffin Brook Road   | Map 5 Lot 36-2    | \$622.00 |

**Public Input II (limited to 5 minutes per person; subject matter ~ any Governmental/Town Business)**

Jeff Clay asked that he get his full five (5) minutes tonight. He commented that he hopes and prays that Lou LaCourse and Cydney Johnson don't stand for re-election, which is coming up soon. They are terrible as Board people, you don't belong in this job, give it a rest, go away, do something else, that's fine, you don't belong here. Cydney Johnson's comments tonight about the electric company as an analogy with the Fire Department is completely asinine. I don't pay to swim in the lake, I just assume it is free, I don't pay if a Policeman comes to my house because I called them for a response. I don't pay the Fire Department to come put a fire out at my house. The problem is not with the Ambulance, the problem is with you people not having policies. I've told you this a thousand times before; create some policies, implement them. You waste everybody's time here. You beat this dog to death! Twice I have been here for this and you still don't have a clue what you are going to do, you are going to have a Public Hearing on it, why, why because you don't have a policy, you can't find a policy Just like you couldn't find a policy on the Town's Attorney and what he's supposed to be



paid. When you take over this job you are supposed to validate or create your own policies but you refuse to do that and it bites you right in the backside every single time. Tell you the truth the Ambulance people are not going to like this but the truth of the matter is you need to reimburse everybody that you have ever collected from because you never had a policy that allowed these people from the Ambulance to collect from anybody. You should reimburse every single insurance carrier, every single person that you ever collected money from and you should stop the process and the discussions, public discussions about the possibility of ruining people's credit or chasing them down or going after them; reprehensible! All because you don't have policies and you won't create a policy. You don't have a policy that says the Police Department can charge me for coming to my house if I have a burglar come in. All of a sudden you are just going to give me a bill, go after me and ruin my credit. Come on people let's think about this, it's not rocket science. You should have figured this out a long time ago; create a policy! I'll go even further I am sitting here reading the stuff about the Ambulance, Fire Department, why in the world wouldn't you fully fund the Ambulance Department, that's what you are supposed to do, that's what we pay taxes for. Why would we buy an ambulance for a department you don't even fully fund. It says you don't even pay for the electricity or the water, or for the dispatcher of the Ambulance people; why not, what else. You are spending money on the Police Chief because he wants to put up a new skylight, rip that skylight out, board it up, put a patch on it and call it a day. Come on now, this is our money if he has mold in there fine, take the sheetrock out put some new sheetrock up and put some silicone around the existing light that is up there. That's what I would do at my home. You think I would repair my entire roof because it had a leak up there. I wouldn't have put the skylight to begin with but second of all I would take it out silicone it and put it back in with a patch on it. Now you are talking about putting tens of thousands of dollars in approving this stuff, come on, open up your own wallets and you pay for it. What are you doing? Why do you sit there and not have any policies? Why do you just piss away our money without thinking through these things? Why do you not fully fund the Ambulance service? Why don't they have electricity? Seriously why don't they have electricity or water, shame on all of you! Think about all this stuff that you people....the Church, I wasn't here in time but I will assume that you voted for the Church, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, good God you just disenfranchised all the Muslims, all the Jews, you disenfranchised the atheists, everybody who will not walk into a house of worship and I don't blame them one bit. That's why it is not done, I have told you about this a long time ago you still refused. Now you have disenfranchised people on religious faith because they don't want to walk into that Church and I am a member of that Church and I don't blame them one bit for not wanting to walk through that Church. They are going to see the cross; they are going to see the statue of the Virgin Mary. Imagine if we had a Mosque in town would you have the election there. You have heard about the separation of Church and State, right? Now you are going to have us all go and vote and walk through and do all that stuff. Shame on you! I told you not to do it! I am probably going to run out of time. Mr. Clay's time ran out. He further stated that he was going to extend his time.

Cydney Johnson informed Mr. Clay on numerous occasions that he was in violation of the Public Input Policy and preventing the Board from continuing their meeting, he was asked again to step away from the table however, he continued to speak and speak over the Chair on numerous occasions.

John Markland made a motion to recess and Cydney Johnson seconded with all in favor of the motion.

John Markland made a motion to return from recess and Cydney Johnson seconded with all in favor of the motion.

**Non-Public Session II:**

Cydney Johnson made a motion to enter into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) and (c) and John Markland seconded.

Cydney Johnson apologized the second session of Public Input needs to be reopened.

Public Input II was closed

Cydney Johnson made a motion to enter into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3, II (a) and (c) and John Markland seconded. The Board was polled in the affirmative with all in favor of the motion.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary K. Jarvis*

Mary K. Jarvis  
Recording Secretary

