

FARMINGTON SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, January 30, 2024

The conduct of the meeting included remote access by telephone, video, and electronic means. The public could attend in person or by viewing the live stream at <http://mtbluetv.org/program-live-streamfarmington-selectmen.html> or Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/MBTV11/> or calling 578-7395.

Selectman Stephan Bunker called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. with the following members present: Joshua Bell; Byron Staples; and Dennis O’Neil. Erica LaCroix, Town Manager; Fire Chief Tim Hardy; Steve Millett, Head of Wastewater Treatment Plant; Leah Giusti, Executive Assistant; MBTV Camera Operator; and members of the press and members of the public were also present. Members of the press and public participated remotely as authorized by PL 209, c.617.

ITEM 1: Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Stephan Bunker led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

ITEM 2: To Award the Bids for Wastewater Treatment Plant Vehicle Replacements

Head of Wastewater Treatment Plant, Steve Millett, addressed the Select Board. He received one bid for each of the three RFPs. He would like to get at least one truck with a plow on it ASAP.

Selectman O’Neil asked if he was seeking approval for one plow truck now. Mr. Millett stated that yes, the others can wait until a later date. The necessity now is a truck with a plow. The bid came to \$57,712.56.

Town Manager Erica LaCroix addressed the Select Board and clarified one truck comes with a lift, the other is without. That is the only difference in the specifications. The truck has not been picked up yet. The lift gate and plow can be rehabbed and salvaged, but the remainder of the truck cannot be used. If we want to retain we can get a salvage title, which insurance will still cover as a totaled vehicle.

Selectman Bell confirmed that the remainder would come out of the vehicle reserve account. Insurance is paying \$34,000 on the F-250. Still waiting to hear back on Chevy and Skid Steer. The plow is 6-7 years old.

Selectman Staples inquired if we could buy the plow truck now and hold off on the liftgate to see what could be salvaged.

Selectman O’Neil made a motion to accept the bid for Truck 2 for \$57,712.56 without the liftgate with the balance to come out of the vehicle reserve and look into rehabbing the plow and liftgate; Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 4 MOTION CARRIED

The Select Board will deliberate and wait to get insurance claims back on the other two vehicles at the regularly scheduled February 13th meeting.

ITEM 3: To Review the 2024 Budget

Selectman Steve Bunker noted that the department heads will not be appearing for this budget discussion. Tonight is to discuss the budget generally before calling the department heads back for questions.

Town Manager Erica LaCroix addressed the Select Board. She did follow up on a couple of questions that the Select Board had at last week's meeting. She identified one account in Fire Department computer monies that were listed in both operating and capital. The item is now only in capital, resulting in a \$1,800 reduction in the operating budget.

There was a question about travel funding in the municipal account for custodial travel to and from the transfer station when we have a dumpster. Mr. Cassidy takes recyclables and things that cannot go into the dumpster to the transfer station using his own vehicle, so he is paid mileage. Last year the total came to \$99. The line item has \$200 to make sure it is covered.

Regarding salaries, there is a 75/25 split between earnings in 2023 salary, new salaries begin April 1. As the Police Department is under contract, their annual increases are already factored into the formula. Retirement, FICA, etc. are all calculated out of there.

There was a question about cemetery money for headstone repair. Tammy and the Town Manager went to Western Mountain Financial where the cemetery financial funds account is held. The account is over \$500,000. Presently, all monies for cemeteries are listed under a single line for Cemetery Maintenance. If headstone repair/maintenance is split into a line item, those funds cannot be used for anything other than headstones. When it is included in the main maintenance line, the item can be used for any maintenance at the cemetery. Ms. LaCroix stated that before Cemeteries were absorbed into Public Works, \$15,000 a year from the financial fund was used to offset the cost of maintaining the cemeteries. When it was absorbed into public works that stopped. Ms. LaCroix suggested headstone repair be put in as a capital item in order to continue building it up.

Selectman Bell asked if those funds could only be used for the Riverview and Fairview cemeteries. Ms. LaCroix stated she would have to look into the legality of which cemeteries the funds can be used for and would have to see if there are stipulations. The tax dollar portion would not be as much and could go to other cemeteries. Selectman Bell also stated that he would like to see a line specifically for stone repair so that maintenance continues going forward.

Selectman Staples inquired about cemetery infrastructure in capital. Ms. LaCroix stated that it covers every type of maintenance. Putting money aside only for headstones would have to have its own account.

Ms. LaCroix stated that the monies from the Western Mountain Mutual account were transferred to the Town when a private company turned maintenance over to the town. The account started

at around \$300,000 and is now up to around \$550,000. It gained \$37,000 in interest last year. It is in a safe return account right now rather than an aggressive investment account. There is some money available that could offset that line item. Selectman O'Neil stated that the historical society may have an idea of what the costs would be. Ms. LaCroix noted that the stones require a special cleaning solution and the epoxy used to repair stones is quite pricey. Selectman Bunker stated that he would like to draw some funds to make use of the interest earned. Ms. LaCroix stated that she could do more research to see if we are legally bound to use the funds only on those two cemeteries.

Ms. LaCroix noted that Matt Foster, Director of Parks & Recreation, has been in talks with Sheraton Construction and EJ Construction regarding the Community Center roof. She believes they are waiting on bonding. EJ Construction is interested but have not been able to bond. If we can get a contract, then the ARPA funds can be appropriated. The \$700,000 in ARPA funds need to be "obligated" by December 31st of this year. If we cannot get a contract, we will need to look into another option for the ARPA funds. There are very few restrictions regarding the use of ARPA funds – they cannot be used to lower taxes or pay regular salaries. They can be used for anything to do with infrastructure. The Select Board asked that Mr. Foster appear before them at the February 13th meeting to discuss the Community Center roof and ARPA funds.

Selectman Bell inquired if the Hippach Field fence line item should be put into reserve account as it had been approved at last town meeting. Selectman Bell also mentioned that the Downtown TIF had \$200,000 earmarked for the Sandy River Bridge rail trail. Found minutes where expenditure was approved but did not say from where. Ms. LaCroix stated that she would check last year's warrant.

They are hoping that most of the infrastructure damage to Hippach will be covered by FEMA. There is no flood insurance due to prohibitive costs. Monies from 2022 and May 2023 storm have still not been paid out by FEMA. That is why she mentioned liability funds until reimbursed by FEMA.

Selectman Bell asked if the server replacement for the Police Department has to be a physical server or if there are cloud-based options. Ms. LaCroix stated that the police department needs to have a secured and certified server. Some things can be cloud-stored but others cannot. She will have to ask Chief Charles. Cloud storage isn't always the cheapest option, but it is always automatically backed up.

Selectman Bunker stated that he was impressed with how few notes he had. Selectman O'Neil stated that he liked the presentation but had questions about numbers not matching up. Ms. LaCroix stated that the summary total does not match up due to one department forgetting a \$10,000 line item. The numbers in the budget itself are correct. It has been corrected on the electronic copy.

Selectmen O'Neil inquired about the difference in the county tax budget. Ms. LaCroix stated the reason that it is so much higher is due to how far underbudgeted the item was the year prior, in addition to the anticipated increase. Selectman O'Neil inquired about the calibration of FICA costs. Ms. LaCroix stated that FICA gets charged on every stipend, unless it is a reimbursement

of a cost that was expended. Insurance opt-out goes against the health insurance line item. There is no FICA on insurance premiums, just for the opt-outs. A lot of people are taking the opt-out, which adds quite a bit. The benefits tab will show safety and bonus incentives charged FICA.

Selectman O'Neil asked about the worker's compensation line items. Ms. LaCroix stated that the worker's compensation is figured on job classifications and total payroll. Public Works went up, but they added three employees. Custodial went up, it could be that the rate on that job classification changed.

Selectman O'Neil asked if the assessor's postage budget would be enough with the upcoming revaluation. Ms. LaCroix stated that she did consider that, however, revaluation mailings are included in the contract with KRT. Selectman O'Neil asked if the KRT contract also covers consultants. Ms. LaCroix stated that she did leave a small inline item, they will cover all commercial as well, and we will be responsible for utilities. The solar fields will have to be done as a utility assignment.

Selectman Staples asked if the current unassigned fund balance is a recommended amount. Ms. LaCroix stated that the only absolute is from the last audit. They have just begun the new audit and are not even close to straightening out QuickBooks. They may not have an actual audit until July. The rule of thumb for bonding is 13-15% holding in fund balance. You get the best rate for bonding at that percentage.

Selectman O'Neil asked if the amount for property sales is based on 2023. Ms. LaCroix stated as far as property sales, not sure if in history they have printed all of them on every sale and assessment, normally available in the tax database. Nichole Stenberg is trying to compile it all for the state, and she will check with her.

Fen Fowler addressed the Select Board. He noted that the Budget Committee had a conversation moving to a fiscal year budget. He is wondering if the Budget Committee has a role to make a recommendation to the Select Board. Selectman Bunker stated that he is not sure if the charter notes a role for the Budget Committee in that particular item, but is not opposed to input or suggestions. Believes it would be a Town Meeting vote. Ms. LaCroix stated that they are welcome to make recommendations, the Budget Committee is meant to represent citizen views on the budget.

Randy Gauvin introduced himself as the republican candidate for congress in our district. The Select Board requested that the Department Heads from Police, Fire, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation attend the next meeting on Wednesday, February 7, to discuss budget items.

Selectman Bell made a motion to adjourn at 8:08 p.m.; Selectman O'Neil seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 4 MOTION CARRIED

Minutes respectfully submitted by Leah Giusti.

Byron Staples - Secretary