



TOWN OF BROOKLINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Minutes *Public Works Study Committee* *August 31, 2017*

Meeting attendees included: Eric Pauer, Jerry Farwell, John Carr, Linda Chomiak, Tad Putney and Ryan Pauer.

Minutes

The August 3rd minutes were approved as written.

Property Proposal

Members briefly discussed a proposal that had been received from the owners of 71 and 73 Route 13 to purchase the land and garage to serve as a future public works garage. It includes a building/garage of approximately 5,000 square feet, a 9,000 pound lift, and 30-foot repair pit. It was built in 2006. **Tad** said that prior discussions have assumed a future public works garage would be located at the transfer station. One benefit is the town already owns the land. **Jerry** noted that equipment would then also be co-located for use on transfer station activities. **Eric** said that the proposal may warrant further consideration, depending on what alternatives the committee identifies. It was agreed that the proposal may be considered more in depth at a later date.

Review of Peer Group Data

Tad reviewed information he had researched on 24 peer towns. After collecting the information, he had deleted Peterborough from the group as the size of its public works department (including town water and sewer) was not comparable to Brookline's scope. The peer data included annual spending on highways on a *per mile* basis, including related warrant articles. Brookline's annual spending was \$13,884 per mile versus the average of the peer group at \$18,589. **Tad** suggested that one big reason that Brookline spends so much less is that we do not have the capital costs associated with having town equipment. The one other peer town that has a similar road agent arrangement to Brookline's is Auburn. **Jerry** pointed out that Auburn's cost per mile is almost exactly the same as Brookline's. The data also showed that the peers have established capital reserve funds for highway-related items that average \$220,000. **Tad** had also researched the number of full-time employees that peer towns have in their highway department. The average number is four, but the number varied by town. There was discussion about the salaries paid to road agents/highway department heads at the peer towns. **Eric** asked Jerry what he thinks his firm is paid by the town per year for solely Jerry's time spent on town work. **Jerry** estimated \$35,000-\$45,000. **Tad** will continue to complete the peer data by following up with the two towns who have not provided complete information yet.

Mason

Jerry said that he had learned information on Mason's approach to dealing with highway calls. They have four individuals on their crew. Each crew member has the department phone for a week at a time. The crew member that has possession of the phone is paid an extra hour each day for having the phone (at time and a half). If they are called out to address something during off hours, they receive a minimum of two hours pay (at time and a half). This approach is NOT during the winter, but rather the other seasons of the year.

Priorities for Owning Town Equipment

Members asked Jerry about what he believes would be the priorities for the town to purchase/lease equipment if it had a highway department. He suggested the following priorities:

- 1.) Pick-up truck with a plow
- 2.) 1-ton (6 wheel) dump truck with a plow and sander
- 3.) Backhoe
- 4.) Building (from 50' x 60' to 50' x 100') – 3,000-5,000 square feet
- 5.) 8-yard capacity dump truck with plow, sander and wing
- 6.) Sidewalk snow blower

Tad asked if Jerry felt it was reasonable for the town to have the first three pieces of equipment without a building to keep them in. He said yes – his equipment is kept outside. For the larger trucks, Jerry noted he would recommend looking at purchasing military surplus as they have fewer electronics and are easier to work on. The greater use of electronics in newer trucks has resulted in them lasting more like seven as opposed to 10 years. **Jerry** said that after one large dump truck is purchased, the Town would still need to subcontract out the use of two more for plowing as smaller trucks are insufficient for dealing with heavy snow.

Costs of Equipment

Jerry provided an estimate of costs to purchase the items (new) noted above based on estimated 2017 costs:

- 1.) Pick-up with plow: \$45,000
- 2.) 1-ton dump truck: \$60,000
- 3.) Backhoe: \$100,000
- 4.) Building: \$300,000+
- 5.) 8-yard dump truck fully equipped for plowing: \$175,000
- 6.) Sidewalk snow blower: \$80,000

Total costs of about \$750,000 were estimated. There was discussion of seeking capital reserve funding of up to \$200,000 per year to start putting funds away for the purchases/construction. **Jerry** said he believed it would be difficult to get approval for \$200,000 in March and suggested a lower figure such as \$50,000, which could be used

to purchase the first vehicle when needed. **Eric** said that the high school is looking at coming forward with a bond request for an addition to the high school and a new athletic field.

Alternative for Consideration

Jerry said that if the 24/7 snow duties were taken off his plate, he would be willing to continue to serve as road agent for up to several years. There was discussion about hiring a full-time seasonal employee to manage winter maintenance and remove such duties from the road agent's role. **Tad** asked when the position would be needed to be working for the town. **Jerry** said October 15th to April 15th (6 months). **Tad** said we would need to see if the position would be eligible for insurance and retirement benefits. He also expressed concern that by being an "employee" the individual could quit at any time, which could put the town in a difficult position in the middle of the winter. It was suggested that a portion of the individual's pay be made in a lump sum at the end of the season. **Eric** said that approach would be similar to the incentives provided to some administrators in the school system. **Jerry** asked who the individual would report to and the general consensus was the Selectboard. **Jerry** also asked if the person would need to be a town resident. There was some willingness to have the person be able to be a non-resident, but only if they lived no more than 5-10 miles from town.

Potential Votes for 2018 Town Meeting

The following scenarios are being considered for March 2018 town meeting:

- Continue with the elected road agent position, have a warrant article to pay for a seasonal full-time Winter Maintenance Supervisor (for the 2018/19 season), and have a warrant article to raise \$50,000-\$200,000 for a Highway Capital Reserve Fund.
- Discontinue the road agent position and have a warrant article to fund a full-time Highway Department Head and a warrant article to raise \$50,000-\$200,000 for a Highway Capital Reserve Fund.

Jerry suggested that he will continue to pursue finding someone to assist him in managing the winter maintenance function for the coming winter as a pilot. It may be that he finds someone to alternate the duties with him on a week-to-week basis.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday, September 21st at 6:30pm. It was agreed that the following items will be on the agenda:

- Refine potential courses of action
- Define the costs, advantages and disadvantages of each alternative.

Minutes submitted by Tad Putney.