



Town of Lee Board of Public Works
MEETING MINUTES of November 27, 2023
Town Hall Courtroom

Members Present: David Forrest, Robert Wright, Jim Ethier, Ashley Shepardson
Others Present: Superintendent Lenny Tisdale, Town Administrator Chris Brittain

Dave Forrest called the meeting to order at 1:00pm.

Municipal Building:

Rob Wright had questions for Town Administrator Chris Brittain regarding the Special Town Meeting and the new Municipal Building. TA Brittain explained that it is a two-step process. At the Special Town Meeting, the residents would need to pass the Public Safety Building with a 2/3 vote. Then it is put on the ballot for either the Presidential Primary (March 2024) or Lee Town Elections (May 2024). The contract is contingent on these two phases being completed. Without this, the Town cannot move forward with demolition or purchasing other properties (i.e., the new DPW garage). Hopefully, with approval in Spring, the Town can start demolition in Fall 2024.

Prop 2.5 is a Massachusetts law enacted in 1980 that places strict limits on the amount of property tax revenue a community can raise through real and personal property taxes. By excluding the debt that will be incurred by the new municipal building, the Town can maintain its levy for property taxes. Bill S 1599, which is relative to the creation of a Massachusetts Public Safety Building Authority, is currently in legislature and well supported.

Dave Forrest inquired if the tax increase would be shared at Town Meeting. TA Brittain said that he would make a chart indicating the tax increase based on the assessed value of properties.

Forrest asked how long the money the Town received from GE is going to sit before it starts being spent. TA Brittain responded that most people think it's too soon to start spending.

Forrest also asked about what will happen if the Public Safety Building fails at Special Town Meeting. TA Brittain said that the first priority would be bring the Ambulance building up to code. Forrest interjected that the location chosen "is the perfect spot!" The Board made a request to see the final plans for the project.

Highway/Cemetery Department
Paving Budget and Priorities

Dave Forrest and Superintendent Tisdale discussed paving priorities. Forrest believes that the Town will have to mill and fill, especially Church Street. Tisdale recommended that the road be shimmed and an overlay be put on. Fairview Street was paved in 2017 and is experiencing premature failure. Forrest did say that it is difficult to stick to a plan because other things come up. Tisdale plans to piggyback Chapter 90 funds to get the current rate for asphalt (\$122/ton). Chapter 90 funds should become available earlier this year, expected in April or May. Forrest requested a plan for paving in case funding runs out. In the Spring, Tisdale and Forrest will drive Town roads to determine what should be done first.

Forrest said that he wants to have \$1M for paving fiscal year 2025. If the Town cannot reach this number, Forrest advised that the Town should raise taxes sooner than would be necessary for the Public Safety Building. TA Brittain informed him that the Town was still waiting for free cash certification. However, the public schools are faced with possibly losing funding from ESSER while still being expected to provide the services. This will impact final budget numbers, including paving. All members were in favor of readdressing paving when the free cash figure was certified.

Tisdale had applied for a grant to pave Beartown Mtn Road. Unfortunately, the Town did not get the grant. Tisdale said he would try again next year.

Other

Capital Improvement Plan

The Highway Department added an additional dump truck for capital purchase. There was much discussion about the bid process, the pros and cons of truck purchases through MHQ versus going out to bid. Tisdale explained that going out to bid is easier because going through the State you can only get one part at a time. Forrest recommends we move forward with an F600. Members of the Board are frustrated with the process of buying new equipment. Forrest recommended that when the money is appropriated at Town Meeting, to pay upfront hoping that the companies, having already received the payment, will move along more quickly.

Tisdale mentioned that we can go out to bid right after Town Meeting in May, as long as the funds are approved, the DPW can move forward. This way, they can have all the specs set in advance. Ultimately, the arrival of the equipment is in the hands of the vendors. Before discussion could take place about what size truck to buy, Forrest mentioned that he wanted Highway Supervisor Zach Sorrentino to be part of the conversation. Forrest said that the Board had made the decision to buy an F600, saying that the Town needs at least 3 big trucks. Jim Ethier asked Tisdale if the Town had enough CDL drivers to drive big trucks. Tisdale responded that we have 5 CDL drivers. Forrest imparted that just because someone has the CDL, it doesn't mean that they have the experience.

Rob Wright made a motion to adjourn at 1:55 pm, Ashley Shepardson seconded the motion; it was passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Samantha Lovett