

Town of Goshen
Joint Meeting of the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen
Minutes of December 14, 2020
FINAL APPROVED

Zoning Board members present: Alicea Bursey (Chair), Ray Porter (Vice-Chair), Ron Parenteau, and Judy Dunn

Board of Selectmen members present: Bruce Nadeau, Dianne Craig, and Steve Smith

Guest (s): Tom Willey (Call-in, Marlow), Ed Gregory (Unity), John Callum (Unity), Bill Schroder (Unity), Gregg Thibodeau (Ackworth), Heather Bliss (Unity), Kathy Lombardo (Unity), Deb Fife, Cindy Williams, Cindy Rouillard (Board of Selectmen Recording Secretary)

Meeting called to order at 6:01 p.m.

Bruce Nadeau, Chair of the Select Board, called the meeting to order with the first item of business being the Broadband discussion with Mr. Tom Willey (Marlow).

Zoning Board Business

Broadband Internet Discussion

Chair Bursey of the ZBA, introduced Mr. Tom Willey from the Marlow Broadband Committee, and explained that he would be giving an overview of the bond process and answering questions. This was a general sharing of knowledge and experiences and not a discussion from the perspective of subject matter experts.

Mr. Tom Willey explained that the Town of Marlow is following the Chesterfield model. He explained the concept behind taking out a bond, gave an overview of the Chesterfield process, and described how the process may or may not affect the taxpayer and tax rate. Typically, a bond is paid back through a fee paid by the subscriber that is added to their monthly internet service statement, not their tax bill. Those not subscribing to a service do not pay the fee.

Mr. Willey explained the different steps that must be followed in this process of acquiring broadband including the bond bank schedule. First the town must prove that they are underserved by the FCC definition of internet speed of 25Mbps/3Mbps (upload/download) and the percentage of the population that falls into the underserved category. Next, the Board of Selectman must send out letters (Request for Information/RFI) to providers to determine if there are interested providers that would undertake the project. The Board of Selectmen then send out a Request for Proposals (RFP) based on response to the RFI to determine the scope, cost, etc. of work to be performed and to inform the bond decision. The Board of Selectmen need to provide at public hearing a public benefit analysis which will show the benefit to the public. The town must hold at least two public meetings which should occur at least two weeks apart to discuss the bond and warrant articles. Once all the meetings have been held, a warrant article can be put on the town's ballot for the annual town vote. All the meetings and dates must comply with the town calendar of events and proper notification and timing must occur.

Chair Bursey opened the floor for public comments or questions. None were made at this time.

Alicea Bursey: Asked if there were any free resources to help in the bond language.

Tom Willey: Responded, yes. He suggested the use of templates from other towns like Chesterfield and Westmoreland that have already been through the process and to connect with them for questions. He also suggested that legal counsel be acquired, especially a bond attorney and a lawyer that has experience with contracts; a town may have counsel that can address this, and it is town dependent.

Heather Bliss (Unity): Inquired if the two weeks prior to the meeting was a minimum or maximum time frame.

Tom Willey: He mentioned that the bond attorney had laid out a list of things that the town would have to provide in the process. The meetings should coincide with the town's calendar of events, making it town specific.

Alicea Bursey: Mentioned that additional information can be found with the NHMA.

Dianne Craig: Asked for the bond attorney reference.

Tom Willey: Stated that they could use the same bond attorney that Chesterfield and other NH towns have used. He will send the Board of Selectmen the information. Chair Bursey noted that she had already sent this information to the Select Board as well.

Bruce Nadeau: Expressed concerns about communicating the information to the public as clear as possible so that people are aware that this will not increase property taxes but rather raise their property value.

Alicea Bursey: Reminded the board that the process for public benefit analysis had already been sent to the board and that meeting would be an excellent time to explain benefits and property value. And stated that she believes, but that the number should be double checked, that on other reports she has seen an increase to property value by 3%. She stated that the Monadnock Implementation Guide that she sent out last week has more information on this.

Steve Smith: Asked if any of the recent federal funding money that was provided under the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund would be given to rural broadband upgrades.

Tom Willey: Stated that he was not sure of the answer to that but that he is currently trying to research this for himself.

Steve Smith: Continued to mention that certain entities would be receiving the monies and that towns may not be able to access the funds - certain entities are getting money, not the towns.

Tom Willey: He believed that was correct, but again, was not sure because he is currently trying to gain more knowledge on this topic.

Alicea Bursey: Added that she too was researching this and thought at first gland money may not be something that towns would directly apply for, but also needed to do more research.

Gregg Thibodeau (Ackworth): Asked if language could be added to the contract to address this situation.

Tom Willey: Stated that the Town of Marlow did not incorporate any language into their contract regarding this topic. He believes that it may complicate the commercial negotiation.

Alicea Bursey: Agreed that it might complicate the contract based on research earlier in the broadband process for the town.

No further questions or concerns from the Board or the Public.

Chair Bursey thanked Mr. Willey for providing the Board's with his time and insight into the broadband process.

Chair Bursey asked the Board of Selectmen if they would like the ZBA/Goshen Internet Committee to continue being a part of this process. After some discussion, the Board of Selectmen decided that yes, they would like to continue to have the support and assistance of the Zoning Board/Goshen Internet Committee and that in the next few months, additional joint meetings may be had so that the two Boards can work together on this process. The Board of Selectmen will first identify a determine a bond attorney and send an additional email to providers letting them know that the sixty (60) day response period is coming to an end on 12/21/2020. They will also begin work on the public benefit analysis.

Bruce Nadeau motioned to identify at least one bond attorney by the end of the week, December 18, 2020. Steve Smith seconded the motion. All [Selectmen] were in favor.

Steve Smith opened the floor for further discussions from any of the other towns present.

Ed Gregory (Unity): Asked how long the Goshen has been working on this project.

Alicea Bursey: Stated that the process began in May 2020. She remarked that the process can be up to a yearlong or more, however, it could be sped up as long as town deadlines and proper notifications are being met.

Ed Gregory (Unity): Asked for clarification regarding the money that would be coming off the principle and interest, and where it would be coming from.

Alicea Bursey: Stated that the money would be collected as a monthly fee from only people who are using the service.

Some additional discussion was had regarding the language in the contract and the amount of money that would have to be paid by the consumer versus the provider. Dianne Craig mentioned that depending on how the RFPs are written and responded to, the consumer would have to pay for the distance from the road to the house. Alicea Bursey mentioned that in the Chesterfield contract, there is language that would be helpful to review and make specific for the individual town's needs.

No further questions or comments.

Judy Dunn motioned to adjourn the ZBA portion of the meeting, Ray Porter seconded the motion. All were in favor.

ZBA adjourned at 6:39pm; Select Board meeting continued.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melissa Salinardi
Recording Secretary