

North Berwick Board of Selectmen Minutes November 2, 2021

**NORTH BERWICK BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES
NOVEMBER 2, 2021**

Present: Chairman Galemmo, Selectman Hall, Selectman Johnson, Sr., Selectman Cowan, Selectman Johnson, Jr.

Also Present: Dwayne Morin, Michael Archambault

Chairman Galemmo called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

2. Review and Approve Minutes of October 19, 2021

Selectman Cowan motioned to approve the minutes of October 19, 2021 as written. Selectman Johnson, Jr. seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0

3. Public Input

Selectman Hall stated that he invited Michael Archambault, the Principal at the North Berwick Elementary School to come tonight. He said that Mr. Archambault is not a member of our community but because he is the principal of our local school, he felt that it would be good to hear from him and maybe start meeting more regularly. Mr. Archambault stated that his fiancé is Josie Chadbourne, and his in-laws are long term residents of North Berwick. He said that he has a house in Lyman and Ms. Chadbourne has a home in North Berwick, so he spends a lot of time here.

Mr. Archambault said that he thought it would be a good idea to come in and meet everyone and said that he probably should have come in sooner. He stated that he spoke with Selectman Hall about the vote tonight and supporting the school building situation. When he saw that the Selectmen were recommending that people don't approve the Referendum, he was a little upset about it. He said he was a little offended by the recommendation because he had not talked to anybody about what was going on and nobody had come in to see what was going on at the school. He said that this is his 12th year in our District. He started at the High School and was fortunate enough to come to the North Berwick Elementary School.

Mr. Archambault stated that one thing he knows about the community of North Berwick is that there is not a stronger community school relationship that he has ever seen. He said that every time he interviews people he talks about the relationship with the town and the community and how the Open House is always packed. There is always parking on Route 4 for these events. Every year, community members reach out to the school to see if kids need coats or snow pants or anything else. He stated that North Berwick recognizes who we are here for and realizes the major part of what they are trying to do. Initially when he found out about the recommendation,

he felt that he hadn't done a good job explaining where North Berwick Elementary School is at. He said that he is in a sort of middle management role, and he doesn't want to overstep or over talk his seat, but he does live it and works with the kids, and he sees what they need and what happens at school. He thinks that schools do a really nice job with having kids learn in school, the general public learning in school and smooth things over with our presentation to parents and the public about learning and growing. He said that the North Berwick Elementary School staff is incredible.

Mr. Archambault wants to explain how tight the space is at the school. He said that he was going to do a Power Point presentation to send to the public showing the hallways and the school outside of school hours so there would be no kids, but he decided against that. He has been very guarded about the situation because he doesn't know what to do about it. He worries that the Fire Marshall could shut them down with how much stuff is in the hallways as far as cabinets and tables. If you go there during the school day, every single table in the hallways are filled with kids because there is not a room for them to be in. He said that the nurse's office was set up for 205 kids and we are over 300 right now in a pandemic. People are waiting in the lobby to see the nurse. He said that it is not a great situation.

Mr. Archambault said that they will have 4 new portable units this coming fall. Every fall after that, they will have to add one for four more years. They have no place for them to go. They have 2 doors which are accessible for people coming and going. They have the recess door which is on the big playground side of the building, and they have the front door. When they are planning on where the portables would be you have to have it at one of those doors. In talking with Kevin Moore, the conversation was to add portables by the kindergarten playground, but this would force the kids to use the main entrance where the public comes up to do all of their business. Mr. Archambault stated that North Berwick has a Police Department for a reason. The Town of North Berwick has the public. There are all kinds of different people that come up to the windows for different reasons. They don't need to have unsupervised kids coming in through the main entrance. So this is not an option of where they can place portables because they don't have access to the building that is restrictive.

Mr. Archambault stated that another option would be for them to bring in a bunch of fill and get rid of the big kid's playground. He doesn't think that this would be a good idea because it is ledge under that section. They know this based of the amount of the mud that they get all year there. Right now, there is standing water there. The only other option would be for them to make a deal with the Ryan Home Project. He said that there is land over there that is flat where they could put 4 cottages or portables plus additional ones down the road. These are never going to have water to them. There are CMP poles there and we could run power to the portables. He said that this area is on the other side of the walking trail, so it is 100 yards to walk to the recess door. He said that it is a long walk from the cottages, as they are now, to the building for a kid to use the bathroom, see the nurse or for a special education student to go for services. He said that they would be across the trail line and into the field. He said that this is something that will have to happen. This vote would not change that. He said that we are way behind with this project. The fact that they will have 8 portables next year is not a good situation.

Mr. Archambault stated that he can not speak for Berwick and Lebanon for the projects, but for the situation at 25 Varney Road, it has to be unacceptable for the community of North Berwick. This is why he is a little bit upset. He said that they will have 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades in trailers in the next 3 years.

Selectman Cowan told Mr. Archambault that she appreciates his taking the time to come to the meeting tonight. She regrets the fact that they didn't have the opportunity to enter into this discussion prior to today's voting. She said that she grew up in this community and went to school here. She has some history with the community. She stated that, the fact that the majority of the Board had to take a position on the School Bonds was a painful one for her because she has also been an educator. She said that it was not an easy decision for them to make. In her mind, it had nothing to do with the validation of the facilities itself. She understands everything that he is saying and supports it 100%. What she does not support is how these projects are being funded. To this day, she still does not know the funding mechanisms for the bonds. Where are these bonds coming from? Who is the District contracting with to complete these projects? What is the percentage rate? She stated that they had the top 3 Administrators from the District come in to discuss and we did not get any answers to these questions from them. She stated that we had proposed to them a different way of funding that would minimize the impact to taxpayers but there was no response of any kind from the 3 individuals. They were told that the process was going to be the same as it always has been. This was the frustration for her with these projects. It is very painful to her to think about not supporting a School Budget. She has never in her entire voting career, not supported a School Funding Project. She wants Mr. Archambault to understand that it was nothing against the projects themselves.

Dwayne stated that it was all about the funding of the projects. He said that the Article that was put out did state that it was not an issue with the projects themselves. He said the only thing that struck him was the number of Pre-K classrooms. He said that there are some significant Pre-K classrooms in the plans, but we don't even have a Pre-K program in the State of Maine. It was portrayed to us at the Public Hearing that this will be a mandate by the State. Dwayne said that this is not true. The Governor will never mandate Pre-K because the State would be required to pay 50% of that cost for infrastructure and programming. He said that the State will be looking to do some BETA programs with Pre-K, so he is wondering why our School District doesn't apply for that. The State has \$10 million to use for a BETA program. We have one of the largest School Districts in the State of Maine so they should be looking into it. Mr. Archambault stated that they have no room for Pre-K. All of the surrounding areas have some sort of program, but we have no space in our schools to do Pre-K.

Dwayne stated that it was really not about the projects but only about the funding aspect. If this is approved tonight, it will add \$650.00 in year 2 to the average taxpayer in North Berwick. It will add \$700.00 in Lebanon and \$750.00 in Berwick. This would be a 15% increase in tax bills without any other increases in the District. He asked why they haven't applied to the State Building Fund. Mr. Archambault believes that the last time the State opened up the window for new building projects was back in 2017. There were about 70 projects that were put forward and there was about \$100 million. The State reviewed everything, and he doesn't believe that we made the cut for the funding. Mr. Archambault stated that the previous Superintendent, Stephen Connolly worked really hard looking into everything with the State and what was available. He

believes that if there was an opportunity to get any amount of funding, Mr. Connolly would have tried for it.

Selectman Cowan's question is regarding what other funding sources can be explored. She has only heard that this is the way the School District has always done it and it is the way that they will keep doing it. She said that Bond Banks and interest rates now is almost like free money. However, if you calculate what we are paying for interest based on what the flyer said, it is an exorbitant rate of interest. She wants to know how it is being funded and what the percentage is that we are paying as a town and as a District for these projects. She stated that we have a right to that information, but she did not see that disclosed anywhere. She said that there are also other funding sources that schools could tap into that we, as a municipality, tap into. She stated that they discussed it with the Administrators so they could minimize the impact on the taxpayers. Selectman Cowan stated that they may find that schools are even more supported if they were to minimize the impact to the average resident.

Dwayne stated that he also has concerns as to what will happen with the School's operating budget. He said that the School Districts are insulated from tax increases. Dwayne stated that if the Referendum does pass, then he believes that the School District will have a hard time passing their Operations budget in the future. Mr. Archambault said that he understood. He said that he has been doing budgets for 5 years now and every time they start the process, without adding anything in, they are already 4% to 5% over. He said they always have to put forward things. Next year, he has to hire 2 teachers. Last year, the number was about \$77,000 for a teacher. He said that they always have budget meetings with the School Board, and they are always taking out \$100.00 from it. This is a tiny drop from the bucket. He stated that their budgets are really tight. Last year, they cut \$6,000.00 for books from the North Berwick Elementary School. They did this because they are very conscientious about the percentile that they will go to the Board with and then they whittle it down some more. He said that they have been at the bone for quite some time now.

Chairman Galemme said that they talk about the impact on the taxpayers and that is somewhat abstract. He stated that part of the Selectmen's title is Overseer of the Poor. A \$600.00 to \$700.00 increase in property taxes will be a definite impact on the elderly and poor. It will make people have to choose between paying for their medication or their taxes. This is equally unacceptable to him as it is for a child to have to walk 100 yards outside to use the bathroom. He does believe that the Central Administration at the school needs to look long and hard at how they operate their finances. He said that we had an increase in School Budget this year and they needed about \$500,000 to do building repairs. He doesn't question why they need things like that. He stated that his wife is on the School Board, and he knows how hard they work to get the budget together. However, he feels that instead of just raising money through taxation to do these capital projects, they could have taken out a loan for a number of years. If they borrowed \$500,000 and did a 10-year loan, then they would only need \$52,000 for this year's budget and for each year for 10 years. The impact on the taxpayer would be a lot less than the \$500,000, but the administration doesn't seem to understand that. He stated that the town took out a \$1 million bond and stretched it out for 10 years because we had a lot of big money projects to do.

Chairman Galemmo stated that the Bond for the Lebanon School should have already been a done deal and we should be a couple year's into paying it now. It seems like they just waited and waited and now we have to do everything at once. He said that there is really no good solution to all of this. Dwayne said that they spoke to Stephen Connolly 3 years ago about the Lebanon School and it should have gone on the ballot at that time because the school is really needed. Mr. Archambault stated that the Berwick and Lebanon votes are always touchy depending on the Town politics. A couple of years ago, there was conversation about the Selectmen in 2 of the towns and how they were trying to stick it to North Berwick taxpayers. The concern was that if they agreed to give Lebanon their school they may not come out and agree for the North Berwick projects or the Berwick projects. They wanted to make sure that everyone was included in the Referendum so each of the towns would get something. Dwayne stated that there needs to be a culture change. He said that we are putting our foot forward by doing a culture change and support the Lebanon School project because we know that it is necessary. We are a District and we are one. We need to build up the community.

Mr. Archambault stated that he wants to be more involved. He said that if the Board or Dwayne reaches out to Administration and they don't get an answer, he would like them to reach out to him. He will do his best to get an answer for them. He loves the kids in the school, and he is here tonight to advocate for them.

Selectman Hall believes that one of the things that people are upset about in town is the Mary Hurd School. When they decided to make the changes, the town was told that there would not be overcrowding at the North Berwick Elementary School and the cottages were put in the year after. It felt like the North Berwick residents had been lied to. They were told that the changes would make money for the District because we wouldn't have to pay to send kids to specialized schools for behavioral problems. He stated that they are all on board with that and agree with it. However, they did not agree to making North Berwick Elementary School at capacity and forcing cottages to be built the following year. He thinks that the Principal at the time was the only one that told the residents the truth and said that it was going to be tight. It has worked so far but there does need to be a solution and the Hurd Academy is not part of that solution. Selectman Hall said that it is just hard to understand why some of these projects have not already been put forth to be voted on. He said that keeping a line of communication open is very important so we can move in the right direction.

Mr. Archambault wants to come in and talk to the Board when needed because he wants people to know the facts. He doesn't want to manipulate the voters or the tax base, but he wants them to know the facts. He invited the Board to come down to the school and he would show them around. He stated that the kids in this town are amazing and feels that the whole district from K-12 is one of the best. He said to use him as a conduit to get any information that they may need. He is here for the kids and to do what he can to make it better for them. Selectman Hall said that they are here for the kids too, but they are in a really tough position because of the way property taxes in the United States work. It pits the elderly against the young and they are the 2 groups that are the most disadvantaged and that we need to help. Until, we as a nation, join the other industrialized nations and change the funding formulas, it will be a tough struggle. Selectman Hall told Mr. Archambault that he understands his frustration with the letter that they sent out with the recommendation to vote against this project. Selectman Hall hopes that he can

understand some of the reasons that the Board made their decision. It is not a permanent decision on their part. They want to move forward and see these projects get done but they want to see different avenues and proposals on how to accomplish this work.

4. Unfinished Business:

A. COVID-19: ARPA Funding

Dwayne stated that he still has not heard from the Water and Sewer Districts about possible projects.

Dwayne stated that there has been a big change in the past few weeks. MMA has come out and stated that all ARPA funding projects are going to go to Town Meeting for approval. A lot of the towns are questioning this decision because we all have Articles that say that if we have grants, we can spend them. MMA said that this is a grant with conditions, but Dwayne said that every grant we get has conditions. They said that they are erring on the conservative side, so they want the towns to bring it to Town Meeting. Selectman Cowan asked if MMA was requiring it or if it was just their opinion. Dwayne said that it was their opinion. He said that we should reach out to our attorney to have them review. Chairman Galemme stated that the MMA is not a government agency. They are like our lobby advocacy group. Selectman Hall asked how many years we had to spend the money. Dwayne said that we had 4 years to spend it so we can take it to Town Meeting if we need to. Selectman Hall asked if it would be at April's Town Meeting. Dwayne said that they could probably do some of it then, but it would most likely take several Town Meetings to approve the various projects.

Selectman Cowan stated that Dwayne had put in the newsletter that if anyone from the public had any ideas, they should contact him. She asked if he had received anything. Dwayne said that he has not received anything. Selectman Johnson, Jr. asked how many employees lost their jobs due to COVID mandates. Dwayne said that he does not have any final numbers yet, but it was not too many.

B. LWCF: Grant Funding of Bauneg Beg Hill Project

Dwayne said that we just got a \$150,000 grant to buy the top of the mountain. He said that there is actually still another step. It has passed the State review and it will now go to the Federal Government to review. He said that it is highly irregular for NPS to say "no" if a State has approved the project. He said that the State already has that money because it was allotted to them. The State then divvies it up, but it still needs to go to National Park Service for their review. The State told Dwayne that it may happen as soon as December, but they are not sure on that yet. Dwayne said that there is a possibility that they may go for additional grant funds. He is waiting to hear back from the Great Works Land Trust. They have a meeting next week and they will get back to him after that.

Reminders: Next Board of Selectmen's Meeting – November 16, 2021 – 6:30 pm

5. New Business:

A. FY23 Budget: Review Budget Timeline for FY23

Dwayne stated that on page 20 of their packet is a timeline for an open Town Meeting on April 9, 2022 for the Board to approve.

Selectman Hall motioned to accept the Timeline for the Town of North Berwick Budget Process for FY 2023. Selectman Johnson, Sr. seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0

Dwayne said that there is a Budget Committee member that was elected but he has not attended any Budget Committee meeting since he was elected. He has never picked up the Budget book or expressed any desire to attend the meeting. Someone asked Dwayne what they could do about this member. Dwayne said that they are an elected official so we cannot get rid of them. He said that they can send him a letter stating that if they are not going to participate, would they be willing to resign so we could appoint someone who would participate. Dwayne wants to know if the Board thinks that this would be an appropriate action to send the letter to Justin Dowling to see if he still wants to be on the Committee.

Selectman Hall motioned to have the Town Manager draft a letter asking Justin Dowling if he would be amenable to resigning from the Budget Committee. Selectman Cowan seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0

Dwayne said that there is still 1 year left on Mr. Dowling's term.

Dwayne stated that one of the things that they discussed regarding the budget was an hourly rate for our Fire Department and get rid of the point system. He stated that this is the last year of our Capital Plan so we will start developing a new Capital Plan next year. We have the last payment on Fire truck #4 and the last payment on our Road Bond. We will look to get another million dollar Bond in the subsequent year for the roads. They are looking to purchase Truck #3 this year. The Truck Committee is working on that right now. We currently have \$80,000.00 set aside. This would add another \$40,000.00 so it would give us \$120,000.00 as a steppingstone towards the truck. It looks like the truck will be in the \$400,000.00 to \$450,000.00 range. We are still putting in \$50,000.00 aside for the Fire Station. It also includes the Tanker Bond Payment, Road Bond, Road Reconstruction, Pavement Maintenance, Transfer Station Improvements, and Sidewalks.

Dwayne stated that we are looking at a different Police cruiser. The Ford package is moving towards electric cars, and this is concerning to us. He said that Dodge is entering the Police market again with a Dodge Durango. They test drove a Dodge Durango for about 2 weeks. They are what Ford was 3 years ago. The cost would be similar to what the Ford one was. He said that by Ford going electric, the price goes way up. He said that the last Ford that they bought, they spent more money on it then they did on all of the other ones combined. They have made changes as they start moving towards a hybrid and a lot of the components are failing.

Dwayne said that one of the concerns is that when they use a car it hardly ever gets shut off so the charging would be a problem. It takes about 3 hours to charge it so that means that they would have to have a cruiser down for that time. Selectman Hall said that they would probably have to have a car charging while another one is being used. Dwayne stated that it would most likely not be a cost saving. Selectman Hall said that there may be significant savings to going this route. Dwayne said there may be but usually those savings don't whittle down to towns. They come as tax savings, and we don't pay taxes. Selectman Hall believes that there will be a push to change in the police forces. Dwayne said that we used to pay about \$26,000.00 for the cruisers but these will cost about \$40,000.00. We then would need to talk about EV Charging stations which are about \$5,500.00 each and we would probably need more than one. Selectman Hall asked what the cost was for the Dodge Durango with the chip shortage. Dwayne said that it is about \$26,000.00. He said that they have not gotten any firm quotes yet, but this is what they were told when they test drove the Durango. Selectman Johnson, Jr. asked what the battery life would be because of the use of all the other electronics in the vehicle. Dwayne said that they have not even looked at that yet. Dwayne would like to see another town do it first and see how it works.

Dwayne stated that it is the last year for our road program as well. He is looking to do the last section of Valley Road and the last section of Ford Quint Road. He is still working on Clark Road to see if he can squeeze it out of this current year budget. It looks like we will have a balance of about \$99,000.00 once the State reimburses us for Linscott Road. This should allow us to do Clark Road. The pavement number on this road will be about \$70,000.00. The grinding will be about \$2,500.00 and gravel should be about \$20,000 which would bring us to about \$92,000.00. He needs to find out how much tree cutting and culvert work needs to be done.

Dwayne said that Selectman Hall had mentioned at the last meeting about the speed limit on Morrells Mills Road. He went out to Morrells Mills Road and walked it a few times. He also looked at the Uniform Traffic Codes. The reason that 40 mph speed limit sign is there is because whenever you have an intersection, you need to have a speed limit sign within 300 feet of it. He said that we could probably move it a little bit. He asked what the ultimate concern was with the speed limit. He said that he sat at the intersection for quite some time. He didn't see anyone goosing it. He said that they are coming down a hill, so it appears that they are coming faster. He also asked the Chief if he saw any increase in speeding in that area and he said that he had not.

Selectman Johnson, Sr. asked if the intersection was marked, and Dwayne said that it was. The concern is that there are 40 mph signs within 300 feet of either side of the intersection. Some on the constituents said that when people see it coming over the hill, they goose it which makes it more difficult for people to go from Sand Pond onto Fox Farm or vice versa. Selectman Johnson, Sr. asked if there was a sign that shows that there is an intersection there. Selectman Hall said that there is a sign, but it is hard to see. It says Intersection Ahead with the 35-mph sign underneath. Selectman Hall said that he believes that it is people that live at the intersection and people walking across the intersection that have issues.

6. Other Business:

Dwayne stated that he received a resignation from Susan Niehoff for the Stenographer position. He will start to search for a replacement.

7. Review and Approve Warrants and Correspondence:

Warrant:	October 26, 2021	- \$ 28,443.42
Warrant:	November 2, 2021	- \$ 0.00

Selectman Hall motioned to approve the Warrant of October 26, 2021 for the amount of \$28,443.42. Selectman Cowan seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0

8. Adjournment:

Selectman Johnson, Sr. motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:24 pm. Selectman Hall seconded the motion. VOTE: 5-0

Respectively Submitted,
Susan Niehoff, Stenographer

Original to Town Clerk

Chairman: Charles Galemmo

Selectman: Jonathan Hall

Selectman: Michael Johnson, Jr.

Selectman: Wendy Cowan

Selectman: Michael Johnson, Sr.

