

PRELIMINARY MINUTES

**TOWN OF LUDLOW
BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

December 14, 2021

**SPECIAL MEETING
Heald Auditorium**

6:00 P.M.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Bruce Schmidt, Chairman Justin Hyjek Heather Tucker
Scott Baitz Brett Sanderson

STAFF PRESENT:

Scott Murphy Nick Miele

OTHERS PRESENT:

Gary Blodgett Marissa Selleck Jean Strong

1. CONSIDERATION OF ANY CHANGES, ADDITIONS OR REMOVALS TO THE AGENDA

A. Scott Murphy advised that no change is needed.

2. CALL TO ORDER

A. Bruce Schmidt called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. FY 2023 BUDGET WORKSHOP

A. Parks & Recreation

- 1) Gary Blodgett said that he is speaking as a community member and past Recreation Committee member. He said that ours is a recreation community and to not embrace that is a detriment to the community. We have several parks and recreation areas that are assets for the residents and visitors and attract visitors and young families. We need to maintain these areas. All of the areas need work; we can't swim at West Hill. The skate park needs to be maintained and needs upgrades. He said that they hope to bring firm numbers to the Select Board meeting on January 3, 2022 for a separate article for the Recreation department. We would like to fix West Hill (dredge it), repair the basketball and tennis courts, the playground and work on the mountain bike path.
- 2) Justin Hyjek thanked the committee for their hard work,
- 3) Marissa Selleck said that Mariel Meringelo (OMS) and Jake Parker (LES) will advocate for this. There are lots of projects to be done.
- 4) Scott Murphy said that on the budget they have combined the labor line for winter, summer and camp into one line. The total is \$1,500 less. They are not paying coaches any longer. He said that the large increase in Insurance was the addition of one full time single person.

- 5) Nick Miele said that the concessions are hard with the athletic guidelines regarding food serving. It was better when there were fans. Last year there were no fans. This year fans were limited to 2 per player with masks. It makes no sense to have concession this year. Hopefully, in the spring they will be able to have concession again. He said that getting youth sports back again was his main concern.
- 6) Justin Hyjek said that he didn't see anything for the dog park.
- 7) Scott Murphy said there is \$500 in there and also \$3,500 in Capital for drainage repairs. He said water runs across the park perpetually. He said that Ron Tarbell got prices for a small culvert system with small footbridge.
- 8) Scott Baitz suggested re-dredging.
- 9) Scott Murphy said that is part of what they will do. Most of the \$3,500 is piping.
- 10) Justin Hyjek asked Nick Miele if there are any improvements he would like to see.
- 11) Nick Miele said his big concern if the unsafe conditions at the skate park. Also, they need to resurface the floor at the Community center. He would like to paint new lines for basketball, pickle ball and volleyball. He also wants to refinish the court and vinyl tarps. He said that the Community center gets lots of use.
- 12) Justin Hyjek said lots of recreation leagues use it in the winter.
- 13) Heather Tucker asked if they make revenue through the activities.
- 14) Nick Miele said no. He said the only revenue is from the Weight Room memberships.
- 15) Heather Tucker asked about pay from the AAU league.
- 16) Nick Miele said yes, per player.
- 17) Heather Tucker asked about sports field maintenance.
- 18) Bruce Schmidt said that the soccer is played at the gym at the high school.
- 19) Heather Tucker asked if they charge rent for that.
- 20) Nick Miele said that originally the school was going to charge us for a custodian. The new principal is allowing me to have gym access and not charging us as there is no custodian.
- 21) Bruce Schmidt asked where the revenue for the AAU league is.
- 22) Nick Miele said through donations.
- 23) Bruce Schmidt asked where the revenue from the talc mine is.
- 24) Nick Miele said in the community center budget.
- 25) Heather Tucker asked about the Babe Ruth league and Chester.
- 26) Nick Miele said for the last 2 years, they have played at Pullinen.
- 27) Heather Tucker asked how much they charge.
- 28) Nick Miele said \$50 per player.
- 29) Heather Tucker said that is not enough.
- 30) Bruce Schmidt said that Ludlow has a Recreation Department and so, Cavendish, Chester and Mount Holly don't have to. He said that the Babe Ruth league has only about 3 to 4 players from Ludlow, the rest are from Chester. There has to be a right pricing for what we offer. We need to charge the going rate. He said that we have \$24,000 coming in and \$15,000 is capital. We are budgeting \$2,500 for Little League, \$800 for softball. We need to be mindful. Their projected expenses are \$209,950.00. He said that about 10% of that is for using the lights. He asked if we need lights in 2 places. Referring to the budget he said it shows a \$1,500.00 decrease and noted \$42.00 costs in Camp Staff and we don't have camp staff. He said he doesn't think it really looks like there will really be a decrease. He noted the Up and Down with telephone/cellphone costs and said the costs for Recreation are \$2,200 and Police are \$9,000. The listers are \$700. He said the costs are all over the place. He questioned if the town should look into a phone system for all of the town departments.
- 31) Justin Hyjek said a central telephone system for the town could be tied into Administration.

- 32) Bruce Schmidt said there are lots of cellphones out there and in some cases, may not be needed.
- 33) Scott Murphy said there are also pagers. He said that 2 years ago, Nick Miele added internet for the Community Center.
- 34) Bruce Schmidt said \$2,200 is a lot for one person.
- 35) Justin Hyjek asked about fireworks and said for the last few years, the talc mine had sponsored them.
- 36) Nick Miele said they will also sponsor them this year, but do not want them set off at the mine; it's not a good location for viewing. He said in 2019, we used West Hill and had Municipal Transit shuttle people around. He said the sponsorship in 2019 was \$7,000. He said that the vendor has different packages. At West Hill, we also had food vendors and we don't charge them. He said there is no parking at West Hill and we would have to have busing. He said one place said \$700/bus for 6 hours. He said that Okemo would provide service at a lower cost.
- 37) Justin Hyjek said they could pick up at the Blue Lot.
- 38) Nick Miele said we would need 2 staff there helping with the parking. He said the hardest part would be getting people down West Hill at night. He said the fire department would be there. He said at West Hill, in the past, we have had a band, games, face painting and food vendors.
- 39) Scott Murphy said we don't charge for busing. He said the talc mine pays for the fireworks and we pay for the busses.
- 40) Scott Baitz asked if there is another lot we can use other than the Blue Lot – maybe C-lot.
- 41) Bruce Schmidt said there is a path from Alpen Meadows to the Red Lot.
- 42) Scott Baitz said he would check that out.
- 43) Heather Tucker asked if people could watch from Main Street
- 44) Justin Hyjek suggested the Moover buses.
- 45) Nick Miele said he would check.
- 46) Bruce Schmidt asked Scott Murphy to check if the town could make a \$1,000 donation to the association and use the Red Lot.
- 47) Justin Hyjek asked what is the breakdown per field and is the High School field included.
- 48) Nick Miele said Pullinen is included. They hold the soccer tournaments at Pullinen.
- 49) Scott Murphy said the high school field is in there.
- 50) Justin Hyjek said that \$19,000 per year seems like a lot.
- 51) Nick Miele said it includes paint and infield nets, over seeding and maintaining the turf at Dorsey.
- 52) Justin Hyjek said there are a lot of fields.
- 53) Scott Murphy said the big ticket is Dorsey. He said we can invite teams to hold home games there.
- 54) Nick Miele said there may be a semi-pro baseball team at Pullinen from May to October, but he doesn't want that to take away from what he does.
- 55) Bruce Schmidt suggested an increase of 7%. Most of it is personnel, youth recreation. He said we budgeted \$4,000 and spent \$2,600. He said for adult activities, we budgeted \$4,000 and spent \$3,100. He said we need to spend more money on the Skate Park, he said the tennis courts are also popular. He said to make sure we don't go over budget on Little League. He added that for Playgrounds we budgeted \$3,600 and spent \$870. He asked if we can bring this back – at the next meeting. He added that revenue is \$9,000 and the budgeted expenses are \$209,000.
- 56) Heather Tucker said we are an active town and we should charge for West Hill and Dorsey. We are losing money for the town.

- 57) Nick Miele said that for Adult Activities, as long as we have no customers, we won't need the \$4,000 and can spend that money on Green Up day.
- 58) Scott Murphy said he will sit with Nick Miele and look over the budget by item and reshape it for the next meeting.
- 59) Justin Hyjek said that the Skate Park Capital budget had \$20,000 in for resurfacing and now it is \$10,000. He is meeting with contractors and if we do the entire surface, it would run about \$500,000.00. He recommends doing it in phases at about \$140,000 to \$160,000 each. He said that they have submitted for a grant. He asked if they can let the Capital budget go to \$0. He asked for the 2023 budget if the board will put it back to \$20,000.
- 60) Nick Miele said there is a large volume of skaters and the nicer and neater it looks; it will attract more people who will respect it.
- 61) Justin Hyjek said that Dorsey is the crown jewel of the parks in town and we need to maintain the fields, playground and skate park.
- 62) Bruce Schmidt asked if Justin Hyjek is proposing putting \$20,000 back into capital for the skate park,
- 63) Justin Hyjek said, as a Skate Park committee member, yes, he would like it funded the same as last year.
- 64) Bruce Schmidt said he has heard about the skate park and knows it is used a lot. He also heard about other towns and we need to be mindful of it. He added that he has not seen anything in the budget for a bathroom at the Transfer Station and he wants to know a price for it. Maybe we could hold off on a new truck or put it in the capital. He asked Scott Murphy to bring back ideas at the next meeting.
- 65) Scott Murphy said this can be the first step.
- 66) Bruce Schmidt said he is open to putting in \$20,000 or \$10,000 for planning it. He said that doing nothing is not acceptable.
- 67) Heather Tucker asked if it would have to have its own septic.
- 68) Bruce Schmidt said we could pump it.
- 69) Scott Murphy said he will bring back suggestions at the next meeting.
- 70) Bruce Schmidt said we need to find ways to increase the revenue for Parks and Recreation.
- 71) Gary Blodgett said these are community assets and people pay for them in their taxes. The administration should provide for the community.
- 72) Bruce Schmidt said there is a level that we provide; he said people pay to ride in the ambulance.
- 73) Gary Blodgett said if we have swimming at West Hill, there will have to be a lifeguard.
- 74) Bruce Schmidt said we need to find a balance for what to charge, not too much. We don't want it to be too much that people can't afford it. We want to support the skate park, it is a good program.
- 75) Justin Hyjek said that the grant writer said that Ludlow has a dynamite recreation department.
- 76) Bruce Schmidt said we need to find sponsors for transportation to the fireworks. He said we spend \$3,500 for summer concerts and get sponsors for that. People enjoy it and expect it.
- 77) Nick Miele said he thinks the soccer tournament is important. He said that this year Green Mountain ran the concession, were responsible for the officials and administration for the event. Ludlow provided the field, lights and facilities. He asked if we should find sponsors for that or try to get money from Green Mountain. There are (4) night games and lots of paint.
- 78) Heather Tucker asked if there is a tournament fee.
- 79) Nick Miele said no.

- 80) Bruce Schmidt said that many of the Ludlow students go to Green Mountain High School and it is viewed as a school sponsored event. He asked how many events there are with lights and how much money is spent on the lights.
- 81) Justin Hyjek said when we hold tournaments, it brings people into town.
- 82) Bruce Schmidt said we can try to get sponsorship. People with food trucks expect to get charged. We can negotiate our fees.
- 83) Heather Tucker said that the Farmers' Market charges fees.

B. Questions from the Last Meeting

- 1) Scott Murphy said there were questions asked at the last meeting
 - a. BRACC – not budgeting the \$3,500 for the mentoring program. They are not doing it due to COVID.
 - b. Listers – They have to take \$30,000 out of revenue for the reappraisal.
 - c. Transfer Station labor – he said that the Part time employee was interdepartmental.
 - d. Transfer Station back hoe – Patti Potter said that it helps with the composting and helps to prevent injuries
 - e. Revenue – revenue was from the After School Program. They have not received from the independent school yet.
- 2) Bruce Schmidt said the question about Transfer Station labor was since they added a full-time person, could they eliminate the part time person. He said that he has also asked for a YTD recap for the current fiscal year.
- 3) Scott Murphy said that he has the numbers, but not a copy.
- 4) Bruce Schmidt said he would like to have a copy for the next meeting.

2. **OTHER BUSINESS**

A. Wage Structure

- 1) Scott Murphy said that overall, staff wages are falling. The national increase was 6.8% while ours was 6.0% and inflation is the highest since 1987. Our pay increases have been about 3.5%. The labor market is very tight. Inflation will come down. He said that wages to new employees are higher than salaries of long- time staff. It's hard to find new employees if you can't pay more than existing employees. Our staff wants a market adjustment and most can find other jobs. People are quitting their jobs and getting sign on bonuses for newer higher paying jobs. That has become the best way for advancement. We have lost administrative personnel and ambulance, police, wastewater and highway personnel. He is asking the board to consider an across the board pay increase.
- 2) Justin Hyjek said we are now giving 2 to 3% increases – where would a 5% increase cost. He said that his belief is that the market will level, but we need to pay our employees.
- 3) Bruce Schmidt asked if the board wanted to continue this discussion in Executive session.
- 4) Brett Sanderson said this would be across the board, no names.
- 5) Bruce Schmidt asked if this would be for salaried or hourly.
- 6) Heather Tucker asked if it is fair that a new employee gets the same salary as someone here 20 years.
- 7) Scott Murphy said that's the market rate now. To hire good employees, you have to pay the salary.
- 8) Bruce Schmidt said that we cover insurance for our employees and that is a huge benefit that some people don't realize.
- 9) Justin Hyjek asked how much below the national average are we?
- 10) Scott Murphy said that private businesses are higher.

- 11) Heather Tucker asked about other gold towns.
- 12) Scott Murphy said we are below Stowe. He said that health insurance is a key selling point for us. We tell projected wages and explain about insurance. We are in the middle for most jobs, but wages have been accelerating in the last few months. People are going to the higher paying jobs. We can manage a 5% increase. He said that with the current draft increase, plus 10%, plus VMERS and FICA, would mean an increase of \$194,000 which is intolerable. A 5% increase would be about \$97,000. He reminded the board that \$149,000 would be an increase in the tax rate of \$.01.
- 13) Justin Hyjek said we will have to consider cuts to the budgets – are we considering cuts, or just add to the budget.
- 14) Bruce Schmidt asked if Scott Murphy is asking for a 5% increase in July plus the normal budget increase
- 15) Scott Murphy said he is suggesting giving it all in July.
- 16) Bruce Schmidt said that waiting until July may not work. Can we find \$100,000 savings now?
- 17) Scott Murphy said if we tell the employees and show them the benefits effective July 1st it should be okay. He said that people do not want to leave their jobs. If we put the carrot out there, it would be a substantial reason to stay.
- 18) Justin Hyjek asked if most towns pay 100% of the insurance.
- 19) Bruce Schmidt said no.
- 20) Bruce Schmidt said our philosophy is to provide insurance, knowing that we are not at the same market levels.
- 21) Scott Murphy said employees with the family plan is a bigger deal than a single person.
- 22) Bruce Schmidt asked about 80/20%.
- 23) Scott Murphy said that most municipalities are at 80/20.
- 24) Bruce Schmidt said we don't treat salaries employees the same as hourly. Salaried are higher salaries.
- 25) Justin Hyjek asked what would be the increase in property taxes if we add to the salaries.
- 26) Scott Murphy said about 2/3 cent.
- 27) Bruce Schmidt said to find money in this year's budget or find money to take out. He said that he doubts that we will see an 11% increase in revenue across the departments.
- 28) Justin Hyjek said we have some big ticket items coming.
- 29) Bruce Schmidt asked Scott Murphy when the budget has to be complete
- 30) Scott Murphy said around January 14th.
- 31) Bruce Schmidt said that the next meeting will be on January 3, 2022. He asked Scott Murphy if he can bring back what is in this year's budget. He said that this budget is at 2.2%. He asked what the percentage will be.
- 32) Justin Hyjek said these are crazy times and 1 – 2% is reasonable. He suggested possibly a bonus this year in lieu of the increase.
- 33) Scott Murphy said that was a suggestion. He said that he would come back to the January meeting with some suggestions.
- 34) Bruce Schmidt suggested a \$3,000 bonus to stay in the job - \$1.44/hour over the year with \$1,500 for part timers or \$.72/hour.
- 35) Justin Hyjek asked if that would be retroactive.
- 36) Bruce Schmidt said over the year and asked if that is enough. He said that it would show appreciation. He added that this does not include the Police Department as they are union. He added that he didn't see anything in the budget for them.
- 37) Brett Sanderson said he is skeptical about giving a bonus now. He said that some people may take the bonus and then leave. He said to pay the increase over time.
- 38) Scott Murphy asked board to send him any other suggestions they may have.

C. Plans for Packets

- 1) Bruce Schmidt asked what would be the plans for board members receiving meeting packets. He said they cannot be sent out on Fridays. He said that board members need time to review them.
- 2) Justin Hyjek said if they receive them on Mondays, it isn't enough time for review.
- 3) Scott Murphy said that the Select Board packets will be available for pick up on Thursdays. He will not make any changes to the budget until the next meeting.
- 4) Bruce Schmidt said he would like to finalize the budget at their next meeting, or they will have to add another meeting.

4. **SET POSSIBLE DATES FOR NEXT MEETING**

- A. January 3, 2022 – Regular Meeting

5. **ADJOURN**

- A. **MOTION by Brett Sanderson and seconded by Heather Tucker to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously.**
- B. Meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisha Klaiber

Bruce Schmidt, Chairman

Brett Sanderson

Scott Baitz

Heather Tucker

Justin Hyjek