

MINUTES

**TOWN OF LUDLOW
BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

February 22, 2021

**REMOTE PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING
ZOOM ELECTRONIC MEETING
6:00 P.M.**

Join ZOOM Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85277101765?pwd=Ty9Dek9qK3NmSWdOSIRFNFJodWdSUT09>

Meeting ID: 852 7710 1765

Passcode: 583569

Dial in by phone: +1 929 205 6099

Meeting ID: 852 7710 1765

Passcode: 583569 (LUDLOW on a phone keypad)

Please download ZOOM onto your computer or smartphone prior to attending the meeting. A direct link to ZOOM may be found on the website's homepage at www.ludlow.vt.us.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Bruce Schmidt, Chairman
Scott Baitz

Justin Hyjek
Brett Sanderson

Heather Tucker

STAFF PRESENT:

Scott Murphy

Ulla Cook

Marty Nitka, Moderator

OTHERS PRESENT:

George Abraham
Eric Alden
Dean Alexander
Linda Alexander
Jeff Billings
Joanna Bombadil
Bob Brandt
Lynne Crosswell
Roger Crosswell

Pam Cruickshank
John Denner
Andria Donohue
Stephanie Grover
Deb Guillow
Gary Joseph
Ginny Kottkamp
Bob Kottkamp
Fred Marin

Nick Miele
Sue Rohdieck
Linda Thomson
George Thomson
Becs Ulrich
Nathan Vilandre
Donna's IPAD
Lisha Klaiber - Recorder
Eric Chatterjee (Okemo Valley-TV)

1. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Scott Murphy called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance. Scott Murphy said this open meeting of the Town of Ludlow Select Board is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Scott's Executive Order of 01-20 Act 92, Amendment #6, due to the current State of Emergency given the outbreak of the coronavirus.

“In order to mitigate the transmission of the virus and reduce the risk of COVID-19 illness, we have been advised and directed by the State of Vermont to suspend public gatherings, and as such, the Governor's Order suspends the requirement of the Open Meeting Law to have all meetings in a publicly accessible physical location. All members of public bodies are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. ZOOM access address to this meeting is listed in the warning, on the agenda and on the town website.”

- B. Scott Murphy said he would take a roll call of Select Board members and asked members; when I call your name, please respond in the affirmative.
Heather Tucker – aye
Justin Hyjeck – aye
Scott Baitz – aye
Vice Chairman, Brett Sanderson – aye
Chairman, Bruce Schmidt – aye

- C. Scott Murphy advised that Eric Chatterjee, from Okemo Valley TV will be keeping track of all persons wishing to speak.
- D. Eric Chatterjee explained that there is a “Raise Hand” option on the ZOOM screen and can be accessed by hitting on the “Participants” icon. It automatically puts you in a queue to be recognized in the order in which you “raise your hand.”
- E. Scott Murphy introduced Marty Nitka as the Moderator for the meeting.

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

- A. No changes were needed.

3. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 1**

- A. Marty Nitka said that the articles in the agenda mirror the Warning. He said that he had read last year’s Town Meeting minutes and noticed that Bob Kirkbride had spoken several times at that meeting. Bob was a dear friend to many of us and was the first person from Ludlow to die from COVID. Pat Liao passed shortly after Bob.
- B. Marty Nitka read Article 1 - To elect Town Officers for the coming year.
- C. Marty Nitka said that there is nothing to discuss about this item.

4. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 2**

- A. Marty Nitka explained that participants at this meeting may not amend and will not vote on these articles tonight. This meeting is for discussion, questions and comments.
- B. Marty Nitka read Article 2 - Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow fix the salaries of the Select Board, Cemetery Commissioners and Trustees of Public Funds the same as last year, Select Board \$1,600, Cemetery Commissioners \$900, Trustee of Public Funds \$500?
- C. Marty Nitka called for questions or comments.
- D. Eric Chatterjee advised that there were no hands raised.

5. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 3**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 3 - Shall the Town of Ludlow collect taxes on Real Property in installments, taxes to be paid to the Town Treasurer on August 16, 2021, November 15, 2021, February 15, 2022 and May 16, 2022, and must be delivered to the Town Treasurer and postmarked on or before the due date?
- B. Eric Chatterjee advised that there were no hands raised.

6. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 4**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 4 - Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow authorize the Select Board to borrow money to pay the necessary expenses of the Town and any part of its indebtedness?
- B. John Denner asked if there is any limit to the amount which the Select Board may borrow.
- C. Bruce Schmidt said that there is no set limit. The limit is to handle the finances of the Town as needed. He said that a shortage may occur if there are no tax receipts or the State funding for Education is late. He asked Ulla Cook to comment.
- D. Ulla Cook said that is correct.
- E. Dean Alexander said that he noticed that the budget for next year shows the Town using money from the Cemetery funds – is the town borrowing or taking these funds?
- F. Scott Murphy said that the Select Boards adjustment is a reduction in the Cemetery budget from excess or unused funds. We are reducing the budgeted amount for next year.

7. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 5**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 3 - Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow vote a specific amount in lieu of a rate on a dollar on the Grand List as set forth in the Select Board’s budget and the Windsor County Budget? Then the Select Board shall set the tax rate necessary to raise

this amount after the Grand List has been completed and lodged in the office of the Town Clerk. The amount to be raised by taxes will be \$4,076,367.00.

- B. George Thomson noted that the amount listed in the agenda is not the same as the amount listed on the ballot - \$4,106,503.00 and asked which is correct.
- C. Scott Murphy said the amount on the ballot; \$4,106,503.00 is the correct amount. He said that last year that amount was \$4,082,863, or an increase this year of \$23,640.00 or a 0.6% increase and less than 1%.
- D. Bruce Schmidt said that he compliments the Select Board, the Town Manager, Department Heads and staff. This budget was looked at long and hard and we all pushed to level fund it. It was important to us to be as level as possible for this time. People are going through a lot and we understand. He said that the Ambulance Service is doing a great job. Putting this budget together wasn't easy and we made some tough decisions.
- E. Dean Alexander said that he is interested in the Cemetery and has discussed this with Herb Van Guilder about picking up the deficit. Dean Alexander said he does not agree and thinks that there are other things outside of the realm of the tax payers.
- F. George Thomson asked if Article 5 is approved, is there a potential increase on future budgets, including Articles 7, 8, 9 that would be added to Article 5.
- G. Scott Murphy said yes.
- H. Bruce Schmidt said in answer to Dean Alexander, both he and Brett Sanderson are on the Cemetery Commission and will not take away from the Cemetery. The Cemetery has not used for the past few years – to the full extent – the funds in their budget. We felt that if needed for projects, the Cemetery will not be short funds. We are confident the Cemetery will continue to work to make this the best cemetery around.

8. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 6**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 6 - **Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow authorize the Select Board to maintain a Capital Fund to support the following vehicle and equipment purchases, building maintenance and repairs and to fund programs?**
Highway Equipment Fund \$30,000
Fire Equipment Fund \$30,000
Police Equipment Fund \$5,000,
Recreation Facilities Fund \$5,000,
Ludlow Town Hall Facilities Fund \$5,000,
Ludlow Community Center Facilities Fund \$5,000,
Black River Senior Center Facilities Fund \$2,500?
The amount to be raised by taxes will be \$82,500.00.
- B. Scott Murphy responded to the question brought up by George Thomson and said that the Articles are added on to the budget and referred to page 16 in the Town Report - the Town Budget summary page.

9. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 7**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 7 - **Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow appropriate the sum of \$7,250.00 to The MOOvers, formerly The Current, to support the public transit bus service to Ludlow, from Bellows Falls and from Rutland? The amount to be raised by taxes will be \$7,250.00.**
- B. There were no comments.

10. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 8**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 8 - **Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow authorize the Select Board to establish and maintain a Facilities Fund for Black River High School Building for repairs and restoration? The amount to be raised by taxes will be \$5,000.00.**
- B. Scott Murphy advised that per State Statute, the town may vote to establish a Capital Fund for Special Purposes. The town has taken over the Black River High School building and that building will need repairs over the course of time. The first step is to set money aside for this.
- C. Justin Hyjek asked about the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) for funding.
- D. Scott Murphy said that they did look into this 2 years ago, but it is a national competitive grant process and we would not be able to be competitive.

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- E. Justin Hyjek asked that if we set up the Facilities Fund, would we be able to put funds into it from alternate sources.
 - F. Scott Murphy said yes, but the funds could only be used for the purpose of facilities repairs and restoration.
 - G. Bruce Schmidt said the building has not been left idle. The space is being used by the Black River Independent School and the After School Program (uses space after school and on Virtual Wednesdays.) It is good to keep the heat on and use the building. We will continue to partner with organizations to rent space down the road.
 - H. George Thomson asked for clarification, noting that there is a line item in the budget for the HS building, is that just for maintenance and the \$5,000 for Capital.
 - I. Scott Murphy said yes. He said that last year, the Select Board budgeted with the anticipation of the building being vacant. There are more expenses this year and they have been incorporated into the 2022 budget.
 - J. Dean Alexander asked if either of the two tenants is paying rent.
 - K. Scott Murphy said the After School Program is paying rent and next year the school will also pay rent.
 - L. Dean Alexander asked if those figures are available.
 - M. Scott Murphy said the After School Program rent fluctuates at about \$500 per month. We have proposed that the independent school will pay \$500 per month next year.
 - N. Dean Alexander asked if that depends on student participation.
 - O. Scott Murphy said no. We are asking that they pay a limited amount so they may grow financially.
 - P. There were no more comments.

11. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 9**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 9 - **Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow appropriate the sum of \$312,085.00 to the Ludlow Community Ambulance Service to help support their overall operations? The amount to be raised by taxes will be \$312,085.00.**
- B. Scott Murphy gave a brief summary. The Ambulance Service has been operating at a deficit for many years. They are an Enterprise Fund. He said that at one time, most of the members were volunteers and that has dried up. Last year, there was \$66,000 in the budget for the Capital Account. This year we are asking for \$312,085.00. This is the actual cost to provide full service to Ludlow residents, visitors, Okemo, Cavendish and parts of Plymouth. The personnel costs make up 73% of that total amount. Staff benefits are \$500,000, 35% over last year. We have a good staff. We now have a billing service. We did not count on COVID and people don't want to go to the hospital. We have looked into partnering or regionalization, but that is not happening. This is the first time we have a realistic number in the budget.
- C. Nathan Vilandre asked if the private membership is included.
- D. Scott Murphy said that the private membership is a choice and provides protection for the household. It is a voluntary contribution.
- E. Nathan Vilandre said that is a conflict. He referred to Londonderry.
- F. Stephanie Grover said that Londonderry does not charge or bill and their staff is all volunteers. This budget includes insurance. Yes, it is a cost, but it saves lives and health care is expensive.
- G. Linda Thomson asked if Cavendish contributes.
- H. Scott Murphy said yes, about \$45,000+
- I. George Thomson noted the significant increase in the budget for health, dental and life insurance, from \$55,975 to \$174,000 and asked why.
- J. Scott Murphy said last year there was one person with a single plan. Now, there is one single person plan, two 2-person plans and one family of 4 plan.
- K. Dean Alexander asked the effect of the billing service.
- L. Scott Murphy said he doesn't have that information tonight.
- M. Stephanie Grover said that with using Comstar for billing, they have had higher and more timely returns, and are up to date on all billing requirements.
- N. John Denner asked if the employees contribute to their health plans.
- O. Scott Murphy said yes.
- P. Bruce Schmidt said that as a Select Board member, he did not realize that this has been coming for the last 5 to 6 years. The billing wasn't a big issue, and the rates did not follow where they should have been. Ludlow has an aging population and uses the service more. Chief Billings and Stephanie Grover are doing a great job managing the service. This is not a volunteer ambulance service. It is not fair to Plymouth and Cavendish to increase them a large amount.

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- We need to work with them and have been incrementally increasing them over the years. We want to be able to pick up the phone and know someone at the Ambulance will pick up. We have 24-hour coverage, including having staff sleep at the building. He said that our call volume shows that the Ambulance Service is needed. He asked Scott Murphy to reach out to Dean Alexander with the numbers.
- Q. Scott Murphy said he would follow-up.
- R. Dean Alexander said that Proctorsville/Cavendish is paying \$45,000. Is that above Ludlow's-\$312,085?
- S. Scott Murphy said that page 19 of the report shows that all 3, including Plymouth are in the budget. Cavendish is \$47,600, Plymouth is \$13,975 and Ludlow \$312,085.
- T. Nathan Vilandre asked if there is a 5-year plan or is this a band-aid and is it worth investing this money.
- U. Scott Murphy said it is a big increase from \$66,000 to \$312,085, but this is a realistic budget and we should not see the same increase next year.
- V. Stephanie Grover said the biggest increase is insurance and our employees are our most valuable asset. It is a big cost, but beneficial. It is not a band aid. We have done a lot and want to be able to go forward. We can't afford regionalization. We work with the fire department and are on track.
- W. Linda Thomson noted that each year, Cavendish and Plymouth have slight increases. She asked what or who determines how much they contribute.
- X. Scott Murphy said for the last few years, we have increased them 10%, but last year 5%. We will be approaching them for population and household numbers and provide numbers based on those. They are not a huge percentage of our calls. They don't have nearly as many calls. We don't want to drive them away – they do bring in revenue. We will put a formula in place going forward.
- Y. Dean Alexander said that our increase is exponential and we talk based on Cavendish and Plymouth residents. We should base it more on the tax base. We have a lot of out-of-town people. Our portion is a 5-fold increase and they only had 5% increase. We should provide service to them, but he said he would have a hard time voting for this. He needs more information.
- Z. Scott Murphy said he would get back to Dean Alexander. He said their portion is a much smaller percentage than Ludlow. We also have Okemo Mountain. They can go elsewhere. He said that part of Plymouth does go elsewhere and Cavendish looked at a private service in the past.
- AA. Dean Alexander said that some of the visitors using our facilities stay in Cavendish and Plymouth.
- BB. Scott Murphy said if someone breaks a leg at Okemo, it is still Okemo in Ludlow.
- CC. Joanna Bombadil said it is a big change. We need to look at what we charge other towns. Do we charge businesses like Okemo or Gill? They couldn't run their businesses without our ambulance service. A large percentage of our runs are to the mountain and Gill. The Ambulance Service serves our town and the people who come here.
- DD. Scott Murphy said that Okemo does pay a contribution. He said that if a person is injured, that person's insurance pays.
- EE. Stephanie Grover said that Ludlow has had paid service for 5 years and we have just switched to 24 hour paid service 2 years ago. We ran the service differently for so long, we just need to pay the bills. The mountain does have a big call volume and we staff 2 trucks on holiday weekends. Gill call volume had decreased lately.
- FF. Ulla Cook said that your life is worth more than a few dollars on your tax bill.
- GG. Dean Alexander asked if Ludlow residents and tax payers get reduced billing.
- HH. Stephanie Grover said we bill the same to all. We can't change the bill. We have set billing. We offer residents hands-on CPR training and participate in town events. We do blood sugar and blood pressure checks. The Select Board can look into the rates.
- II. Dean Alexander said he has no problem with the budget, just where the money is coming from. The Ambulance needs to separate community service events and actual response costs.
- JJ. Stephanie Grover said they increased their billing 2 years ago and are in-line with the rest of the state and are also in-line with the state with per house or per capita numbers.
- KK. Bruce Schmidt said that as board chair, he knows that this is an important subject and he is not happy to have to bring this to the voters. The Ambulance Service is determined by the state and we can't move money around the departments. They have looked into regionalization and there is no desire for that in the area. It is important that we have a good, professional ambulance service. He said that he appreciates the concerns of the voters and the Select Board will keep working to prioritize this and make sure it does not happen again.

12. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 10**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 10 - **Shall the voters of the Town of Ludlow pay for asbestos removal in the boiler room at the Black River Museum Academy Building with a cost not to exceed \$18,760.00? The amount to be raised by taxes will be \$18,760.00.**
- B. John Denner asked if the asbestos has to be removed or have, they considered encapsulation.
- C. Scott Murphy said this was an unforeseen item. They were doing repairs in the basement and found the asbestos. It does need to be removed and encapsulation is not an option for this repair.
- D. Bruce Schmidt said this came up late in the budget process and we felt it best to put it to the voters. We do subsidize the Black River Academy. We are putting this in front of the voters for transparency.
- E. Gary Joseph referred to Article 8.
- F. Marty Nitka said we can't go back to previous discussions.
- G. Gary Joseph said, regarding to the asbestos, can the board set up a new fund for all of the town owned buildings with estimates for items such as roofing and parking.
- H. Bruce Schmidt said the department heads look over the buildings. The asbestos item just came up due to a disturbance in the basement. We do let funds build up. We have people pay as they go and not use if not needed. The department heads have spread sheets for buildings and vehicles.
- I. Justin Hyjek said that lumping all of the buildings into one fund is worth discussing.

13. **REVIEW & DISCUSS ARTICLE 11**

- A. Marty Nitka read Article 11 - **To transact any other business necessary and proper when met.**
- B. Marty Nitka asked Ulla Cook to advise people how to vote.
- C. Ulla Cook said that voting will be held on Tuesday, March 2, 2021 from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. People may also call her office at 802-228-2828 for absentee ballots and she will send them out.
- D. Dean Alexander thanked everyone for a very professionally done meeting.
- E. Scott Murphy expressed his compliments to Pam Cruickshank for a great job on the Town Report'
- F. Bruce Schmidt thanked Marty Nitka for stepping in to moderate this meeting. He thanked Eric Chatterjee for his assistance during the pandemic and Okemo Valley TV for giving to the community. They help keep the lines of communication open.
- G. Justin Hyjek said he echoed thanks to Okemo Valley TV, Scott Murphy, Ulla Cook and Pam Cruickshank and all of our constituents.

14. **ADJOURN**

- A. Marty Nitka adjourned the meeting at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisha Klaiber

Bruce Schmidt, Chairman

Brett Sanderson

Scott Baitz

Heather Tucker

Justin Hyjek

Ulla Cook, Town Clerk

Jean Strong, BCA Chair

Marty Nitka, Town Moderator