

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 17, 2024**

Present: Ryan Curley-First Selectman, John Dillon, Robert Hetrick, Jr., Shaun Manning, Michael Pelton, Jim Tripp

Absent: Michael Hernandez

Others Present: Jennifer Billingsley (Library Director); Members of the Public and Media

1. FIRST SELECTMAN CALL MEETING TO ORDER

First Selectman Ryan Curley called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:09 p.m. in the Buck-Foreman Community Room located at 265 Main Street, Portland, CT.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

3. APPROVE MINUTES: (Regular) January 3, 2024

John Dillon made a motion, seconded by Jim Tripp, to approve the January 3, 2024 minutes, all were in favor, motion carried.

4. ACCEPT AGENDA

Shaun Manning made a motion to accept the agenda, seconded by Jim Tripp, all were in favor, motion carried.

5. COMMUNICATIONS/CORRESPONDENCE

Ryan told of a carjacking incident that happened the night before here in Portland. A press release went out drafted by Captain Cunningham. Capt. Cunningham will talk about different options for police protection at a future BOS meeting.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

7. OLD BUSINESS

A) Monthly Report – Committee on Solidarity –

Liz Hibino (via zoom) told of a recent presentation regarding social work in law enforcement that started in CT. Many calls are received regarding mental health and a social person can help in those instances. There are still openings to serve on the Solidarity Committee; the meeting is held on the second Tuesday of the month. The PRIDE event in April is tentatively scheduled for the 20th. Juneteenth details are still tentative.

B) Appointments/Reappointments to Boards and Commissions

None

8. NEW BUSINESS

A) Jennifer Billingsley, Library Director – Library Strategic Plan

The plan was passed in December, 2023 and is condensed into a tri-fold pamphlet. Jennifer read the new purpose and vision. There are three Major Initiatives: Welcoming Spaces, Strategic Communications and Responsive Services. The Library may introduce a “Library of Things.” Right now the “things” would be games. On the pamphlet back are core principles. Jennifer also distributed a welcome letter. On the back are the names of the strategic planning team who contributed to the plan.

John Dillon thanked her and complimented them on the end result. Michael Pelton expressed the importance of the Library for the town and encouraged Jennifer to keep doing what they are doing. Ryan said as a new director, they hit it out of the park.

B) Refunds of Excess Payments:

Robert Hetrick made a motion, seconded by Michael Pelton to reimburse Warren, Susan M [\$113.75]. Vote unanimous, motion carried.

9. STATUS & COMMITTEE REPORTS

- Ryan reminded everyone of the public hearing next Wednesday, January 24 at 6:30 p.m. followed by a special town meeting. He read the following letter into the record; it will be printed in the *Rivereast*:

Dear Residents of Portland,

I am writing today to address a pressing concern regarding our primary fire protection vehicle in the countryside, Engine #3, and to propose a solution that is in the best interest of Portland residents.

As you may or may not be aware, Engine #3 recently suffered a catastrophic tank failure while returning from a call in October. Upon disassembling the tank, it was revealed that extensive repairs, estimated to range from \$100,000 to \$250,000, would be required. Given the truck’s age, now exceeding 30 years, The Board of Selectmen carefully considered and concluded that investing a substantial amount in its repair is neither practical nor fiscally responsible for our taxpayers.

In collaboration with former Chief Shea, current Chief Puida and other members of the Fire Department, we initiated the process of finding a suitable replacement for Engine #3. This task initially proved challenging, particularly due to a competitive marketplace and the unique specifications that the garage bay at Fire Company 3 requires. Timing is also a factor with a six-month lead time on any vehicle purchased, pushing the timeline to June of 2024 at the earliest.

The good news is that our contractor recently identified a truck that meets all the necessary specifications and requirements. The total cost for the replacement engine, including contingency, amounts to \$525,000. We firmly believe that acquiring this vehicle is in the best interest of the Town, ensuring adequate protection for our residents.

To address the funding for this emergency expense, we have worked closely with Finance Director Tom Robinson. The identified funding sources include \$367,112 from unanticipated revenues that we received in the current fiscal year as well as a transfer of \$157,888 from unassigned fund balance in the general fund.

To facilitate community input and decision-making, a Public Hearing has been scheduled for Wednesday, January 24th, at 6:30 pm in the Buck-Foreman Community room at 265 Main Street. Following the hearing, a Special Town Meeting will take place at 6:45 pm, during which a vote will be conducted on the proposed purchase.

We understand the significance of unanticipated purchases, but given the safety concerns and the paramount importance of protecting our residents, the Board believes this decision is imperative for the well-being of the Town.

In a positive turn of events, the Town of East Hampton has generously offered the Town one of their spare engines as a loaner while we work towards procuring this new truck. This not only allows us to maintain adequate protection for our residents, but also enables us to return our own tanker to mutual aid service. We extend our sincerest gratitude to the Town of East Hampton, especially to Fire Chief Robert Rainville and Town Manager David Cox, for their invaluable support during this challenging time.

I would like to encourage the residents of Portland to attend the Public Hearing and Special Town Meeting to voice their opinions and participate in the decision-making process. Your engagement is crucial as we collectively work towards ensuring the safety and well-being of our community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to a positive outcome that prioritizes the safety of our residents.

Sincerely yours,

Ryan J. Curley
First Selectman

- The new bus for the Senior Center will be in service on the 18th.
- Dave Kuzminski will be retiring after 50 years with the Town on January 19th. An event is planned for March 7th at St. Clements tickets will be sold soon.
- Ryan has a meeting scheduled with Dan Bertram to discuss mixed use at Brainerd Place.
- Andy at Parks & Rec is working on getting the banners up for Spring.
- The BOS subcommittee is still working on updating our fixed assessment policy. Suggestions were compiled. Yesterday's meeting was cancelled due to weather. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, January 23rd, at 5:00 p.m. Kudos to the assessor who was extremely helpful. Rich reached out to other towns for suggestions.

John Dillon said he sat in on the BOE discussion that was very detailed.

10. PUBLIC COMMENT

Meg Scata, 5 Freedom Way, with regard to the survey, asked what the status was with the committee on town buildings. She would like to see it move forward and asked anyone who is interested in serving on it to please come forward.

Liz Hibino (zoom) told of an oral history project that is being worked on for black history month. They hope to soon start interviewing Portland residents. The committee is working on a podcast series.

11. BOARD OF SELECTMEN GENERAL INFORMAL DISCUSSION

Ryan said the survey will be discussed more at the next meeting.

John Dillon echoed Meg Scata's comments. Jim Tripp agreed.

12. FOLLOW-UP ITEMS

- **Ethics Ordinance**
- **Review Town Charter**
- **Policy on Fixing Real Property Assessments**

13. ADJOURN MEETING

At 7:42 p.m. a motion was made by Shaun Manning to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Robert Hetrick, all were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Hoy
Board Clerk