

Town of Sherman
Boar of Selectman Monthly Meeting
November 19, 2020 at 7:00 pm
Via ZOOM Teleconferencing

Member's Present: First Selectman Don Lowe, Selectman Bob Ostrosky, and Selectman Kevin Keenan

Member's Absent: None

Audience & Invited: Treasurer Eric Holub, Fire Chief Chris Fuchs, BOE Chair Kasey Diotte, Ed Hayes, and members from the community.

Clerk: Margaret Beatty

Call to Order/ Pledge of Allegiance: First Selectman called meeting to order at 7:00 pm followed by the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment: First Selectman Don Lowe offered a friendly reminder that a Town Forum is scheduled for Saturday, November 21, 2020 at 10:00 am via ZOOM regarding the cell tower proposal.

Correspondence: Nancy Astor White expressed her optimism through a letter to the First Selectman regarding the proposed cell tower project. She reflected on the hardships that resident's endure during inclement weather and the isolation that comes with potential power losses. She expressed her concern with the inability to contact emergency services and is hopeful that this project will help in aiding a community that, in recent time, has been incapacitated by severe weather.

Susan and Drew Spangler of Cozier Hill Road expressed concern through an email to the First Selectman that the proposed cell tower would obstruct the esthetic appeal of Sherman. They emphasized their empathy for the lack of adequate cell service but conveyed the importance of an alternate location to preserve the rural feel of the Town.

Note: First Selectman Don Lowe stated on the record that Niaromi, now the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy group have been contacted several times about cell towers and have not expressed interest to date about placing any cell towers on their properties.

Stan Greenbaum commented that he sent a letter in reference to the RCC Communications study done in 2013 be regarding a cell tower be represented on the town website. He felt the report acknowledged the shortcoming the Town experiences with its service outreach. He also feels that the information has not been widely available to residents. He also mentioned that the Siting Counsel has been awarded a Covid 19 caveat to extend the process an additional 90 days. First Selectman Don Lowe responded that the Board is unable to put in place the

Executive order provided to the Siting Counsel and that it is up to the Siting Counsel's discretion.

Administrative:

A) Approval of Minutes:

10/22/2020 Board of Selectman Regular Monthly Meeting

Motioned by: Selectman Kevin Keenan

Seconded by: Selectman bob Ostrosky All in favor: Unanimous

10/31/2020 Board of Selectman special Meeting

Motioned by: Selectman Kevin Keenan

Seconded by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky All in Favor: Unanimous

B) Tax Refund: A refund of \$671.70

Motioned By: First Selectman Don Lowe

Seconded by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky All in Favor: Unanimous

C) Financial Review: Business Manager Liz LaVia was unable to participate in the meeting. First Selectman Don Lowe gave a brief synopsis of the Town's current financial standing. He stated that the Town is tracking as normal and that there have been no unusual changes in the budget. He relayed any further comment to Treasurer Eric Holub, in which he commented that, the Town has transitioned to Paychex for payroll and the transition has been better than expected.

Information & Discussion:

A) SVFD monthly report: Fire Chief Chris Fuchs enthusiastically announced the arrival of the new Tanker. He noted that the department members have been engaging in active training for several weeks and that the Tanker had responded on its first call the evening of 11/18. The new Tanker provides a more enhanced and comprehensive approach to fire safety in Town. He also noted that the old Tanker has been turned over to Public Works. Lastly, with the rise of Covid cases in Town he commented that any classroom training has been moved back online, practical training is done outside in small groups, and when members respond to calls appropriate screening are done upon entering homes and continued use of appropriate PPE.

B) Covid 19 report: In the last 4 weeks the Town has reported 19 confirmed new cases, with a total of 34 cases. The cases are not from 1 event and the Town has not reported any super spreader event. The Town of Sherman has been designated red and that we all should be vigilant and continue to practice proper hygiene such as mask wearing and washing hands, as well as socially distance when necessary. On a positive note, no source of infection has

originated in the school and that the school has been doing a diligent job protecting the students, staff, and community. The next 6-8 weeks will be critical, with Thanksgiving quickly approaching please be mindful of traveling plans and of the company you will be keeping. Visit the Town website for new and ongoing information.

C) Happy Acres farm report: First Selectman Don Lowe is pleased to report that the work being done on the barn has been completed with the exception of 2 window sashes. He commented that there is one remaining capital improvement on the property that will be revisited in the spring. Dave Jellen has been doing an impeccable job maintaining the grounds, the cattle are thriving in the pastures. Lastly, First Selectman Don Lowe revisited the lighting of the cross on the silo. He stated that the Board would pledge to preserve the farm in the reflection of the way Tony Hapanowich ran the farm and that the cross will be designated a historical artifact and will shine brightly during the Christmas season.

D) Renewal of Farm Manager's contract: First Selectman Don Lowe stated that the current contract is set to expire and that Dave Jellen expressed extending the contract to a 5 year commitment. No decisions will be made until December meeting, First Selectman Don Lowe opened up the topic for discussion amongst the selectman.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky replied that he would like to review the current contract to familiarize the specifics and wasn't opposed to possibly extending the contract.

Selectman Kevin Keenan agreed with Selectman Bob Ostrosky and feels that Dave has been an asset to the community.

Treasurer Eric Holub suggested that a clause be written into a new contract, should the Town consider moving toward extending it, addressing the use of the farm house in the event that Dave Jellen only makes use of the apartment on the property.

First Selectman Don Lowe agreed to rewrite the agreement and send out a draft for review.

E) STEAP grant update: The Town applied for a STEAP grant amounting to \$128,275 to help cover the expenses associated with the repair work on the farm. The paperwork has been returned to the Town that will start the process of finalizing a contract for allocation of funds.

Comment: Collette Shulman suggested the possibility of hiring an intern to help Dave Jellen as he expands his work and responsibilities. The suggestion might be a consideration when drafting a new contract for the future Farm Manager's contract.

F) Candlewood Lake Authority update on new water patrol watercraft: Spokeswoman Marianne Gaffey of the CLA formally rescinded the request for out of budget funding for patrol boats. She updated the Board stating that the CLA was able to secure a loan from Firstlight for \$100,000 with no contingencies and an additional \$50,000 from CLA to cover the expense of purchasing one boat for the next patrol season. The CLA has a verbal agreement with Silver Ships to maintain the price of the second boat which will be a request in the next budget cycle.

She added that New Fairfield Fire Department donated a year 2000 boat to the CLA that will be used for staff and science boat. She thanked the BOS for all their help and cooperation.

G) Board of Education conceptual design services project (proposed school renovation): The BOE completed a three year assessment, which included a building study by Friar Architecture and a design concept by Tecton Architects Analysis. All parties agreed that the best path forward is a comprehensive design that standardizes, upgrades, and repairs the building. The cost for the project can vary from 22-25 million depending on the design concept chosen moving forward. First Selectman Don Lowe offered the floor to BOE Chair Kasey Diotte. She acknowledged that the project is a very large expenditure and proceeded with a comprehensive presentation along with a spokesperson of the team. The goal of the project is to maximize the potential of the existing building while integrating additions that would comply with health and safety standards providing for an environment reflective of the Sherman School's small classroom allure. A committee was formed to assess the shortcomings of the building that aided in the development of the projected plans for the school. Tim Laughlin surmised the goals of the design categorizing the renovation into 3 options, 1) Capital Improvements, 2) Optimize Existing Building, or 3) Additions and Renovations. BOE Chair Kasey Diotte followed up the presentation thanking the Board for their support and gestured for any feedback or guidance they can provide moving forward.

First Selectman Don Lowe thanked the BOE for their presentation and commented that he needs time to digest the information presented. He also acknowledged that the Board will thoughtfully provide feedback to the BOE moving forward.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky also echoed First Selectman Don Lowe's sentiment on all the hard work put forth by the BOE. He suggested it was important for the BOS to address the information. A public forum in the form of a special meeting would address any questions or concerns.

BOE Chair Kasey Diotte commented that the school needs to address some significant repair issues and inquired when the BOS would deliberate and return with a response. First Selectman Don Lowe replied that a firm statement would tentatively com in January 2021. He also encouraged Kasey Diotte to have the school's Facilities Manager provide a list of pressing repairs at the school to the BOS. Selectman Bob Ostrosky also echoed First Selectman Don Lowe about providing a repairs list.

Matt Vogt, Board of Education member, interjected reiterating the importance of improving the school. He believes the school is the gem of the Town and attracts families in search higher education with a small town appeal. He hopes a solution can be determined without over burdening the tax base as well as achieving a higher performing school.

Martha Watson duplicated the sentiment of improving the school. She believes that the Sherman School prides itself on the reputation of offering a higher standard of learning. Increasing the appeal of the school will attract new families in search of higher learning.

Al Ziesler was looking for clarification as to the expense of the project. He noted that multiple numbers were discussed but was unclear as to why the discrepancy in amounts. He would like a breakdown of the specifics and how it would affect the increase in taxes to payers.

First Selectman Don Lowe wrapped up the agenda item by confirming to the residents that there will be ample opportunity to provide feedback before any decision is made.

H) Sherman Veterans Association's request for an organization headquarters: First Selectman Don Lowe provided an update on the search for a permanent meeting place for the Veterans. At the current moment the Scout House has been under consideration.

Selectman Kevin Keenan questioned the displacement of the Scout troops. First Selectman Don Lowe responded that no decisions have been made and that it is still an ongoing conversation. The intention is not to shift the Scout's entirely out of the house other than to keep the conversation moving forward to offer a space for the Veteran's.

Ed Hayes interjected that he was appreciative that the Board has taken the idea seriously but he doesn't want the idea of the meeting place being hijacked with misinformation. He explained that the Veteran's Association has no intention of displacing the Scout's but merely an ongoing attempt to establish dwellings that could offer potential to the Veteran's.

First Selectman Don Lowe ended the conversation by stating more planning and research needs to be done prior to revisiting the idea on another agenda.

I) Storage space for Town organizations and entities: First Selectman Don Lowe prefaced the conversation by stating that this idea is in its infancy. He acknowledged that the Town is lacking in offering viable storage space for miscellaneous goods associated with boards and commissions. He has walked ground with Don Borkowski of Public works to seek out a location/locations that could be accommodating. First Selectman Don Lowe expressed the need for safe, rodent proof storage that can meet the Town's needs. If anyone has any information please contact First Selectman Don Lowe's office with any ideas.

Selectman Kevin Keenan mentioned to Contact Ron Cooper, the Town's Zoning Enforcement Officer, with questions pertaining to any specific spaces or properties.

J) Wireless telecommunications tower at 16 Coote Hill: First Selectman Don Lowe verbalized a reminder that the Town will be hosting a forum/ presentation on Saturday November 21, 2020 at 10:00 am via ZOOM regarding a cell tower on Coote Hill. Homeland Tower's will be providing a presentation, this meeting will allow for residents to participate and ask questions and make comments. A friendly note, the Town does not decide the fate of the tower nor does planning and zoning but planning and zoning will provide their recommendations to Homeland Tower's the Town's regulations.

K) Volunteer Field fence repair proposals: The agenda item has been tabled, the repair can be potentially handled as an insurance claim. The agenda item will be revisited at another meeting

L) Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy tax refund and tax abatement request: First Selectman Don Lowe explained that prior to Niaromi merging to the NCLC, the organization acquired 3 properties but paid back taxes on 2 of the parcels in-between the Town's fiscal year. The NCLC is being charged the taxes even though the Conservancy is a tax exempt organization. The NCLC is looking to be refunded for back taxes as well as an abatement for new owed taxes. First Selectman Don Lowe opened discussion to all selectman.

Selectman Kevin Keenan has no problem granting the request and noted that they are a certified organization.

Amanda Branson, the Director of Operations and Finance for NCLC, clarified the situation stating that a property was acquired in December 2019 prior to the October 2019 assessment. The NCLC was told to pay the 2 payments that were required of the October assessments, one payment in July of 2020 and another payment in January of 2021. The NCLC is looking to be refunded for the payment made on behalf of the first owed taxes in July and are looking to abate the second tax payment due in January 2021.

Selectman Bob Ostrosky questioned if the previous owner of the property did not pay their taxes and the NCLC was on the hook for paying back taxes owed. Amanda Branson commented that all taxes paid were owed after the NCLC took ownership of the property.

All Selectman agreed that previous information provided to them was confusing in nature as to the description of the circumstance.

Motion: To refund the requested amount to the Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy, non for profit, already paid amount of \$1867.49 and further we abate the upcoming bill for the fiscal year 2021 of \$ 1344.50.

Motioned by: First Selectman Don Lowe

Seconded by: Selectman Kevin Keenan

Comment: Selectman Bob Ostrosky commented he is not against the idea but is uncomfortable with the wording of the letter and would like more time to review the literature. He would prefer to table the agenda item for future meeting.

First Selectman Don Lowe commented that he would like to see the vote pass unanimously and is not opposed to tabling the idea to allow the selectman to digest the information.

Rick Hudson of Crooked Furors Road responded that the right thing to do is rescind the motion and continue the discussion when all the information is in place.

First Selectman Don Lowe rescinded his previous motion and Selectman Kevin Keenan rescinded his second and First Selectman Don Lowe will rewrite a proper motion for the December meeting that adequately depicts the topic.

M) HRRRA organic food scrap recycling: First Selectman Don Lowe was presented with an idea from HRRRA the potential to offer composting to the residents of Sherman. A Nixle message will be sent with a survey to complete by residents to gage the temperature on the idea. No decision on topic has been made, the agenda item will be discussed further at another meeting if interest is peaked by residents.

Other Business: None

Public Comment: Susan Zietler of 8 Curtis Drive was seeking clarity in the confirmed Covid case count in Town in terms of differentiating between actual illness or confirmed positive. First Selectman Don Lowe responded that information to him is reported by the health department in terms of positive test results, which constitutes a confirmed case. He went onto explain that there are probable cases which refers to those who have felt sick and have been tested but results have not been confirmed yet. All information provide to the Town on the website are confirmed cases.

No other public comment.

Selectman Kevin Keenan moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 pm.

Motioned by: Selectman Kevin Keenan

Seconded by: Selectman Bob Ostrosky

All in Favor: Unanimous

Notes respectfully submitted by Margaret Beatty on November 24, 2020.