



**Selectmen's Meeting
September 18th, 2019
MINUTES**

Selectmen Present: *Chad Hanna, Paul Yates, Kristine Poland.*

Also Present: *Chris Hall (Town Administrator); Rachel Bizarro (Town Clerk); Jessica Westhaver (Assessing Clerk); Randal Manning and Alan Hinsey (Tidewater Telecom); Clyde Pendleton and Sandra Lane (Parks Commissioners); Lara Sargent (Parks Director); Candy Congdon (Lincoln County News); Phil Congdon; Pat Porter.*

The meeting was called to order by Chair Chad Hanna, at 7:00 pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

It was moved by Poland, seconded by Yates, to accept the Minutes of September 4th as presented. Motion passed 3 – 0.

Presentation by Tidewater Telecom:

The Town Administrator introduced Alan Hinsey and Randal Manning of Tidewater Telecom, respectively Director of Marketing and Vice President of Operations and Engineering of Bristol's incumbent local exchange telephone company. Hall mentioned some factors pointing to a need for town-wide availability of high speed broadband internet access, including for school homework, for home businesses, and because of growing disparities in real estate values based on access to broadband.

Mr. Hinsey gave a PowerPoint presentation beginning with an overview of Tidewater and its affiliate companies, and its products. He emphasized the growing demand for bandwidth for both homes and businesses, expected to grow in future with such developments as 'smart homes,' telemedicine, and distance learning. His company's goal, for their core business area, is to offer coverage to 100% of homes, but this will take perhaps 10 years. Priority will be given to those towns that partner with Tidewater by assisting with funding and publicity. He hoped that Bristol could be one of the first towns to achieve 100% coverage.

Tidewater outlined the features of a partnership to create 'Smart Connected Communities.' These include collaborative goal setting and needs analysis; establishment of a Broadband Committee and representation on Tidewater's Advisory Council; partnership in seeking innovative funding options and grants;

support for increasing the take-up rate upon line expansion; subsidy for low-income residents; and annual contributions to agreed charitable causes.

Turning to Bristol's specific needs, Tidewater's preliminary assessment identified a need to build out 59 miles of loop fiber to 689 dwellings, to achieve 100% coverage in Bristol, in addition to 20 miles in place today. He noted that along the current 20 miles of loop fiber, 106 homes and businesses subscribe to fiber, while 346 do not. The total cost of such expansion, including necessary Central Office equipment upgrades, engineering and field work to place all 59 miles of fiber, and the individual home installation cost is estimated to be \$885,000.00.

Sources of funding for a project to give 100% coverage would include:

- Tidewater's own funds (equity), in excess of 50% of total cost;
- ConnectME state grants, probably limited to five figures due to the failure of the Legislature to agree a bond issue for the fund in the present year;
- Town funding, through a budget request approved at a town meeting;
- Other grants and foundations, including national and local philanthropic sources.

Hanna felt that partial Town funding could be possible, but would depend on Town Meeting approval of a budget incorporating such funding.

ConnectME grant funding might be available for parts of the community that are 'unserved', defined as less than 25 x 3 Mbps internet speeds. Connect ME requirements also include 85% of target households signing forms declaring their support, and 50% signing pre-approval commitment cards. They also seek to fund projects with less than \$500 installation costs per dwelling.

Hall asked them to confirm that the first step to take would be a Needs Assessment, for which a volunteer Broadband Committee would need to be formed. He agreed to bring back to the next meeting further information on:

- Planning grant funding availability and the potential for support from Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission;
- Candidate volunteers for a Broadband Committee;
- Any possible expenses for the planning phase.

With this, the matter was tabled for further consideration on October 2nd.

New Business:

Assessing Clerk: Jessica Westhaver requested permission to explore a 'Tax Club' for the option of a monthly payment plan for property taxes. She had identified a number of towns which each have slightly different plans. Typically a person signing up to such a plan would receive a book of coupons for monthly payments, and there would be penalties and termination of membership in the Club in case of late payments. Benefits would be smoother cash flow and potentially fewer defaults, as well as convenience especially for lower-income residents. Many such

clubs offer the benefit of waiving interest on payments made after the due date, if made in full as part of a specific payment plan.

After discussion, Selectmen asked her to contact the Tax Collectors of towns with such clubs, to ask for their experience of the clubs' impacts on default rates, administrative costs, and take-up rates, plus any other problems we should be aware of. The idea, if approved by Selectmen, would need an ordinance and approval by Town meeting. She will bring the information to a future meeting.

Marsh Island: Westhaver also raised the possibility of reducing the property tax the Town pays the state for its Marsh Island property in the Lincoln County Unorganized Territory. She recommended to classify the land as Open Space (gaining a 20% reduction in taxes), Permanently Protected (an additional 30%), Forever Wild (20%) and open for Public Access (25%). The 95% total reduction would cut the annual taxes payable from \$412.45 (at the current state Mill Rate of 5.65) to \$20.63. Selectmen signed the application form to that effect.

Shellfish Committee: For the Committee, Town Clerk Bizarro brought their recommended 2020 shellfish license fees, including a proposed increase from \$20 to \$25 for Resident Recreational Licenses, other fees being unchanged. It was moved by Hanna, seconded by Yates, to approve the 2020 fees as recommended. Motion passed, 3 – 0.

Hagar Enterprises: At this point, the Chair recognized Seth Hagar of Hagar Enterprises, Inc., who had this day opened the new Upper Round Pond Bridge to traffic. The bridge and roadway are substantially complete, although ornamental masonry work will be completed in October. Mr. Hagar wished to thank the Town for their business, and was complemented on his firm's work with a round of applause.

Old Business:

Parks and Recreation Commission: Chair Clyde Pendleton and Commissioner Sandra Lane, with Parks Director Lara Sargent, reported on the Commission's selection of a general contractor for the new Pemaquid Beach Pavilion. Approval had been received from the administrator of the NPS grant, Doug Beck, to accept the second-lowest, rather than the lowest, bid. The grounds for this were as follows:

- The low bidder firm's relative lack of experience in non-residential, wooden-frame construction;
- Lack of relevant experience of the two named managers for the project;
- Doubts raised by certain answers in their interview;
- The intent to build prefabricated sections off-site, making it harder to check quality.

It was also noted that there would be a higher local content in the second-lowest bid, from Ledgewalker Builders, though their price is approximately 10% higher.

Hall pointed out that as Ledgewalker's principals are town residents, he would be comfortable recommending that the Selectmen waive a requirement for a performance bond, thus obviating additional expense that would go with a more distant contractor. The Commissioners felt that Ledgewater would be responsive to the expectations and scrutiny of residents and could be relied on to honor their commitments.

Sargent presented the project's financials as follows:

Project cost:	Ledgewalker bid,	\$ 776,987
	Architects and surveying,	<u>\$ 80,000</u> (approximate)
	Forecast cost:	\$ 856,987
	Add 5% of bid as contingency:	<u>\$ 38,850</u>
		\$ 895,837
Funding sources:	Grants & donations to date,	\$ 616,400
	Capital reserves committed,	\$ 60,000
	Operating surplus cash flow,	\$ 40,000
	Expected land trust grant,	<u>\$ 30,000</u>
	Total available:	<u>\$ 746,400</u>
	Additional funds needed:	\$ 149,437

Commissioners noted the success to date in fundraising and hoped that the gap would be closed in the course of the next six months. Several sources of grants and donations are being pursued. However they want to commence construction immediately on receipt of the DEP and Planning Board approvals, in order to avoid winter concrete costs and to have the facility open by Memorial Day 2020.

Parks wished to have a line of credit available to cover this funding deficit in the event that additional grants and donations are not sufficient to cover costs. Hall had researched the costs of such borrowing – around 2.2% interest on a \$150,000 standby credit line, with no fees. Although it would be repaid from a dedicated revenue source (Parks fees), it would be considered a charge on the faith and credit of the Town and would need Town meeting approval. This would not make any meaningful impact on the Town's borrowing capacity, limited by statute to 7.5% of appraised value, or roughly \$75 million. At present the Town has only approximately \$80,000 of outstanding debt, on its 2013 fire truck loan.

Pendleton asked about the possibility of holding a Special Town Meeting to approve such a line of credit. Selectmen questioned whether this would meet the needs of the contractor and the timing of the project, as the 60-day notification and hearing process for a Special Town meeting means that one could not be held before December, by which point the construction schedule would be well advanced.

After discussion, it was agreed that Hall would work with the Parks Department to draft a contract with Ledgewalker that would protect both the Town and the contractor in the event that funding could not be raised for the full amount due, for example, to a negative vote at either a special or regular Town Meeting. He will explore this with Ledgewalker and ensure review of any draft by the Town's attorney, and report back on October 2nd. The matter was then tabled to that date.

Before leaving, the Parks Commissioners were asked to review a letter from the Wiscasset Parks and Recreation Department inviting Bristol to become a Partner Community with reduced-price access to their swimming pool and gymnasium.

Town staffing and structure:

Selectmen returned to the discussion of Town staffing and structure, tabled on August 15th. Rachel Bizarro and Jess Westhaver presented detailed descriptions of their jobs by frequency of task, and Hall circulated a further description from Lindsay Currier.

There was a lengthy discussion, key points of which included:

- The current structure of the Town has developed on an ad hoc basis over many years. An organizational chart, if drawn up, would look chaotic and have too many dotted lines.
- With additional department heads (Parks Director, Fire Chief) and major projects to coordinate, the Town Administrator's job has evolved away from a primary focus on the Town Office.
- The Town Office is fortunate to have well qualified staff in key positions who have taken on increased responsibilities formerly carried out by the Town Administrator.
- It is important to continue their professional development and give them increased recognition. Hall had previously proposed that the title of Treasurer, for example, should be granted to J. Westhaver. Compensation should follow responsibility, and be competitive with similar towns.
- Poland felt that both salary structures and benefits should be reviewed so as to treat staff as equally as possible across departments, subject to length of service and performance. Common policies should apply to the Town Office, Parks, and the Fire & Rescue Departments.
- In particular, she asked for a study of options for offering retirement benefits to staff, as well as a clearer basis for employees either taking health insurance through the Town, or alternately being compensated for making other health insurance arrangements.
- Westhaver and Bizarro were complimented on their job descriptions, and both expressed satisfaction and pride in their work.

Hall proposed that Selectmen review the Human Resources handbook, as had last been done upon the hire of a full time Fire Chief. He will also look at how neighboring towns offer benefits to full-time staff and report back.

It was agreed that this discussion would be continued in October with a view to considering changes in titles and policies that might need approval at the 2020 Town Meeting.

Regular Business

Building permits: Selectmen reviewed and approved applications for properties at Map 005, lot 055; Map 011-A, lot 001-B; and Map 018, lot 010-10-A-13.

Selectmen reviewed and approved a CMP pole permit application for a home on Long Cove Point Road.

Selectmen reviewed a Hardship/Poverty Abatement request, Warrant number 2019-0007 of September 9th. It was moved by Yates, seconded by Poland, to deny the request.

Selectmen reviewed and approved Warrants for payroll and accounts payable for the Town Office and Fire & Rescue Department, and the Parks & Recreation Department.

Under 'Correspondence Received', the Maine Municipal Association requested appointment of a voting delegate for the Town at the 2020 Annual Meeting. Yates planned to attend, and Hanna and Poland signed the nomination paper to appoint him as delegate.

Thank-you notes had been received from New Hope for Women and a recipient of a grant from the General Assistance budget.

There were no Public Comments.

Yates stated that he had been approached by the Old Bristol Historical Society regarding transfer of the McKinley School back to the Town. This will have to be approved by Town Meeting, but the Society will be told that the Selectmen view this favorably. Hall asked that consideration be given to the sale of the Irvine School, which is of considerably less historical value and is currently only used for about six meetings a year by the Route 66 Snowmobile Club.

In light of the lateness of the hour, the Chair waived the Notice of Forthcoming Public Meetings, which are published on the Town's web site and in the Lincoln County News.

There being no further business, Selectmen adjourned at 10.00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Hall
Town Administrator