

**Beacon Falls Board of Selectmen
Beacon Falls Board of Finance
10 Maple Avenue
Beacon Falls, CT 06403**



**BEACON FALLS BOARD OF SELECTMEN
and BOARD OF FINANCE
Budget Workshop
February 23, 2021
MINUTES
(Subject to Revision)**

1. Call to Order / Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Tom Pratt called the workshop to order for the BOF at 7:03P.M.

Selectman Gerard Smith called the workshop to order for BOS at 7:06 P.M.

Members Present: Gerard Smith (GS), Mike Krenesky (MK), Chris Bielik (CB), Dalton Fennell (DF), Jim Carroll (JC), Kyle Brennan (KB), Steve Leeper (SL), Tom Pratt (TP), Wendy Hopkinson (WH)

Others Present: Natasha Nau, Erin Schwarz, Jeremy Rodorigo, Robert Egan, 2 Members of the public

Others Absent: Rob Pruzinsky, Peter Colon, Ruth Burritt, Kristen Jabanoski

2. Budget Discussion & Action

- a. Emergency Management/Public Safety** – Jeremy asked the BOF if there are any items that need clarification on the submitted budget. TP asked Jeremy to review Finance recommendations. Jeremy stated that he has reviewed them and approves recommended changes including changing the Civil Defense title to Emergency Management. Natasha asked for Jeremy to give a quick summary of budget line items. Jeremy – everything is staying the same except for the CERT Team. They get a mini grant from the State to get equipment and one of the things that I wanted to do was to add another \$1,000 to the line item. This would be used for recruitment, retention, and safety supplies not covered by the State grant. The other items are standard costs like Code Red. Natasha – I know we spoke about Code Red and if we would stay with them. Kerry did a lot of research about other companies, and we paired down on some services. I think we can use Code Red more often. Jeremy – I think we can use this more especially for vaccine rollouts etc. TP – does your CERT Team has a roster and is their equipment tracked and returned if they leave? Jeremy – yes, Bill McCausland oversees CERT team and when equipment is issued, members keep those items until they quit. Are there members that keep the equipment, I am sure, but the idea is that they are issued equipment and it is returned if they quit. These are not people who are getting expensive equipment. They get a vest, hard hat and a flashlight. Those costs are not tremendous if they are not returned. Natasha – if anything, what do you feel like your department should be measuring? How can we connect those dollars to items spent? Is there anything we should track as a metric? Jeremy – it is about having a hazard mitigation plan, knowing what the hazards are for your

community, how your community responds and the expectation of the leaders to respond and how did we respond. All these things should be measured after every incident. When we are not busy, we should be making sure plans are up to date and understood by the leaders of the town. We have been monitoring the pandemic as Emergency Managers. We have been trying to get our key players vaccinated, ensuring they have proper protection and PPE. Natasha – the COG is putting together the Hazard Mitigation Plan for us as we speak. GS – the latest and greatest should be available shortly. TP – obviously, you do not have an office, what do you consider a phone line that you use? Do you have a line that you need changed or moved? Jeremy – currently the Fire House is our EOC and I have a Town issued cell phone. The only issues would be if we had to move the EOC. We would have to make sure that wherever we go has phone lines and wifi. GS – I think the Town Hall is the back up EOC. Jeremy – the only issue is that we do not have two-way radio service there. TP – how about storage of items that you have? Jeremy – files are kept at Town Hall or my house. EOC plans are kept at the fire house. Natasha – you have a capital item, too right? Jeremy – yes, correct. Currently we have a backup to our secondary communications tower at Rimmon Hill. There is no emergency power there, so if we lose power, we have no communication. If the tower at Rice Lane is down, then we have no communication. Although we have a control station at the Fire House, it relies on the repeater system at Rice Lane. Rimmon Hill does not have back up power. What I am proposing is that we put back up power at Rimmon Hill. Our system can dispatch police, public works, and fire. Natasha – who owns the generator at Rice Lane? Jeremy – I believe it is a lease. TP – I did some checking and previous chiefs have gone before Region 16 with a similar proposal because it is the Regions property. When they put the unit in, I believe there is a 3-day battery back-up. My question is has that been maintained? Also, there is a plug for a portable generator. If we bring a generator in, we must go back to the Region and get another agreement. I believe a propane tank can be installed to the other side of the fence. The Region may not approve that. I just wanted to point these out. If we cannot move forward with your recommendation, then we should look into a portable generator as a backup. Jeremy – those are good points, and that location is not ideal for auxiliary power. I think it can be done and I have not explored the options with Region 16 yet. It is possible and not impractical to put a temporary generator up there as a need-by-need basis. It is not ideal, but it is doable. GS – as part of facilities that we use, isn't the high school a shelter? That would play well into the ask to expand the tower. Jeremy – yes of course. These are all valid concerns. TP – I think it is a well worth item, but Region 16 needs to be part of the plan. Natasha – if you are going to do a portable, would you agree that it has to be diesel? Jeremy – it would be gasoline. Natasha – ok, so similar in cost? Jeremy – much cheaper. Jeremy – my last item was a vehicle mounted radio. This is not a high priority. The EMD in Seymour did replacements and they provided me with a radio and I have that in my car. I would like to give that back but they do not expect it back. TP – we do have a line item in Safety #48 with about \$5,000 in that line and this would fall under that present money now. I really think it is feasible to get that out of the line item. I did not realize that you did not have a radio. GS – it will be mounted into your pickup, how hard is it to transfer it if we had to move it to another vehicle? Jeremy – the equipment can transfer, there are just removal and install fees. Natasha – what if it gets stolen out of your vehicle? We insure Town vehicles but not yours. Jeremy – I would just claim it on my insurance if it were stolen. Natasha – yes, we can keep a copy of your insurance on file. Norcom is the State bid and we have bought from them before. TP – great, something we can talk about in March and hopefully get purchased.

b. Custodial – Natasha – we can run through this section quickly. This will be a team effort between myself and Erin. Peter does not have his own separate budget however he has many materials needed to keep the buildings maintained. Some of these items should be discussed as to if they should remain under this department. I do not think we are asking for any large changes. Everything is pretty much flat from last year. Erin does a great job at managing our utility costs. Erin – office supplies is higher due to our contract with CBS. They provide maintenance and toner for all printers in town. They have also leased us 5 new printers. Natasha – something Erin and I have talked about is putting the printer costs in with IT. The printers are a great added capacity for us, which helps efficiencies in the departments. Erin – the office supplies line also houses, shred vendor, water vendor, copier lease in First Selectman's office. Miscellaneous repairs is the main custodial line and that is where he purchases those supplies. It also houses the pest control, heating maintenance and plumbing repairs. SL – my question with that line is, is that enough? Erin – it does fluctuate. We have replaced air handlers and had duct work cleaned out of that line. Natasha – to close the book on IT, I think we will have a good presentation from Novus when they present, that is why that line is blank. We are in talks with them about a more advanced Adobe client and our 365 licenses. TP – the electricity/solar generation, how does the solar turn into electric? Erin – we have been paying the owners of the solar panels and that number is based on the KW the panels produce each year. Right now, we pay .103 per KW and next year it will be .106KW. We are using the average number of KW it generates. TP – the panels that are on Town property, we are paying them for electricity? Do we get money from them? Erin – yes, we get credits off our bills at 5 locations. GS – what do the credits total? Erin – I can get you that information. TP – what is the Alarm Monitoring for? Erin – that is the alarms at the Police Station and Fire. GS – I am working on a price for an alarm at Pent Road. Even though there is not internet, they can get cameras and monitoring. They would be able to do a 30-day lookback. TP – what about the Senior Center? Are we looking to get that alarm system up and running? GS – I followed up on that yesterday and will have the revised quote in the next few days for monitoring all facilities under one line item. Natasha – looking at utilities, we have had some current conversations with Dime oil, they came in as low bid. Unfortunately, the market is different. When we locked in with the current provider things were different. My proposal is to keep the current provider if we can because we are making out in the current deal. Rates are high right now, due to winter. We are looking at \$2.05 a gallon and right now we are paying \$1.35-\$1.65 which is what we are paying now. TP – I agree, that is fine. Erin – the only other utility change would be telephones. We have a service maintenance contract with CT Communications for our landlines. The one-year warranty is expiring. Also, I was thinking of breaking out town cell phones. We added about 13 new lines due to COVID. Natasha – we have been doing a lot of procurement and trying to keep track of the legal notice fees. It is about \$100 per ad. TP – maybe we should have a line item for town issued cell phones. GS- TP are you proposing one line for all town phones under Town Hall? Erin – currently the cost is dispersed among departments based on how many lines they have. Natasha – from my perspective, it does not make sense for Erin to divide these up among the departments. TP – Erin would it save you time if they were all in one line? Erin – certainly. We would just have to pull it out of each departments budget. GS – I believe we are all with Verizon, so it should be just one bill we get and itemize it by the number. KB – eventually COVID will end, are we planning on getting rid of some lines when staff is not remote? GS – yes, and some. A lot of people who have them should, like the Tax Collector. It is a good way to reach key personnel in town. It is a benefit to the town. Do we need all of them, no, but the majority of them. Erin – we

have over 30 cell phones in town. All full-time officers, EMD, public works etc. GS – they are computers on the go. They are the time clocks, GPS tracking etc. Public Work's cannot always clock in at the office, they clock in on their cell phones. If there is an incident on the roads, they can take pictures etc. DF – are we using a group purchasing plan? Erin – yes, we are on group plan. The phones cost nothing, we always get the free phones. DF – I think they are very useful for the Town and I think they should stick around. As 5G comes around more and more it will be more prevalent to have and, in the future, we can use 5G phones to run computers and EM items. GS – regarding capital projects, we do have one quote for the roof at Town Hall. We are going to get other quotes and look at the whole situation. This quote is probably a good number to use however, we will have a final number in the coming weeks. We will compare the quote to the state contractor lists. TP – how many roofs are at Town Hall? GS – two but it is really the lower roof that leaks many times, but this quote is for the full replacement. MK – someone should also look at the fire escape because it is rotting away. GS – yes, that was discussed because it is also pointing the bricks. That will probably be another CAP project. We are getting a price for the stairs and the re-pointment will be quoted by a mason. Natasha – you can probably get that all on one quote.

- c. **Conservation/Open Space** – Natasha – I can try to run through this. They are wanting to do community outreach including a clean up which was delayed due to COVID. They have made strides in determining Open Space in town. Their focus is on tree work and making sure areas are cleared. They want to continue work at Lantern Ridge and it does not appear to be an acquisition year. Open Space Preservation Fund has about \$7,000 and we put \$1,000 a year from the general fund. Natasha – do we have a 5-year plan for Open Space Preservation? Typically, the Planner will talk with the Commission about the vision of the town. GS – that is a good question, and our Town Planner can discuss that with the Board. I will have Keith reach out to the Commission. Erin – POCD is at the 10-year mark in 2022.
- d. **Parks & Recreation** – Robert Egan – operating is flat except for seasonal wages, due to the increase in the minimum wage, \$500 more for recreation program activities. Right now, we are looking at new locks for the parks and we are looking to include costs for what the Park Ranger incurs (signs etc.) The new Park Ranger is not paid but does patrol 4 parks and the new line item is his mileage reimbursement because he does use his personal vehicle. All our other items are flat. I included the Recreation Director again. TP – what about the buildings and storage at the Rec? Robert – Rob Pruzinsky would be better to ask about that because the town crew takes care of that. I do not even have access to it. TP – ok, I will follow up with public works. Natasha – what is coming up within the next few months regarding recreation plans. Robert – we would like to have the summer rec camp. Heather is willing to run it again. We have preliminary plans but nothing definite. The fireworks are up in the air. We are trying to coordinate with the 150th. The fishing derby will probably not happen because St. Michael's Men's Club is not having any organized events. I would still like to stock it this year even if we do not have a derby. Summer Concerts – we have the same problem with the church because they are not having activities. Performers are willing to perform if possible. GS – TP – I would suggest we move the CAP projects for Park & Rec to the regular BOF meeting on Tuesday. GS – I am not opposed to stocking the fish, but can we over stock it? Will it affect the ecosystem of the pond? Robert – I think it would be fine.
- e. **Public Works/Town Garage/Safety** – GS – recommend skipping this and adding it to the Regular BOF meeting on Tuesday. Public Work's has been out all hours due to the storms and were not available tonight.
- f. **Region 16 Update Budget Items** – Natasha – as you recall we talked about the letter that we received from the Region at the regular meeting which discussed the

amount they were transferring into non-capital recurring fund. The two questions that were proposed was are they following State Statute and are we getting the correct reporting from them that we need. I spoke with the Finance Manager at Region 16, I communicated with the Town Attorney and then we received information from the Regions attorney. They do hold to the opinion that they are following State statute and our attorney agrees with them. They can pass the transfer without having the information and plan behind it. They must have all that back up when they do the expenditure. The transfer is going to happen at the meeting tomorrow night. JC – several members of the Board of Ed are requesting that the full surplus go back to the Towns. The conclusion from each attorney's is that we need a detailed report, and we are not getting that. All they sent us was a screenshot of checks. Their own attorney even told them we should be getting detailed reports. Natasha – in my suggestion in this memo, we want to keep our relationship as it is, and I have thanked them for what they have provided and included our request for more. JC – we have too but that does not mean we need to close our eyes and ignore about following Statute. I have been asking about this report for 3 years. Positive relationships are wonderful but when it comes to what the taxpayers of the Town of Beacon Falls are not getting the required documentation under the opinions of two attorneys my question is where are our BOE representatives? Why are we not getting it? Natasha – that is why I want to put it in writing and have it serve as a formal letter requesting the provisions of the report. JC – I love that both attorneys agree. GS – The answer that I got from a member of the BOE is that they are aware of the Statute and their interpretation is that the Statute applies to BOE that are not part of a region and a region does not need to detail anything. JC – if you read the opinion by both attorney's they tell you exactly what they are supposed to do and the Statute states Regional Board of Ed. What are we supposed to do as a town if they ignoring the legal opinions? GS – the letter can come from my office and I think the letter should point to both attorney opinion letters stating that. TP – when was the conversation that you had with the Chair? GS – last week. TP – I went to her house and brought all the documentation. She is brining it all up at the meeting tomorrow night. I think it will be addressed but a letter should go out from us, so they read it in their meeting tomorrow night. I think this whole thing will be clarified tomorrow night. They have a right to keep the 1%. I did give this whole packet for her and I hope it cleared up some misconceptions that they had. GS – when I had the conversation, she was adamant that they were correct. If she is presenting that they were wrong and acknowledge that, I do not know if it is in our best interest to provide a letter. TP – I think after I spoke with her, she had a different perspective. I think it should be a soft letter and it should include both attorney letters. The letter will let them know that we as a town are on top of it and clearly understand what is required that they are supposed to get to us. I think it is the appropriate thing to do. JC – I agree 100%. TP – the Chair thought we were getting the State report. Natasha – we also got the 5-year CIP but what is the timeline on this letter? GS – I am ok with writing the letter, but the meeting is tomorrow night. Natasha – I can get you the letter tomorrow night. JC – according to the article in the paper, they are going to decide if they are going to give the refunds to the towns or \$100,000 into the fund. Natasha – I will draft the letter and get it to GS tomorrow morning. CB – you can reference this conversation tonight stating that there is concurrence from both the BOS and the BOF. Natasha – should we include a request for money back? GS – I do not know. Erin – I am looking at the capital plan out a couple of years and I am wondering if these transfers are for those improvements. Natasha – the other big project is the heating loop at Laurel Ledge, I am not sure what that is. I will formulate a sentence about the capital plans in the letter.

3. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn BOS at 8:36 P.M. CB/MK, all ayes.

Motion to adjourn BOF at 8:36 P.M. JC/DF, all ayes.

Respectfully submitted,

Kerry McAndrew

First Selectman's Office Administrator/Clerk