

**Minutes of the
Board of Selectmen (BOS) Special Meeting**
Town of Redding CT
January 22, 2024 at 7:30 pm
Via ZOOM Only

Board of Selectmen in Attendance: Julia Pemberton; Margaret O'Donnell; Michael Thompson.

Others Attending: Amy Atamian; Janet August, Recording Secretary; members of the public.

1. Call to Order

First Selectwoman Julia Pemberton called the meeting to order at 7:32pm.

2. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Ms. O'Donnell moved to approve the minutes of the BOS Special Meeting on December 20, 2023. The motion was seconded by Mr. Thompson. The motion was carried with Ms. O'Donnell and Mr. Thompson voting in the affirmative, and Ms. Pemberton abstained from the vote.

MOTION: Mr. Thompson moved to approve the minutes of the BOS meeting of December 18, 2023. Ms. O'Donnell seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.

3. Public Comments

None at this portion of the meeting.

4. Eversource Transmission Line Vegetation Management Project

Kathy Ferrier, Supervisor Transmission Vegetation Management at Eversource, provided a presentation on this project. She noted it is vital to keep the transmission lines clear. Eversource had professional surveyors mark the borders of the transmission line easements. Additionally, Eversource identified trees greater than fifteen feet tall. She

reported that they are looking to clear the area of incompatible vegetation. She discussed the types of transmission lines in Redding that are greater than or less than 200kv.

In the border zone in Redding, the maximum height of trees is thirty feet, and noted it was previously twenty-five feet. She stated there are many trees in the 25–30-foot height range. Ms. Ferrier discussed using landscape trees that, at maturity, would not be tall enough to fall within 10-15 feet of the wires. She added that an arborist would assist property owners with a planting plan, which can include compatible vegetation. She suggested that plant flagging can identify which trees and shrubs should stay and/or be removed.

Mr. Thompson thanked Eversource and Ms. Ferrier for the presentation and for keeping the lights on. He asks Ms. Ferrier if this project is driven by the State, or how did the project come about? Ms. Ferrier stated the project arose internally at Eversource. Mr. Thompson asked what type of flexibility is there for homeowners who object? Ms. Ferrier replied that in the past, Eversource has had discussions with the homeowners. She added that Eversource considers the re-planting offer as a plan for homeowners who object.

Ms. Pemberton inquired about the graphic Ms. Ferrier showed with revised specifications, including additional areas to the edge of the right-of-way (ROW). Ms. Pemberton reported that the equipment being used by Eversource is exceptionally large and in general, looking at the trimming that has been done it is hard to believe there was selective trimming performed. Ms. Ferrier responded that in areas that have not received trimming prior, Eversource has seen many trees and shrubs. She adds that the “big” equipment is the choice of the contractors, but they try to leave compatible vegetation like mountain laurel.

Ms. Pemberton asks what the border areas are for different transmission lines. Ms. Ferrier stated they use twenty-five feet for the 115kv lines and thirty-five feet for the 345kv lines. Ms. Ferrier reports that the flagging for removal was completed over a year ago but recognizes the flagging may have come down in areas. Matthew Helman of Eversource provided more details on the flagging. He reported that the flagging was decent, but sparser around Granite Ridge and Umpawaug Road. He states that Eversource will put out fresh flagging. Ms. Pemberton stated that no orange flags have been seen from Windy Hill to Umpawaug Road, no trimming before re-flagging, no outreach to the neighbors, and the ROW narrows in some areas.

Ms. O’Donnell and resident Laurie Heiss both agreed that they saw very few flags. Ms. Ferrier states that the Eversource work will start in the next 2-3 weeks. Ms. Pemberton asked if they are working on the 345kv line now, will they then move to the 115kv line next. Ms. Ferrier stated that the work in the 115kv line is to be determined.

5. 2024 – 25 Town Budget: Workshop Discussion

Ms. Pemberton noted that the Town Hall closure (weather related) last week did not allow the BOS to meet then. Ms. O'Donnell and Mr. Thompson stated that they have not had follow-up from the Board of Finance (BOF) yet. Ms. O'Donnell suggests another meeting to discuss the Budget Workshop.

The selectmen discussed some thoughts on the workshop. Ms. O'Donnell stated that the budget for the Redding Police Department (RPD) and Georgetown-related items are being reviewed. Mr. Thompson noted that Park and Recreation is asking for a 22% increase, a larger department and budget, and that more discussion is needed on their budget proposal. He added that the Park and Recreation's proposed survey/study cost is a high number, and it should be discussed. Ms. O'Donnell noted that the Park and Recreation Director is currently on vacation.

Ms. Pemberton reported that space is a significant issue at the Redding Community Center (RCC) and the seniors have asked for more space. Ms. Pemberton suggested that all commissioners should address current and future space utilization and needs. She adds that the survey would be of every athletic facility in Town and would address the senior center and all recreation programs. She will provide Mr. Thompson and Ms. O'Donnell with an old RFP for a study, and she clarifies that they are not talking about expansion now. Mr. Thompson suggests speaking with the BOEs (Boards of Education) about space that is now not available.

Ms. Pemberton reported that she spoke with Finance Director Jim Sanders and the budgets, as proposed, are a 4.98% increase. She adds that new labor contracts contain a 3.5% increase, and budgeted health insurances costs are up 11%, but the renewal rate is up 19%. She remarked that the Town is in the very early stages of renegotiation and based on experience, the discussions over the next few months will help, and suggested they may be able to move healthcare down to 10%.

Mr. Sanders stated that the 11% increase would put us 3% above where Anthem was seven years ago. He suggested that when this issue is discussed with the healthcare consultant, it might be more prudent to use Connecticare. Mr. Sanders noted that the budget for FY 25 includes funding for highway department equipment purchases, the reference recreation needs, and a Georgetown placeholder.

Ms. Pemberton emphasized the need for a planning position to be filled, and noted that clearly, planning is not solely the wire mill and Georgetown. The expertise of a planner is needed to move forward, and we have staffing needs. She noted the impact of retirement and changing a position from full-time to part-time. The Planning Commission has not made a formal recommendation. Steve Gagnon is the newly installed chair of the commission. Land Use Director Aimee Pardee would include their recommendations in her budget.

Ms. Pemberton notes the health insurance fund is stable with more employees taking the offered health plan. Ms. O'Donnell states that the BOS needs to determine availability for Park & Recreation and the RPD to have further discussions. Ms. Pemberton noted that several recent changes to the police department retirement plan could result in increased retirements in the department. If faced with a large number of retirements, staffing and therefore officers on the road would be negatively impacted. Ms. Pemberton opined on whether to bring in new officers in anticipation of retirements. Ms. O'Donnell agreed that this is an especially important discussion. She adds that the department has fifteen officers, after being "right-sized" from seventeen officers. She agrees that a discussion is warranted. Ms. Pemberton adds that the schools are at a 4.65% budget increase.

6. Wire Mill Advisory Committee: Charge Review

Ms. Pemberton began the discussion and noted the committee has been in existence for approximately one and a half years. She reported that in that time, they have managed the two DECD (CT Department of Economic Community Development) grants and are currently working on a grant application for a DECD BAR (Brownfield Area-Wide Revitalization) planning grant. She continued that this Advisory Committee has recommended increasing their charge. She recognizes the amount of work they have done, and the Planning Commission understands also. Ms. Pemberton stated she supports adding a Georgetown Village Restoration Inc. (GVR) member to the Advisory Committee. She asks if the selectmen are comfortable with the charge as is? Ms. O'Donnell stated she is confused with the overlap of the mill and Georgetown and wants to ensure that this Board is not mixing up the two. She asks Mr. Thompson to opine. He stated that he does not have enough experience to express an opinion of adding a representative from GVR. Ms. Pemberton stated that it would be up to GVR to choose their representative for the Advisory Committee.

Ms. O'Donnell agrees that it does make sense and asks about the term. Ms. Pemberton states that it is a one-year term, and Amy Atamian was just elected to serve as Chair for a second term. Ms. Pemberton stated that the Advisory Committee's Annual Report (October 2023) contained a recommendation for planning support/resources and that is in the new budget. Ms. O'Donnell notes the short tenure of current Planning Commission members.

Amy Atamian stated that planning for just the mill site itself leaves out the rest of Georgetown and makes the point that development in Georgetown may be able to move along more quickly than at the mill site. She added that GVR has been accepted into the Main Street Program, and states that the BAR grant is for planning of the entire Georgetown area, not just the mill site. Ms. Atamian added that Steve Gagnon and Regina O'Brien, both members of the Planning Committee, are now on the Advisory Committee. She informs the Board that the \$200K BAR grant would require a 10%

match from the Town. Therefore, if granted, the BOS would need to have a resolution agreeing to the 10% match.

Rob Dean, a member of the BOF and Advisory Committee, spoke regarding planning. He opined that it is more than physical planning with pictures of the site. He opines that the key component is to improve the Town's tax base. He adds that from a development point of view, the Georgetown Village is "undercooked," and that we need the synergy between the mill site and the rest of the village to bring about investment. A discussion of future recreation and "pop-ups" at the site was held.

Ms. Pemberton stated that it is premature to grant a change to the charge without Planning Committee support, and she will reach out to the Planning Committee. She wants to wait until both the Planning and Zoning Commission's are on board.

MOTION: Ms. O'Donnell moved to amend the Gilbert & Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee charge to include a GVR representative on the committee. The motion was seconded by Mr. Thompson and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Atamian asked about discussing the Advisory Committee's Annual Report. She added that they may want to defer the State Historical Preservation (SHPO) grant application and have APS update the costs and findings from their previous building stabilization report. She added that this is building stabilization efforts (to prevent further deterioration) and they do not have a targeted future use. She reported that grant sources will not fund the stabilization work without targeted use. Ms. Atamian stated that they were hoping to fund the update to the building stabilization work and costs with the SHPO grant, but now believes that APS could be able to update their initial report faster and will less costs. She asks if the Town can hire APS outright. If we have SHPO prepare the plans and specifications (after APS report), then we would be able to get restoration money.

Ms. Pemberton states that a BOS review would first be necessary to understand it, and suggested they do a narrow scope as an update. She suggests that she and Ms. Atamian write a memo for the BOS. Ms. Atamian stated that the update would cost approximately \$25K. Ms. Pemberton will add this issue to the February BOS meeting agenda. Ms. Atamian notes that also at the February meeting, the BAR Grant application would need to be approved, and they need to have the Planning Commission endorse it in advance of that meeting.

7. Reappointment of Laurie Heiss to the Board of Ethics for the term: 02/09/24 – 02/09/26.

Laurie Heiss is willing to serve another term on the Board of Ethics.

MOTION: Ms. O'Donnell moved to approve the reappointment of Laurie Heiss to the Board of Ethics for the term of 02/09/2024 to 02/09/2026. The motion was seconded by Mr. Thompson and the motion carried unanimously.

8. Administrative

Neighborhood Assistance Act Program: Ms. Pemberton stated she wants people to know this program exists. The program allows corporations to donate money and receive tax credits. The Georgetown Fire Department and the Mark Twain Library have used this program to get donations. She will put the information on the Town's website. She stated that proposals need to be sent to the BOS by 03/01/2024 since a public hearing is needed. This program covers several areas including energy, child-care, and education programs.

9. Public Comment

Jenifer Wyss of Cross Highway and a BOF member rose to make a comment. She states she has reviewed the Park and Recreation budget proposal for FY 25 and has some concerns about the request. First, she noted, Topstone Park has significant expenses versus revenues and the gap is growing. She rhetorically asks if that gap can be closed with greater efficiencies. She continued that Director Rob Blick included a new initiative for a teen program but did not include fees. She wants to know why no fees were included. Regarding the \$80K survey/study on recreation needs, she stated that the Town should be prepared to spend more money on programs in response to the study, and if not prepared to spend more then do not do the study. Lastly, she asks regarding the Town Planner position, 1) what would a Town Planner do, and 2) could we hire the planner halfway through FY 25 and save money in FY 25.

Ms. Pemberton answers that yes, potentially on the hiring date. She explains that planning is done everyday but Georgetown is complex. She suggests using a portion of the Georgetown funds to fund a certain percentage to Georgetown.

MS. Wyss asked about building inspections, specifically, why increase a building department position to full-time while declining revenues are forecast? Ms. Pemberton provided an explanation with background on the issue. She stated that prior discussions eliminated building department staff previously, but now there is greater work, specifically regarding Town facilities. Ms. Wyss stated that the increase in salaries is greater than the change from part-time to full-time. Mr. Sanders, Finance Director, stated that the Assistant Building Inspector expenses are recorded in a different manner. The BOS discussed the hours of full-time employees and stated she will refresh the hours in the position.

Ms. Wyss opined that a 4.6% overall budget increase plus the school requests is very high. She notes that residents are facing many pressures. She expressed opposition to the increases and hopes that efforts will be made to reduce them. Ms. Pemberton states that the budget process for FY 25 has just started and believes Ms. Wyss's points are good. In closing, Ms. Wyss added that the Budget Workshop was very good.

Resident Janice Rotchstein states that Eversource is waiting on permits; however, permits for what? She asks what environmental impacts are being conducted for the clearing being done and what studies have been done prior. Ms. Pemberton states she does not know but notes Eversource has flagged the wetlands. Ms. Rotchstein asks if Tree Warden Charlie Hyatt engages in these discussions. Ms. Pemberton states that the tree warden has limited authority and cannot override Eversource within their own ROW.

10. Board Member Comments

Ms. O'Donnell agrees with the BOS that the town departments did a wonderful job in their budget presentations. She notes that it would be helpful to see the budget prior to the budget workshop, which may allow department heads to avoid presenting, if not necessary.

11. Old Business

Redding League of Women Voters (LWV) Report: Ms. Pemberton states that the LMV's report contained recommendations that the BOS has not had a chance to discuss. She wants them to come back to the BOS at a later date. She asks if Margaret Brown and Mary Ann Carmen have anything additional to add. February 20th was discussed as a date. Ms. Pemberton will work with the BOS to schedule.

Gilbert and Bennett Wire Mill Advisory Committee Annual Report: No additional comments or actions.

12. Adjournment

Mr. Thompson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. O'Donnell and the motion was carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.

Next regular meeting: Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Submitted by:
Janet August, Recording Secretary