

TOWN OF ORFORD

Board of Selectmen

Meeting Minutes

December 18, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kevin Follensbee, Chase Kling, Larry Taylor

OTHERS PRESENT: Esther Dobbins-Marsh, Donald Polaski, Assessor Brandon McGahan, Interpreter Denise Kahler-Braaten, Engineer Erin Darrow, Road Agent Ted Nutter, David Smith, Road Committee Chair Charlie Smith, Anna White, UVLS Reg Planning Commission

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 am

Tax Abatement Appeal – Polaski filed an appeal with the Board of Tax and Land Appeals (BTLA) regarding the abatement granted by the Selectboard for his property located at 2449 Route 25A, based on the recommendation from our contracted assessor, Todd Haywood of Granite Hill Municipal Services. The original abatement reduced the property value from \$552,200 to \$440,000 - Polaski feels the assessed value should be reduced further by an additional \$80,000, as he feels his property was assessed incorrectly. Polaski bought his property in 2021 for \$475,000 and 3 years later the assessed value is at \$660,000 (the assessed value at the time of the sale was \$551,300, and in 2024 was \$552,200). McGahan said the only reason the value would change between revaluations would be if physical changes were made to the property. A new appraisal could also be submitted for consideration, but McGahan has not received one.

He asked what property the assessor used for sale value comparison – it was the store at the corner of Bridge Street and Route 10. Polaski asked why are his taxes are higher than property located at 51 Route 10 (McGahan said he can't speak to his tax rate). The property at 51 is assessed at 400,000 compared to Polaski's property which is assessed at 440,000 – he feels Route 10 has better exposure than route 25a plus his property has no internet. Polaski said Thomson has more rental units and storage units that generate more income than his property does. Kling reminded all that how property is used, or how much money the business makes is not a factor when calculating the assessed value. Also, when you add the assessed value of 51 Route 10 and 53 Route 10 (the office, storage units and garages) the assessed value is \$575,800 – these two properties together are a closer comparison to Polaski's property.

Polaski feels the fair assessed value should be based on a Comparative Market Analysis completed by a professional realtor. McGahan said when he reviewed the report he found a lot of issues, and feels it was poorly done. For example-one comparison was a multi-family unit that sold for \$190,000 in Grafton, NH. The house was less square footage and only 2-units, less acreage and was in poor condition. Also, it has no out buildings and was zoned as residential not commercial.

Typically, discussions around assessed values are between the property owner and the assessor, then the assessor submits their recommendation to the Selectboard for their approval. If Polaski still doesn't agree with the assessed value (if changed), he will need to

appeal to the BTLA again. It was agreed that Polaski and McGahan would leave the work session and continue the discussion in the Selectboard office to try and reach an agreement on the appeal.

Indian Pond Dual Culvert project – The Selectboard asked Engineer Darrow to attend the work session to review the plan and wetland application to be submitted to the State of NH DES. The Selectboard questioned why the current plan calls for 3-5' culverts, when at the time of preparing for the 2024 warrant article, 4' culverts were discussed. Taylor said with larger pipes, it will cost more for the wetland application and for the culverts. Darrow said the estimate for the warrant article is only preliminary, and once she got more involved in the project, it was determined an H&H study needed to be done, and those results indicate 5' culverts need to be used. She also recommends using geo mat to help support the culverts and the weight of a higher road base covering them. (with the 5' culverts, the road height will be raised 2'-3").

The Selectboard asked about the plan to replace the culvert across the Indian Pond beach access road. Taylor said water hasn't flowed thru that culvert in several years. In addition, it was mentioned that the wetland application and plan are for the warrant article work only (which is the replacement of the culverts) and therefore, the plan will be changed to remove reference to the beach culvert, as well as from the wetland application.

Darrow will send to Dobbins-Marsh the revised wetland application for the Town Clerk and Selectboard Chair to sign, then it will be returned to Darrow to file with NH DES. Darrow said she will need to file a Shoreline Permit, but there is no fee to do that.

Kling said the Selectboard will need to meet with the abutters to review the project before it begins, and need to put the project out to bid soon. It's possible the Selectboard will need to create a warrant article to request additional funding to complete this project. Concern was addressed that the engineering and permitting fees are already more than originally estimated. The Selectboard also told Darrow that on-site engineering isn't needed. Once a contractor is hired, they know what to do, and don't need supervision. Darrow said because her company files the wetland permit, they have to sign off that the work was completed correctly, but conceded they may only need to be on site the day the culverts are installed. Removing the on-site engineering will help offset the higher engineering & permitting fees as well as some additional costs not accounted for originally (H&H Study, survey and additional gravel due to increasing the road height).

Public Comments: Charlie Smith asked to confirm the road height over the 4' vs 5' culverts. Darrow said the 4' culverts will need 3' 2", and the 5' culverts will need 2' 3"

Other

- Cemetery Bids – the Cemetery Commission voted to use contacted services for maintaining the cemeteries in 2025. The Selectboard will need to approve this recommendation at their meeting on 1/8/2025
- Public Hearing – on January 8th the Selectboard will need to accept the funds received for the sale of the 2019 F-550 – the Public Hearing will be posted this week.

Manifests, Payroll and Accounts Payable folders

The manifest, payroll and accounts payable folders were reviewed and signed where necessary

Adjourn

Motion made by Taylor, seconded by Follensbee to adjourn the meeting. Motion Passed 3/0

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Esther Dobbins-Marsh