

Town of Northumberland Building Committee
Draft Meeting Minutes
March 18, 2021

Present: Bill Caron, Alan Rossetto, Gail Rossetto, Sam Oakes, Peter Pelletier, Ryan Shannon, Jim Weagle, Robin Irving

Public: Roach Kennett, Mike Phillips

Chairman, Alan Rossetto, opened the meeting at 6:00PM.

Alan asked for a motion to accept the February 23, 2021 meeting minutes. Bill motioned to accept the minutes, Sam seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

First item on the agenda is discussion of the NBRC grant that Robin is working on. Robin is not here yet. Alan advised us that Robin needs a working plan to send in for the grant. Bill responded that we already have a working plan to send in, the plan from REI. We can change some aspects of it after the fact if we need to. Bill also said that the deadline for the grant is March 26, so we need to go with what we have. There is not time to change now. Allan Clark of REI has received his last payment and his contract with us is completed. We could possibly reach out to Allan Clark and see if he would be willing to help us with new pricing. Alan Rossetto said that he had spoken with Allan Clark and he would be willing to help with the new pricing if the project was going to be on a warrant article next year. Mr. Clark hazarded a guess that a year from now the price will be substantially higher than the current prediction.

Alan opened the meeting up for discussion. Alan asked if Mr. Phillips had anything to say. He said no he did not.

Ryan asked what do we do now. He was unable to be at Town Meeting so he wanted to be filled in on what happened. He knows that it was defeated so he wants to know what are the next steps we have to take to keep going forward with this project.

Alan said that because it was voted down, that stopped everything for this year. Robin had worked diligently on the NBRC grant for this project.

Ryan asked Peter and Sam about any issues they might have now that the warrant did not pass. Will the Town be getting fined because of the Police and Ambulance inadequacies? Peter advised that what his department is doing is trying to get better. Because the warrant article was voted down, that is all he can do. They are putting band aids on band aids. Jim Weagle advised that when dealing with government agencies, as long as you can give them some hope that you are trying to get better, they will work with you. As long as there is not a major safety issue they probably will not "drop an ax".

Ryan asked if any of this came out at Town Meeting. Peter said that the motion to move the vote was seconded and granted before anyone on the building committee could give any information.

Robin came into the meeting and Alan asked her to discuss the NBRC grant funding. She said that her letter of interest is due next Friday. Whatever information is put into the letter of interest is not used against her in the application.

The letter of interest will get her through the door. The application round opens on April 14, 2021 and the final application is due May 15, 2021. What she puts in that application is final. The awards would happen on August 31, 2021. We do not need to have the building first. We cannot build first and then use Northern Borders money towards the building. In fact, you send in an application and the Northern Borders will give you a notice to proceed. You need to wait for that notice to proceed in order to use their money to build the building. So we are looking at an award that happens on August 31, 2021. We would not be able to begin construction until late fall or early spring.

Because the warrant article failed, we have to wait until next Town Meeting to get the actual vote to be able to raise and appropriate. So, in the application, Robin would have to say that we have to wait for the bond vote for the committed match to get the final agreement. If the bond vote passes in 2022, we could start construction in the spring.

We are still looking at other grants. The timeline for Robin, is May 14, 2021. That is the deadline on the application. She needs a plan and a budget. Robin said there are other opportunities to pursue that are not open right now but they will be coming up.

Friday, March 19, Robin will be talking with USDA about the water bond. While she has them on zoom, she will speak to them about the public safety building if they have time. She will share any information she receives.

What she shared at Town Meeting was that we would qualify for a USDA grant because we are in a high poverty and high unemployment area. But, with USDA grants, you relinquish all control. We saw that with the Town office building. It goes to an architect. You still get to put in your needs and wants and there is a construction meeting. Actually, you can submit REI's design and see how much of it could be reincorporated into what they are doing. Allan Clark's design is just a conceptual design and not for construction. Robin has already sent Allan's plan to USDA and they said no to the design. They want to use their own architect. That does not mean that a large portion of the plan would not be approved.

At this point, Alan called Allan Clark to discuss the plans. Allan agreed that the plans we have would not be adequate for the USDA loan. To finance with USDA, it would add \$250,000 to \$300,000 to the cost. We would need to have a construction loan from a bank. Interest rate now is 3.75 percent and is a loan/grant.

Alan asked Mr. Clark what loans and grants should Robin be looking at for this project. He advised that NBRC is the most favorable at this time.

Alan said that as a building committee, we are just trying to see how we can go forward. Allan Clark advised that if we follow the logic of Mr. Phillips, and try to add two bays to the existing fire station, that isn't going to work. The entire fire station would then have to be sprinklered. You still would not incorporate the needs of the ambulance. They need the bunk space, decontamination areas, and other facilities. Where would the fire fighters park if we take over the parking area next to the fire station. Mr. Clark said that it is absurd to think that this would solve the ambulances problems.

Jim Weagle discussed the issues that we have with the USDA grant we received for the Town office building. There were items that we did not want to put in but had to put in so that we could receive the grant. There are many rules and regulations that go with pursuing a USDA grant.

Robin advised that a program that we did not pursue was a CBG Block Grant. They have changed their criteria for public facilities. They were focusing on housing for domestic violence, regular housing, and homeless shelters. She has tried to call them numerous times about critical public facilities as they are calling them. She thinks that EMS or anything that has to do with public health and safety should fit in that especially with Covid. Robin said that we should send in an application and see how the chips fall. The total is \$500,000.00. We would need to write a warrant article that would say to raise and appropriate. We would only raise and appropriate if said grants were awarded. We would make it contingent on the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) grant.

There are six other grants waiting to open up. There is a preparedness grant , DOJ grants, and others.

Tammy advised Robin that monies, a total of 1.9 Trillion dollars, are coming from the Feds specific to public infrastructure and buildings and we need to follow up on that. Robin will contact our congresspeople, maybe Annie Kuster first. If she is unable to get any answers there, she will go elsewhere. However, we still have to have a match. That match would be 20 percent.

Robin wants guidance as to what is needed to go to NBRC. Bill said we need a plan and a budget for Robin to apply.

Robin has had 3 meetings with NBRC and told them the warrant article failed. Their feeling was pretty audible in the room with all the Federal agencies there. She advised them that she didn't think it was necessarily a lack of community support. The Town meeting followed the school vote and due to the lack of state aid, at the school meeting they voted in a \$3 increase in the tax rate for the school. People weren't willing to add any more to the tax rate. There also seemed to be some issues with the exposure of the public safety building project. When she presented it that way, it didn't look as much of a failure as it was. We can still be a player in the application process.

Alan asked Robin what she needed from the building committee. Robin said she needs to know if we are going to proceed with the plans for the project as is.

Alan asked if there was any other discussion. Roach asked what we were proceeding with. Alan advised that it was the plan from REI that was drawn up by Allan Clark. Alan said that we are an advisory committee. We give the Board of Selectmen our opinions and suggestions on how they should act on this matter.

Roach said when we go to the selectmen with our opinion of moving on, we need to have a pretty good idea of what it is going to cost individuals in their tax rate. He said that those numbers were never brought forward at Town meeting. Peter said that the building committee was not given a chance to bring any information up as the motion to move the vote was made, seconded, and voted on before we had a chance to speak.

Alan advised that, had the warrant passed, the cost would not have exceeded 89 cents per thousand dollars of property valuation. The building committee put on two public information meetings to bring all the information to the public before Town meeting. So, if your property is valued at \$100,000, your cost would have been an extra \$89 per year in your taxes. However, it was voted down. Now, construction costs, materials, and the interest rate has increased. What the cost is going to be a year from now, who knows. Because the warrant was voted down, we lost the 1.67 percent interest rate which Robin had for this project. We lost the guaranteed price of \$2.3 million dollars which we expected to come in lower than that. We also lost the commitment from REI that we would

have a fully functional building by Thanksgiving. All of this information and more would have been brought to the voters attention if the motion to vote had not been asked for so quickly. This project would have been an asset to the Town and would have led to growth for Northumberland. We also lost an agreement that Robin had negotiated with Quasarwave, at the old Co-Gen plant, to supply electricity for this building at 4 cents per KWH. Much lower than Eversource.

Roach said that about 300 people voted on Tuesday but less than 200 people showed up for Town meeting. That is terrible. There was not enough information given prior to the vote. Alan advised that the building committee put on two informational meetings and only eight people showed up. We had brochures available with all the information on cost and reasons why we need this building. The meetings were advertised in the newspapers, on facebook, and the building committee members talked to everyone they knew. Jim Weagle even streamed the informational meeting on Facebook. What else could we have done?

Ryan said that he thinks we could have targeted our marketing approach a little differently. The committee did a wonderful job in trying to get the information out.

Peter said that one of the problems at Town meeting was that someone moved the question before the discussion was finished. We were not able to get any of the positive information out to the public. Unluckily, after the vote to move the question, no one asked to have the discussion brought back up. If someone had done that and been seconded, we could have continued the discussion.

Ryan said that moving forward maybe we should just simplify the information given out. Just say how much it will cost each individual homeowner. Maybe a bulk mailing of a postcard to every resident with just the necessary information of why we need the building and what it will cost that property owner. There was much discussion on how we would accomplish a bulk mailing and what it would cost.

Bill said that he should have gotten up as the select board rep to the building committee and given the positive information before he allowed people to ask questions. He had the opportunity to give his information and chose to let the people ask questions instead. What is in the past is in the past. We need to learn from our mistakes and move forward. Robin needs a building plan and budget asap.

Alan asked for a motion to recommend that the Select Board proceed with the REI plan as is. Peter made a motion, Sam seconded. All in favor. Motion passes. We will move forward with the plan as put forth by Allan Clark of REI. Robin will work with Allan Clark on the new budget cost.

Alan said that we will learn from our mistakes and try our best for town meeting next year. The Town needs this desperately. We can't look back, we need to move forward.

Our next meeting is to be determined.

Alan asked for a motion to adjourn. Bill made a motion to adjourn. Jim Weagle seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 6:50pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Gail Rossetto, Secretary