

**MEETING MINUTES**  
Town of Heath  
**SELECT BOARD**  
Jacobs Road Municipal Center  
Tuesday, April 23, 2024

**Called to Order at 6:00 p.m.** With Robyn Provost-Carlson, Susan Lively, Elissa Viarengo and Hilma Sumner, Town Coordinator.

**Others in Attendance:** See attendance sheet.

The meeting was recorded.

**Public Comment:** None.

**Review Minutes:** *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the minutes of April 16, 2024, as amended.*

**Request for Use Fee Waiver:** Sheila Litchfield had requested a fee waiver for using space in the JRMC on May 5 for a “meet the candidates” time. *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to waive the use fee for an event that will be used for informing Heath voters.* The Select Board also affirmed that a public announcement could be made through the Town’s email address list.

**Broadband Update:** Municipal Light Board members Art Schwenger, Ned Wolf, Anne Emmet, David Gordon and Bill Fontes, along with Municipal Light Plant Manager Sheila Litchfield were present to present information to the Select Board.

A written financial report was reviewed; it included a five-year expense and income projection was reviewed. One of the considerations in the financial picture is the amount added each year to an account for depreciation reserve so that funds will be available as equipment ages and needs to be replaced. It is also anticipated that \$20,000 will be needed during FY 2026 to purchase and install an additional board for account ports.

The first installment of CAF II Federal Funding monies is expected to arrive this summer. The decisions for spending the funds lie with the Select Board although the money can only be used for broadband-related expenses. The Accountant recommended that a special reserve fund be established that the annual payments would be deposited into. The exact amount that will be received is a percentage based on the total bandwidth at the point of testing. It is currently estimated that this year’s amount will be approximately \$168,000 which will be prorated for a three-year period. This will be in addition to the yearly broadband revenue turnover although both incomes will be available to help with payment of debt.

The new WiredWest agreement is being reviewed by the WiredWest Board and has been reviewed by Heath’s town attorneys. It is a ten-year agreement. The Heath Board has not made a decision to sign the agreement yet but is waiting for the WiredWest Board to finish their review first. It was asked that the Heath Board compile a comparison list of the pros and cons of remaining with WiredWest.

Both the Municipal Light Board and Select Board agreed that there were many more questions about finances that could not be answered at this time so a follow-up meeting will be scheduled in the future.

**MTRSD Agreement Articles:** The Finance Committee members and resident Ken Rocke were present to discuss preparation for tomorrow's meeting to be held with MTRSD officials. Since it will be a Select Board meeting, Robyn will call the meeting to order and present a statement of Heath's hopes for the discussion. Goals that Heath is hoping for include to be able to tell townspeople what changes will mean in terms of cost. Ken stated that he hoped the Business Manager would agree to meet with him to compare financial numbers. It is also hoped that there can be a change of focus to one of cooperation between all the district towns.

Presently there is not the clarity of why the projected impact appears to be significantly different in numbers between Ken's calculations and those from the business office. It has been noticed that Heath does not appear fairly characterized in district communications. For example, nowhere is it acknowledged that Heath is the poorest town in the district, nor has there been explanation of how the district benefitted when the elementary school closed.

Many individuals believe that the sustainability study should be completed before any changes to the district agreement are proposed. Based on the numbers Ken has had available to him, he calculated scenarios of assessment differences between using the present formula and the proposed approach. The FY2025 assessment for Heath would increase \$57,677 if the previous two years were recalculated and an increase of \$143,540 if a five-year estimate were used.

Reasons for voting against the proposed district agreement changes include the need to see and absorb the results of the sustainability study. There are portions of the changes that would be beneficial if looked at from a different perspective. This would also give time to hopefully resolve the financial concerns. For Heath, in particular, the proposals would mean a financial impact that Heath cannot absorb.

**FY2025 Budget Planning:**

Operating Budget (Art. 3): After hearing recommendations from the Finance Committee and reviewing current maintenance costs for town buildings, the Board set the maintenance/utility costs as: \$19,000 for Sawyer Hall, \$13,000 for Community Hall, and \$70,000 for JRMC. *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve the proposed operating budget (Art. 3) with an adjustment of Community Hall Maintenance/Utilities level funded of \$13,000.*

ATM Warrant Articles: The Board reviewed the warrant articles and took the following actions. Article 4: It is hoped that the Finance Committee will study various aspects of the MTRSD operating budget during the coming year.

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to recommend Article 5-10.*

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to give no recommendation on Article 11.*

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to recommend Articles 12, 14-18.*

Article 13: The Board asked that any documents related to terms of repayment of the FY2022 MTRSD assessment error be retrieved to determine if the Town committed to a two-year repayment schedule.

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to recommend Articles 19-23.*

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to recommend Articles 24-27.*

Articles 28-30: The Board will wait on determining a recommendation until after tomorrow's joint meeting with MTRSD officials.

**Letters of Support for Grant Applications:**

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve a letter of support for the Heath Parks & Recreation Committee in a Woodlands Partnership grant.*

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve a letter of support for the New England Forestry Foundation for an EOEEA grant for environmental studies.*

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve a letter of support for the Connecticut River Conservancy for a grant to analyze designation of the river to be a conserved scenic body of water.*

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve a letter of support for the Franklin Regional Council of Governments for a grant to assess regional services for environmental safety.*

*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve a letter of support for the Franklin Land Trust for a grant to design and install means of improved access to the Crowningshield Land Preserve.*

**Community Hall Windows Fundraising:** The total amount received in donations to date is: \$14,302.34.

**Accountant Resignation:** After review of a letter from Dave Fierro giving his resignation as of May 22, *on a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to accept with regrets the resignation of Dave Fierro from the position of Accountant.* The Board requested that postings be made to notify the availability of the position. Hilma will also check with FRCOG and other towns to inquire about any possible available options.

**Building Use Committee Resignation:** *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to accept with regret the resignation of Marie Forster from the Building Use Committee.*

**Salt Shed:** Robyn stated that she and the Highway Superintendent will map out the new salt shed for size in order to share the information with the landscape architect so he can develop a site drawing.

**Mail:**

- Draft letter for Heath Parks and Recreation Committee grant application
- Draft letter for New England Forestry Foundation grant application
- Draft letter for Connecticut River Conservancy grant application
- Draft letter for FRCOG grant application
- H. Hallman re: request to close road in front of Community Hall Sept. 1, 2024, afternoon.  
*On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to approve closure of the road.*
- K. Barrows re: receipt of second state aid payment of \$2,200.81.
- FCSWMD re: report of April recycling processing fee
- FCRHRA re: quarterly report ending March 31, 2024

**Next Meetings:**

Wednesday, April 24, 4:30 p.m., MTRHS library

Monday, April 29, 4:00 p.m.

Tuesday, April 30, 6:00 p.m.

**10:45 p.m. *On a motion by Susan Lively and seconded by Elissa Viarengo, the Select Board unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting.***

Respectfully submitted,

Hilma A. Sumner  
Town Coordinator