

**Sharon Selectboard
Special Meeting Minutes
December 16th, 2023 FINAL**

Participants: Kevin Gish, Selectboard Chair; Scott Henkels, Selectboard Vice Chair; Sarah Pfeiffer, Selectboard Clerk; Frank Rogers, Road Foreman; Nicola Shipman, Selectboard Assistant; Lucy Pierpont, Finance Manager; Deb Jones, Treasurer; Karen Rodis, Baxter Memorial Library; Emma Basham, Baxter Memorial Library; Tom Lober, Sharon Fire Department; Mary Ayers, South Royalton Area Senior Center; Martha Fisk, South Royalton Area Senior Center

1. Call to Order:

Kevin Gish called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM.

2. Agenda

Scott Henkels made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Sarah Pfeiffer seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Budget Planning Session

Budget discussions began with a review of the Highway Equipment Reserve Fund and the equipment replacement schedule.

9:28AM Karen Rodis arrived.

9:35AM Emma Basham arrived.

9:36AM The Selectboard invited Emma Basham and Karen Rodis to discuss the Baxter Memorial Library budget as presented to the Selectboard.

Emma Basham noted that \$35.82 per capita is the State average spending for municipal libraries. Currently the Town of Sharon spends \$14.92 per capita, which is less than half of the state average. When looking at Towns by population, Towns with populations of 1000 – 2500 spend \$28.24 per capita on average. If the Town of Sharon has 1,616 residents, per source Emma Basham was using for her research, the Baxter Memorial Library budget as presented for FY25 represents the equivalent of \$18.00 per capita of spending.

Tom Lober joined the meeting at 9:38AM

Emma Basham also noted that the average Town budget for libraries in the State is \$43,035. The Baxter Memorial Library is requesting \$36,976 for FY25.

Scott Henkels asked what the specific plans would be for the increased funding.

Emma Basham suggested the priority is to pay the librarian a living wage and retain her on staff. Karen Rodis and Emma Basham noted that Sharon's librarian, Shana, recently received an award in recognition of her contributions to the Town's library.

Karen Rodis noted the value and importance of the library and the programming offered that serves children and adults with services that include free Wi-Fi, technical assistance, computer access and community connection and support. Deb Jones also highlighted that the Sharon Health Initiative holds open hours once a week at the library, and the Baxter Memorial Library board is also seeking ways to collaborate more extensively with other community organizations, to integrate services and programming throughout community in a more holistic way.

Kevin Gish asked a clarifying question about the FY25 revenue plan, noting the reduction in grant funding revenue. Emma Basham noted that there was a change to the way the library is reporting its revenue, and the donations and grant revenue are broken out in different lines for the FY25 budget even though the total amount raised is the same as past years.

The Selectboard thanked the Library Board members for their time. Emma Basham and Karen Rodis left the meeting at 9:40AM.

Chair Kevin Gish recognized Tom Lober, who had arrived to discuss the Sharon Volunteer Fire Department's FY25 budget if needed, but Tom also highlighted the need for improved paving and drainage at the Fire Department estimated at roughly \$90,000 a year ago but would likely be more as that estimate did not include the full scope of work.

The Selectboard thanked Tom Lober for his time and for his service to the town in his multiple roles.

Martha Fisk and Mary Ayer arrived at 10:00 AM to represent the South Royalton Area Senior Center.

Mary Ayer and Martha Fisk briefed the Selectboard on some of the financial challenges the Senior Center is experiencing. The Center provides over 14,000 meals in a year, with meals provided on site at the Senior Center, as well as curbside pick-up and the Meals-on-Wheels delivery program. They said there is one paid staff member, but other staffing is on a volunteer basis though the Senior Center does reimburse delivery drivers for mileage.

Mary Ayer reminded the Selectboard that the Vermont Council on Aging reimburses the Senior Center just \$4.64 per meal served. Martha Fisk and Mary Ayer said there is a suggested donation is \$5 per meal, but the actual cost to prepare the meals is \$9.64 per meal. The difference between the amount raised per meal and the cost per meal is creating a budget shortfall for the Senior Center.

The South Royalton Area Senior Center does fundraisers throughout the year to offset these costs, but they no longer run the thrift store and costs of basic ingredients have increased. Martha Fisk noted that this \$10,000 appropriation request is for operational costs and something Martha also highlighted is that the Meals on Wheels program is more than just food delivery, as

it also serves as a way for home bound seniors to connect with a familiar face and the twice weekly delivery is also something of a welfare check for seniors when they receive their food.

Kevin Gish asked if the request could be a per capita request. Martha Fisk said the request is not based on a per capita funding model. Martha also noted that the Senior Center has made the same \$10,000 appropriations request to each of the four towns served by the South Royalton Area Senior Center which include Bethel, South Royalton, Strafford, and Sharon. Martha Fisk does not anticipate that this would be a one-time only appropriations request but rather it is likely to become an annual \$10,000 appropriations request.

After additional review and discussion, Mary Ayers and Martha Fisk were both thanked for their time and the Board took a moment to thank them for their extensive service to the Town. Mary and Martha left the meeting at 10:22AM

As the Board continued its discussion for the FY25 Budget preparation, the Selectboard has agreed to include the Baxter Memorial Library budget as presented in the FY25 budget.

The Board's discussion then moved to the Highway Infrastructure Fund, the Highway Operations Budget as well as the General Operating budgets including appropriations as well as considerations for the lister's salary.

The Board will review the following in more detail on Monday, December 18th: South Royalton Rescue appropriations request, South Royalton Area Senior Center appropriations request, and the Recreation Department's proposed FY25 budget.

4. **Adjourn**

Sarah Pfeiffer made a motion to adjourn at 12:53PM. Scott Henkels seconded. Motion approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Nicola Shipman, Selectboard Assistant