

Town of Hampton  
Board of Finance  
Special Meeting  
October 21, 2019  
7pm  
Hampton Town Hall

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Members/Alternates Present: Perry Matchinis, Kathy Donahue, Nick Brown, Rick Matejka, Lisa Sanchez, Kathi Newcombe, Stan Crawford.

Others Present: First Selectman Al Cahill, Selectmen Dan Meade and Bob Grindle, Recording Clerk Dayna McDermott Arriola

Chairman Matchinis seated Stan Crawford for Ed Adelman.

**Citizen Comments:**

Mark Becker expressed his disappointment with the diligence of some of the companies he's witnessed removing the town's hazardous trees.

Penny Newbury stated her support for the purchase of a bucket truck, but questioned the training the road crew has received. First Selectman Cahill confirmed that the current road crew is trained and bucket certified.

Diane Gagnon suggested that the Finance Board present information regarding the purchase and alternate options for removing the trees.

**Approval of Minutes:**

**Motion:** Kathy Donahue, seconded by Perry Matchinis, to move the Approval of Minutes to the end of the meeting. Motion carried unanimously.

**Discussion of Acquisition of a Bucket Truck for Tree Removal**

Chairman Matchinis stated that the Board of Finance was unaware of the Selectmen's decision to purchase a bucket truck for \$173,000 until their October 8 meeting when the First Selectman informed members of the Selectmen's vote to approve the purchase. He explained that while the finance board had discussed the issue of hazardous trees, they were not involved in the purchasing decision. Stan Crawford clarified that he was aware prior to the finance board's meeting as he'd attended the Selectmen's October 7 meeting when their decision was made. First Selectman Cahill noted that the Selectmen also voted to schedule a Special Town Meeting on October 24 for the legislative body to approve the purchase. He stated that the list of dangerous trees was updated in July, 2019 when 500 trees were identified as hazardous.

Kathy Donahue explained that the Board of Finance acknowledged the importance of removing the trees but suggested that there were different ways to address it, listing: purchasing a used instead of a new bucket truck; collaborating with other towns on the purchase; leasing a bucket truck; or out-sourcing the work and bidding trees in clusters rather than individually. She also listed fiscal concerns members raised, namely the unknown costs of the ambulance service and reductions in State funding, as well as the additional costs which the town would incur with the purchase, such as an increase in workmen's compensation, insurance, and fuel. Ms. Donahue said she researched some financing options, the cost of used vehicles, and the price of renting a truck, \$4000 a month. She suggested this option would afford the road crew an opportunity to use the equipment prior to investing in it, noting that there's a large difference between the 25' height the road crew is currently using and the proposed 75' bucket truck. Nick Brown acknowledged that while the Board of Selectmen is responsible for the road crew, renting versus purchasing equipment is a valid discussion.

Chairman Matchinis stated that he obtained a price of \$1200-\$1500 for the removal of five to eight trees per day from a local company. He and Lisa Sanchez expressed concern for the safety of the crew and questioned the amount of time they could dedicate to tree removal given their other duties. First Selectman Cahill said that out-sourcing would still occur for difficult trees or where power lines were an issue, noting that the crew would be safer in a new truck than in the equipment they're currently using. To Rick Matejka's question on the percentage of time the road crew would spend on removing trees, First Selectman Cahill said that when the crew is not paving, mowing or plowing snow, they would be removing trees.

Chairman Matchinis also questioned whether or not the Selectmen's decision on the purchase met the bidding requirements of the newly adopted Town ordinance, challenging First Selectman Cahill's position that a dealership matching the "State Bid Threshold" satisfied the provision that "Expenditures made through or administered by the State or Federal Governments" are exceptions to the bidding requirement. Kathy Donahue stated that several members of the Board of Finance urged the Board of Selectmen to adjourn the decision on the purchase to a referendum. First Selectman Cahill noted that a similar purchase was approved at an Annual Town Meeting in 2015. Ms. Donahue countered that the 2015 purchase was the subject of many months of discussion at Board of Finance meetings, and that taxpayers received sufficient notification of that purchase. She stated that the Selectmen missed the opportunity to include the purchase as part of the July referendum, when voters could have considered the \$175,000 land purchase and the \$173,000 truck purchase, and to include it on the upcoming November ballot. She also noted that the bucket truck was not listed on the 5-Year Plan taxpayers approved at the Annual Meeting. Chairman Matchinis stated that it should not be considered a "threat" to allow people to vote on purchases which represent 10% of the budget. He suggested that the Boards of Selectmen and Finance are supposed to work together, and stated the expectation that a written analysis of all options be provided to taxpayers. Lisa Sanchez also expressed her concerns with the process, noting a lack of due diligence in the collective decision making process. She suggested that proposals supported with sufficient information are more persuasive to taxpayers.

Stan Crawford voiced his opposition to incurring debt to finance the purchase and provided comparisons of interest rates on loans versus interest rates on Certificates of Deposit. Kathy Donahue suggested that a loan could be paid in full at the end of the fiscal year with a clearer picture of the Town's financial position.

#### **Citizen Comments:**

Pat Cascio questioned the rates Chairman Matchinis obtained for the amount of trees to be removed daily and the costs. She also noted that tree removal is not a short term problem and will be necessary for the next 20 years.

Penny Newbury suggested that the State obtains multiple bids to arrive at a minimum threshold.

Diane Gagnon urged the Selectmen to research the cost of used bucket trucks.

Kathy Thompson suggested the Selectmen research the cost of tree removal equipment which is pulled behind vehicles. To her question on the width of easements, First Selectman Cahill said the roads differ, with the widest easements 20 to 28 feet.

#### **Approval of Minutes of October 8, 2019 Regular Meeting**

**Motion:** Kathy Donahue, seconded by Perry Matchinis, to approve the Minutes with the following amendments: Under First Selectman's Report, strike "*Due to the uncertainties of the costs for delivering emergency services through the end of the fiscal year*"; under Discussion of Town Purchase of Bucket Truck, "...if the members of the Public Works Department have been *properly* trained..."; under Citizen Comment, strike "*She and Kathi Newcombe stated their confidence in the Town's approval based on*" and replace with: "*Kathi Newcombe noted the history of taxpayer generosity regarding Town needs and Kathy Donahue noted there were multiple ways to meet those needs.*" Motion carried, 4-0, Lisa Sanchez and Rick Matejka abstaining.

**Adjournment:**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dayna McDermott Arriola  
Recording Clerk

*This is a draft version of the Minutes until approved by the Board of Finance.*