

**Board of Selectmen
Regular Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 26, 2024**

Members

Beth Cacciotti, Chair
William Baldwin, Vice Chair
David Paquette
Robert Worden
Gregory Spero

Others Present

John Apple, Town Administrator
Timothy J. Crowley, Police Chief
Andrew Schafer, Assistant Fire Chief
Kate Rochford, Chair, Historical Society
Ellen Beckwith, Director Historical Society

6:00 PM Open Public Meeting:

Chair Cacciotti opened the February 26, 2024 public meeting of the Atkinson Board of Selectmen at 6:00 PM.

- Pledge of Allegiance

Officer White led the Pledge of Allegiance.

- Attendance

Selectman Spero, Selectman Worden, Vice Chair Baldwin, Selectman Paquette and Chair Cacciotti are present.

Appearances:

- Police Department Staffing Appointments – Police Chief Crowley

Police Chief Crowley appeared. Police Chief Crowley explained that there was a sergeant's exam February 1, 2024 that all officers were eligible to take. As part of attaining master patrolman rank, the first step is taking and passing the sergeant's exam. Once the sergeant's exam is passed, that, together with years in service an officer is eligible for Master Patrol Officer rank.

Police Chief Crowley explained that the three patrolmen present took the sergeant's exam and passed it. One of the patrolmen was sent to the first line supervisor's class through the FBI's Law Enforcement Executive Development Association, the other two will be scheduled. They will complete it within the year as required. Police Chief Crowley is requesting these three officers be promoted to the rank of Master Patrol Officer effective today. They are Officer Marc Melia, Officer Jacob White and Officer Justin Bettencourt. Officer Melia has 10 years service to the Town, Officer White has five and Officer Bettencourt will have four in December. Police Chief Crowley explained

that the Atkinson Police Department does not have a supervisor for every shift. The Master Patrol Officers have passed the sergeant's exam and will have to use the supervisory level training taken or will have taken because they will have supervisory duties.

Ms. Kari Bodicote swore in the officers as master patrol officers and all members of the Board of Selectmen congratulated them.

Police Chief Crowley stressed that all three officers were hired directly by the Town of Atkinson.

Chair Cacciotti requested that Fire Department Staffing Appointments be moved to a non public hearing and that the Board continue with the Center School Update.

- Fire Department Staffing Appointments – Assistant Fire Chief Schafer – moved to a non public hearing.
- Center School Update – Chair Kate Rochford

Ms. Kate Rochford and Ms. Ellen Beckwith came before the Board to update them on the Center School renovation. Ms. Rochford gave a slide presentation. Phase one, interior demolition was completed February 16, 2024. Phases 2 and 3 have also been completed. Ms. Rochford thanked Mr. Stewart and explained that the original windows and shutters were saved and put in the attic when the building was worked on previously by him. The windows are now being restored by the present contractor, a restoration and renovation expert. The window renovation should be complete in late May. The vinyl siding was removed in Phase 3 and the condition of the original wood clapboard was checked. The windows will be replaced by the original windows.

Following phases of restoration will be determined depending on costs and funding.

Next, Ms. Rochford discussed financials. She informed the Board that more than \$50,000 has been raised to date. They have gotten money from grants. Atkinson Historical Society contributed \$20,000. They have received money in 2024 from the New Hampshire Casino Society and will be eligible in 2025. A mailing was done and several residents have donated as much as \$1,000. Fundraising is ongoing and they are looking for sponsors. The number to call is 603-362-9317. There is a website for the Center School and for the Historical Society. Ms. Rochford stated that she found an Atkinson resident who writes grants and is willing to work with the Historical Society.

Ms. Rochford asked for questions from the Board. Selectman Spero stated he believes that the Historical Society will reach its financial goals and then asked what they planned to do with the building after it is restored. Ms. Rochford informed the Board that at this point, the building will only be open 6-8 months in a year. Heat is not included in the first round of restoration. The building will be open to other historical societies and will be open to second graders every May. They may allow other

organizations such as the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts to use the building as well. They have not made final plans.

Vice Chair Baldwin asked how the building was heated when it was a schoolhouse and Ms. Rochford informed him that it was with a coal stove. One may be donated to the schoolhouse to be used as a display. Residents have offered to donate old desks. They are planning to have ADA accessibility and an ADA bathroom. The current heating system has been removed. Ms. Rochford offered to open the school Saturday morning from 9:00 am to 10:00 am if anyone would like to see it. They prefer no children because it is a work zone. The Historical Society has no current plans for a heating system, but would like to heat it in the future. Ms. Rochford reviewed different grants applied for and received with the Board.

Member Worden congratulated Ms. Rochford and Ms. Beckwith on a job well done. Ms. Beckwith is requesting Atkinson residents who may have attended Center School to contact her for an interview. Ms. Rochford and Ms. Beckwith left the meeting.

Chair Cacciotti requested the Board move to New Business and Energy Commission Reappointments.

New Business:

➤ Energy Commission Reappointment

Chair Cacciotti requested Mr. Apple speak. Mr. Apple informed the Board that Ms. Michelle Veasey has been recommended for reappointment by the Chair of the Energy Commission until April 2026.

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to reappoint Ms. Michelle Veasey for the remainder of her term set to expire in April 2026. Selectman Worden seconded the motion. All members of the Atkinson Board of Selectmen voted in favor. Vote: 5/0/0. The motion passes.

➤ Planning Board Appointment to RPC Transportation Advisory Committee

Chair Cacciotti requested Mr. Apple speak and Mr. Apple informed the Board that the Planning Board is recommending the appointment of Mr. Bill Baldwin, the Selectman Ex-Officio to the Planning Board, to the Rockingham Planning Commission Transportation Advisory Committee. Mr. Apple explained that there are many reasons to have someone on the Committee, one is because the Town is going through a grant process to replace a vehicle for Elder Services. They get updates on the Transportation Advisory Committee from RPC but this would give the Town even more input.

Selectman Worden made a motion to appoint Mr. Bill Baldwin, Selectman Ex-Officio to the Atkinson Planning Board, as representative from the Town of Atkinson to the RPC Transportation Advisory Committee. Member Spero seconded the motion.

Discussion: Selectman Worden asked if this was a term appointment. Mr. Apple replied that he did not believe so but he would check and inform the Board. Chair Cacciotti asked if recommendations to the committee must come from the Planning Board. Mr. Apple responded that he believes they must.

Vote: 4/0/0, Vice Chair Baldwin recused. The motion passes.

Board members thanked Vice Chair Baldwin for volunteering.

➤ Information Postings – Budget

Chair Cacciotti requested Mr. Apple speak. Mr. Apple explained that he has included a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the budget in the packet. Carriage Towne News is no longer being published and many residents do not have access to internet, they must rely on newspapers and ACTV. Therefore, he is proposing to place this PowerPoint presentation explaining the budget on ACTV. Town Administration is also considering a voice over. Copies of the presentation will also be placed in Town Hall and on the website. Selectman Paquette is concerned about the slide show being too long and recommended removing slides 4-11. The Board continued to discuss the slide show. Selectman Paquette pointed out that the last slide is not very legible and recommended changing the color. Mr. Apple will make the recommended changes and send out the final version. The Board agreed that a voice over is a good idea. The Board also agreed that a mailing would be too expensive.

Chair Cacciotti requested the Board turn to old business.

Old Business:

➤ Academy Avenue Waterline – Bill of Sale

Chair Cacciotti requested Mr. Apple speak. He explained that an 850 foot linear stretch of water main from the Library to Woodlawn Avenue was completed to mitigate PFAS problems. The Town received a bill of sale from Hampstead Area Water Company (“HAWC”) for the water main continuance. The Town received a letter from HAWC advising the Town to take over the infrastructure in the ground. Mr. Apple explained that the bill of sale was reviewed by Town Counsel, NHDES and NHDOT. He was told that this was standard procedure. However, Atkinson does not have a municipal water company. Therefore the Town should sign the bill of sale over to HAWC. Vice Chair Baldwin asked about leasing the pipes to HAWC. Selectman Worden pointed out that HAWC would be the owner of the extended water main and would be responsible for maintenance since Atkinson does not have municipal water. It would behoove the Town to sign the bill of sale and turn over ownership to HAWC. That way, HAWC would be fully responsible for the pipeline.

Chair Cacciotti pointed out that regarding leasing the pipe, all the Town would own is the pipes, not the water.

Selectman Worden made a motion to sign the bill of sale and transfer ownership to HAWC. Chair Cacciotti seconded the motion.

Discussion: Chair Cacciotti thanked HAWC because Atkinson is not the only Town in New Hampshire with PFAS pollution. Other Towns do not have a way to treat it. This allows Atkinson residents to stay in their homes and have clean drinking water.

Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

➤ Policy Review

Chair Cacciotti requested Selectman Paquette review the policies, starting with the investment policy.

○ Investment Policy

Chair Cacciotti stated that there was no investment policy in the packet. Selectman Worden asked if there was a requirement for review. Selectman Paquette responded that there is a requirement by State RSA and that the Board of Selectmen has to sign that it was reviewed. The treasurer has stated that he is happy with what is in it. Chair Cacciotti asked if Mr. Apple could add an explanation for the review of the Board of Selectmen in the future.

Chair Cacciotti asked if a vote was required and Vice Chair Baldwin replied that it has to be officially approved by vote.

Selectman Worden made a motion to accept the Town of Atkinson Investment Policy without revision. Selectman Spero seconded the motion. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor. The motion passes.

Chair Cacciotti requested the Board turn to purchasing policy.

○ Purchasing Policy

Selectman Paquette stated that this policy is to be reviewed on a three year cycle and it was reviewed last year. There is no note as to any changes. Mr. Apple explained that it is not a problem as it is written, however, he is recommending procurement guidelines be changed so that the amount a department head or board, commission or committee chair could expend without a vote should be raised to \$1,000. The maximum amount the Town Administrator can expend be raised from \$2,500 to \$3,000. Three quotes should be required for expenses over \$3,000 for a vote by the Board of Selectmen. An RFP should be required for expenses over \$6,000.

Selectman Worden stated that the cost of goods has gone up substantially so increasing these figures makes sense. This also gives town department heads the

ability to bid on quality and value. He supports the changes put forward by the Town Administrator.

Chair Cacciotti pointed out that board, commission or committee chairs/members are not Town employees. Therefore, a change should be made to the conflict of interest, ethics in purchasing guidelines to note that they should apply to anyone with purchasing power. She recommends the Conflict of Interest Committee get a copy.

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to approve the Atkinson Purchasing Policies and Procedures, Procurement Guidelines with the following changes: the amount a department head or board, commission or committee chair could expend should be raised to \$1,000; the Town Administrator from \$2,500 to \$3,000; three quotes required for expenses over \$3,000 and a vote by the Board of Selectmen; and an RFPC be required for expenses over \$6,000. Also page 3 of the conflicts of interest guidelines be changed to include anyone with purchasing power. Selectman Worden seconded the motion. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

- Trash Cart Policy

Selectman Paquette explained that this policy is reviewed annually because prices change annually. Mr. Apple informed the Board that the rates change in May and recommended the Board vote on it then. The Board tabled it.

Chair Cacciotti asked if there were enough carts. Mr. Apple explained that there are no more 96 gallon carts, but there are enough 64 gallon carts. 50 more 96 gallon carts are being purchased. People who have requested 96 gallon carts get 64 gallon carts now and will get 96 gallon carts when they come in.

Mr. Apple stated that Mr. Paquette had asked about a record retention policy. He explained that it was updated last in 2012. Mr. Spero informed the Board that a new record retention policy should be ready to come before the Board shortly.

- Drug and Alcohol Policy

Mr. Apple stated that it is long and asked if anyone would read it. However, this policy is approved and recommended by Primex. It has consent forms and reasonable suspicion forms. It specifies and holds the Town accountable. The proposed policy was also sent to the Joint Loss Management Committee. They will review it.

Selectman Worden reviewed the document and stated that it is one of the most thorough he has seen. He recommends the Board table it until members have had a chance to review it thoroughly. Vice Chair Baldwin stated that part of his job is safety and drug and alcohol policy. He has reviewed the document thoroughly but would prefer to discuss it later. Selectman Paquette pointed out that on page 3 it states that,

“not all employee hiring requires testing...” Who gets tested has been an issue. This policy states that only those employees driving a vehicle will be tested. It states that random testing is only for those with a commercial driving license. He suggests reviewing this.

Page 5 discusses the testing center. Selectman Paquette feels it would be safer to name a testing facility. Mr. Apple agreed that a designated facility would be good. He stated that the testing facility procedures should be sent to Primex for their review as well. Selectman Worden stated that in some cases the designated facility might not be available. Selectman Paquette suggested that more than one testing center be listed in the policy. The criteria for the testing center do not need to be listed. Vice Chair Baldwin stated that random testing does not need to be done at a facility. There is a company that comes to communities. Another issue is a safe work environment and make sure that testing is done equitably and equally.

Chair Cacciotti would like it clarified as to where a substance is illegal. Town policy can state that a substance can be legal and still be against Town policy. Chair Cacciotti also asked who the policy should apply to.

Mr. Apple stated that the policy recommends different procedures in the case someone fails a test. Also, there are different requirements for employees holding commercial drivers licenses.

Chair Cacciotti tabled this policy until all Board members have a chance to review it.

- Employee Wage Scale and Pay Policy

Chair Cacciotti requested Mr. Apple speak. Mr. Apple informed the Board that the wage scale pay matrix needs to be updated. The policy lays out the framework to follow the matrix. Another question is the difference between a bonus and a merit raise. The employee evaluation form is also part of it.

Selectman Paquette is opposed to putting a line item for a merit/bonus in each department budget. He recommends it be put in the executive budget. A percentage of the payroll could go to that line. The merit raise is tied to the evaluation and the evaluation form states the amount of increase is tied to the evaluation. Someone getting a high evaluation at the top of the pay scale may be treated differently than someone at the bottom. It should be worded, *“give an employee a merit raise justified by their evaluation.”* The Board discussed how to reward employees by bonuses and raises and problems with rewarding people at the top of their scale.

Vice Chair Baldwin stated that wages should be evaluated every two years. He also recommended performance steps. He feels an employee evaluation is important because it lets people know how they are doing.

Mr. Apple recommends moving forward with this once it is updated and doing a wage scale and steps later. Vice Chair Baldwin stated that evaluations need to be implemented in the departments.

Chair Cacciotti recommended that the Employee Wage Scale and Pay Policy be tabled until some revisions are made.

- Employee Evaluation Form

Selectman Paquette reviewed all the forms, and none of them ask if the employee understands their job requirements and if they meet them. Number one on the evaluation has to be job description. All job descriptions need to be added to the form.

Chair Cacciotti stated that she does not like the number rating. She recommends a word description. The Board discussed how to implement the rating. She recommended that the scale be reviewed by department heads in order to make sure that everyone understands it.

Mr. Apple stated that the levels of performance were supposed to go with the raise matrix. He explained that he discovered an old employee evaluation form in the Atkinson files.

Chair Cacciotti thanked Selectman Paquette and Mr. Apple for their hard work.

Assessing:

- 2023 Abatement

- Map 17 Lot 66 Abate: \$1,147

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to approve Assessing Abatement to Map 17, Lot 66, in the amount of \$1,147. The motion was seconded by Selectman Worden. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

- 2024 Veterans Tax Credits

- Map 1 Lot 12051-05-102 Rec: Grant \$750
- Map 3 Lot 1 Rec: Grant \$2,000

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to approve Veteran's tax credits to Map 1, Lot 12051-05-102, grant for \$750, Map 3 Lot 1, grant for \$2,000. The motion was seconded by Selectman Worden. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

Chair Cacciotti requested the Board turn to 2024 solar exemptions.

- 2024 Solar Exemptions

- Map 8 Lot 133-11

Grant: \$19,000

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to approve Solar Exemptions to Map 8, Lot 133-11, grant for \$19,000. The motion was seconded by Selectman Worden. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

➤ 2024 Elderly Exemption

- Map 11, Lot 13

Grant for \$300,000

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to approve the 2024 Elderly Exemption to Map 11, Lot 13, in the amount of \$300,000. The motion was seconded by Selectman Spero. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

Chair Cacciotti asked for liaison reports.

Liaison Reports:

Fire Department: Selectman Spero had a meeting with the fire chief and was informed that some of the towns who are part of the Trinity ambulance contract may pull out. There may be fewer towns joining at the next renewal. Selectman Spero will get with the Town Administrator to arrange a meeting with the towns to see who is planning to renew. It is important that the Board of Selectmen have the information. Selectman Spero would also like to see how Plaistow is doing with its transports.

Recreation Commission: Selectman Worden reported that the Recreation Commission met last week. There was a sold out crowd at the Community Center to bring forward Atkinson Days. The Commission is hoping for total participation of the community, especially volunteer groups, departments, boards, commissions and committees. There is a robust schedule of activities for September 7, 2024 to be held at Woodlock Park and the Town Common. There is the possibility of a fireworks show at dusk at Woodlock Park. The Lions dinner was a big success. Selectman Worden was informed that the Lions will be donating money for Atkinson Days.

Selectman Worden requested a proclamation at the next meeting, March 4, 2024, to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Atkinson Conservation Commission and to kick off a monthly celebration of events to highlight their accomplishments.

Police Station Steering Committee: Vice Chair Baldwin reported that there will be a meeting of the Committee at Town Hall on Saturday, March 2, 2024 from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM. There will be an open house and they will be giving tours for small groups at the police station. It is important that people are informed of the facts of this project.

Historical Society: Selectman Paquette urged everyone to visit the Center School Saturday morning.

Selectman Paquette also has an issue with the Zoning Board of Adjustment. He is concerned about Bill 538L, the Homenibus Bill and requested Vice Chair Baldwin as

liaison to the ZBA review it and have the ZBA review it. The bill appears to let the State take some control from the towns. The State wants to allow more housing in the state and would limit it by not setting the house to the lot size. They want to tie it to the size of the septic. Vice Chair Baldwin agreed.

Department of Public Works: The DPW has been using the garage and power wash to clean equipment. The investment is paying off. Chair Cacciotti has heard that there is an issue with Plaistow and their dispatch, but that is all.

Chair Cacciotti requested the Board turn to donations.

Donations:

Donations for Elder Services were received before the meeting.

Selectman Worden made a motion to accept donations for the Elder Services in the amount of \$490.00 and thanked everyone for their contributions. Selectman Spero seconded the motion. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

Chair Cacciotti requested the Board move to approval of minutes.

Approval of Minutes:

- **January 18, 2024 Public Hearing Minutes (12:00 PM Public Hearing)
Second)**

There were no changes. Chair Cacciotti requested a motion.

Selectman Spero made a motion to accept the 12:00 PM January 18, 2024 Public Hearing minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Selectman Worden. Vote: 4/0/1 with Chair Cacciotti not voting.

- **January 18, 2024 Public Hearing Minutes (12:15 PM)**

There were no changes. Chair Cacciotti requested a motion.

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to accept the 12:15 PM January 18, 2024 Public Hearing minutes as written. The motion was seconded by Selectman Paquette. Vote: 4/0/1 with Chair Cacciotti not voting.

Chair Cacciotti reopened the meeting to allow Selectman Worden to second the motion to appoint Deputy Chief Andrew Murphy as Fire Warden and Chief Erik Thomas as Deputy Fire Warden for the Town of Atkinson starting February 5, 2024 and requested the motion be placed in the February 5, 2024 and the February 26, 2024 minutes.

Selectman Spero made a motion to appoint Deputy Chief Andrew Murphy as Fire Warden and Chief Erik Thomas as Deputy Fire Warden for the Town of Atkinson

starting February 5, 2024. Selectman Worden seconded the motion. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

➤ **February 5, 2024 Regular Meeting Minutes**

Selectman Paquette would like the words “we” and “our” on lines 107 and 109 of the February 5, 2024 minutes be changed to “Chief Thomas”.

Selectman Worden made a motion to accept the regular meeting minutes of Monday, February 5, 2024 as amended. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Baldwin. Vote: 5/0/0. All in favor.

FYI: Town Election will be held on Tuesday, March 12, 2024 at the Atkinson Community Center located at 4 Main Street. The polls will be open from 7:00 am to 8:00 PM. Chair Cacciotti informed the audience that information is available at Town Hall. Selectman Worden is waiting for the school department ballot so all ballots can be mailed out.

Future Agenda: The Next Board of Selectmen Meeting will be held on Monday, March 4, 2024, at 6:00 PM.

Non-Public Session:

- RSA 91 A:3, II(a) Compensation and RSA 91 A:3, II(c) Reputation

Selectman Spero made a motion to go into nonpublic session under RSA 91-A:3 II (a) dismissal, promotion or compensation of an employee and RSA 91 A:3, II(c) reputation. Vice Chair Baldwin seconded the motion. Roll call vote: Selectman Spero, yes, Selectman Worden, yes, Selectman Paquette, yes; Vice Chair Baldwin; yes, and Chair Cacciotti, yes. Vote: 5/0/0. The motion passes.

9:02 PM- Re-enter into public meeting:

Vice Chair Baldwin made a motion to approve the proposed 2 PD sign on bonuses of \$5,000 each using ARPA funds. Member Worden seconded the motion. The motion passes 4-1.

Member Spero made a motion to offer Matt Leary the Fire Department promotion as proposed at the rate of \$24.75. Member Worden seconded the motion. The motion passes 5-0.

The Atkinson Board of Selectmen meeting was adjourned at 9:15 PM.