

**TOWN OF BEDFORD
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
September 27, 2023
10 Meetinghouse Road**

1. ROLL CALL: A meeting of the Bedford Town Council was held on Wednesday, September 27, 2023, 10 Meetinghouse Road. Participating were Bill Carter (Chair), Lori Radke (Vice Chair) and Councilors Phil Greazzo, Dave Gilbert, and Kathleen Bemiss. Also present was Town Manager Rick Sawyer. Councilor Thomas had an excused absence. Michael Strand arrived at 7:15 PM.

Chairman Carter opened the meeting at 7:00 PM.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Led by Councilor Bemiss.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS – None.

4. NEW BUSINESS

a. Award of the ambulance billing contract

Mr. Sawyer stated they were recommending terminating their contract with Quick Med Claims and to approve a contract with EMS Management & Consultants (EMS M/C) for the Town's Emergency Medical Service billing services. In August, the team put out a bid for improved services and competitive pricing with 8 companies returning proposals. The review committee selected 4 firms to be interviewed. Out of that process EMS M/C was recommended. The proposed billing rate is 4.5% down from 5.5% with our current contract. The term of the contract will be from January 1, 2024 through December 2026 with 1-year renewals. Their recommendation is that approve the contract as presented.

Councilor Radke wanted to know if there were penalties. Mr. Sawyer responded no, the current contract had a clause in there that either side could terminate the contract with 90 days, so that's the imperative to move this forward tonight, so they could end by the end of the year and start fresh on January 1st with a new firm.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to know if they knew what their bad debt ratio was with the previous contract and would it improve with the new contract. Mr. Sawyer stated that it was why they were making the change; to have a better overall billing process. Not only the amount of billing, but the responsiveness to their questions and how much they follow up and quickly follow up with bills that they struggled with recently. Matt Mannino, Finance Director, stated that the reason they wanted to make the change was typically they're collecting 80% of what they bill out. The company they are with now was about 60% of what they've billed. They were trying to get back to 80%. Councilor Gilbert stated that the staff reports says that the EMS could get up to 95%. Mr. Mannino stated that traditionally there were at 80%, but 95% would be great. Councilor Radke wanted to know of the company gave an excuse why or just not responsive. Mr. Mannino stated that they weren't responsive. It came to the point where they were doing the collecting themselves. They've been sending out the letters and having more of a response. The letters they sent out

hadn't received invoices. Councilor Radke wanted to know if the company got a percentage of what they collect. Mr. Mannino responded, yes; it's in their best interest to do it. He thought it was an organizational thing. Mr. Sawyer stated that they didn't know all of the reasons, but they were clearly not meeting the Town's needs. Councilor Bemiss thanked them for looking into other options. Mr. Sawyer stated that the staff had been great and when they sent out a letter or invoice directly from the Town, the people getting those were very responsive and take care of them very quickly. Those have been out there for a long time and for whatever reason they either never got a bill or it was never followed up with. They appreciated Ellen's efforts; the Assistant Finance Director.

Councilor Greazzo wanted to know what the process was for collecting the 40% of unpaid bills. Mr. Mannino stated that they're going to keep collecting those bills that had already gone out. Anything that wasn't collected goes to a collection agency, First Financial Resources, and they continue to try and collect that. They eventually just write it off as bad debt. Mr. Sawyer stated that their intent was to get as much as possible, but they've never gotten much beyond 80%. Councilor Greazzo wanted to know if they've thought of charging Medicare and Medicaid. Mr. Sawyer stated that they do. Mr. Mannino stated that they search out any avenue to get paid. Mr. Sawyer stated that this new firm said that they truly specialize in trying to find insurances that may not be reported. They do a tremendous amount of background work to try and find those insurances.

Councilor Bemiss wanted to know if the bills that go out from the agency had their return address or did it say the Town of Bedford and their address underneath. Mr. Mannino stated that it shows their address, but it shows the Town of Bedford. Councilor Bemiss was wondering if people were perceiving it as junk mail. Mr. Mannino stated that it was obvious that it was from the Town. Mr. Sawyer stated that if they transport to the hospital they were also getting medical bills and would be anticipating having an ambulance bill.

MOTION by Councilor Gilbert that the Bedford Town Council approve the contract with EMS M/C to provide ambulance billing services to the Town from January 1, 2024 through December 31, 2026 and authorize the Town Manager to sign all documents related to the contract. Seconded by Councilor Radke. Vote taken – Motion Passed – 5-0.

b. Submission of the draft 2024-2033 CIP

Mr. Sawyer stated that to be included in the Capital Improvement Plan the project or piece of equipment needed to be valued at \$25K or more and have an extended lifespan of 3 years or more. The Plan was put forth in accordance with RSA 674 and the Town Charter. The Charter requires that the Plan be submitted to the Town Council one month prior to the budget submission. The Plan is also submitted to the Planning Board for their review and comment especially on project rankings. The rankings are his proposal to the Council, but can be changed and had no impact on when a project was done. The rankings and the entire Plan remained flexible all the way through the budget process until the vote at Budgetary Town Meeting. Bedford had historically completed a 10-year CIP and includes items that were covered in both the operating and capital budgets. The total CIP for 10 years was \$99M with approximately \$9M in 2024 with \$3.78M of that being debt service for the local roads program. Not everyone includes debt service in their CIP, but they

historically had. An additional \$2M (up from \$1.5M in 2023) was proposed for local road maintenance as part of the operating budget for a total dedicated to local roads of over \$5.78M. The 3rd road bond that was sold in early 2020 completes the over \$60M in bonding authorization for the program, which was transitioning to maintaining the roads rather than rebuilding them. The CIP currently recommended the next item to be bonded be for the 1st phase of facilities improvements starting in 2024 for the construction of a police and fire substation on South River Road. The plan included an additional bond for facilities in 2027 as existing road bonds were paid off. The facilities plan represents their most significant financial investment since the roads program and was vital to the long term success of their emergency response program and personnel. Multiple public presentations on the proposed South River Road Police and Fire Complex would be completed this fall. Also reflected in the plan was debt service for the nearly \$4.4M bond authorized by the voters in 2023 for the installation of a 1 MW solar array at the capped landfill and conversion to electrical compactors at the Transfer Station. The remaining Recreation Plan improvements were shown to be completed over time by saving \$125K a year and completing field improvements every 2-3 years. Selvoski Field was being rebuilt this year, and they've done Sportsman Field and Riley Field in the same way. 2024 was the 3rd year of saving to replace the turf at Sportsman Field in 2031 estimated at \$800K. Included in the CIP was the replacement of emergency response vehicles, DPW vehicles and equipment, Town valuations update, plan updates, and savings for furnace, roof, and other building maintenance matters. The equipment portion of the Plan was significantly impacted by inflation and supply chain issues that resulted in a minimum 15% increase in the cost of vehicles. Delivery times for ambulances, fire trucks, and dump trucks was generally 24-40 months or more than double what they previously experienced. They need to have money available sooner in order to place orders in time to have deliveries in time to stay on their replacement schedule. The plan includes four new projects for 2024; capital reserve accounts for Town Hall, Library, and BCTV that currently do not have reserves and a forth for recreation trail improvements. The plan proposes to close the Library parking lot, septic system, boiler, and carpet reserves with the remaining funds being transferred to the new Library reserve. He wasn't sure why the Library had specific breakout ones where as all of the other buildings had general ones that were catch all. The plan was flexible all the way up until Town Meeting in March and was part of the budget, so the Council could make changes as part of their budget review. He welcomed any comments they had while he works on his budget over the next month so changes could be made as part of what he submits to them in one month. He received one comment from a Planning Board member that was specific to the cistern project that was a new project last year. That member felt very strongly that he should be placing a higher priority on that project and getting the first cisterns installed sooner rather than proposed in the current draft CIP, which was still a couple of years out before that first cistern would be installed. If money was not object, he would agree, but they could have that conversation as they go forward in the budget process.

Mr. Sawyer stated that the CIP was available via the Council's agenda, but they would establish the budget link under the Town Manager for 2024 and place it there as well.

c. Approval of 2024 Town Council Meeting Dates

Mr. Sawyer stated that the list of dates reflected a similar schedule that they've always had. The January dates were also their budget public hearings. Town Meeting was listed

as March 13th and their organizational meeting on the 18th, which was the Monday following. All of the dates were consistent with this year and previous years.

MOTION by Councilor Radke that the Bedford Town Council approve the 2024 Town Council meeting dates as presented. Seconded by Councilor Gilbert. Vote taken – Motion Passed – 6-0.

5. OLD BUSINESS – None.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

a. Public Session – Safety Complex Tour, September 13, 2023

MOTION by Councilor Radke that the Bedford Town Council approve the minutes of the September 13, 2023 Safety Complex Tour. Seconded by Councilor Gilbert. Seconded by Councilor . Vote taken – Motion Passed – 5-0-1 (Greazzo abstained as he was not present).

b. Public Session – September 13, 2023

MOTION by Councilor Radke that the Bedford Town Council approve the minutes of the September 13, 2023 Public Session. Seconded by Councilor Gilbert. Vote taken – Motion Passed – 6-0.

7. TOWN MANAGER REPORT

- 1) Friday, October 6, 2023 – Last day to change party affiliation prior to the 2024 Presidential Primary Election. This could be done during regular business hours with the Town Clerk and the Supervisors of the Checklist will also be holding an extra session on the 6th, 7:00-7:30 PM, Town Office Building. Councilor Radke stated that it was important to change your party affiliation as they head into the Presidential Primary. After that election, you would be able to change it again. You would have an opportunity to change it throughout the year, but it was important to change it now if you want affect the Presidential Primary. Mr. Sawyer stated that if you are undeclared you can pick either ballot and change back to undeclared before you leave the polls.
- 2) Selvoski Field Construction – All of the poles were in and sod started going down this week. The biggest improvement would be the drainage as the field was often unplayable due to water conditions as well as the lighting, which was not in yet. Having the field available for extended hours starting next year would be a great improvement for their female softball players and a great addition to the community.
- 3) Bedford Center Road Construction – The water line and road reconstruction project, finally they have pavement on Bedford Center Road and N. Amherst Road. That was the primary conclusion of the work for this year. There were service connections that hopefully would be done to residences and businesses along the way, but they shouldn't have the same kind of detours that they've experienced and apologize for the long delay of that section of road not being paved. The road would stay in that condition until spring after the service connections were all done and the entire section all the way to BCTV/Meetinghouse Road would be overlaid as part of the project.
- 4) September 30 – Fall Fair, Educational Farm at Joppa Hill, 10 AM - 4 PM.

- 5) October 1 – Library Concerts & Cookies Series, Daniel Bennett Group, 2:30-4:00 PM, please register through the Library website.
- 6) Sunday Concerts & Cookies Series – 2023 – 2024 – Hosted by the Friends of the Bedford Library. Free community events, 2:30 – 4:00 PM, doors open at 2:15 PM.
 - Sunday, October 1st - Daniel Bennett Group, Jazz & Woodwinds
 - Sunday, November 5th - Laszio Gardony, Pianst
 - Sunday, December 3rd - Funky Divas, Rock/Pop Holiday Celebration
 - Sunday, February 25th - Steve Blunt, Concert for Famililies
 - Sunday, March 3rd - Jeff Snow, Celtic Music
 - Sunday, April 7th - Rob Dionne, Keyboard & Vocal SingalongRegister online or at the Library.
- 7) October 5 – Thursday Theater at the Library, “Asteroid City”, 2 PM and 6:30 PM, please register through the Library website. It’s free.
- 8) REI has announce that they will have a Grand Opening on Friday, October 6, 2023 at 10 AM with special events happening throughout the opening weekend.
- 9) October 8 – Cinema Sunday at the Library with discussion and viewing of “Arsenic and Old Lace”, 1:30-4:30 PM, please register through the Library website.
- 10) October 9 – Columbus Day, The Library will be closed to the public for staff training; all other facilities will be open; Transfer Station will be closed as typical on Mondays.
- 11) October 19 – Town Office Building Closed for required staff training, 1–4:30 PM.
- 12) Trick-or-Treating is scheduled for Tuesday, October 31st from 6–8 PM.
- 13) Facilities – The Facilities Communications Committee, BCTV team, Jeanne Walker and the Council’s reps had been working on their first video; it’s a 4-minute video (played for the Council). They also had a table at the Safety Complex open house, which was well received and people were interested in the project and very positive about it. He thanked the Communications Subcommittee and Sue Mullen, a member of that subcommittee, for narrating the video, and Councilors Gilbert and Thomas for their work on getting the video out and other presentations, PowerPoints that they were preparing for their rollout of information to community members. They would meet with anybody anywhere over the next several months. That was the first of several videos that help explain the entire project and process as they go forward.

8. COUNCILOR COMMENTS AND COMMITTEE UPDATES

Councilor Bemiss stated that Astroid City was released this year. They had a Dredge & Fill application at the Conservation Commission meeting last night for a new sand shed at DPW. They discussed a project at Joppa Hill for restoration of some of the grounds, which would be coming to the Town Council to talk about a partnership for funding. They would also ask the Town Council to accept a grant for the Marsden-Dunlap parking area. They approved a request for a memorial bench for a puppy that used to walk on the trails and had passed away, which will be at Joppa Hill. The Big Read was still going on.

Councilor Gilbert stated that the Zoning Board met and approved four variances and one equitable waiver. One of their biggest issues at the EFJH was parking when they have an event. If people have trouble parking on Saturday, they could park at the soccer fields at Joppa Hill; they’ve cut a path through to the Farm. He encouraged people to look at the website. He mentioned the event last week concerning housing. The land use boards and Town Council discussed steps forward. They were looking at a study to see what they could do in Town from a perspective of different housing; zoning that could change, or

what to be brought up to the public. The next meeting was going to be a forum where people could ask questions; November 14th at 6:00 PM in the high school cafeteria. They all did a workshop, gave their suggestions, and the two consultants were going to compile all of the data and come up with a presentation and discussion at what they could look at going forward. Councilor Radke pointed out that it wasn't taxpayer money doing the study. It was NH Invest, a \$100K grant they received. The goal was to come up with a report or recommendations moving forward. Councilor Strand thought it was interesting and that they were doing it the right way in terms of going grassroots and community first and going back to some common denominators that he thought everyone agreed with in terms of community buy-in, local control and not having it be a top-down thing, which nobody wants. They want to maximize any opportunities they have in Town. He enjoyed being at the same table with Councilor Gilbert. Councilor Gilbert thought it was very interesting. One of the things they promoted and was said was local control; it was very well driven home. He thought an interesting statistic was 63% of the kids in their school system were from single family homes. It were going to have to weigh all of the alternatives; by no means was it going to be shoved down people's throats. Everybody had a voice. Chairman Carter thought it put everybody on the same page, because they were all sitting there listening to the same thing. From what he heard from his table it was very well received. Councilor Gilbert stated that anything that goes anywhere had to be voted on by the public. Chairman Carter encouraged everyone to come out on November 14th. Councilor Bemiss added that if you go to the Town website, Planning & Zoning, in the top left-hand, that's where they would click for the survey. There were four different surveys depending on which category you fall into; current residents, perspective residents, builders, and employers. Councilor Strand thought one of the things they kept coming back to was that Bedford had done it effectively on their own for the majority of the years that responsible development had happened and it was really up to private stakeholders.

Councilor Radke stated that last night they had a Charter Commission public hearing and had several people speak regarding the proposed Charter changes. After the public hearing, the Commission reviewed the proposed changes as well as the final report; it's all in draft form. The next step was the proposed changes would now move forward and be reviewed by the Secretary of State's office, Attorney General's office, and the Department of Revenue Administration. They have 45 days to review and get back to them. They would meet again one more time after they get those reports. She believed it would be on the ballot in 2024, so the public would have the opportunity to vote on the proposed changes to the Charter. More information would be coming out soon. They had Highway Safety Committee meeting and talked about the intersection at New Boston and Joppa Hill. They were recommending putting on Joppa Hill some blinking stop signs to stop the traffic. Chairman Carter stated that unfortunately the last two accidents, someone drove right through the stop sign and got t-boned. Councilor Radke stated that it was to make sure people stop. New Boston Road was a fast road and the State was unwilling to reduce the speed limit, so they were going to try and encourage people to stop before they turn onto New Boston. They had a discussion about the intersection of McAllister and New Boston. The Town engineer was going to work with the resident at the corner of McAllister and New Boston to see if they could move some vegetation to make the sight distance a little better. The same thing at 263 North Amherst Road. There is a blind driveway. The Town engineer was also going to work with that homeowner to see if they could get a better sight vision or some other ideas and thoughts to help that resident. The volunteer appreciation breakfast was set for Saturday, November 4th, starting between

8:30 and 9:00 AM. She would be getting all of the paperwork out and doing a blast to all of the volunteers of their boards and commissions. She was looking forward to that.

Chairman Carter stated that the Town Council received a ‘thank you’ from the residents of the HOA at Bedford Hills, Barrington Drive, for lowering the speed from 30 to 25 MPH. The employee appreciation day would be Friday, October 20th, 1-4 PM, at the Fire Dept. They will open a bay or two to put some tables up. They are calling it ‘Cider & Donuts’. They will have a couple of other things they will plan for that. To show appreciation to all of the employees. It allows them to have a meeting spot, so people could stop by; Fire, Police, DPW, any employee. He mentioned driving down from the lakes region through Bristol, and he saw a safety complex that was being built on the side of the road. It looked exactly what Bedford was going to be doing. He mentioned the Town Council liaison assignments; it was pretty much the same as last year. They were encouraged to start contacting those departments once the Town Manager had the budget out to the Council. They were changing things up when it came to the Town Council workshop. Usually it’s on a Saturday in November, which would have been the 4th, but they’ve broken it up into Wednesday night sessions; 11/1, 11/8, and 11/15 if needed, starting at 5 PM. Dinner would be supplied on those nights. It seemed that breaking it up might be the best thing to do. Mr. Sawyer stated that they would need the 15th based on staff availability. There were a couple that couldn’t make the earlier dates. He received a letter from the Attorney General Department of Justice concerning Town of Bedford election review and follow-up dated 9/15/23. It also went to Town Clerk Kellar, former Moderator Klein, and Moderator Shaughnessy. It read, *‘On January 30, 2023, this office sent a letter requiring Town officials to contact two affected voters whose absentee ballots had not been counted. On March 21, 2023, the Town provided copies of written letters that the Town had sent to those two affected voters. Because the Town took all required remedial actions, this letter confirms that this matter is now closed.’* Lastly, he stopped into the Live Free Refillery, introduced himself, welcomed them to Bedford, and met the owner. It was pretty interesting what you could get. They’ve been open for about two months. He thought it was a great place. Councilor Bemiss stated that she went in there; it’s by Jonathan’s Jewelers. It’s reducing packaging, which reduces their landfill, which reduces their environmental issues. You can bring in a clean container; they would weigh it empty, you fill it with whatever you want, and then they weigh it on the way out. You are only paying for the things inside the container. They sell containers there as well. She thought it was a fabulous concept and the more people go there, the more variety of products they would have. Chairman Carter thought it was a great business to be in Bedford.

9. NON-PUBLIC – RSA 91-A:3 (if necessary)

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Councilor Radke to adjourn. Seconded by Councilor Bemiss. Vote taken – Motion Passed – 6-0.

Public meeting adjourned at 7:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn Boufford