

Town of Fowler November 9, 2023 Regular Scheduled Board Meeting Minutes & Public Hearing on the Proposed 2024 Town Budget at 6PM.

The Town of Fowler Regular scheduled Town Board meeting was held on the above date with all Board members present. Also, present were Town Clerk Tami Gale, Highway Superintendent Randy Durham, Bookkeeper Barbara Finnie, Assessor Chair Kathleen Besaw, Code Enforcement Officer Glen Besaw, Terrell Ferrer, Anthony Seguin, John and Deb Walsh, Todd Bates, Leo Knight, Dale Munn, Dave Fenlong, Susan Fenlong, Jackie Kelly, and Rachel Hunter, Editor of the Gouverneur Tribune Press.

Supervisor Newvine called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM then proceeded with the pledge of allegiance.

Supervisor Newvine led a moment of silence to honor our military men and women, our local health care workers, and for our families who have lost loved ones in the Town including Brad Farr, C. MacDonald Grout, Randy House, and Dale Hutton.

Supervisor Newvine asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the October 4, 2023, Town Board Meeting. A motion was made by Councilperson Cleveland, seconded by Councilperson Bishop to approve the minutes. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

OPEN PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED 2024 BUDGET

At 6:01pm Supervisor Newvine asked for a motion to open the Public Hearing on the proposed 2024 Town budget. A motion was made by Councilperson Simmons seconded by Councilperson Bishop to open the Public Hearing on the Proposed 2024 Town budget. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

Supervisor Newvine reported the Public Hearing on the proposed 2024 Budget would be left open for as long as anyone needs questions or clarification and stated there were copies of the proposed budget available for the public to view.

Presentation by Jacquelyn Kelly, Superintendent of Schools, on the Capital Improvement Project

Supervisor Newvine introduced Superintendent of Schools, Jackie Kelly to meeting attendees with a presentation on the proposed Capital Improvement Project which will be voted on December 12, 2023 at the Gouverneur High School Auditorium from 12:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Ms. Kelly provided Capital Project Overview packets to all those in attendance and reported a building condition survey had been completed by Bernier, Carr, and Associates in the spring of 2022, which identified needs at each building within the district.

Ms. Kelly discussed a prioritized list of deficiencies was generated for the High School, Middle School, Elementary School, and Bus Garage.

Capital Project Estimate of Costs

Site Work	\$12,425,000
High School	\$38,650,000
Middle School	\$ 1,835,000
Elementary School	\$ 1,380,000
Bus Garage	<u>\$ 3,090,000</u>
	\$57,380,000

Ms. Kelly went over several of the projects to be included in the proposed Capital Project and reported the Capital Project/Bus Purchase is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Ms. Kelly answered several questions from meeting attendees.

Supervisor Newvine thanked Ms. Kelly for coming to the Town of Fowler with the Proposed Capital Project presentation.

OPENING OF FUEL BIDS

Supervisor Newvine reported only 1 fuel bid had been received and handed the sealed bid to Councilperson Cleveland to open and read aloud:

Tripp Fuel, a Division of Glider Oil

Item #1 Low Sulfur Diesel : .17 cents reference today's price is \$3.506/gallon

Item #2 Regular Grade Gasoline: .17 cents reference today's price is \$2.452/gallon

Item #3 No.2 Heating Fuel for the Town Barn (50/50 Fuel Oil & Kerosene Mix)

Heating Oil: .17 cents reference today's price is \$3.408/gallon

Kerosene: .17 cents reference today's price is \$4.340/gallon

Item #4 No.2 Heating Fuel Oil for Town Hall: .17 cents reference today's price is \$3.408/gallon

All prices do not include any applicable taxes. A non-collusive bidding certificate was attached to the bid.

Supervisor Newvine stated that all the items #1 through #4 were all .17 cents and the board members questioned what the .17 cents meant. Highway Superintendent Durham stated he felt it meant .17 cents above cost, and they would make .17 cents a gallon by the sounds.

Supervisor Newvine discussed the need for the .17 cents to be clarified by the bidder. Councilperson Bishop added he would like to know if the .17 cents were a set price or if the price would fluctuate. It was discussed Hwy. Superintendent Durham would need to seek clarification from the bidder.

Supervisor Newvine asked the board if they would like to accept the bid, and not award the bid until clarification is garnered on the bid, After some discussion, a motion was made by Councilperson Andrews, seconded by Councilperson Cleveland to accept the bid, and not award the fuel bid until the December 11 board meeting, allowing clarification from the bidder to be received and reviewed. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

CLOSING THE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED 2024 BUDGET

Supervisor Newvine asked if there were any questions on the proposed 2024 Town budget.

With no questions received, at 6:36PM, a motion was made by Councilperson Andrews seconded by Councilperson Bishop to close the public hearing on the proposed 2024 budget. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION #17 OF 2023

Adopting the Town of Fowler Budget for Fiscal Year 2024.

Supervisor Newvine submitted Resolution #17 of 2023, a Resolution, approving and adopting the operating budget for the Town of Fowler for Fiscal Year 2024 to the board for adoption. A motion was made by Councilperson Cleveland seconded by Councilperson Bishop. All in favor. MOTION CARRIED.

AYES: 5 NEWVINE, SIMMONS, BISHOP, ANDREWS, CLEVELAND

NAYS: 0

TOWN DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Town Justice

Town Justice Tim Knowlton:

- Court was not held on Tuesday, November 8th, due to the general election.
- He attended the magistrates meeting in Canton, which are held on the fourth Monday of each month. This month there was an informative presentation on DWI's.

- Several of his felony cases have been moved up to the Superior Court, to include manslaughter cases. They were packed up and mailed to the County by Court Clerk Ashley.
- Court Officer Willie Wilson continues to do a great job and it is very nice to have him during court.

Bookkeeper

Bookkeeper Barbara Finnie:

- Provided Town of Fowler Cash Balance month ending October 31, 2023, and Budget Balances month ending October 31, 2023 to the board for their review.
- Reported there is \$81,119.34 of ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Funds at this time.
- Reported 89.26% of the General Fund has been spent and 126.26% of revenue has been received. It should be about 83% spent and is a little over.
- Reported 33.01% of the Highway Fund has been spent and 83.58% of revenue has been received. It is under spent, while waiting to pay for the new 2024 Mack Plow Truck when it arrives. Any funds left over will be placed into the Fund Balance for the next year.

Assessors

Assessor Chair Kathleen Besaw:

- Reported it has been business as usual.
- Exemption renewals were mailed out last week to clergy, BOCES, and various others.
- Senior Citizen renewals will be mailed out the first week in December. She reported the State did raise the rate for senior citizen exemption and asked if the Town of Fowler was planning on keeping our rate the same, which is a maximum of \$20,000. Supervisor Newvine asked what the State raised their rate to, and Assessor Chair Besaw reported it was raised to \$58,000.
- Assessor Chair Besaw reported the Town of Fowler is right about where other towns are. It was the consensus of the board to leave the senior citizen exemption rate the same.
- She has started auditing the houses that are being put on the real estate market for sale for hundreds of thousands of dollars. Explaining that anything that comes across her desk, she will pull the data cards, look on satellite imagery, go into their real property system files, and look at what they are being assessed on and what the assessor's office is showing they are being assessed on, and offered the following example.
- A house on Sylvia Lake is on the real estate market listed for \$450,000.00. The only thing they are being assessed on is the house. She reported: it has a 2-car garage with a loft, a huge storage shed, a windowed patio, a deck along the entire front of the house, a small dock, a boat house, and all kinds of additional features, and it is being assessed only on the house. None of the other items are listed on the data card, or anywhere in the parcels' assessor files for information. No pictures, no nothing. She reported it is the third one she has found like this in a week.
- When she finds discrepancies with assessments not being done on what is actually located on the property, she is going to be adding the items to the property's assessment and informing the property owner by mail. She reported people aren't getting building permits, and re-assessments aren't done, unless the assessors have had a reason to go to a property, so in many cases the "extras" being seen on a property may be several years old. She reported she would like to be as transparent as possible to all involved.
- She asked the board to really listen to Bruce Green, with the Real Property Office, when he comes to discuss the benefits of having a revaluation done in the Town of Fowler. She stated the Town is so Topsy-Turvey we are headed towards a less than 8% equalization rate.

- Assessor Chair Besaw stated the whole idea of a revaluation is that it has everyone paying their fair share of taxes. People who are under-assessed are having people who may not have had anything added at all to their properties and have had no improvements done to their homes, paying taxes for the people who are so grossly under-assessed, and those are the people who can't afford to do it.
- Assessor Chair Besaw reported there are only 3 towns in all of St. Lawrence County, that haven't had a re-valuation done.

Supervisor Newvine stated he is going to ask Bruce Green to do a presentation to the town after the first of the new year.

- Reported the town has an on-going court case involving one of the hydro plants. It has been in a small claims court for 5 years. It has now moved on to the Federal Court. She reported if they were to win this case, the Town will have to re-pay them for the last 5 years of taxes that have been paid, the difference plus interest.

Historian

Historian Karen Simmons reported:

- She has been working on the final of 4 genealogies, one of the persons had sent a check for the food programs.
- She is starting to work on a list of names of people who served during the Korean Conflict.

Animal Control

Councilperson Karen Simmons reported for Dan Moyer who was not in attendance:

- DCO Moyer has received many dog complaints.
- Several complaints were made involving the Amish dogs on the Country Club Rd which resulted in several tickets being issued and the owner being summoned to Town of Fowler Court.
- Several complaints were received about excessive barking dogs on Main St. Hailesboro Road. Several people were found to have multiple dogs and many of the dogs were found to be unlicensed with the Town of Fowler. DCO Moyer has given 2 weeks for the owners to obtain dog licenses for the animals involved.

Beaver Control

Councilperson Karen Simmons reported for Moyer's Wildlife Control who was not in attendance:

- A bill has been turned in for beaver control that is in the invoices to be approved at tonight's meeting.
- He is presently working on beaver control on Fullerville Rd, Chub Lake Rd, and Shantyville Rd.

Code Enforcement

Code Enforcement Officer Glen Besaw:

- It has been business as usual.
- Two of the new homes have been completed.
- There are a couple of new homes going up on Sylvia Lake.
- He has received 1 complaint that turned out to be a conflict between neighbors.
- 1 person was found working without a building permit.
- He has received information that he can now send a certified letter to serve tickets for violations.
- He would rather give people a chance to comply before giving out tickets.
- He asked anyone who sees someone working without a building permit to call him and he will address it the same day.

Town Clerk

Town Clerk Tami Gale reported:

- The gross DEC sales for the month were \$1,746.00 with the Towns commission being \$78.67, she had issued 1 marriage license , issued 1 one-day marriage officiant license, collected \$110.00 in kennel fees, licensed 40 dogs, handled 9 building permits, issued 11 Certified Death Certificates, sold 1 bicentennial book and had taken in \$.75 in photocopies.
- She had received a scrap metal check in the amount of \$171.50 from NorthStar Auto & Salvage for 1.65 tons.
- She had taken in \$41.00. from family day item sales, and there are many more items to sell if anyone is looking for stocking stuffers for Christmas.
- She and Deputy Town Clerk Kim Reed had attended a government training conference at Potsdam State University on October 10th with several other dignitaries of the Town of Fowler.
- She had scheduled the town hall and town barn furnaces to be cleaned on November 21st with M & M Heating and Cooling.
- She is still looking for newsletter information from a few department heads.

Highway Department

Highway Superintendent Randy Durham:

- Reported the highway department is ready to go for the winter.
- He has not received a status from Viking on when the Town will receive the new 2024 plow truck.
- Reported the Town of Fowler needs to declare its seasonal roads, as is done every November. A motion was made by Councilperson Cleveland seconded by Councilperson Simmons to declare the following roads as seasonal roads from December 1, 2023, to April 1, 2024. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

SEASONAL ROADS DECLARED

Stone Road from bus turn around to Orebed Road.

Sibley Road from bus turn around to State Land.

Fire Falls Road from Luke Gates home to Town of Fowler Line.

Lamb Road from Country Club Road to Town of Fowler Line.

Shantytown Road from the Besaw Farm to the plow turn around on Byrns Road end. (Corral)

Discussion on 1998 International Plow Truck

Hwy. Superintendent Durham reported the 1998 International Plow Truck that was earmarked to give to BOCES, after it was declared as excess at the April 10th board meeting, put out for bid, with the single bid received being rejected at the May 8th board meeting, remains unclaimed by BOCES, and asked the board what they would like to do with the plow truck.

After some discussion, it was the consensus of the board to put the 1998 International Plow Truck back out for bids to come in at the December 11th board meeting. It was discussed the town clerk would re advertise the bid.

Councilmembers

Councilperson Scott Cleveland:

- Suggested the pavilion rental times be changed to: from Memorial Day to Labor Day, stating the pavilion had been winterized for the season and he had received a very last-minute call to rent the pavilion. Councilperson Cleveland opened the town hall bathrooms to be used in this instance, but

suggested the pavilion rental times follow the timeframes of most State Parks, being from Memorial Day to Labor Day. It was the consensus of the board to change the dates.

- Discussed the possibility of having music in the pavilion in the summer months using some of the pavilion fund for the entertainment. It was the consensus of the board that this was a good idea.

Councilperson Lynn Bishop:

- Notified Hwy. Superintendent Durham that there is a light out by the tin barn that he would like to have fixed.
- Asked the highway department to cut down the two dead trees behind the town barn.
- Asked if the County had been called about the yellow lines not being painted properly on County Route 22 and County Route 24. It was discussed both Hwy. Superintendent Durham and Supervisor Newvine had made calls with the concern, and it won't be addressed until next year as paving season is over.
- Asked Councilperson Simmons if she had any new information on the new mandatory dog kennel upgrade specifications. She reported she has nothing new to share.

Councilperson Jeff Andrews:

- Had his questions answered previously in the meeting and had no further comments.

Councilperson Karen Simmons:

- In the month of October, the HAP food pantry had a total of 26 visits.
- She has had four individuals donate groceries, one person donate money, and one person donate lap blankets that she will place in the Christmas delivery for the SOS Program.
- The next SOS delivery will be made in December and there are 99 households expected to receive the delivery.

Councilperson-Elect Leo Knight Jr.

- Thanked everyone for their support, as well as thanked everyone now for having patience with him as he moves into his newly elected seat as a councilman.

Supervisor Ricky W. Newvine:

- Congratulated everyone who won their recent election.
- Reported DANC representatives attended his last supervisor's meeting. The Town of Fowler will be in good standing for housing grants after having joined a couple of organizations with their direction.
- A list is being updated for people who are seeking grants in the Town of Fowler.
- It is likely going to be 2025 before any grant money will be made available.
- DANC representatives also let him know that if the debris from the nuisance property on County Route 22 is hauled to Rodman, the Town would receive a 25% discount in the tipping fee.
- Reported he has been asked if a light could be installed at the turn around on Glasby Rd. He reported he contacted National Grid to have the light added.
- He has received a letter from Generac, asking if the Town of Fowler wanted to purchase an extended warranty on the generator. It was the consensus of the board to purchase the 10-year extended warranty.
- Reported he will be sending some of the requested information to NYMIR (Town of Fowler insurance underwriter) the following day in response to a visit to town facilities earlier in the year.
- Reported he will have his updates for the newsletter tomorrow.
- He had accepted the invitation to tour the Gouverneur Correctional Facility and was very impressed.

Public Comment

- Rachel Hunter, editor of the Gouverneur Tribune Press, asked if the playground itself gets closed for the winter. Councilperson Cleveland reported the playground remains open all winter, and year-round. The pavilion rental used to be available until November 1st, and that is what was changed at tonight's board meeting, it will now be available for rental purposes from Memorial Day until Labor Day.
- Kathy Besaw reported she had something to add, stating Edelweiss Holdings, Inc, a lumber company out of Lowville, who owns three private forests in the Town of Fowler, are going to split one of the parcels into 25 and 50 acre lots and sell them.

Supervisor Newvine asked for a motion to audit the bills. A motion was made by Councilperson Cleveland seconded by Councilperson Simmons to audit the bills. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

The bills audited for the General and Highway Fund were #417 to #466 with a total of \$23,698.39.

Executive Session for discussion on union contract negotiations

At 7:23PM, Supervisor Newvine asked for a motion to enter executive session, with Councilmembers Simmons, Bishop, Andrews, and Cleveland, to discuss union contract negotiations for the highway department. A motion was made by Councilperson Simmons seconded by Councilperson Cleveland to enter executive session. All in Favor. Motion Carried.

At 7:52PM, Supervisor Newvine asked for a motion to end the executive session to discuss union contract negotiations for the highway department. A motion was made by Councilperson Cleveland seconded by Councilperson Bishop to end the executive session. All in Favor. Motion Carried.

Executive Session Minutes Provided By Supervisor Newvine

In an effort to make Fowler highway workers' wage scale more in line with the current pay for workers in their profession, the Town Board agreed to increase all qualified CDL licensed employees hourly wage by \$2.50 per hour (new wage \$22.82 per hour). This will take effect with pay period beginning November 22, 2023.

Unqualified workers will receive an increase of \$1.25 per hour. This action will negate and replace the 2% increase scheduled for 1/1/2024.

Morale issues are in the process of discussion between the Board and all those involved in the daily operation of the Fowler Town Highway Department.

The request for additional health care coverage will be a part of negotiation for the contract subsequent to the current articles of the agreement that expire on 12/31/2024. We hope to begin discussion on same in September of 2024.

This action does not alter or amend any other part of any agreement in place between the Town of Fowler and the Fowler Town Highway Department.

On a motion of Councilperson Simmons, seconded by Councilperson Bishop, and agreed to this day November 13, 2023. All in Favor. MOTION CARRIED.

Roll Call:

Ayes: 5 Newvine, Simmons, Bishop, Andrews, Cleveland

Nays: 0

Absent: 0

Town of Fowler Supervisor

Ricky W. Newvine

The next regular scheduled board meeting will be held on December 11, 2023 at 6:00PM.

With no further business, on a motion of Councilperson Cleveland, seconded by Councilperson Bishop, the meeting was adjourned at 7:54PM PM. CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Tami Gale; Town Clerk