

Town of Alexander Selectmen's Meeting

5 June 2025

Attendance:

Skip Colson
Carl Oakes
David Sanford
Beth Johnson

Kristy Crawford
Jane Manza
Joe Manza
Ted Carter
Foster Carlow Jr.
Larry Hill

Meeting called to order at 6:00 PM.
Pledge of Allegiance recited.

Additions / Deletions

None.

Approve the Minutes of Previous Meetings

Motion to approve the minutes of the April meeting by David S. and 2nd by Carl
Voting: 4 for

Motion to approve the minutes of the May meeting, as amended, by David S. and 2nd by Carl
Voting: 4 for

Setting the Budget Town Meeting Warrant

Changes to the Town Cemetery Ordinance:
Skip said that a hearing must be held about the cemetery ordinance changes at least 7 days before the Town meeting in which the changes will be voted on. Jane consulted Rhonda by text message and they agreed that the hearing could be held at 5:00 PM on Tuesday 17 June. Skip said they would wait 15 minutes, probably nobody would show up, and that would be the end of the hearing. On the June town meeting warrant, the vote to approve the updated cemetery ordinance would be article number 2.

Ted said that he would like to have the school budget voted on first [before the rest of the town budget.]

Skip said that for Article 3, where the town will vote on the DBU loan, only the first paragraph will be included and Kristy will *not* be signing it.

Skip said he's not totally on board with this article.

Beth said that she would like the verbiage of the article to be changed to say what the August 2020 town meeting warrant article for the DBU construction loan had said:

"The loan will be repaid by those residents of Alexander who utilize the service over the length of the loan."

Kristy explained that this article, as written, was given by Pittman, in order to allow a tax exempt loan.

Ted said that when the loan was put out to bid, that The First Bank approved the loan. Now, 7 years later, it's

time to start paying this loan. The DBU has \$338,000 waiting to pay these loans down. Baileyville and Calais are waiting on Alexander to allow this loan.

Skip agreed that, at some point, the town will have to vote on this warrant article, in order to cover the town's obligation. Having said that, Skip was concerned that:
-Town officials have tried to find out the interest rates for this loan and they have not heard those.

-The loan documents are still not drawn up.

-The article, as written, does not say that the town will be the "co-signer" of the loan. Instead, it looks like it's saying that the town is responsible for the loan, period. (Skip would like the terms of the loan tailored to what the town agreed to.)

-The DBU interlocal agreement and bi-laws are not accurate. How can the town be subject to laws that the DBU doesn't have?

Beth said that, according to Crystal Gallina, the vote on the new loan will demonstrate that it is tax exempt. Kristy said that the town auditor said that it looks to him like the DBU is taking out a loan and the town is guaranteeing it. That is what others have said as well. This is the only way to move forward. Beth said she would not be comfortable voting for something like this without seeing something from the bank in writing. Kristy said that there is something written, but it is a year old, with the interest rate being as of July 2024. Now, they could be negotiating new interest rates. The loan total amount was also as of July 2024.

But Ted pointed out that the bank has maintained that rate and the bank is still honoring the amount.

Beth said that what she has for paperwork expired in 2023. It was fixed at 1.61%.

Ted said that, if this passes, he will recommend to the board to start paying down the debt. The only money this has cost the town is \$2,000 [for the cost of the design] out of total of \$7,000, because \$5,000 came from a private donor.

Discussion ensued about what the town would do if the DBU were to fail. The fiber optic infrastructure would revert to town ownership. The town could sell it off—such as to Pioneer Broadband—to pay the rest of the loan.

Carl asked if the town could pay the loan off early. He said the town should want to pay it off early. Kristy said, yes, if the DBU is dissolved/goes bankrupt, it can be paid off. Ted added that the bank would not have a penalty for early pay off, nor if the DBU renegotiates the interest rate (which is/will be a fixed interest rate). The DBU towns being "in this together" and what that would mean for the new loan, were also discussed.

David S. said he is OK with the article going to town meeting. Carl said he has no problems either. All his questions have been answered.

Beth continued to express reservations such as why the vote for this article was necessary when the loan vote was already done in 2020.

Skip again expressed concern about not having the loan documents on hand. He assumed that everyone involved, at the bank, etc. are honorable people. Still, even with the best of intentions, something can go wrong when it is finally put in writing.

Ted explained what will transpire at the town meeting: At a town meeting in 2020, the town voted for the \$540,000 loan, but because of grants, it ended up being less. Now this new loan will bring everything together. The DBU has 160 homes in Alexander now that use the fiber optic service. That's over 400 people in a population of 520. Part of the function of a town government is to provide infrastructure. That's what the town is doing by doing this. Skip replied that perhaps it should be provided, but without becoming so deeply in debt. This will be article number 3.

Ted asked if Article 3 can be voted on by voice vote. However, Skip said that, because it has to do with money, it must be done by written ballot. Ted was concerned that all the paperwork would confuse voters. Ted said that his spiel will be that the construction of the fiber optic network cost about \$540,000. "We constructed it. We will pay it down." Skip thought that the treasurer should do as much explaining as possible. Additional details could be shared by Ted or Danny Sullivan.

Ted said he would see if Danny could come to the town meeting to explain.

Ted said that the DBU has a total of 1178 customers. Beth agreed that that's a lot of people. Kristy said that Pioneer has really marketed itself.

Administration Account: Kristy did not think there would be any money left in this fund, from which about \$137,000 has been spent. Next year, it should probably be \$150,000, some to be raised from taxes and the rest to be appropriated from the Undesignated Fund. She noticed that that fund seems to coincide with the County tax.

There is \$358,000 in the Undesignated Fund. (There will be more money added before the end of June.) Kristy recommended appropriating \$150,000 from there in total. That would leave a little more than \$200,000, which is near the recommended 10% of the annual town budget.

Animal Welfare Account: \$1,500 were used in that account with \$2,265 left. Kristy recommended putting in money every other year. (The account can be taken down to nothing.) Beth asked how much the town gets for dog licenses. It's between \$300 and \$400 each year. Skip recommended increasing the Animal Control Officer pay by \$150 to bring it up to \$1650 per year. So, raise \$550.

The Fire Department is happy with what it gets right now, which is \$19,200.

No money was used from the General Assistance Fund this year; nobody qualified. So, keep it the same. (The

town is reimbursed 70% by the State. State legislators are considering raising this to 90%).

Solid Waste looks like it will be costing about the same as last year: \$55,000.

For transferring excise tax funds to the Road Account, Kristy thought that \$140,000 would be fine again for this year. About \$139,000 have come in as of today and there are 3 weeks left. Anything over \$140,000 just goes into the Undesignated Fund. (Veteran's exemptions from paying excise taxes are expanding, but not on motor homes.)

The Road Account: Larry went through what needed to be done for the roads in the coming fiscal year: Repair and pave the lower half of the Davis Road into the campground. Raise it by a foot around the intersection with the Crawford Road, feathering the road surface in all three directions. Four or five large rocks that are sticking up in the road would be removed. Jimmy will do his road into the campground at the same time.

Skip said that a sink hole in the Arm Road needs to be repaired and paved. Also there is a section, about 5' by 10' that needs to be paved as a walkway between the main parking lot and the main driveway into the school. That will be part of the handicap parking. (Larry said that the school's back lot needs to be fixed and wondered if the State would provide some money for that. Ted said he would ask the superintendent to look into it.)

Cutting back the roadside brush: Do about \$15,000-worth of a few prioritized roads each year. [One contractor that had bid required at least \$12,750 worth of work in order to come at all.]

Carl said there is quite a bump about a 100 feet into the McArthur Road. A culvert perhaps? Larry will look into it.

The second culvert in the Crawford Road needs to be reset. Perhaps Kevin Dean could do it more cheaply. It shouldn't be more than 3 hours of work. Kevin is going to look at it and give an estimate next week. Larry will let people know.

Larry will get 1000 or 1200 yards of sand for about \$17.50 to \$18 per yard, so about \$22,000 for 1200 yards. The sand to salt mixture will be about 8 to 1. \$13,000 for salt roughly.

Plowing will be \$99,900, a decrease from the previous year.

Road Expenditures:
\$150,000 for paving
\$15,000 for cut back of roadside brush
\$22,000 for sand
\$13,000 for salt

\$99,900 for plowing
\$2000 for mowing
\$5000 regular road maintenance
=\$310,400 total budget [something missing by \$3500]

Road Income:

\$50,000 carry over
\$22,000 LRAP money
\$140,000 Excise tax
= \$212,000

\$310,400
-\$212,000
= \$98,400 still needed

Skip thought that all this money could come from the Undesignated Fund, plus a little extra for unforeseen road repair, totaling \$100,000.

Kristy said that the Undesignated fund should be kept at about 10% of the annual budget. If it's more, the state may say that the town doesn't need as much state subsidy. The town has about \$600,000 in reserve accounts: About \$300,000 is the school's and about \$300,000 is in the town Undesignated Account.

Larry wanted to buy a leaf blower to get rid of the winter gravel at the road intersections. Carl instead recommended that a broom at the end of a weed wacker works better and is less expensive. Larry agreed and will find out how much that would cost.

Forest Fire Insurance Fund: Kristy explained the reason for the forest fire fund and that the town has been putting in \$6,000 each year. The portion that the town would have to pay for forest fire fighting services to be brought in is based on town valuation, which is currently understood by the State to be \$84.9 million.

The Cemetery Accounts have about \$8,000.

Carl said that Rhonda has asked for the same amount as last year: \$5,000.

Capital Investment: Kristy recommended to put another \$1,000 in.

Skip said that this fund has been very helpful. The town has used that for a number of things.

Downeast Community Partners has requested \$1128.06. This is 5% of the \$22,561 worth of services that it provided to people in a year in Alexander, such as heating and electric bill assistance, holiday gifts for kids, and transportation.

Building Maintenance: \$3200 were spent. \$6000 is the estimated balance forward.

The office floor mold was brought up.

Beth suggested a mold test kit to find out for sure. Kristy said she has been working on finding out about that. She put bleach on the floor, but that didn't do anything to it. Lesliann had a drill with a bristle brush. This made the floor really clean, but in a week, it had come back.

Carleton Davis had recommended putting down sealing wax on the floor regularly. The school has a burnisher, but it is too big for the office.

Kristy said that if mold remediation is needed, it would be around \$10,000.

Skip recommended to find out what it is and to raise \$3000 for that account.

Property Tax Lay Pay Maximum Interest Rate

Kristy thought that if property taxes will be going up, maybe give everybody a break on the interest rate. But Skip said that if you want to give somebody a break, give the break to people who pay their taxes on time such as by giving them a 2% discount if they pay it early. There are people that are responsible and pay their bills on time year after year. *They* need a break. The people who pay late can afford to pay their taxes on time, but don't.

Jane also recommended not to have the maximum interest rate because it only hurts the people who are trying.

Kristy agreed that the incentive for paying late taxes is foreclosure, not the increased amount of money to pay based on the interest rate. The town has already brought in most of the taxes and there is less than \$100,000 left to collect the taxes. The (maximum) interest rate, which has been 8.5%, is a way to get some revenue in for the town. This is about \$2,700 extra dollars that come from basically 4 families that are already struggling to pay.

Larry told one guy in town the he was foolish for paying his taxes 3 years late. The guy was angry, but then thought about it for a week and realized it was true. Now, he pays on time every year.

Kristy has been telling people that the tax commitment will be in September. She is moving it back slowly. Next year will be August.

Beth also spoke of the interest rate. Banks make big money on loan interest.

Kristy explained the fairly extensive process of putting a lien on a property, which Skip called "an administrative nightmare".

Beth asked if the increase in the interest rates has made a difference. Kristy said the taxes aren't paid any quicker. Beth said that the town doesn't want the late penalty interest rate to be so low that taxpayers would make more money from interest by keeping it in the bank. David S. preferred not to have the maximum interest rate, (but it could be close to it).

However, since the maximum allowable interest rate will be decreasing to 7.5%, that will be acceptable for now. Carl said that those who have been paying late have had poor management of money.

[Ted leaves at 7:47 PM]

Foster said that the Down East Emergency Medical Services (DEEMS, AKA Downeast Ambulance) will stay the same as it has for over 10 years. Skip asked Foster to send the Board's thanks for not increasing their costs.

Grant Writing: There is no money in this account. Kristy didn't know of anything that might be needed in this regard.

She also thought that the town could vote to move money from the Archive Fund to another fund.

Comprehensive Plan Account money can be moved to the legal fund.

Jane did not think the archive needed anything right now.

Beth said that if the money isn't being used, then it should be moved to where the town could use it. Skip thought it could be moved to the Administrative Fund.

Kristy thought to the Building Maintenance Fund.

Skip said a warrant article would be put in to vote to move the leftover Archive Project money to the Administrative Account.

The Legal Fund has \$7,600. The town spent \$265 of it. (The town no longer keeps a lawyer on retainer).

Skip said that Andy Snowman has said that he would like more money for being the Code Enforcement Officer. His position has not been on the warrant for a while at least. Currently he gets \$2500 a year. He would like more, but did not ask for a specific amount. It could be a 10% raise.

Larry said that, as Chairman of the Planning Board, he calls Andy quite a bit. Andy has come out each time he has been requested.

Skip thought he could get \$250 more. He certainly puts up with a lot...

The CEO is paid by the town and does not fall under "all others" in the town pay scale. He should be paid like the Animal Control Officer. His pay will go up to \$2,750.

Skip said he would post the warrant after Kristy printed it out and each member of the board signed it.

Motion to accept the June 2025 Town Budget Meeting warrant by Skip and 2nd by Beth.

Voting: 4 for.

Cemetery Sign

Jane said that the new sign for the cemetery, along with posts to hold it up, has come in. It was made by Sign Shop North and cost about \$1,700. It will hopefully be put up in July. Skip volunteered to donate his time and tractor (which has an auger to drill the post holes) to help with that. Joe and Skip talked about how to put up the sign on the heavy 6" by 6" posts; also how to attach the sign to the posts.

Scott gave an estimate for stump grinding of \$1,000 or less, about 10 hours of work. Rhonda wasn't sure if that was a good deal or not.

Finances:

Kristy said that the desktop version of Quickbooks is coming to an end and now has to be switched to the online version. Kristy has been using both, trying to

keep the desktop version through the end of the fiscal year, while still keeping the online version up to date and ready for the new fiscal year.

Kristy gave an update on the situation with the people who have had the poverty abatement that was issued by the Board in January. They have come in faithfully at the beginning of every month with the \$100 to pay their property taxes, as they promised.

Also, the late Brenda McPhail's properties are getting taken care of for property taxes.

Kenny Mercier swept the winter sand off of the school parking lot. He offered to sweep the municipal parking lot. If the town buys its own broom or mower, the town can do it. Larry can make that decision.

Carl said that the Fire Department used to take a hose and blow it off.

The town office is now giving out the basic car license plate. Kristy offers the choice of the license plate either with "tree or no tree". She does not deal with vanity plates or non-cars. Everybody that has a chickadee license plate can get the new plate at the town office.

The Hometown Jubilee and Town 200th Anniversary Celebration is coming up on July 12th and 13th.

There will be a garden party, sponsored by the Grange, on June 14th, flag day. People can sell or swap their plants if they want. Refreshments will be there. A flag burning ceremony will be at 4:00 PM.

Beth and Kristy talked about the US flags that were put up on flag poles. Bruce Baker, Carl & Rhonda Oakes, Joe & Jane Manza, the Grange and others have sponsored them for \$35 each, to hopefully go at least through the parade route on the Cooper Road. David D., who is spearheading this, did not want checks made to him personally, so he had them made out to the Alexander Volunteer Fire Department. The bracket that holds the flags will stay up on the pole year round. David D. is not putting them up. Eastern Maine electric put them up for him so far.

Foster said that there will be a meeting of Down East Ambulance at end of the month.

Motion to go into executive session per 1 M.R.S.A § 405 (6)(F) to consider 2 concealed weapons permits by David S. and 2nd by Carl at 8:33 PM.

Voting: 4 for

Out of executive session at 8:45 PM

Motion to approve 2 concealed weapons permits by Beth and 2nd by Carl

Voting: For 4

Motion to adjourn by Skip and 2nd by David S.

Voting: For 4