

**Georgia Selectboard Informational Meeting
Chris Letourneau Meeting Room via Zoom
Monday, February 28, 2022
7:00 p.m.**

Approved: Approved

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Board Members Present: Kyle Grenier, Carolyn Branagan, Sara Nadeau, Michelle Phelps, Scott St. Onge

Board Members Absent: None

Staff & Other Board Members Present: Amber Baker, Town Administrator; Ashley Sterling, Selectboard Clerk; Cheryl Letourneau, Town Clerk; Dawn Penney, Assistant Town Clerk (zoom), Bridget Stone, Library Director; Ben Ebert, Library Trustee; Gary Deziel, Library Trustee; Keith Baker, Fire Chief

Public Present: Karen Grenier, Fred & Heather Grimm, Julie Taylor, Buddy, LCATV; Catherine Messer, Valerie Keller, Doug Bergstrom, Jessica Denton, Sarah Williams, Catherine Lavigne, Ken Grenier, Ben & Barb Dow, Russell Lavigne, Sara & Joe Walker, Landon Baker, Jamieson Barber, Pat King, Erin Yandow, Jessica Tromblee, Lynn Cemel, Lori Hobart, Sarah Formalee, Sarah Tuttle, Veronica Fallon, Brendon Riodran, Carrie Hungerford, Amanda Forcier and several others who attended and could not be identified.

Carolyn Branagan, Town Moderator, opened the Selectboard Informational Meeting for Monday, February 28, 2022, for the Town of Georgia via Zoom with an introduction of herself as current Town Moderator and Selectboard Member at 7:01 p.m.

A PowerPoint presentation was shared on screen for those on Zoom.

Article I: To elect all Town Officers as required

Carolyn informed the viewers which Officers will be voted on.

Article II: Shall the voters authorize payment of real and personal property taxes on Monday, October 17, 2022, by delivery to the Town Hall postmarked on or before that date?

Presented by Sara Nadeau

Article III: Shall the voters enter an agreement with the St. Albans Recreation Department to support the difference between the residential vs. non-residential rate at a cost of \$18,000.00 for a term of one year?

Michelle Phelps explained to the viewers that it is the intent of the Selectboard that moving forward, the St. Albans Recreation Department will become a line item in the budget. This Article would allow Georgia residents to pay the St. Albans rate when signing up for recreational programs.

Heather & Fred Grimm asked if there was a cap on the program and if the Town goes over the \$18,000.00; would the Town be liable? Michelle let Mr. & Mrs. Grimm know that yes, if the resident usage is over the allotted \$18,000.00, then the Town would be liable.

Jessica Denton asked for confirmation that this article be added as a line item going forward. Both Carolyn and Michelle confirmed that yes, it would be.

Doug Bergstrom asked the Selectboard, if the vote is on \$18,000.00, how can the Town exceed that amount? Amber Baker, Town Treasurer, answered that the City of St. Albans did not give the Town of Georgia a dollar amount option. Amber explained that with programs available and a start date of April 1st, 2022, the Selectboard did not see going over this dollar amount.

Carolyn explained to the viewers that the reason the Selectboard added it as an article this year and not a line item is because they were unsure of the usage the program would receive from the Town.

Jessica Fike asked with the starting date April 1, 2022, with the St. Albans Recreation if those who have already registered for an activity, like swim lessons, if they could get reimbursed and when the program will end. Michelle let Jess and the viewers know that if they have already signed up for a program, they would not be reimbursed and went on to say that they can try to withdraw from the program and sign back up under the new rate; but risk the chance of being waitlisted or not getting in at all. Michelle also let her know she, and others, could contact St. Albans Recreation for more information on this. Michelle let the viewers know that the program runs April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023.

Mr. & Mrs. Grimm asked if the \$18,000.00 a direct subsidy or a discounted subsidy, meaning the difference between the residential rate and non-residential rate, is the Town getting a discount on that or is the Town subsidizing the difference? Michelle explained that this would allow the Georgia residents to receive the St. Albans resident rate and this amount would cover that non-resident to resident fee. Scott St. Onge went on to add that yes, the Town is paying that in full. If that program was a \$120.00 non-resident fee and the \$100.00 resident fee, the Town would pay that difference to give the Georgia residents the St. Albans rate. The difference between the 2 rates will come out of the \$18,000.00 the Town has budget for. Scott went on to say that there is no discount being received from the St. Albans Recreation department and that it is all based on usage. Fred mentioned his concern with this is that if a family uses a lot of this program, then they are receiving a huge subsidy off a family that doesn't use any. He went on to say that if there was a discount that he would propose to do like the school budget where everyone pays a block rate and collect the money.

Article IV: Shall the voters establish a reserve fund to be called the Contingency Reserve Fund to be used for unanticipated revenue shortfalls and to pay non-recurring and unanticipated general and highway fund expenses, in accordance with 24 V.S.A § 2804?

Kyle Grenier informed the viewers that the Selectboard has been discussing different ways to save monies for unexpected Town expenses. Currently the Town collects revenue from the cell phone tower and have been told that there are mergers, between cell phone carriers, coming down the line, which

would decrease the amount of money the Town would receive. As of now, the Town has not seen the decrease, but it does not rule out the possibility of this happening in the future. Another area that has had some fluctuations in revenue that Kyle mentioned is with the Town's recording & license revenue. Kyle said that the pandemic has shown the Selectboard that there are dips in revenue through billable services. He went on to explain that there was no overall decrease but there were specific decreases in budget lines, which show the Selectboard some vulnerabilities. With that being said, Kyle informed the viewers that another big liability the Town has is that currently there is no fund that could support unanticipated replacement of major structural or mechanical systems within Town owned buildings and that often times these planned for in Capital Improvement Planning. He explained that the procedure now, is the Town applies for a loan and pay interest on the loan to make those improvements. Having this revenue fund could also help offset other purchases where interest is related. For instance, the last two parcels that were purchased for Town expansion have cost the taxpayers about \$13,000.00 in interest alone. If the Town had this savings account, those funds could have been offset slightly. Kyle mentioned that this fund could also cover smaller costs, one-time financial needs, such as Town wide mailers. The Selectboard has learned in the past couple of years that postage has been expensive, and this fund could help to pay for that.

Kyle explained to the viewers that the Selectboard is not asking for any money to be into this fund but that the Selectboard has to receive the ok from the voters to create the fund first and if passed, the subsequent boards would discuss methods of funding it or how much money is appropriate to put into it.

Mr. & Mrs. Grimm asked how the money would be used and is it just decided by the Selectboard to decided? Kyle answered with yes, it would be the Selectboards discretion. Kyle let the viewers know that the law for Reserve Funds states that if there was any amount of money in the fund that a majority of taxpayers at a Town Meeting wanted to move that to, they could.

Doug Bergstrom commented that when he was on the Schoolboard, they did something similar to this as well, by taking any extra money left over from the budget and putting it in a Reserve Fund to be used for Capital Expenses. He asked the Selectboard if they have ever thought about doing this as well as it looks like there is an overage from this year of \$125,000.00. Doug went on to explain how the school utilizes a similar fund.

Article V: Shall the voters authorize total fund expenditures for operating expenses of \$3,459,136.00 of which \$2,230,025.00 shall be raised by taxes and \$1,019,111.00 by non-tax revenue?

Scott St. Onge explained that the new Town Garage increase is shown in the numbers, even though it was voted on during last year's Special Town Meeting, as the first loan payment was not due till one year after the start of the loan (2022). Scott informed the viewers that the increase would be \$40.20 per \$100,000.00 which includes the increase of the previously approved Town Garage. Scott made mention that the Selectboard had no control over this as it was previously approved by taxpayers and whether the budget passes or fails, that increase would still need to be paid. The budget being presented is a 1% increase. The Town Report shows a breakdown of expenses by department, and put those numbers against fiscal year 21, which Scott mention was something different that the Selectboard did this year. Some lines show zero as the Selectboard is trying to consolidate budget lines. For instance, the Fire Department and First Response are not together instead of being two separate parts of the budget. The Auditor budget lines have been consolidated as well due to using a Firm and those have been rolled into

Admin Contracted Services within the Selectboard department. The same goes for Planning and Zoning. Now that there is a DRB established those salaries are now in the board salary line and the Zoning Administrator salary has moved to the Administrative Salary line. Scott stated that next year this will look a lot smoother when looking at the budget.

Doug Bergstrom asked if there would be a person added to the Fire and Rescue staff. Scott responded with yes, they are looking to hire a full-time Fire/EMS person. Amber added that if that vote does pass, it will be a July 1st, 2022, starting date. Scott stated that this was in reaction to Georgia being a small town and having difficulty getting people to respond to calls, especially during the day, when people also have jobs. He went on to say this person would also help the Highway Department with small jobs. Doug stated that he wanted a little more clarity as the Fire/EMS budget line showed them together as well as an increase in monies.

Doug asked where the Historical Society expenses had been moved to. Amber let Doug and the viewers know that the budget line had been moved from Town Boards to Buildings & Grounds.

Doug also asked about the large increase to paving & blacktop. Amber explained that on page 25 of the Annual Report, the line that says State Aid Paving Money to Restricted Fund (\$70,000.00) was moved up to the Paving/Blacktop line with additional funds added to the line.

Doug asked about the almost doubling of the Conservation Commission monies. Scott answered that in previous years the Selectboard has dropped their budget down as well as their reserve fund. This year they added a little bit more money. He also said the Conservation Commission has some expenses on trail upkeep and putting more money into the Town owned properties. Sara Nadeau added that the Conservation Committee also used some of the money towards mapping for those trails, increasing the communication with the Town as to where those trails are and what is available. Sara mentioned that the Conservation Commission has been working with the library to come up with programs as well.

Doug asked about the Roadside Contracted Services line. Amber explained that Todd had previously come to the Board asking to purchase an excavator then decided to not make the purchase as it is better for the Town to hire out for the work needed instead of making a big purchase, storing the excavator, insure it and maintain it, etc. Doug went into the Town's equipment line next. Asking if the Town's equipment was having issues as he noticed the Town's parts and supplies budget increased dramatically, asking if items are going to need to be replaced. Amber informed Doug and the viewers that Backhoe does need to be replaced but is not in this year's Capital Budget. Amber said the 2010 GMC is scheduled to be replaced this year which does show a budget line of \$4,500.00.

Mr. & Mrs. Grimm asked if the fulltime fire position had been in other minutes or in the Town book as he hasn't seen it mentioned anywhere else. Kyle responded that it has most recently been mentioned in the Budget meetings that have taken place which those meeting minutes are to be approved at the Regular Selectboard Meeting following this Informational Meeting. Fred asked why the position wasn't made public to the Town more than it was and why the Budget Meetings are not recorded by LCATV like all other meetings are. Amber said it is up to the Selectboard to make that decision and Scott agreed that going forward, LCATV should be present at Budget Meetings. More discussion was had on the fulltime Fire/EMS employee was had between Fred Grimm and the Selectboard.

Fred asked a question about the increase to Dog Licenses on page 18. Amber explained that for the past

two years, the State has not allowed late fees to be collected due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and that beginning on April 1st of the year, late fees will be reinstated. Fred confirmed that there would be about \$1,000.00 collected in dog fees and Amber answered yes. A discussion was had between Amber and Fred regarding the State fees listed on page 34 for Dog License and how much the State receives from each license.

Fred asked if the change in the Park and Recreation salary was due to the Highway Department taking over some duties? Scott answered yes. He also asked if the position was going to be replaced? Scott said yes to this as well and said they are still working out the details of that position.

Fred asked why the salaries were not listed in the Town Report this year as they have been previously. Amber stated that the Town's CPA has recommended to not list these going forward due to income sensitivity. Amber let Fred and the viewers know that other Towns are doing away with this and that anyone can come to the office and ask for list of Town salaries. More discussion was had this from Fred.

Fred commented that on page 16 under Asset's it would be great to have a breakdown of which department each line refers to. He also asked about the ARPA money. Amber let him know that this would be discussed with the new board and asking for community outreach.

Carolyn thanked everyone for joining and asking questions and reminded everyone to go vote!

Carolyn ended the meeting at 8:13 p.m.