

**North Branch Fire District #1
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THESE MINUTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL UNTIL APPROVED BY THE PRUDENTIAL COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Informational Meeting of the North Branch Fire District #1, Prudential Committee, April 28, 2021

This Meeting, having been duly Warned, was called to order at 7:04 p.m., by Chairman, Thomas Ferrazza. Technical difficulties causing business to start at 7:10.

Members Present: Thomas Ferrazza, Daniel Facilla and John Snow

Also Present: Jodi Keeler, Mike Garber, Bart Howes, Linda Holland Rebecca Snow, Helen Krzeminski and Mike Eldridge.

Via Microsoft Teams: Steve Montello, Elizabeth Prial, Bob Stone, Jim McDevitt, John Giordano, Ken Westby, Amie Pritcher, Carole Cosover, Dennis Wilson, Lincoln Raldman, Scott Stein, Tabi Freedman, Gerie Golet, Brian Festa, Ginny Reed.

Public Comments: Jodi Keeler, read a statement regarding the current Prudential Committee, a newly formed citizens group, their lack of transparency and her reasons for her recent resignation from the Prudential Committee.

Tom Ferrazza addresses Rich Werner's letter and concerns.

Cost of Operations Dan Facilla addresses and corrects a statement, made in the newspaper about the first bond being at 5%. Facilla clarifies that there are two bonds. The first for \$1.8 million is a 3.37% variable rate, that rate subsidized by the Federal Government. The average high was at 3.67 %. The second bond was for \$4.7 million and is at 2 % for administrative fees. Notes that during Covid last year, the administrative fee was waived.

Bart Howes, Chief Operator, notes that there were numerous hearings regarding the \$4.7 million dollar bond. Business owners and residents attended voting to eliminate future bonds and costs to payers for any new meters that are and will be installed.

Gallonage Ferrazza states the price per gallon of \$6 in 1986 was artificially kept low. The sewer board, at the time was comprised mainly of realtors. This rate did not allow for maintenance and upgrades of the treatment plant.

In 1987, a motion was passed to raise the rate from \$6/gallon to \$18/gallon. Three board members tried to kill it, but it remained, it still passed. Even though the motion passed to raise the rate, it was never raised and never brought up again.

Ferrazza made the comparison of hook-up fees to putting in a septic system. Hookup fees for a four-bedroom house or unit would be \$19,200. A comparable septic system would cost approximately \$30,000.

Raise and Appropriate. Ferrazza noted that when Brendon Ryan was on the board (2017-19), he proposed lowering hookup fees because he was affiliated with Mt. Snow, and the Carinthia Hotel was to be built.

Guidelines for sleeping spaces Ferrazza stated that the guidelines for sleeping spaces have not changed in 35 years. He states public can go through minutes and ordinances that are stored at North Branch Fire District.

Ferrazza asks real estate agents to give more that 2-3 days' notice for closing. Further confirming, with public, that sleeping space charges stays with the life of the property.

Waiver of Fees

A figure of \$441 was noted for what was forgiven for the Town of Dover in sewer charges in exchange for sanding, recording fees, use of excavators and use of the transfer station. Nbfd would incur significant charges if this were billed directly.

The Annual Meeting in 2020 was scheduled for March 29, 2020 and the State went into shut down due to Covid -19. Nbfd was directed, by the State, in November of 2020, not to have the Annual Meeting. Elections were postponed, from March to May at Nbfd and Town of Dover, for 2021.

2018-19 Water usage notices There was some confusion, according to Rich Werner's letter, about notices that were sent out during construction. They were mailed Christmas week and President's week asking users to conserve. Language used was provided by the State. The Prudential Committee was unaware that users were concerned as there was no communication, to North Branch, to that affect.

Recording meetings Audio recording of Meetings are currently being done. A new system has been purchased, but to be installed for live meetings. It will include video and audio recordings.

Financial Accounts Sleeping Space account is only for funds obtained for that. A Reserve account was established in 2017 with 100,000 in it. Voters allowed Nbfd to use those funds for construction. State reimbursements came in slow so Reserve account borrowed from the Sleeping Spaces account. Funds from hookups or sleeping spaces, at the end of the year, go to the reserve accounts. A request from the public will be needed to access those accounts. Other income goes into the Capitol Account for upkeep and operational expenditures. An article will be presented at next years Annual Meeting concerning how much to appropriate for the reserve account.

Sub committees The Committee disagrees that there needs to be sub committees to the Prudential Committee. It is stated that if a group wants to send a representative to the Prudential Committee meetings, their input would be welcome.

Executive sessions Ferrazza states that executive sessions are used for legal issues and personnel matters. The hours needed for these sessions is customary for comparable municipalities.

Billing Dan Facilla stated that the Committee is investigating a potential new billing system using a 7 day mean during peak times. Bills the following year will be based on that time frame and has been approved as fair and equitable. There will be further discussion, including the programming, minimum billing and whether to bill on a monthly basis or continue bi-annually.

Bart Howes explained that Nbfd#1 will need to expand as mandated by the state and Act 250, if we are to ever go over our 585,000 gallons/day limit within a 7-day period. We have only hit that once in winter of 2003/2004. Nbfd has restrictions on expansion, due to the SAAB in Ellis Brook. Although exceeding annual discharge limits are not probable, it is possible.

Facilla further explained each added sleeping space reduces potential future hook-ups. Nbfd had an engineer study usage for one year and found that charging for sleeping spaces as development occurs, was most fair. As of this meeting, Nbfd has 13,875 sleeping spaces recorded which is 832,500 potential gallons per day.

Public Comments

Bob Stone commented on the charge for sleep sofas. Asking to charge only for gallonage used. Stone also asked why sleep sofas were not charged from 2018-2019. Ferrazza stated Nbfd went silent on sleep sofas during that period, but reinstated charges in 2020.

Facilla addressed flow vs. sleep spaces. He explained every sleep space equals potential flow. Nbfd must follow ordinance.

Steve Montello stated that he is representing a group of 1,200 members. That Rich Werner donated money to the group. He stated he and Rich are the largest users at Nbfd.

Montello expressed extreme concern over the executive session at the Prudential Committee's April Regular Meeting. He stated it sent him into "orbit" as he expected Rich Werner to present his letter in regular session. Montello wanted further explanation on exemptions Nbfd gives to certain entities such as Twice Blessed, Town of Dover, The West Dover Church and Dover Historical Society.

Elizabeth Prial stated the same concerns as Montello as far as "giving freebies" and asked why the burden is not given to a broader base such as the town taxpayers.

It was explained, by the board, that the Nbfd users voted on the exemption to the town, the school, a church, the Historical Society and Twice Blessed. Amending that motion can be done, from the floor at the Annual Meeting, if anyone wants it changed, Ferrazza explained.

Montello suggested mass email for communication to all users.

Mike Eldridge asked about postings on website.

Steve Montello made several suggestions and had many questions about Nbfd's billing and finance processes.

Facilla further explained the Bond Account, municipality finances and what needs to be supported by voters.

Facilla made a motion to ratify a new contract with Mike Garber at Ironstone Property and a separate contract with Gary Henry, to purchase necessary gallonage at \$12/gal for 5 years, to start immediately, prior to sale to new owner. Any new owners will be charged at the current rate John Snow seconded the motion.

It is noted that Ray Reed and Spalla (Encore) need to sign their contracts.

Ferrazza adjourned meeting at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

Helen Krzeminski
Administrative Assistant

cc: T. Ferrazza, D. Facilla, J. Keeler, J. Snow, K. Braunbach, E. Floyd, B. Howes, H. Terhune, R. Stone, A. Pritcher, A. Palmiter, A. Perkins, A. Havreluk, C. Helmstetter, C. Turpin, G. Henry, G. Golet, Grayghostinn, J. Gooch, J. Eckert, J. Flanagan-Marchese, J. Mahon, J. Densmore, J. Brunen, J. Redd, L. Harkawik, L. Fraser, M. Hamilton, M. Formel, M. Hathaway, M. Garber, P. Fisher, P. Fitzpatrick, R. Reed, R. Caplan, R. Rubin, W. Ruane, S. MacDougall, S. Dupuis, S. Joyce-Albano, T. House, Weathervane Lodge, Y. Strus, Deerfield Valley News and Brattleboro Reformer.

Posted: North Branch Fire District #1, Wastewater Treatment Facility & Administrations Building. Dover Town Office.

