

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

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the North Branch Fire District #1, Prudential Committee, April 13, 2022.

This Meeting, having been duly Warned, was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman, Steve Montello.

Members Present: Steve Montello, Bob Stone (via Zoom), Peter Edwards, Jon Prial and Ken Westby.

Also Present: Helen Krzeminski and Bartholomew Howes. Public members: Tom Ferrazza and James Valente, Mathew and Catrina Kast.

Public Comments: Tom Ferrazza asked when the budget would be available for review. Montello said that it would be available after the board approves the annual budget. Ferrazza asked if “fund balances” would be included in the budget. Montello clarified that account balances for the reserve account and the operational account would be in the annual report. Ferrazza stated that there were two funds, a “sinking fund” and the reserve account that seemed to be merged into other accounts. He stated that one the sinking fund needed state approval to create and that both accounts had voter approval. Westby asked for clarification of what he was asking since fund balances and account balances were two different entities. Ferrazza stated he wanted to know where physically the cash was. Westby stated that there was still a reserve account. Ferrazza asked what happened to the “slush fund”? Montello stated that there is no record of any account called a “slush fund”. He further stated that he did not know what Ferrazza was alluding to and did not appreciate telling members of the public that the current board is doing anything but the good things they are trying to accomplish. Westby stated that Ferrazza made a comment about legality of the position of the Treasurer. Westby commented that a Prudential Committee member is not a Select Board member. Westby stated that the Board was actively look for a Treasurer. Prial commented, to Ferrazza that if he thought the board was doing something illegal, he should go to the state or “sue us” and take a different action other than public comments.

Minutes: Edwards moved to approve the minutes of the March 9, 2022, Regular meeting. Seconded by Prial. Motion passed.

Letters: Montello reported that a by letter was written by NB, to Rich Werner, requesting emails to help making our billing more efficient. Letters were received from the State of

Vermont, Office of the Attorney General, Joe Miller, regarding a complaint that was made by a resident. He stated that it would be discussed during executive session. NB received a letter from Shannon Brown dated March 21, 2022 and is so noted for the minutes.

Treasurer's Report: Westby stated that they hired a part time bookkeeper, Brenda Handy. No bills have been paid that were not budgeted for. He stated that the billing process for the May billing are underway. He stated that staff was trying to correct 450 errors that have been carried for many years. He said that these errors create hours of manual data input every billing period. Westby stated that they would like to correct as many of the errors as possible before next Friday, then process billing. He stated that NB was still on target to get the bills out by May 1, 2022. Prial noted that the new bills will have different text, including a bill number, a note if the bill was estimated and a message about obtaining email addresses.

Montello stated that accounts/receivables have dropped from 220,000 dollars to 15,000 from last year and he thanked Westby for his efforts on that. Montello reported that there was 2.4 million in cash, on the books. He noted that 700,000 of that is allocated for the reserve account. Montello reported that the audit has not been completed for 2021 and that NB would press the independent account to complete it, as NB is moving to a fiscal year on July 1, 2022.

Kast: The Kasts requested cooperation from North Branch Fire District in resolving an urgent problem they have discovered on their property at 51 Blue Brook Road. Recently they discovered they were not hooked into the collection system at North Branch Fire District, but instead, had an independent septic system, which could be failing. Their goal is to hook up to NBFD as soon as possible. They asked for abatement of the sewer charges, an additional sleeping space charge and any they stated they are asking formally, to waive the hook up fee. Montello explained the abatement process for the sewer charges and sleeping space and stated that NBFD would do what they could to expedite the hook up process, but any further financial relief would have to be discussed after an investigation and then under executive session.

Rates and Charges: Prial presented a document and explanation of that, to be added to the website. This includes how rates are set, proposed rates, hookup fees, excess usage fees, processing fees and violation penalties. Westby made a motion to approve the schedule with rates/fees. Seconded by Edwards. Passed unanimously.

Chief Operator's Report: Howes presented the following report.

Operations

- Our engineer Ed Floyd of Technicon, had to suddenly retire due to health issues. I have contacted the Dufresne Group, MSK, VHB, and Stantec about coming to do our annual inspection due in April. I have also contacted Bryan Harrington at the ID program to inform him of our situation. Once I can get someone lined up to do the inspection, I will also send them all out an RFP about doing our holding pond liner project.
- I received a quote back from Evan's Construction about repairing the concrete in our CLR tanks for \$4,200. I have yet to hear from anyone else. I recommend we hire them before they are too busy. Edwards made a motion to approve the repair. Seconded by Stone. Passed unanimously.

Water meters

- To date we have 30 endpoints not communicating. I have replaced the ones at condo associations. These that are remaining will need appointments setup with the homeowners so we can replace the endpoint.
- We have 34 water meters that are still the old hand reads. These homeowners will need to be informed that they must hire a plumber to change the meter.
- We have 17 water meters that have radio heads on them. These will need appointments setup with the homeowners so we can replace the register and endpoint.
- We have just enough registers and plenty of meters and endpoints now to replace these. I have multiple times contacted Stiles to get another 48 registers, so we have some spares. But they are still having supply issues.

Montello stated that there will accountability and enforcement for the meters that need to be replaced, including timelines and fines for nonfunctioning meters that need to be replaced by owners.

Montello asked about progress on getting the fence repaired. Howes stated that he was seeking quotes.

Organizational Documents: Prial explained he was updating the Ordinance for the Board to approve so that it could be posted for public review. He stated that it would be presented at the next meeting. Prial updated the board that he is working on revising North Branche's mission statement, that is on the website. He is also complying a set of Bylaws for internal use, that also will need to be approved by the board.

Technology: Prial stated that a security camera system will be installed. He reported that NB will be working with Arcomm Communications to install that system and work on updating computers, synchronizing with existing printers and other equipment. Prial asked for the board to weigh in on establishing board member emails, to keep them separate from their personal emails. Prial stated that we will be adding Invoice Cloud to replace MunciPay for our billing system. This will help with the transition from paper billing to email billing, in the Fall of 2022. Prial said that he is getting quotes, from companies, to do a mass mailing, explaining the transition to paperless billing.

Review/Approve Budget for annual meeting: Westby explained the modifications and adjustments he had to make of the budget, going from a calendar year to a fiscal year starting July 1, 2022. He made a motion that Nbfd Raise and Appropriate \$585,000, through usage fees, for billing. Seconded by Edwards. Passed unanimously.

Westby presented the budget for the fiscal year 2023, with total expenses at \$1,735,000. He noted that it was very close to the approved budget of the calendar year of 2021, which was \$1,744,166. Westby made a motion to approve the budget for the fiscal year 2023. Seconded by Prial. Passed unanimously.

New and Old Business: None were presented.

Executive Session: Stone moved to go into executive session, to discuss personnel and legal issues at 11:44. Seconded by Westby. Motion passed. The Prudential Committee came out of executive session at 12:36.

Decisions: Prial made a motion to raise Krzeminski's hourly wage. Seconded by Westby. Passed unanimously. Edwards made a motion to advertise for a temporary and seasonal position for operations. Seconded by Westby. Passed unanimously. Prial made a motion to give Krzeminski a bonus for all the hard work she has done in the past year. Seconded by Westby. Passed unanimously.

Prial made a motion to approve the Warning, for the Annual meeting, that was drafted by Krzeminski. Seconded by Stone. Passed unanimously.

Montello adjourned the meeting at 12:30.

Respectfully submitted,

Helen Krzeminski

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Administration

The next, regular meeting of NBF#1's Prudential Committee is on May 11, 2022, at 10:00 a.m.

Posted: North Branch Fire District# 1, Wastewater Treatment Facility building and Administration's building, Dover Town Office and www.northbranchfiredistrict.com.