

Selectmen's Minutes, Monday, September 28, 1981

Present, Paul Mercier, Chairman, Katherine Ring, Leslie MacNeil, and Betty Shaw.

Checks were signed and approval given for the payment from Phase III Sewer Acct. to Palmer & Dodge.

Jane Hill spoke to Selectmen and guidelines will be forthcoming for welfare cases in the town. The amount of rent the town will pay, will be determined when Jane checks with landlords to get an average cost. All who are able will be asked for the names of at least three job applications a week. This applies to single parents as well as couples. All will be told of the advance of monies for rent electric or food vouchers will be a loan. Properties belonging not only to the applicant but families can and will be attached until such time as money is paid back to the town. No past bills will be paid by the town. Current bills may, if the selectmen approve, be paid.

Brian Brown, Police Chief requested Special Session, and all agreed to same. He gave a report on the police matters from the past week. Linden Joseph was sworn in after the special session. He will be a special officer for the town of Antrim, Brian hopes to use his photography knowledge as part of Linden's duties

* closed session was voted for the privacy of a welfare applicant.

Rod Zwirner spoke about plans of the conservation committee to hire someone at school teachers pay to work with school children in regards to conservation. The committee plans to use money from the Hurlin Fund. A question arose as to the rights of the committee to spend money from the fund without the approval of the selectmen. Secretary will check with Lloyd Henderson. The committee plans to erect observation platforms on Baker land once they determine the boundaries.

Report from the Army Engineers on the Gregg Lake Dam are missing. Secretary will check with Lloyd to see if he has them.

Lloyd Henderson was asked some question on welfare cases. He will look into some that are in question.

A letter to the Messenger will be sent in answer to their editorial. Copy attached. It was decided to have all welfare cases in about 9pm in order to vote for executive session and complete all private business at the one time to avoid misunderstandings in the future.

Ed Hymes has permission to cut pine trees on neighbors property.

The question of intent to cut came up. Will a form have to be filed, and a yield tax paid? It is intended that Ed will cut the trees and sell some of the lumber to cover the cost of the cut. B. S. will check with the department of forestry, and call Ed back with the answer.

Ed also brought up the fact that Adolph Bayer was being taxed for part of the road that is counted in the amount of land he owns. Lew Gillmore will be questioned on this and if need be a correction will be made on his property.

A barrier has been put across Patty Brown's Rd. by the lake. This is unauthorised, and prevents use of road.

George Cole has made arrangements with Chase Tree Service to be in town within the next two weeks. They will try to see to clearing any trees from power lines. George will also pick out the worst tree problems and have them attended to.

George's crew has been working on the bridge on Elm st. and have poured cement and new barrier. He will talk to State and request using TRA money to redo Turnpike Rd instead of Liberty Farm as was previously planned.

George was told to correct problems on road as he sees fit but cautioned not to do any of Pandelenas without ok and complete track of time and material, in order to bill proper parties.

George Carlson is to be called as there is still a question as to who is responsible for the Depot St. problem.

Signs will be going up closing Depot St. Hill from Water St. to Main St. to heavy through traffic. Notice to go in the Advertiser for the next two weeks.

It was suggested that Fred Wasserloos be asked to be a trustee of the trust funds. All agreed and Paul will contact Fred and ask if he will accept.

Highway crew is responsible for the cutting in the cemeteries.

TOWN OF ANTRIM

Sept 28, 1981

Dear Editor:

Referencing Your Editorial Comments In Last Week's Hillsboro Messenger, I Would Like To Offer Several Comments.

Firstly, The Confidentiality Of Applicants And Interviews For Town Aid, The Divulsion Of Information By Our Law Enforcement Personnel In The Investigatory Process, Personnel Relations And Counsel Discussions With Potential Litigation Are Not Public Information.

The "Right To Know" Law Was Enacted Not Only To Make Available What The Public Truly Should And Will Know, But To Protect Those Dealing With Public Agencies And Their "Right Of Privacy". We Are None The Less Responsible In Assuring That It Remains So.

Traditionally We Open Our Meeting With The Signing Of Checks, Some Of Which Fall Into The Categories Mentioned Above. It Is For This Reason Only That We Restrict Participation During This Period, Usually About 15 Min. This Also Allows Timely Processing By The Town Treasurer And Disbursement To Employees.

Appointments Are Made And An Itinerary Published From Approx 7:45 To 9:00 PM With Other Business That May Occur Fitted Between And After These Times, Until The Wee Hours (There Is No Set Closing Time, Save Physical Endurance And Sanity). People Coming In Are Advised, If Deemed Necessary, Of The Presence Of Media. If They Request Confidentiality, They Are Given It.

Unfortunately The Subject Matter At A Selectman's Meeting Ranges From The Very Pertinent To The Inconsequential, And A Reporter Trying To Cover This Will Either Make Print Or On Occasions Have Wasted His Time. We Have Accommodated Media In The Past By Direct Participation And Both Summary And "Follow-Up" Telephone Conversations. If A Written Transcript Of The Meeting Would Help In Reducing The Number Of Corrections Requested Of Your Newspaper, We Would Be Pleased To Provide It As Well.

For The Board Of Selectmen, I Am,

Respectfully Yours,


Paul D. Mercier, Sr.,
Chairman

Editorials

Mundane?... Who Knows?

"Openness in the conduct of public business," reads the preamble to RSA-A:1, "is essential to a democratic society." Better known as the state "Right to Know" law, the statute gives citizens ready access to public meetings and records and in doing so ensures the accountability of public officials. In its scope, RSA-A:1 indeed affords freedom of information law, as fundamental to the democratic process. It ensures, in the words of the preamble, that the federal Freedom of Information Act in 1974, that "the government and the information of government belong to the people." The intention here, of course, is that it should be the burden of government to justify secrecy rather than of the citizen to prove why information should be made available.

Most public officials, even in our small communities, are acutely aware of the law and what it means. Some regard it as a nuisance, other acknowledge it for what it is: a watchdog of the citizenry. And though nearly every

official, we imagine, has at one time or another been guilty of bending the law a little, few have put it through court. Since the way the Antrim selectmen have Antrim officials believe the best way to deal with the public's right to know is to make believe it doesn't exist. To them, it appears, the public has a right to be heard, but not to hear.

The sign outside the Antrim Town Hall says the selectmen meet Monday nights at 7:30. However, even the most punctual visitor finds the selectmen already behind their office door signing checks, approving purchase orders and going over the mail. Only town officials may enter the office; others are shooed away. Finally, when those meetings are over the public may go in. They usually leave with their questions answered, but with no knowledge of what went on before. The Antrim selectmen are probably not hiding anything, but then again, who knows?

The method espoused by the Antrim selectmen is, in effect, the right to call one long executive session. Executive sessions may be called, of course, but they must first be voted on by the selectmen and that must be done during regular meeting time so that their reasons for calling the session may be questioned by the public or the press, if need be. The selectmen cannot go into executive session on a whim, nor can they prescribe their own procedure for calling the session in the first place: the state does that for them.

The state says that executive session may be called when officials are acting upon the following matters only:

- The dismissal, resignation or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee, or the investigation of any charges against him, unless the employee affected requests an open meeting.
- The hiring of any person as a public employee.
- Matters which, if discussed in public, likely would adversely affect the reputation of any person, other than a member of the body or agency itself, unless each person requests an open meeting.
- Consideration of the acquisition, sale or lease of property which, if discussed in public, likely would benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those in the general community.
- Matters discussed by a legislative committee sitting in executive session, which should not be made public as determined by a three-fifths roll-call and recorded vote of the members present and voting at such meeting.

The Antrim selectmen are bound by the same laws which govern other municipal, state and, in a larger sense, federal government groups. Much of their normal week-to-week business may seem mundane and unworthy of public scrutiny, but there is a principal at work here: the public's right to know. When an organization flouts that right, no matter how unintentional, they are violating the public trust.