

**Minutes  
Town of Skowhegan  
Regular Selectmen's Meeting  
5:30 P.M.  
Tuesday, February 9, 2021**

**\*\*Public wishing to see this meeting may do so from the  
Town of Skowhegan Facebook page\*\***

**Board of Selectmen:**

Paul York, Chairman  
Betty Austin, Vice Chairman  
Charles Robbins  
Todd Smith  
Roger Staples

**Town Manager:**

Christine Almand

**Executive Secretary:**

Cara L. Mason

Call Selectmen's Meeting to order.

Paul York called the meeting to order.

1. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
2. Town Manager's Report and Department & Committee Reports

Town Manager's Report:

The Highway Garage Heat Pumps Bid closes on February 17<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am. For more information, visit our website or contact Greg Dore.

The Town offices will be closed on February 15<sup>th</sup> in observation of Presidents Day.

Department Reports:

Gail Pelotte:

- Nomination Papers will be available on Friday, February 26<sup>th</sup> and will be due back on Friday, April 9<sup>th</sup> by 4:30 PM.

**Nomination papers for 2021:**

Two Selectmen (three-year terms)  
One Assessor (three-year term)  
One Road Commissioner (three-year term)  
One Town Clerk (three-year term)  
One Town Treasurer (three-year term)  
One Overseer of the Poor (three-year term)

Two Park Commissioners (five-year terms)  
Four Directors of SAD#54 (three-year terms)

Trisha Austin:

- New employee – Pollution Control Plant Operator – Ricky Lessard, started Monday, February 8, 2021.
- Posted a job for the Highway Department, Truck Driver Laborer – Closes on Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 4pm.

Jeff Hewett:

- We have been talking to Dirigo Solar on the project for the landfill. The first interconnective impact study was finished by CMP with the results as expected. So, Dirigo Solar would like to do an extension for their Due Diligence period with a 2nd year payment. The reason for this extension is to allow Dirigo Solar time to determine what CMP's 2nd impact study will provide in cost to the project. Hopefully the PUC will find a solution to this problem for our project and the hundred other projects State-wide that have also been hit with a 2nd impact study.
- The State has accepted our letter of intent for the Façade grant and invited us to prepare a formal application. This application needs to be submitted by April 9<sup>th</sup>. If anyone knows any business in Skowhegan that would like to improve their building façade, please have them contact the office at 474-6905.

David Bucknam:

- Would like to thank the road crews from Highway Department for doing an amazing job keeping up with the snow removal.
- Reminding everyone not to push snow across a road when plowing. Not only is it illegal, but it could cause an accident you may be liable for.
- Remember to start slowing down well before your turn or before stopping to avoid sliding off the road.

Shawn Howard:

- Last week Folsom and Son Auto suffered a devastating fire loss. It is always tough to see our citizens go through this. The fire presented some challenges to us, the building's construction type, the heavy fuel load, and the travel distances to a reliable water source made for a scenario that puts us behind from the onset. Fortunately, our strong automatic and mutual aid agreements worked to help us aggressively fight the fire and save some of the structures and equipment and prevent the fire from spreading to other buildings.

The following agencies assisted us:

Norridgewock FD	Waterville FD	Redington Fairview EMS
Madison FD	Clinton FD	Skowhegan PD
Canaan FD	Pittsfield FD	Skowhegan Highway Dept
Athens FD	Solon FD	Somerset Communications Center
Oakland FD	Fairfield FD	

- The fire service continues to see the trend of needing more and more mutual aid companies to battle fires. We are thankful for each of these agencies and their communities for their assistance. The danger in this model comes when there is more than one emergency in the area. Each of these communities is relying on the availability of all of these departments in our time of need. We are making a gamble and eventually somebody is going to lose. I pass on this information not to be a doomsday whistleblower, but to share my concerns as a fire chief.

Greg Dore

- We will be holding our Sidewalk Committee Meeting on February 18, 2021 to finalize the 5 & 10-year plans; which will be brought to the Selectmen for approval to be put in front of the residents for Town Meeting.
- H.E. Callahan arrived Monday morning to start prepping the area to start the repair work on the garage wall. We are working with their crew to move all items away from the wall; the work seems to be going smoothly at this time. We did receive some good news with the project that the Sprinkler System did not need to be moved so that saved on expenses for the project.
- Also, on Monday one of my employees Michael Gordon was able to return from work after being placed on FMLA. We are still looking to fill one Full-time position and one Seasonal position as truck driver/laborers. Please if you know of anyone with a minimum of a Class B license, send them our way.
- Things have been going well with the last few small storms we have had recently.

Denise LeBlanc:

- The Skowhegan Rec has been live-streaming all Rec games on our Facebook page due to the covid building capacity limits and have had a lot of positive feedback. We have had between 300 to 750 viewers for each game. You can find the weekend scheduled games on our Facebook page. You just have to Like the Skowhegan Parks and Recreation Dept. page to view, and it is free for anyone to watch.
- We are currently taking sign-ups for Ages 3 & 4 and Kindergarten Basketball until Feb. 19th and will be starting in March. We also are taking registrations for our indoor field hockey program for Grades K-5. For more information, you can contact the Rec. Dept or visit our Facebook page.
- A "BIG" Thank you to our Volunteer Coaches, Parents, Kids, Staff and Community Supporters for a very safe and successful couple weeks of youth basketball and scrimmages!! It has not been what any of us planned for. But together, we have responded to the best of our ability and in the best interest of our youth and the community. I am beyond grateful to all of you. To everyone within our department, thank you for your willingness to change direction at almost a moment's notice when we had to change the way we operate. We pulled together to completely rethink the way we do business – from instruction to food service to technology to maintenance and operations. Let's keep recreating, playing safe, while having fun and making Skowhegan the best community that it can be!

3. Selectmen's Items

Betty Austin said that Skowhegan Outdoors was in the newspaper. They have been doing a lot of projects. AmeriCorp does that through Main Street Skowhegan. Boynton's Greenhouse was also in the newspaper for Valentine's Day.

Today food boxes are being handed out in the Federated Church parking lot. Tonight, there are free meals at the Methodist Church. The Community Refrigerator is downtown. Nobody in town should go hungry. Betty Austin is thankful that we have so many people that are caring for our town.

Roger Staples said that it is great that so many people are watching the Community Center games live on Facebook.

Charles Robbins thanked Denise and whomever decided to livestream the games. It is a bummer to have a kid playing and only one parent can attend in person.

Hats off to the fire departments for their work on the devastating loss at Folsom's.

Lake George has Somerset SnowFest coming up on February 27<sup>th</sup>.

Todd Smith sent condolences to Dave and Bobbi Folsom for their loss with the fire. Thanks to our department and all of the mutual aid departments.

He also thanked the highway department for keeping the roads clear.

Paul York said it is nice to see that we have all of these towns helping with mutual aid. He also thanked the highway department for keeping up with the roads even though we are short-handed.

Recording Time: 14:39

**Presentation:**

Miranda Kessel from Brookfield will give a presentation regarding the future of the Weston Dam.

**Introduction**

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is Miranda Kessel. I am the stakeholder relations manager for Brookfield Renewable, and I live along the Kennebec River in Bingham. This evening, I'm here to discuss a critical matter that would significantly affect our communities, industries, businesses, and homeowners along the Kennebec River.

I'll first provide some background information about our vested interest in the restoration of sea-run fish, including Atlantic Salmon on the Kennebec River. From there, I'll move into tonight's key topic, the proposed Maine Dept. of Marine Resources amendment.

## **Fish Passage**

Regarding the Kennebec River's fish restoration efforts, I am going to highlight our commitment to work in good faith with state and federal fisheries agencies and the four environmental organizations, who make up the Kennebec Coalition. Since 1998, state and federal agencies and the Kennebec Coalition have discussed how best to restore sea-run fish populations on the Kennebec River.

Fifteen years later, Brookfield Renewable acquired the lower Kennebec assets in 2013. Since that time, we have been committed to the design, construction, and operation of upstream passage facilities. All four facilities have eel passage and downstream passage. The Lockwood and Hydro-Kennebec dams both have upstream fish passage. Hydro-Kennebec's nearly \$14 million upstream passage facility was completed in 2017, and Lockwood's existing fish passage, originally installed in 2006, is slated for future improvements.

We continue to diligently work with state and federal fisheries agencies to install safe, timely, and effective fish passage for Shawmut and Weston dams. Brookfield has invested \$15 million in passage facilities for the lower Kennebec and has proposed \$32 million in future investments. Pending final review and permitting, we have plans to begin construction as early as this year for Weston's downstream fish lift facility, a project estimated at over \$10 million. To date, Brookfield has already spent \$3 million in design, permitting and studies related to proposed passage facilities on the lower Kennebec.

As you can see, we are very much a vested and enthusiastic partner in the continued river restoration efforts for the Kennebec. We employ a full-time fish biologist assigned to the Kennebec. We also employ five fish technicians, who operate our passage facilities from spring through late fall, typically working 12-hour days at the height of migration seasons. Our crew is responsible for all components of the fishways that include sorting species of concern, Atlantic Salmon, American Shad, River herring, and American eels.

Since Brookfield acquired the facilities, several considerations have caused delays in constructing fish passage facilities on the lower Kennebec. The referenced environmental groups have opposed any forward steps that go toward construction and improvement of fish passage on the lower Kennebec. This includes a lawsuit (2015) and through either opposing or requesting delays of environmental review, permitting, or design plans for passage installation and improvements (2013, 2020).

On a final note, Shawmut is the only hydro Project of the four lower Kennebec dams under the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's relicensing process. From 2015 through 2019, the Maine Department of Marine Resources was an active participant, including in all the upstream fish passage facility's design phases. Five years into the relicensing process in March of last year, the MDMR suggested dam removal for the first time. The MDMR and the referenced environmental groups followed up with letters advocating for removing all four dams on August 28 and August 29 of 2020.

## **MDMR Amendment**

The Maine Department of Marine Resources has proposed a substantial update to the *Kennebec River Fish Restoration Management Plan*. The proposal would adopt a significantly amended management plan that would require potentially unachievable fish passage performance standards and implicitly seeks dam removal for the Weston, Shawmut, Hydro Kennebec and Lockwood dams.

The 2020 Amendment would substantially replace the 1993 Kennebec River Resource Management Plan. The original Plan was developed through a multi-year effort that included numerous public meetings to achieve a comprehensive review of the various beneficial uses of the river.

Contrary to the development of the original Plan, the MDMR introduced the Amendment on December 29, 2020, during the lull of the holiday season and just days before coronavirus cases hit an all-time high in Maine. In addition to the ill-timing, MDMR did not follow the customary public consultation process before issuing the Amendment and failed to notify affected parties.

We feel MDMR's is taking a nontransparent, singular, predetermined approach. The MDMR's coordination with the referenced environmental groups to advance sweeping changes in their "all of nothing" pursuit of dam removal lacks a good faith effort to achieve a balanced outcome.

### **Brookfield Presence**

The MDMR's new Plan to advance dam removal would result in the loss of stable water flows and minimize shorelines, causing harm to Skowhegan's recreation and economic development prospects. The removal of the Weston Hydro Project would result in the loss of the Project's impoundment. The 12.4-mile impoundment has a gross storage capacity of 18,600 acre-feet at a normal pond elevation of 156 feet above sea level and a flow requirement of nearly 2,000 cubic feet per second.

The Amendment's fiscal statement claims it will have no fiscal impact on municipalities. The Weston hydro project and impoundment provides continuous flows for municipal and industrial water users, recreation activities for boating, floating, fishing, and which generate tax revenue. Hydro facilities are also an essential climate resiliency tool for limiting climate impacts on water resources.

The Weston facility generates \$618,000 in local tax revenue. The total economic impact for the lower Kennebec dams averages \$4 million, annually. Our Kennebec regional headquarters is located here in Skowhegan and includes 20 employees, 12 of which directly support the lower Kennebec operations. Within our Kennebec workforce, 80 percent of our local hydro technicians are union-represented.

The lower Kennebec facilities rely on materials, supplies, and services of 42 different Maine businesses, the majority of which are locally based. Some of these local businesses include Cianbro, Kleinschmidt, Hight Auto, Hammond Lumber, Quinn Hardware, Whittemore & Sons, ACV Environmental, Skowhegan Equipment, to name a few. We also invest thousands of dollars each year into supporting various charitable and community organizations in Skowhegan and throughout Somerset County.

### **Policy, Energy Consequences**

With the State of Maine adopting some of the country's most ambitious carbon reduction and renewable energy goals, existing Maine hydro must be part of the all-of-the-above renewable energy equation in order to meet these goals. Brookfield Renewable is committed to helping the State meet its carbon reduction goals by providing zero emissions, clean energy, now and into the future. The four lower Kennebec dams that provide a generation capacity of 45 megawatts, remain critical in helping Maine meet its carbon emissions targets.

Moreover, replacing 45MW lost to the grid requires land, capital, permitting, and much more. As recently reported in the news, this also does not consider the current transmission limitations faced by Maine's renewable energy producers.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, it's worth noting that we *all* have a shared goal of restoring sea-run fish on the Kennebec River; however, we must take a careful, transparent approach in doing so and make a good faith effort to achieve balanced outcomes. Brookfield Renewable is very a much vested and vital partner in the restoration of sea-run fish on the Kennebec River. We will continue to work collaboratively with state and federal agencies to sustainably balance fish restoration and hydropower generation on the Kennebec River as demonstrated by our past and future investments in passage facilities that total \$47 million.

Again, we must take a careful approach to wisely and sustainably balance our river resources. The MDMR's proposal sets a bad precedent for a diversity of river users, who successfully coexist in balancing the Kennebec River's natural resources. The MDMR's actions create profound consequences for communities, residents, and river users, who depend on the stable and continuous river flows and the river acreage created by the dam impoundments.

We urge you to balance the diverse interests of river users in your community and to share your concerns about the significant consequences this has on Skowhegan's future.

Roger Staples said that if the fish passages could be brought up to standards, that would be great.

Miranda Kessel said that they are balancing hydro generation with fish restoration. They have had success on the Penobscot.

Facebook question: Have there been any troubles with the fishways? Is there anticipation to install a fishway in Shawmut?

Miranda Kessel said that she just went over those numbers. There are plans to invest \$32 million. That includes what is proposed for Shawmut and Weston. We have already invested \$3 million in the design.

Todd Smith said that the permitting process was going pretty smoothly from 2015-2019. Has there been a change in Commissioner in MDMR?

Miranda Kessel said that she didn't believe so.

Todd Smith asked if there was any indication as to why they took a new tone?

Miranda Kessel said she didn't want to speak for them. She said that she would be available for questions. Christine Almand knows how to get ahold of her.

Roger Staples said that MDMR is holding a Public Hearing on February 16<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m. They are taking written comments until February 26<sup>th</sup>.

Christine Almand said that in order to participate, you must register by Noon that day.

Recording Time: 34:49

**Consent Agenda:**

1. Approve the Minutes from the following:

Regular Selectmen's Meeting – January 26, 2021

**A motion was made by Betty Austin and seconded by Todd Smith to approve the Consent Agenda as written.**

**Vote: 5/0**

**Regular Agenda:**

1. Discussion and decision to choose a recipient of the Spirit of America Award.

Betty Austin said that Karen Lewia has done a lot and worked hard for the Skowhegan Library.

Charles Robbins recommended the Hight Family Dealerships. Skowhegan is very lucky to have the Hights. Last week they donated a space to RFGH for vaccinations. They have done so much for this community over the last 100 years. They are well deserving of this recognition.

Todd Smith also recommended the Hight Family Dealerships. They did barbeques for the public safety and first responders this summer. They always step up to the plate to help the community. They ask for nothing in return.

Paul York said that it is hard to make this decision, and choose just one. It is nice to see people step up. There is still good in the world.

Christine Almand asked if the Spirit of America Award has been done for more than one.

Betty Austin said she didn't think so. It has been done for groups. She isn't sure if it has ever been a business. Certainly, the Hights have done more than most businesses would even think about.

**A motion was made by Todd Smith and seconded by Charles Robbins to award the Spirit of America to the Hight Family Dealerships.**

**Vote: 5/0**

2. Discussion and decision to choose the dedication for the Town Report.

Roger Staples recommended Tom Keene.

Todd Smith said he immediately thought of Tom Keene.

Paul York said that a lot of names were thrown out there...Dale Watson has done a lot for the community and was also a Town employee...Carl McKenny also dedicated his life to serve the Town.

Paul York said that these are all great people who served this community very well.

Betty Austin suggested dedicating the Town Report to all three. They were all employees of the Town, who did more than just their jobs.

Charles Robbins said he had asked Christine Almand if we had ever done that. She said that we had in 2012.

Christine Almand said that, that year we dedicated it to those who donated for the Opera House Sprinkler System, as well as the group of people who teamed up to get rid of a group of buildings on the corner of Commercial Street and Madison Avenue to improve the area.

**A motion was made by Betty Austin and seconded by Roger Staples to dedicate the Town Report to Tom Keene, Dale Watson and Carl McKenny.**

Charles Robbins said that it was dedicated to his father when he passed. It means a lot to the family.

**Vote: 5/0**

Paul York said that all three of them were a great loss to this community. His heart goes out to their families. They were great people.

Todd Smith said that Carl McKenny was his first employee.

3. Discussion and decision to accept the Maine DOT, Bicycle & Pedestrian Program Funding in the amount of \$48,000.00 and to expend an amount not to exceed \$12,000.00 from the Highway Department Reserve Account, Roads and Sidewalks Designation for our portion of the Sidewalk Design for Norridgewock Avenue, pending federal funding.

**A motion was made by Betty Austin and seconded by Roger Staples to accept the Maine DOT, Bicycle & Pedestrian Program Funding in the amount of \$48,000.00 and to expend an amount not to exceed \$12,000.00 from the Highway Department Reserve Account, Roads and Sidewalks Designation for our portion of the Sidewalk Design for Norridgewock Avenue, pending federal funding.**

**Vote: 5/0**

Recording Time: 47:39

4. Discussion and decision to allow Christine Almand to place the following four foreclosed properties out to bid to sell the properties:

- Bid #1: Map 29, Lot 107 (6 Edward Court)**
- Bid #2 Map 29, Lot 223A (3 East Leavitt Street)**
- Bid #3 Map 21, Lot 14-3ON (66 South Factory Street)**
- Bid #4 Map 21, Lot 14-6-ON4 (10 Butler Street)**

66 South Factory Street taxes were paid in full.

**A motion was made by Charles Robbins and seconded by Roger Staples to allow Christine Almand to place the following four foreclosed properties out to bid to sell the properties:**

- Bid #1: Map 29, Lot 107 (6 Edward Court)**
- Bid #2 Map 29, Lot 223A (3 East Leavitt Street)**
- Bid #3 Map 21, Lot 14-6-ON4 (10 Butler Street)**

Todd Smith said this is one of the hardest things this board has to do.

Paul York said that a lot of work goes into this. Christine Almand diligently goes above and beyond to make contact with all of these people and make arrangements. To have only three after the number of notices that went out...it's amazing. We certainly don't want to take anybody's home.

Christine Almand said that in the notices that we send out, they are notified that if they cannot pay their taxes, they should contact her. We do have poverty abatements for people who truly are unable to pay their taxes. It is a confidential process. She would like to have those conversations early on in the process. If you are having trouble paying your taxes, it is better that she know now, instead of when there are three years of taxes unpaid.

**Vote: 5/0**

5. Discussion and decision to approve the letter to be sent to Maine Department of Marine Resources regarding the Kennebec River Management Plan Diadromous Resources Amendment.

**A motion was made by Betty Austin and seconded by Todd Smith to approve the letter to be sent to Maine Department of Marine Resources regarding the Kennebec River Management Plan Diadromous Resources Amendment.**

Todd Smith said that he supports this, but thinks that the letter should be a little stronger. This will be detrimental to our community. Changing the word "may" to "will" would be helpful.

Betty Austin said that she is happy to change her motion.

Roger Staples said it isn't just Atlantic Salmon. It is about other migratory species of fish as well. He would like to see economic impacts added to the letter, not just impacts. This is amendment is just a recommendation, and from what he read it is not enforceable.

Christine Almand said that they are putting forward an amendment...so should we say "amendment and recommendation"?

Paul York said that economic impacts are mentioned.

Roger Staples said that paragraph 2, 2nd sentence should say "economic impacts".

**An amended motion was made by Betty Austin and seconded by Todd Smith to approve the letter to be sent to Maine Department of Marine Resources regarding the Kennebec River Management Plan Diadromous Resources Amendment with changes.**

Christine Almand said that MDMR says right in their amendment that it is not enforceable. The federal government relies heavily on the State's input. Although not enforceable, it does carry a lot of weight.

**Vote: 5/0**

6. Discussion and decision to nominate one Selectman to serve as a member of the Somerset County Budget Committee.

**A motion was made by Roger Staples and seconded by Todd Smith to nominate Betty Austin to serve on the Somerset County Budget Committee.**

**Vote: 5/0**

7. Treasurer's Warrants to be approved:

#59	\$	43,835.91 (Payroll #4)
#60	\$	45,055.32 (Payroll #5)
#61	\$	26,800.87 (State Payables)
#62	\$	569,852.77 (FY 2021 Accounts Payables)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>685,544.87</b>

**A motion was made by Betty Austin and seconded by Charles Robbins to approve the Treasurer's Warrants as written.**

**Vote: 5/0**

8. Other Business

There was no Other Business discussed.

9. Unfinished Business

Review Policies and Ordinances

Run of River/Economic Development – Christine Almand said that she and Kristina Cannon are having almost daily conversations about the impacts that dam removal may have on Run of River project. We have always said that it is not dependent upon what Brookfield does, as far as the release of water. We are just not sure what, in addition, the removal of the Shawmut Dam will do.

Roger Staples asked if other similar facilities in other states are dam controlled.

Christine Almand said that some are, but not all. Some of these were spearheaded by dam removal. The consultants are not overly concerned when they hear these discussions.

Utilizing Outside Services

Marketing/Celebrating Skowhegan

Public Safety Building – Christine Almand said that there is an initial approval for the floor plan design. Still trying to work out some of the aspects. Currently having bi-weekly meetings with the architects, engineers, both Chiefs and Christine. Committee is kept up to date on the milestones.

Paul York said that the square footage is down a little bit. Things were moved around to make it flow better, as we are going through the process. There were some concerns with the roof line.

Charles Robbins asked what these back-and-forth changes were going to cost.

Paul York said that this is just part of the design process.

Betty Austin said that is part of the contract.

Sidewalks and Bike Trails/Lanes

Second Bridge

Solar Power

Betty Austin said that it sounds like MDMR has not taken into consideration the full impacts that dam removal will have on people, jobs, electricity, money from taxes...even Norridgewock with the money they spent there.

Christine Almand said that she is learning of new impacts all the time. A lot of them are negative, but some are positive.

Betty Austin said that the Sandy River is supposed to be a great place for them to spawn, which is why they want them to be able to get up past us.

Christie Almand said that Brookfield is the second highest taxpayer in Skowhegan, just behind Sappi. Sappi is concerned about the Shawmut dam removal. They are concerned about what it will cost them to redo their water intake. She is also not sure what impact it will have on Maine Water Company. As we speak, they are putting in water intake infrastructure. Sappi is our highest paying taxpayer. Maine Water Company is the 6<sup>th</sup> highest. Brookfield is 2<sup>nd</sup> highest. Brookfield pays just over \$617,000.00 in taxes. There are also potential impacts to the assessed value of properties along the river.

Roger Staples said that dam removal would create a world-class fishery. He has paid money to fish on rivers with no dams. It generates money. People come from all over to fish. The Kennebec has that potential.

10. Sign Documents

The Selectmen signed documents.

**Adjourn Selectmen's Meeting.**

Approved and signed on February 23, 2021.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

A True Copy Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cara L. Mason, Executive Secretary