

**Town Council Meeting**  
**October 22, 2024**

**Open Town Council Meeting:** Councilor Chair Mark Ketch opened the Town Council meeting; all Town Council members were present. Also present was Town Manager Melissa Doane

**Assessing Agent Mark Gibson:** Upon the Town Council's request, assessing agent Mark Gibson was present to discuss pending abatements due to the re-evaluation. The first item was his recommendation for abatement requests for properties around 114 Cram Street. He defined his reductions based on economic obsolescence. He recommended reductions on five properties located directly by this property due to the condition and actions involved with 114 Cram Street. These residents will need to request an abatement in 2024. However, the reductions will automatically occur next year and continue until the situation is resolved. Mr. Gibson then discussed his \$200 per acre assessment of wasteland. In 1990, he established an assessment of \$100 per acre of those lands; this equates to 20% of the value of the backland, which was \$500 per acre. When he did the revaluation, tree growth values doubled; therefore, he doubled the amount to \$200 per acre, and it still is 20% of backland, now \$900 per acre. He stated that 4989 acres are considered wasteland, which equates to \$11,000 in taxes, which, if the \$100 per acre were applied, would be a loss of \$5500 of tax revenue. Manager Doane believed that this land was categorized as wasteland as it was in tree growth, so the loss would not equate to that. Mr. Gibson stated that there is property outside of tree growth that is categorized as wasteland, determined by either a forester giving that designation or by the indicators on the tax map. Manager Doane asked how land that is submerged by water was assessed. He stated that it is evaluated at zero, and a forester or survey is needed to prove that designation. Councilor Lugdon noted that the \$200 per acre ratio was a 100% increase, and no other properties were getting that much of an increase. He further stated that Mr. Morin had requested an abatement due to the large increase and that there was not one tree on the property. Mr. Gibson stated that he thought the amount per acre was so low it would not be an issue, he also added that tree growth land did increase 100% sometimes even more. Councilor Lugdon asked if Mr. Gibson had told Mr. Morin that he could let the town take the property back by nonpayment if he did not want to pay the amount taxed. Mr. Gibson stated he may have, though he does not typically make this statement to other taxpayers; he further stated that he and Mr. Morin have a history, and he has experienced difficulty with him. Councilor Hatch asked if evidence was provided to him regarding the submerged land, for instance, the conversation that Melissa had years ago with a forester regarding the town not having any land available for forest operations if that would have been evidence enough to make the change in the assessment, Mr. Gibson stated it maybe. Councilor Ketch stated that if Mr. Gibson has issues with a taxpayer, that taxpayer needs to be directed to the Town Council. Mr. Gibson then discussed a property on Great Works Stream owned by Richard Ouellette; he had requested an abatement on his camp from Mr. Gibson and was denied; therefore, he presented it to the Town Council. Mr. Gibson stated that based on the values of other camps on leased land, he believes the value to be correct. Manager Doane had provided the Town Council information regarding those other camps and agreed the value seemed appropriate. Mr. Ouellette provided pictures of the camp, stating that it was deteriorating and the value was not there. It was determined that Mr. Gibson and Mr. Ouellette would look at the pictures and provide an abatement recommendation. Councilor Ketch motioned to table the abatement request of Mr. Ouellette; Councilor Lugdon seconded, vote 5/0.

**Review of Minutes:** Councilor Ketch made a motion to accept the minutes of October 8, 2024, seconded by Councilor Lugdon; Councilor Lugdon suggested that some re-wording of the sentence regarding the discussion of 114 Cram Street, the sentence states, "Melissa requested that this case not continue," the intent of that was to prompt the court to act faster, Melissa will reword that sentence, vote 5/0.

**Citizens Request:** Resident Ann Delaware stated that the Four Seasons Luncheon went well.

**Managers' Report:** Melissa stated that the attorney did not recommend she attend the conference set up on October 16, 2024, regarding 114 Cram Street. As it was done via phone. The judge has agreed to consolidate the contempt of court and the order for demolition into one case. The attorney appointed to Robert Wing, Mr. Toothaker, informed the Court that he should have the guardianship filed in the next couple of weeks and will request the Probate Court to prioritize the guardianship. The next court date will be in six weeks. Councilor Lugdon and Clemons stated that there seemed to be progress. Melissa was hopeful. However, she learned last week that 12 people in Penobscot County have been ordered guardianship and are in jail as there is no opening in mental health facilities available. Melissa also stated that she has been going out a few times a week to take pictures; last week, there were signs saying that she was going to die, so she called the Sheriff's office as she felt it was threatening. She added that she has received numerous phone calls and emails about Mr. Wing's behavior and adding more signs to his property. She reported that these residents must call law enforcement, as she cannot do anything. The calls to law enforcement may assist with the guardianship process.

Melissa emailed the Town Council a copy of the appraisal report regarding 43 Highland Avenue. The appraised value was \$47,000. If the Town Council wants to keep the property for municipal use, the excess funds must be returned to the prior owner, Mr. Coulter. Melissa estimates that amount to be \$31,000.00. According to the municipal attorney, the Town Council has until the end of January to do so if they decide to keep it. Otherwise, a new appraisal will be needed. Melissa stated that if the Town maintains the property for municipal use, a deed would be created, and the town would own the property; she added that the Town technically owns it now through the foreclosure process. However, there would be an official deed. She also explained that if the Town wanted to sell the property, it needed to be done so through a real estate agent, and the highest market value must be obtained; the property would have to be for sale for at least a year to obtain that value. Whatever the property sells for minus the fees would be returned to Mr. Coulter. Councilor Lugdon asked if anyone had looked at the property to see if it was suitable for cemetery use. Melissa stated that it had not yet been decided as there was no official decision. Councilor Ketch and Councilor Lugdon asked if it was unsuitable and if it could be sold afterward. Melissa stated she was not sure of that process. She added that the law will hopefully be readdressed in the coming legislative session. There are many issues, including if prior owners are MIA, and the excess funds need to be sent to Maine Revenue Lost Property. There was further discussion about the property, and the voters approved removing funds from the undesignated fund for cemetery development.

Melissa reported that 10.97 tons of debris were collected at the fall clean-up, which cost \$1155.03. In addition, Neil Bonneville charges \$1500 for each clean-up. Revenue collected totaled \$1080; she recommends that the Town Council consider increasing the clean-up fee to help cover more costs.

Melissa met with the students at the ballfield area last week. They would like to move forward with a public meeting. Melissa would like to know if the Town Council would like to schedule that on a regular Council meeting night or do a separate event. Town Council requested the meeting be at 6:00 pm on November 5, 2024.

Melissa reported that she learned from Mark Gifford that the cost of flags is expected to be \$75.00 per flag. She would like to have authorization to increase the amount of the flag donation program to that amount. She noted that a resident had already donated \$150.00 for three flags; the additional funds needed to purchase them will come from town funds. Councilor Wade motioned to change the amount to \$75.00 per flag, seconded by Councilor Clemons, vote 5/0.

**New Business:** Resident Ann Delaware asked if there was any update on the town line signs. Melissa stated that they are complete and behind the municipal building. She has contacted John Milligan, and he will put them back.

**Unfinished Business:** None

**Municipal Warrants:** Councilor Ketch made a motion to approve the municipal warrants as presented; seconded by Councilor Wade, Councilor Ketch asked what the invoice was for tree removal. Manager Doane stated that overgrown brush and trees on Bullen Street and Brown Street were removed, and a tree overhanging on Cram Street was removed. vote 5/0.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting was set for November 5, 2024.

**Adjourn:** Councilor Ketch made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Wade, vote 5/0.