

Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 30, 2020 at 6:30 pm via Zoom Conference Call

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), John Brabant (Vice Chair), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Sharon Winn Fannon (Member, leaving at 8:30 and returning at 8:53 pm), Clif Emmons (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Judy Robert (Town Clerk), Sandra Ferver (Town Treasurer), Barbara Butler (Asst. Town Clerk), Toby Talbot (Operations Manager), Scott Bassage

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.
2. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: The meeting began in Executive Session at 6:30 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (3), personnel matters. The Board resumed Regular Session at 7 pm. The Chair had nothing to report publicly.
3. Public Comment: None.
4. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
5. Operations Manager's Update: The Operations Manager noted that the Road Crew is working well under the conditions of coronavirus; they for the most part do not have public contact, and have had meetings with the Operations Manager to plan. The Road Crew are considered essential personnel and remain busy preparing the roads. Gravel pits will remain open and considered essential, car parts and repair shops as well. He noted that new processes for handling paychecks, bills, and orders are functional.

The Board and Operations Manager discussed a check whose USPS delivery was not made to an employee. Denise Wheeler noted that direct deposit would have eliminated the possibility of this situation occurring and would have avoided significant stress to the employee. The Operations Manager reported that the Road Crew is now switched over to the springtime four day work week. The Board raised questions and concerns about the process by which employees' schedule was altered without Board communication or awareness. The Operations Manager responded that historically, the date of switching from plow/sanding season (5 days) to spring work (4 days) has been variable and not based on any particular date, and the switch in work week hours was done by report of the crew to the Operations Manager. He added that the crew takes advantage of time for road work in relation to weather and conditions. Sharon Winn Fannon noted we need stronger rationale than "that's the way we've always done it.". Rose Pelchuck added that the Road Commissioner's return on April 6 should have been waited for; clearly it is not summer weather road condition and plenty of work (brush trimming, culverts) remains to be done, nowhere near time for establishing a four day work week. The Board noted the crew has never switched to four day work week this early in the year; the Road Commissioner's institutional knowledge, the minutes, and the payroll may be consulted to learn what has been historical evidence.

The Operations Manager explained that the Town Hall electric panel can have fire alarm monitoring installed if the Town chooses to contract with a service company. (This allows for the vacant building to send a signal to an outside source in the case of a fire alarm activation.) The electrician installed a fire alarm system, but it is currently not connected to anyone outside the building. The cost is approx. \$51 per month for year-round monitoring and ambulance testing. The Town Garage is currently monitored by the company that made this estimate. The Board planned to consider this issue further at a future meeting.

6. Shedd Request for Curb Cut: The Operations Manager visited the site (1055 Sand Hill Rd.) and reported that there is good sight distance and a 15” driveway culvert is needed. Cliff Emmons made a motion to approve the Shedd curb cut on Sand Hill Road, with the caveat that it needs a 15” culvert, and authorize Denise Wheeler to sign the form on behalf of the Board. Rose Pelchuck seconded. The motion was voted and passed 5-0.
7. VTRANS 2020 Highway Mileage Certificate: This certificate is an annual form that notifies VTRANS if a town has added or subtracted road mileage; nothing has changed in Calais in the past year. Rose Pelchuck made a motion to approve the VTRANS 2020 highway mileage and certificate and authorize the Chair and Town Clerk to sign and submit it. John Brabant seconded; the motion was voted and passed 5-0.
8. Town Clerk Update: The Town Clerk acknowledged that March 3, Town Meeting Day, seems like a very long time ago. She reported that staff have done a good job working through numerous announcements, changes, and statutory information regarding meeting the needs of the COVID19 crisis. Staff perform week-by-week assessments to respond to what needs to happen. The Assistant Town Clerk has been in the office some number of hours per week to perform in-office duties. Records recording is a piece that is accumulating and needs to be addressed ahead of the election in August. Staff are discussing how to remedy necessary office space sharing without compromising each other’s health.

With the Board’s approval, the Town Clerk would purchase a much larger and more secure drop box for items such as legal documents, packages, etc. USPS mail drop off and delivery will still utilize the mailbox at the end of the driveway. Marriage and birth certificates are not considered “essential” work—however, these licenses *are* essential for babies and marriage partners to access health care. The Board discussed Judy and Barbara alternating work weeks so each of them can access the office, separately. The Board thanked the office staff for their efforts and invited them to let the Board know if there is anything that they can do to support them. The Town Clerk noted that Calais has received a lot of feedback that they set the tone for many other towns in their swift response; the Chair agreed that Calais set the bar and has been an appreciated role model to other towns.

9. Town Treasurer/Delinquent Tax Collector Update: The Town Treasurer explained that in the move from her office to her home, the first week required adjustment to put systems into place; she noted the process is now complete. She has run orders and payroll; NEMRC has been able to provide remote support appropriately. Orders and paychecks, etc., continue to roll along reliably. The server is slower and the work takes longer; she is working time on Saturdays and Sundays to complete her work when the server is less busy and to meet

expectations as they have changed rapidly. The Treasurer comes in Thursday afternoons to pick up checks the Town has received for deposit.

The Town Treasurer reported the February treasurer's report shows us headed into the next part of the year in very good shape, even with the 2019 taxes. The landscape has changed (COVID19), in a way that we cannot really predict. She explained that the Town does have a good fund balance and will likely get through FY20 and not be in a loss. Where there may be a challenge is in FY 21, depending on when the State is able to calculate the education tax rate. VLCT has a survey going around learning what immediate needs Towns have for borrowing; Calais's tax collection effort is behind them and the Town does not need to borrow. The Town Treasurer asked the Board to have some discussion and decide if it is prudent to look at whether unbudgeted expenditures are absolutely necessary. As a side note, she supported purchase of a secure drop box, affirming it will be utilized regardless of the coronavirus setting.

Receipt of outstanding 2019 taxes (approx. \$91,000) may be affected by COVID19. Implications include how long will folks be out of work; will they be able to make the first tax payment. A cash flow issue may result in FY21. If the tax rate is received from the State by August, the Board would be asked to come in for a special meeting, set the Town tax rate as quickly as possible, and have bills out in about eight days. The second tax date, in November, was set at Town Meeting and cannot be changed.

The group considered how federal and state government will be affected; grant reimbursement and state aid to highways may be facing a potential cash flow crunch in FY21. Without predictability around many factors, over the next many months, we should consider the wisdom of taking on liability of a large grant that requires the Town to expend first, when there is a concern about ability to be reimbursed. The Town Treasurer noted that any structure grant expenses incurred with that large highway grant could await payment until FY21. John Brabant noted that the Town enters into a contractual agreement with the State, who is obligated to pay; he noted historical and current threats that may impact the State's ability to escape its contractual agreement. Calais is already in a contract with the State to complete the work by 2020; in the past the structure grant funds have been available from the year the Town *signed* the grants. The project could be cancelled. However, the benefit may be to get the essential work done and access the monies while there are still funds for it. The Board asked the Operations Manager to speak with Shauna Clifford, the district V-Trans contact, to learn more about the availability of grant funds and will revisit this conversation in the future.

At Town Meeting, the voters approved two loans (the office server and the wood chipper), and the bank is putting those loans together. The hard copy will go to the office, and someone authorized to sign on behalf of the Board will then leave them for the Treasurer to sign. The first bill from rbTech has arrived and will be paid after the loan is signed. The Board was aware of the possibility of a petition for reconsideration of the article on the wood chipper; Thursday will be 30 days after Town Meeting and therefore the close of any petition for reconsideration.

The group considered the prudence of making the wood chipper expenditure (via taking out a loan) in light of the drastic landscape change since Town Meeting Day. The Board could not

have anticipated the state of the emergency we are in. If the Board desires to *not* make the purchase on the woodchipper, the Town Attorney may need to be consulted for the group to understand the latitude the Board has. The loan is built into the tax rate. John Brabant mentioned a tip on a wood chipping service he will be exploring in this interim period. The sum total of this situation asks the Board to want to be very measured in its position at this time. The Town Attorney will be consulted to learn if a specific article demands the purchase, or if the Selectboard has the authority to decide it is not prudent to make that purchase, and therefore the first payment is not built into the FY21 tax rate and budget. Does the Board have authority to then buy it in the next fiscal year—how long does that authority last? The Board was in agreement to wait to gain more information before proceeding in this discussion.

Two tax sales are scheduled for April 28 (no payment nor communication for 2018 taxes; no payment nor communication for 2019 as well) and have nothing to do with the existing COVID19 situation. Attorney Gloria Rice advised it is possible to reschedule the sale, and it would be to the taxpayers' benefit as well. Clif Emmons made a motion, and Denise Wheeler seconded, that the tax sale be moved to a date mutually agreeable by the Delinquent Tax Attorney and Delinquent Tax collector, in June. The motion passed 5-0.

The Treasurer will have the bank prepare loan papers for the server but not the woodchipper. John Brabant moved to authorize the Chair to sign on behalf of the Board, subsequent to the Board's vote, including the server loan for the Town Office computer system. Rose Pelchuck seconded. Sharon Winn Fannon inquired how broad John's motion was. It would be subsequent to a Board vote on any interim period. The motion was seconded by Rose Pelchuck and the motion passed 5-0.

The Town Treasurer reiterated that setting up systems at home that accommodate the new norm are now in place, including remote IT and NEMRC support; safe scheduling of employees at the office has been well honed. The Board asked her to let them know if she needs support. The Town Clerk agreed she also feels well supported and will continue to work out logistics with the Assistant Town Clerk and Town Treasurer.

10. Revised CLG Grant: Scott Bassage explained that the original CLG grant application was for \$18,000; the initial grant award turned out to be \$13,000. The cancellation of the annual gathering (due to COVID19) allowed additional funds to be awarded. The amendment to the original agreement awarded Calais an additional \$5,000, making the amount to spend \$18,000; match in-kind would go from \$9,000 to \$12,000. A motion was made to approve receiving the additional funds and to allow the Chair to sign the paperwork for that. John Brabant seconded and the motion passed 5-0.
11. IT Update: A current IT goal is to extend usability of the newly purchased Zoom (conference calling system) license to other Town groups without needing Clif Emmons's presence on each call, and without incurring additional cost. The bandwidth on any call is a function of the bandwidth available from the conference call participants. The group appreciated Clif Emmons's efforts in getting Calais up and running so seamlessly. Clif Emmons noted that on Thursday, the Town Clerk and he will be in a conference meeting with rbTech to learn how the sever installation layout and timeline will progress.

12. Public Wi-Fi Access The Wi-Fi zone has been reenabled at the Town Hall, allowing members of the community to access internet connection from the Town Hall parking lot during the current crisis. Scott Bassage raised consideration of use of a firewall for security at this location. The Town does have a license to access such a service through August of 2022 (a five-year license was already paid). Clif Emmons explained that the low-budget answer is to discover the usability of the device that is already in place from 2014 (done by a certified installer, including establishing connection to the Sysco server, verifying the license and serial number, etc.). If not fully functional, a newer more robust device would need to be installed by a certified installer (approx. \$600 for labor and material). Initially the VT Council on Rural Development offered a grant as they installed Wi-Fi hotspots all around the State (the grant covered the hardware and first two years of service). Scott Bassage spoke in support of the purchase of this Wi-Fi protection, amortized over the next 3-4 years; Justin would be the one to do the install, whether it's the old one or the new one. Rose Pelchuck made a motion to purchase the new device and have Justin from Sysco install it. John Brabant seconded. Clif Emmons noted he consulted with rbTech and this type of installation takes a couple hours to perform, and the price is within an expected range. The motion was voted and passed 4-0.
13. Quarterly EMFD Meeting: The quarterly meeting with East Montpelier Selectboard and Fire Department would normally take place on April 9. The EMFD reported that they do not think this meeting is necessary. Denise Wheeler requested that the Board agree to postpone the meeting a couple of weeks and that it is prudent to plan a meeting. Clif Emmons noted that technologically, it is possible to have the meeting by Zoom. The Board wants to be apprised of their current situation financially, and if they have any concerns considering what has happened; what their plan is in the case of staffing illness; or holes that Boards might need to address. Meeting in May would be before the end of the fiscal year. Rose Pelchuck explained that the Department is part of "District 6" and are tightly communicating and planning. The Board will request the EMFD provide their contingency plan.
14. Chair Updates:
- The Board has gotten good results from all of their Front Porch Forum postings and surveys and has received much positive feedback to the team effort addressing COVID19 in Calais.
 - Green Up Day is postponed, as the coordinators felt it was in the best interest of public safety and avoiding transmission of the disease. The state postponed it until May 30. The Board discussed the appropriateness of picking up on rural Calais roadways and asking the coordinators to join the statewide planned date (May 30).
15. Review and approve minutes, warrants
- a) The Board reviewed the invoices and orders were processed for payment.
 - b) Approval of minutes was tabled until a regularly scheduled meeting.
16. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: John Brabant made a motion to go into Executive Session at 9 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (3), personnel matters. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 5-0. The Board resumed Regular Session at 9:11 pm. The Chair had nothing to report publicly.
17. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: None.

18. Adjournment: John Brabant made a motion to adjourn at 9:11 pm. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 5-0.

Date: 4/1/2020 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the May 4, 2020 meeting

Click on the link below to view documents associated with this agenda:
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=17IwHRt3vBkOo1Yg7duW4K8BACFZZeMC4>