

Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Monday, August 10, 2020 at 7 pm via Zoom conference call

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair), John Brabant (Member, leaving at 9:15 pm), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), ORCA Media, Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Sandra Ferver (Town Treasurer), Barbara Butler (Assistant Town Clerk), Toby Talbot (Operations Manager), Alfred Larrabee (Road Commissioner), Peter Harvey, Scott Bassage, David Healy, Steve Whittaker

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Updates/Reports: Treasurer: Clif Emmons made a motion to direct the Town Treasurer to send in the \$3,478 worth of COVID-19 expenses for reimbursement (the threshold for submittal is \$3300) to FEMA. John Brabant seconded and the motion passed 5-0.

The Board and Town Treasurer discussed the NEMRC proposed contract which allows for a service amount “up to” four hours per month (the NEMRC auditor has billed significantly less than this amount monthly). Clif Emmons made a motion to approve and sign NEMRC contract for continued auditor services and to authorize the Selectboard Chair to sign on behalf of the Selectboard. Rose Pelchuck seconded, and the motion passed 5-0.

The Board inquired about an order that includes a significant expense for a grant that the Town is reimbursed for afterward. The order in question includes a culvert grant and is more than \$140,000. The Town Treasurer explained that the fund balance will have to cover it (approximately \$360,000 in the fund balance). The Operations Manager explained impact to cash flow should be minimized because the culvert grant project should be done in two weeks and reimbursement should be received within a month. The Town Treasurer described the fund balance as “comfortable” which has allowed the Town to not take out a note in anticipation of collection of taxes. She added that Highway is in the negative in terms of expenses and revenues; the fund balance covers this, and as revenues come in, Highway is returned to the positive.

5. Updates/Reports: Delinquent Tax Collector (DTC): The group discussed options for payment of taxes and heard from office staff on the challenges and risks of accepting cash tax payments. Town Office staff described events that illustrate security risks and lengthy transactions in a remote rural environment that is not secured. The Town Attorney has shared an opinion that essentially says the Town may opt not to accept cash. Accepting check, credit

card, and money order could reduce the risk to office staff considerably. Having a large amount of cash on hand in a remote location, especially under the circumstances of a single employee working during the coronavirus pandemic, is a concern. The Town has the authority to take payments in the way the Town feels is best under the circumstances. The Town Treasurer estimated that maybe 20-30 people would be impacted. The Board would be supportive of the office staff not having to collect taxes in cash. John Brabant told Office staff that he would be willing to drive a resident, who for whatever reason, does not have capacity to get to town, to get a money order from the bank or from the Post Office. Clif Emmons learned that the Calais USPS policy allows for a money order for up to \$1,000 for a charge of \$1.75. Many banks are waiving any service fee for a cashier's check. The Board emphasized their commitment to do their best to support any residents who may be struggling for various reasons and discussed how to ensure that people who have difficulty paying in a way other than cash could get an accommodation.

Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion that the 2020 approach be that cash payments are not accepted for tax in the Town Offices; we acknowledge that some people need to pay by cash, and the Board will figure out a way to accommodate this. Denise Wheeler seconded and the motion passed 5-0. The Town Clerk's policy is not to accept cash for other payments (such as dog licenses) and fees and payments are the purview of the Town Clerk. The Office does sometimes still receive small amounts of cash through the mail and in the drop box even with the Town Office closed, which the staff does accept (rather than tracking someone down for a \$9 payment, for example).

The Town Treasurer will post to FPF tomorrow about the tax bills being en route and to remind residents of the due dates. The Selectboard Chair will follow up with a second post to FPF about tax payment.

6. Updates/Reports: Road Commissioner and Operations Manager: Toby Talbot applied for a state grant for enough masks for 25% of the Town and is awaiting reply.

The Board asked the Operations Manager to communicate directly with Bryan Olkowski, WCUUSD Superintendent, who emailed questions to the Board about the proposed shared cost of the solar speed limit sign for Lightening Ridge Road. The Board noted that the school is being asked to share half the cost; the vendor information and the invoice are ready to be shared by email; and the rationale is that over the years the Town has received a significant amount of complaints about speeding on Lightening Ridge. The speed sign is for the safety of the children and staff at the school. It would be on the road sign post all the time (not stored).

Sharon Winn Fannon and Rose Pelchuck gave an update about their efforts to reach out to folks about tree health. They met with Stephanie Kaplan (Chair of the Conservation Commission), who wasn't aware that Calais had adopted the State standards (however, the motion to do so maintained the Town standards where not in conflict with the State standards, but might augment them when not operating in conflict). Stephanie volunteered to analyze exactly where standards are in conflict between the Calais and the State. Calais's road standards were applauded for being more stringent than the State standard. The Board emphasized the importance of Calais's own standards that set the Town's bar, and articulate an environmental stewardship ethic. The Municipal Roads General Permit is a VTRANS policy that they adopt together with ANR, and is born out of statute. Sharon Winn Fannon noted that

we need to involve the folks that work so hard on the roads, and keep the tie to the rural environmental stewardship as part of our road conversations. The Chair noted that she had reached out to CVRPC regarding support around Town tree health on roadsides and will provide further update when she hears back from Joanne Garton.

The Road Commissioner updated the Board that roadside mowing is all done. The mower head has been switched to the flail head to tidy areas where brush is hanging in the road. A new set of teeth do not need to be purchased because the Town has existing teeth to be installed from another machine. The Road Commissioner will get in touch with the Town Treasurer to coordinate on the process of woodchipper purchase. George Road culvert work (contractor Blue Mountain Trucking and Excavating) continues currently. Peter Harvey thanked the Road Crew for pressure washing the machine (to prevent seed spread) and asked if the Crew is going to vertical mow the roadside brush on the four roads around Bliss Pond, can you do these four roads first so as to not bring in any wild chervil seeds? The Road Commissioner agreed. Peter Harvey noted that Joanne Garton's Calais Resilient ROW Action Plan which was approved last summer recommends washing the machinery, and the Board agreed this is a best practice for integrating environmental stewardship with Calais road practices.

The Road Crew is ditching to prevent runoff into a water body, and the gravel was laid on the road and rip rap to stabilize the bank and prevent road material from running off in to the lake. No ditching material is in a position to run into the lake.

The Road Commissioner inquired about reappointment of his position and union negotiation progress and requested he be added to an upcoming meeting executive session (the Chair agreed).

Clif Emmons commented that he will be monitoring the Town Hall painting process and will let the Road Commissioner know if the road dust needs treatment during the painting facing the road.

A resident raised a concern about parking at Curtis Pond. Two road barrels at Curtis Pond have been stolen. There was a request to put in boulders or fill the barrels with sand. It is not permissible to put anything in a roadway that could cause a liability to the traveling public (ie, they cannot be filled with sand or gravel). The Road Commissioner will replace the barrels tomorrow and they will be labelled "Town of Calais."

7. H.966 COVID-19 Relief Bill and Broadband: David Healy, Calais CV Fiber delegate, attended and explained that under H.966 COVID Relief, the state is spending \$11 million on short term fixes to broadband connectivity. The Department of Public Service is taking proposals in three batches. H.966 requires the Department to circulate for review any proposals to the respective communications union district for review and comment. Any solution using this money must be up and running by December of this year (eliminating use of this money for extending fiber optic). One proposal received is by a company out of Massachusetts, called "RTO," who proposes an approximately \$1 million dirigible balloon be floated somewhere above Kent's Corner (possibly tied in to fiber line there) on a 2,000 foot tether that is rewindable in a storm. It would provide potential broadband to 485 people in Calais. David Healy saw this proposal

through the CV Fiber review process and notified the Selectboard; he invited the Board's input to take back to the communications union. He and the Board discussed their concern that RTO's proposal sought no input or feedback from the local community and that the proposed internet would not be available in a storm. David noted that Cloud Alliance is expected to also send a proposal in soon. John Brabant raised concerns about a rushed project without public input, and reiterated historic precedent of resident concerns about health impacts of wireless internet. Rose Pelchuck questioned the impact and process for this project in an historic site (which Kent's Corner is). John Brabant made a motion that the Selectboard formally go on record to oppose the RTO dirigible proposal in Kent's Corner, due to the following considerations: it is in an historic district; it is too short a time frame for the community to consider this proposal's implications; we have concerns that it may operate to effectively displace the buildout and financing of our communication district's fiber optic effort, which is in our best interest. Denise Wheeler seconded. There is a friendly amendment to the original motion that adds additional concerns of hidden costs and who would foot the bill; John Brabant accepted the friendly amendment. The motion was voted and passed 5-0.

David Healy continued with an update on CV Fiber's progress. They are going to hire a temporary project manager (which will relieve some of David's significant volunteer responsibilities) and are in negotiations with Washington Electric Coop who are finishing their feasibility study right now. He contrasted the fact that the State would consider spending \$1 million to put up a temporary balloon for internet to 485 people by December, when all of Calais can have fiber optic in two years' time for \$2.5 million. The group talked about the planning for where fiber goes in first and the Starlink project run by Elon Musk for worldwide broadband.

8. Open Meeting Law Training: The Town Attorney had advised that a multi-town recorded webinar on open meeting law may be the most cost-effective option for Calais board and commission members. The Board discussed their preference for a means of proving DRB member attendance at the training and the Chair will check with the Town Attorney. The group considered: How do we sustain a focus after such a training to ensure that we systemize Open Meeting Law compliance? The question may include how to have somebody "audit" a group's understanding and compliance with the law, in much the same way the Town Office is audited.
9. Town Hall Building: The exterior contracted painting is moving along nicely, with meticulous effort, and the work will break for the statewide election and then recommence. Clif Emmons will bring the work-in-progress agreement document to the Board after the Friends committee meets.
10. IT Update: Clif Emmons will meet with Andy Felice later this week about getting things installed for the exterior antennae and the completion of the slingshot (backup data) system, as well as the alarm redundancy connection.
11. State Police Letter: The Board appreciated the State Police reaching out and engaging via a letter expressing their desire to hear directly from the Board and the people they serve about priorities and concerns in the context of systemic racism and policing. The Chair will express the Board's appreciation for this outreach in an email back and suggest that in the future they

convene a public forum in our central VT community that people can participate in face-to-face (via Zoom). The Board sees their role as facilitating a larger conversation with the central VT community (rather than a response from the Board).

12. Chair Update:

- UVM Roads Study – Professor Lens offered to come to a meeting and help the Board digest to study results. The Chair noted the changes to plow routes being worth studying. Feedback on the narrowness of roads doesn't align with Calais's road standards. Calais has previously strongly resisted allowing the size of the roads to be dictated by the size of the trucks (the report notes that the trucks may be oversized). Sharon Winn Fannon questioned how other towns who have an ethos like Calais work with their road crews (Sharon Winn Fannon and Denise Wheeler will look into Peacham's standards). The Board emphasized the importance of a town Selectboard staying on top of protecting tree canopy and roadside trees, and the tragedy that has been seen in neighboring towns when centuries-old trees have been quickly removed from roadsides.
- Joint meeting with E. Mont. SB and EMFD on Thursday, August 13, 2020 @ 7 pm. The Calais Selectboard has been conducting business via video chat after discussing best leadership and health practices in the evolving coronavirus pandemic (see last meeting's minutes with Calais Health Officer Jay Copping). The Chair will let everyone know that the Calais Board is available to attend via Zoom video call.

13. Review and approve minutes, warrants

- a) The Board reviewed the invoices and orders were processed for payment.
- b) Denise Wheeler moved and Sharon Winn Fannon seconded to approve the minutes of the 6/15/2020 special meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 5-0.
Sharon Winn Fannon moved and Denise Wheeler seconded to approve the minutes of the 7/13/2020 meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 5-0.
Denise Wheeler moved and Clif Emmons seconded to approve the minutes of the 7/27/2020 meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 3-0 (John Brabant had to leave the meeting before voting, and Sharon Winn Fannon abstained from the vote on the meeting as she was absent, and voted in acceptance of the executive session section which she attended).

14. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion to go into Executive Session at 9:20 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (3), personnel matters. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 4-0. The Board resumed Regular Session at 9:38 pm. The Chair reported the Selectboard will meet Thursday, August 13, 2020 at 6:00 pm for an Executive Session per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (3), personnel matters. This will take place before the Joint SB Meeting with the EM Selectboard and EMFD Board of Directors that begins at 7:00 pm via Zoom.

15. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: None.

16. Adjournment: Rose Pelchuck made a motion to adjourn at 9:39 pm. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 4-0.

Date: 8/12/2020 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 8/24/2020 meeting

Click on the link below to view documents associated with this agenda:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1FibeRhP7ataJ8-bk25y2vpPERvp3AWaN?usp=sharing>