

SELECTBOARD SPECIAL MEETING
Draft Minutes

December 9, 2016

9:00am Town Office Building

Attending: Denise Wheeler, John Brabant, Scott Bassage, Toby Talbot (arrived at 9:20 am) and Rose Pelchuck.

Others attending: Jim Barlow, Esq

Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 9:08 am. There was no public comment or changes to the agenda. Denise explained the primary goal of the meeting is planning for the town's future needs and identify goals to achieve that end.

Denise Wheeler reported the Selectboard has been informed that Donna Fitch, Town Clerk and Treasurer has expressed her intention to cut back her hours and duties. She further stated that Donna's experience and knowledge are a valuable asset to the Town; she has earned our respect and gratitude for bringing the Town Office into the 21st century. Denise went on to say continuing to expect that one person, as both Town Clerk and Treasurer, can perform all the obligations, with more and more state and federal mandates, reporting requirements and more complex issues, is no longer realistic. The town is experiencing growing pains, as are many towns around the state. The "good ole' days" and way of doing business is no longer realistic. The Selectboard has the responsibility to insure that all the statutory duties and other tasks are accomplished and that the current staff is at full capacity. Denise noted that change can be difficult and encouraged the Selectboard members to work together, in everyone's best interests, to guide the town into the future and be open to looking at other options as we plan for the future needs of the town.

This summer, Donna Fitch proposed the Selectboard hire additional office staff. Initially, Donna requested office help of 20 hours per week and later changed her request to five hours per week. This was to free up time that would enable Donna to complete specific tasks she has been unable to get done including conversion of the accounting system to NEMRC (as strongly recommended by the outside audit firm of FSV). This fall, Donna informed the Selectboard that she did not plan to not run for Town Treasurer in March 2017 and was going to only run for Town Clerk. More recently, Donna changed her mind and decided to run for Town Treasurer and not run for Town Clerk. Historically, Calais has had one person serve as both Town Clerk and Treasurer. This evolution has suggested to the Selectboard with input from Donna, that there needs to be a plan for the future to determine the next steps to structure the business of the town in the best, most affordable way possible, thus the idea of a Charter. The first step is to define the statutory duties of the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer and see what else needs to get done. The other Selectboard members had a chance to share their thoughts about planning for the town's future.

Scott Bassage recalled how the State treated him upon announcing his retirement plans a few years ago and sincerely hopes the Selectboard treats Donna the way he wishes he would have been treated. Scott noted the town does have some time as Donna is not retiring soon.

Rose Pelchuck spoke about the fundamental reason so many people volunteer so many hours for the town because we care about Calais, its people and character. We hope that people can come together in an honest, forthright manner to discuss the issues and problem solve ways to figure out what is best for the town going forward. Rose noted the belief that some people don't come clean and share what they know about current issues, which ends up being a detriment to the town as a whole.

John Brabant noted the audit discovered unmet work not being done by the town. Donna has a value system that requires her to fix the shortcomings. In the corporate world, recognition/appreciation is acknowledged by wages as a way to praise someone's great work effort, many small, towns do not have the financial resources to do this. We have placed so much responsibility in one person holding

two positions for so many years. John would like the Selectboard to set the stage so that future Selectboards are not encumbered by only one person. The town needs to figure out a way to acknowledge our employees and if the current compensation is adequate, be brave enough to say that. Running the town is much different than in years past and the job responsibilities are overwhelming. John reiterated the need to define the statutory roles of the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer and what we want done; also to have more clearly defined assistants and an administrator person should be given serious consideration.

Toby Talbot noted that Donna is frustrated by the Selectboard not hiring a bookkeeper; it's about time not money. Toby reported help is needed with menial chores in the office. Don Welch, East Montpelier Town Treasurer, makes \$33,500.00 for working three days a week. Toby urged the Selectboard to identify all the tasks the Town Clerk needs to do and the same for Town Treasurer then list all the other stuff that needs to get done. Currently, all other duties such as Human Resources and administration fall on the Selectboard. Rose Pelchuck did note that Donna Fitch is also the Clerk for the Selectboard, which is why she does a lot of the administration.

Jim Barlow, Town Attorney, stated it is a great idea to have job descriptions with a list of job duties for each position. Jim Barlow recited the brief list of statutory requirements for both positions as follows:

Town Clerk:

1. deeds and land records
2. vital records
3. conduct elections
4. issuing licenses, death and burial certificates
5. serve as member of Board of Civil Authority and Board of Abatement

Town Treasurer:

1. keep accounts of the town (keeping the books "accounting")
2. pay orders approved by the Selectboard and keep running list of orders
3. with the Selectboard, has joint responsibility investing town funds
4. collect current taxes

The Selectboard is responsible for preparing and sending out tax bills, which Jim Barlow noted is appropriate to assign to the Treasurer. The Charter, if approved by the votes next year, will take care of the appointed treasurer duties. Jim Barlow explained the difference between a having a Town Manager and having a Town Administrator. Jim Barlow recited several similar sized towns to Calais for the Selectboard to see what their town clerks, town treasurers and town administrators are paid. Jim suggested to first come up with the job descriptions then estimate what it will cost. The Selectboard will need a public campaign to inform the townspeople about the proposed change in administrative structure along with the charter. The Selectboard isn't intending to increase costs, just take the total budgeted amount for town administration and divvy it up differently. Jim Barlow offered Selectboard Assistant or Town Administrator as titles for someone to do the administrative duties currently being done by Donna and/or Judy.

The Selectboard asked Scott Bassage to contact Ernie Sanders at NEMRC to ask about options for help with further implementation of the NEMRC financial data software.

Regarding the office of auditor, Jim Barlow reported the town can vote to eliminate the auditor position and have a professional audit done each year; or through the charter, not eliminate the auditor position and have an appointed auditor(s) (not necessarily a Calais resident) that gives the town the opportunity to reconcile bank accounts, petty cash account and make deposits. The auditor examines the accounts of the town and reports to the taxpayers in an annual Auditor's Report. This would be less costly than having a professional audit done annually and would then only need to be done periodically.

Town Charter - Jim Barlow noted the dates on the charter adoption schedule; it will be revised and redistributed to the Selectboard. Two public hearings will be held in January. Public notices will be duly posted and published in accordance with the law as outlined in the schedule.

Other Business - Toby Talbot, Operations Manager, provided a document from VTrans that will provide an additional \$15,000.00 in grant funds to the town for the _____ project. Denise Wheeler, Chair, signed on behalf of the Selectboard.

The meeting was continued to next Friday, December 16, 2016 at 9:00 am at the Town Office.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose Pelchuck
Calais Selectboard Member