

Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 2, 2020 at 5 pm at the Calais Town Offices

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), John Brabant (Vice Chair), Rose Pelchuck (Member, arriving 7:30 pm), Sharon Winn Fannon (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Judy Fitch Robert (Town Clerk), Jan Ohlsson (Lister), Toby Talbot (Operations Manager), Barry Bernstein, Peter Johnke

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 5:07 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Rural Community Transportation, Inc. (RTC) Appropriation Request: The Board considered an appropriation request in the sum of \$975.00 to support Rural Community Transportation, Inc. (RTC) for the 2020 Town Meeting Warning. John Brabant made a motion to add the RCT appropriation to the list of social service agency requests in the 2020 Town Meeting Warning. Clif Emmons seconded.

Peter Johnke commented that this bus route is a regular public transit route. This is a “no-fare” bus and is paid for through a stream of funding outside of the appropriation; after three years it will go through a normal process of evaluation to see if it’s a viable route, etc. For the first three years, the funding is covered, but the money requested from towns will help pay for a local match needed for the actual physical bus (total cost estimated between \$100,000-120,000). Peter Johnke added that the route begins in Morrisville and ends in Barre (there is a connection at the East Montpelier Park and Ride with the Route 2 bus), and makes a significant improvement in his options as a rider in getting to Barre (no longer having to travel all the way into Montpelier, then transferring to another bus to Barre). Barry Bernstein commented that he has been working on rural transportation since 1979, when efforts originated to specifically support disabled and elderly residents. The new no-fare bus is an effort primarily to serve people who need transportation for work (the route runs early in the morning and late in the afternoon); however, he sees public transportation as one component of fulfilling a general population need as people increasingly desire ways to lesson carbon footprints. The group appreciated the new bus route and considered whether to locate RCT in the list of Social Services, or as a separate warned item.

The motion was amended to rename “social services” to “community services” or a similar title. The amended motion passed unanimously.

5. Road Crew Procedures and Coverage: Toby Talbot stated that where Alfred made the judgement about morning road maintenance at around 3:30 AM, his approach to planning road

work for the early morning hours is made ahead of time based on the weather forecast at 4 pm. Making a judgement at 3:30 AM is “the only gap.” Toby feels comfortable that making the judgement late in the afternoon before is sufficient 99% of the time.

Toby notes, with regard to getting timely information to the school busses, that other towns pay weather forecaster Roger Hill a stipend (\$800 per school and \$600 per town) to gather information at 5 am and report to the U-32 district schools, for the purpose of deciding on any school delay/cancellation. Calais has not contracted for this service, and without it, there is no link between the plow driver and the schools; each town has considerably different road conditions. John Brabant pointed out that this service for our school makes sense for a community; but the question may be: after being forced to take on other schools’ debt, and not owning our own school, whose financial commitment is this? Should this be the responsibility of the union school district? Toby Talbot commented that the person out plowing is generally the one who will communicate with Roger Hill by radio at 5 am, and that any road crew member would be capable of making the needed observation of conditions (and allow the driver to communicate directly with school staff). If the Town opts to join Roger Hill’s service, Roger Hill will send a bill to the Operations Manager for this season, and the Operations Manager will communicate with the road crew about expectations for reporting to Roger Hill at 5 am. The Board voted to move forward and sign up to participate in the weather communication with Roger Hill.

The Board noted that it has not been the expectation nor practice having road crew members who have worked weekends stay home on alternate dry days the following weekdays. There are currently two crew extras and the Operations Manager complimented staff work.

The Road Commissioner is taking a leave of absence until April 3 and the Board planned to post basic information for the public on Front Porch Forum, including reassurance that a plan is underway. Toby Talbot is providing leadership for the Highway Department. He confirmed that he is covering Town garage email and phone; checking on the garage daily or once every two days; communicating with employees about a plan for the day including truck repair; handling invoices; making orders for materials. He will send the Board an email to keep them apprised of any issues (with cc to the Town Clerk). The Operations Manager mentioned he plans to try running the extra truck and five drivers on a bigger storm and will see how this impacts rodeo lengths and overall road maintenance. The Board appreciated his leadership, and this communication on a new approach to winter roads, and requested his continued attendance and communication at meetings. Toby confirmed that the only “gap” is 3:30AM assessment of road conditions and his expectation that making that judgement the afternoon before based on up-to-date predictions will be sufficient.

The Board approved purchase of a woodchipper and tractor at a previous meeting; the group planned to wait to make a purchase until a decision can be made with a road crew member who will be operating the machinery.

6. FY 21 Proposed Budget: The group reviewed the most recent version of the budget and made adjustments. They reviewed a detailed calendar of document, proofreading, report, and printing deadlines and meeting schedules for the next two months.

The group considered the overall budget as it stood in 2010 and 2020, seeing an average increase of approximately 3.3% yearly (between 2010 and 2020). Emergency services was 7% of the budget in 2010 and increased to 13% in 2020.

The Board estimated that the overall increase at the start of this meeting as follows: Highway: 3%; General Government & Highway: 4% (not including Emergency Services). This status did not include planned salary increases. Salary increase of .75% plus CPI (currently 1.6%) was considered. The Board revisited their long-term goal to have a systematic, predictable formula for yearly salary increases, instead of “starting from scratch” each year. The unpredictable nature of Union negotiations was acknowledged, as well as the major implications of unpredictably high health insurance premium increases.

The Board calculated the amount of money needed to be whittled down to keep the overall budget increase under 4% and salary increases at 2.35%. They reviewed every line item to locate any possible savings. A number of hours in, the Board identified enough savings so that the process resulted in full-time and part-time staff receiving a fair increase at 2.35%. The Board’s expectation is to establish year-over-year stability and predictably in its approach to salary increases to avoid erratic increases and surprises to the taxpayers

The piece of the budget the Board controls, General Government and Highway, is an overall increase of 2.96%.

Denise Wheeler made a motion that the Board approve the proposed FY21 budget as finalized on January 2, 2020. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. The Board appreciated the team effort, and the process the Town Treasurer brought to planning this year.

7. 2020 Town Meeting Warning: The Board and Town Clerk reviewed all details of the Town Meeting warning, making edits as needed. A motion was made to rescind the previous motion of John Brabant of September 9, 2019, as follows:

John Brabant made a motion to borrow up to \$5,000.00 out of the Town Office Reserve Fund to perform design work with Steeplechase Design+Build in anticipation of paying back the reserve fund as part of our next budget cycle. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 4-0. The Selectboard will put an article on the Town Warning in March 2020 to ask the voters to authorize this expenditure (the money would then go back into the reserve fund). The Town Office layout has been ill-fitted for its use for some time, making it very difficult for personnel and the public to get their jobs done in a quiet, efficient environment. The current layout does not have a closed area for confidential business to take place.

(The point of the motion became moot.) The motion to rescind was seconded and passed 5-0.

8. Selectboard Annual Report: This item was tabled for a subsequent meeting.

Executive Session for Personnel Matters: Denise Wheeler made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:30 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 8:41 pm. The Chair reported the Selectboard approved a Leave of Absence for the Road Commissioner, Alfred Larrabee, from December 24, 2019 through April 3, 2020 with a return to work date of Monday, April 6, 2020. Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion to authorize Denise Wheeler to

sign a letter to Alfred Larrabee on behalf of the Selectboard confirming details related to the leave. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 5-0.

9. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: The Selectboard discussed the schedule for upcoming meetings. Denise Wheeler collectively praised the Selectboard members for all the long hours, including 37 Selectboard meetings in 2019, in addition to other committee meetings and associated work. Great team effort!
10. Adjournment: John Brabant made a motion to adjourn at 8:50 pm. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 5-0.

Date: 1/6/2020 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 3/9/2020 meeting

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<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1GyMiHkOWTm6AV9waufQjeWA7Z7AJp-g>