

Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 9, 2020 at 7 pm via Zoom conference call

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), John Brabant (Member), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), ORCA Media, Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Judy Robert (Town Clerk), Sandra Ferver (Town Treasurer), Maureen Cassidy, Fred Duplessis, Alfred Larrabee (Road Commissioner), Cindy Gardner-Morse

Absent: Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice-Chair)

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Updates/Reports: Town Office: The Chair congratulated the Town Office staff for a magnificent statewide general election job. The Town Clerk noted that the primary was more difficult and stressful because the mailing, including multiple ballots, was done by the Town Office, while the general election ballot was mailed by the Secretary of State.
5. Updates/Reports: Treasurer: The next tax payment is due November 16th and grace period ends on the 23rd. The Chair thanked Fred Duplessis of Sullivan and Powers for performing Calais's audit again this year. The total fund balance came in over \$391,000 (estimated to be about 80 days of cash for Highway and the General Fund), which Fred Duplessis described as being in good shape going into the fiscal year, especially in terms of the pandemic.

Overall, the Town did better than budget in spending and revenue, having planned them to break even, but was able to use that surplus to add to the general fund balance. Approx. \$4,640 was able to be moved from the Highway budget to the Capital Equipment Fund. There are no material issues and no compliance issues. There is a note on a period of time at the beginning of the audited period about a need for a second set of eyes on any journal entry changes and notes; this has already been resolved by hiring the NEMRC auditor to do this monthly (this note will not arise in the audit going forward).

The group discussed an auditing "qualification" that could be eliminated by selling investments (cemetery funds) and buying them right back. The Trustees of Public Funds and Cemetery Commission may meet with Fred Duplessis about this area of the audit regarding the mixing of two kinds of funds (operating fund and perpetual care fund). The Town Treasurer explained that when the checks come in for a purchase of a plot, they go directly into the endowment fund. The auditor suggested creating a Cemetery Fund (just as the Town has a Conservation Fund, for example). The Town Treasurer believes this would be fine.

Discussion turned to budget preparation. Board members plan to utilize budget preparation binders as the Town Treasurer initiated last year. The FY22 budget template is formatted and ready. Digitization of land records and the deficit loan will be paid off in FY22. The server loan and Town Hall Renovation loan will be paid off in FY23. This year is the last year for the 2016 Western Star truck; the 2017 Western Star truck and excavator will be paid off in FY23. \$50,000 for Town Hall painting is also not in next year's budget.

The Town Treasurer reported that 2019 delinquent taxes are coming in and hopefully will be paid by November 23; we have a very healthy fund balance to rely on. The Board thanked Sandra for her phenomenal job on yearly delinquent tax collection work.

The Town Treasurer and Board discussed the timeline for health insurance plan enrollments but not to make changes for the upcoming year.

6. Updates/Reports: Operations Manager: The Operations Manager was not present for an update.
7. Updates/Reports: Road Commissioner: The Road Commissioner stated that all equipment was operational for responding to the first snowstorm of the year last week, and is ready to go for the next. The spare truck has a number of smaller repairs needed before it will pass inspection. There are some rust issues; new trucks have an undercoating applied, and an undercoating is then applied yearly. A temp employee has been called in as regular employees used time off.

The group reviewed the Road Commissioner's proposed adjustments to the plow routes, altered from four routes to five routes, which results in a decrease in the length of each "rodeo" (one complete plow route). The extreme length of each rodeo was identified as central to concerns about winter road maintenance during last year's public information sessions with Vermont Local Roads officials. The Board asked the Road Commissioner to try using these five routes and hire the fifth person who can plow one of the rodeos.

The UVM Roads Study identified the starting point of the rodeos as a significant disadvantage, especially in covering "hot spots" in a timely manner; however, this is not a factor that can be altered due to the fixed location of the Town Garage. The Chair appreciated the study's spurring new ideas in Town and thanked the Road Commissioner for presenting this new plan. Rose Pelchuck appreciated that a bigger, heavier truck will be used to do Lightning Ridge (hopefully reducing the ridges from plowing) and appreciated the Road Commissioner's work in thinking outside the box and giving a new plan a try. The Board asked him to report back on how it worked following the next storm.

8. County Road Residents' Speed Petition: The Chair acknowledged receipt of residents' petition for a reduction in the County Road speed limit (currently 50 mph), and explained several steps are ahead. CVRPC will do a traffic study at the start of 2021; the VT State Police and Sheriff's reports have been gained. The process of what it takes to reduce the speed will need to be considered following that traffic study. Cindy Gardner-Morse commented that she supports reducing the speed limit. Maureen Cassidy commented that the road is a Town highway and wouldn't require a traffic study. The Board's reading of the statute is that a Class 2 road does require the traffic study; this will be investigated. John Brabant noted that the study

parameters, designed by AOT, calculate vehicle speed and identifies the 85th percentile, which presumes that is the “safe” speed. He strongly disagreed that “safe” driving speed be determined by how fast people are driving. He discussed the benefit of employing traffic calming measures to cause the driver to react by slowing their vehicle down; this is in contrast to the way County Road was built by AOT, which is to encourage speed.

9. LGER Funded Projects: The Town has received approval for a little over \$35,000 for use in projects such as a phone system upgrade at the Town Office (approx. \$9,000+), a computer laptop and printer for the zoning administrator so that he can perform his function better during the pandemic, and offsetting the cost of improving internet connectivity at the Town Office. Clif Emmons explained that internet system improvements for rural areas are happening globally that may become available to Calais. Board members agreed to allow Clif Emmons and Denise Wheeler explore phone system options with Town Office staff and come back to the Board with a proposal for how to use these grant monies. The business Zoom account, at approx. \$2,000, would allow for more licenses, and features that could make Town Meeting (likely to be some kind of hybrid including virtual) more possible. The Town Clerk agreed there is a need for a business Zoom account.
10. Town Hall: Painting continues as temperatures are above 50 degrees. Clif Emmons explained that during the election, it was noticed that people were using the door toward the rear of the Hall (the handicapped accessible door). The Friends of Town Hall looked into installing two ADA compliant automatic door closers, which range from \$100-500 apiece. It is an arm that is installed at the top of the door, set with a delay to allow a person plenty of time to enter and clear the door before it closes; there is no resistance to overcome. John McCullough is willing to install them; funds would need to come out of the general fund. The Friends suggest purchase of two midrange automatic door closers (total \$600) and a warranty. The arms would be matched to the color of the door finish. John Brabant made a motion to authorize the expenditure to provide the two Town Hall door closures, with the money coming out of the general fund, not to exceed \$1,000 and with a minimum 25-year warranty. Rose Pelchuck seconded the motion and it passed 4-0.

A Calais resident requested to use the Town Hall for two-three hours for recording songs: five people total and before the colder weather. With central Vermont having a spike in COVID-19, along with restrictions for residents’ use of the Town Hall during pandemic, the Board decided not to alter the Town policy. There is a blanket policy against any use of that Hall that is not essential until after COVID-19 has some resolution. They considered the acoustic quality with no drapery or bodies in the Hall may further discourage music recording.

11. IT Update: VLCT’s insurance review and the financial audit both raised the need for cyber security training. The Town Clerk noted that she and the Assistant Town Clerk both have taken trainings in the past.
12. Other Updates: John Brabant reported that the Chittenden Solid Waste District (CSWD) applied to the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District (CVSWMD) meeting regarding the draft certification amendments for two CSWD facilities. John Brabant and Denise Wheeler attended the meeting last week which they reported resulted in a very productive and lengthy discussion. CVSWMD (of which Calais is a member) Board members

were receptive to learning what Calais had to say, and the Board had not been aware of the circumstances around nor extent of the issue. CVSWMD made a motion which they approved to send a letter to the state Solid Waste program, who is to an extent allowing the CSWD to escape punishment, asking that only after the case is resolved should they even consider granting this entity an after-the-fact permit for this misuse of the glass that had been sent to be recycled. John Brabant commented that he came away from the meeting feeling like they really want to do the right thing. Rose Pelchuck praised the talent and intelligence of John Brabant and his ability to educate the Boards and people involved and actually make important change. Denise Wheeler added that the CVSWMD Board did not realize what had been going on and John's handling of the matter made all the difference. John Brabant reiterated his immense concern about the hiding of a significant criminal and civil case, and how much has been done to shrink awareness and public disclosure. A settlement agreement is due to be released and much has been done to cover up violations and while accommodating the CVSWMD. John Brabant identified checks and balances as essential to avoid it being easy to circumvent the proper processes. He continued that there are really no checks on the VT Attorney General's office nor ANR; no provisions in Vermont law allow for recourse for Vermont Towns whose interest is impacted. He sees a possible way forward through citizen suit legislation.

Election Day (Nov. 3) in Calais went well and democracy was in full swing. At 5:30 pm at the polls, a ballot that had been misdirected within the Montpelier post office was personally driven by a young person to the Calais polling location so it could be received timely, efficiently and transparently researched by the Town Clerk to confirm voter residence, and counted.

The Chair and Recording Secretary will work on a process to review and update various Town Policies and Ordinances.

13. Review and approve minutes, warrants

- a) The Board reviewed the invoices and orders were processed for payment.
- b) John Brabant moved and Denise Wheeler seconded to approve the minutes of the 10/12/2020 meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 4-0.
- c) Clif Emmons moved and Denise Wheeler seconded to approve the minutes of the 11/2/2020 special meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 4-0.

14. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: Clif Emmons made a motion to go into Executive Session at 9:26 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (3), personnel matters. The motion was seconded by John Brabant, voted on and carried 4-0. The Board resumed Regular Session at 9:34 pm. Denise Wheeler reported the Town Health Officer, Jay Copping, has done an amazing job with some very challenging situations this year; because Jay has done so much work in his capacity as Town Health Officer and advising the Selectboard regarding COVID-19 guidance, Denise Wheeler made a motion to give Jay Copping a \$1,000.00 stipend from the town. John Brabant seconded the motion, it was voted on and carried 4-0.

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

16. Adjournment: Rose Pelchuck made a motion to adjourn at 9:37 pm. The motion was seconded by Clif Emmons, voted on and carried 4-0.

Date: 11/11/2020 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 11/30/2020 meeting

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

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1koHsZQe8gLQe3EUePq9sCD-9d79UO74S?usp=sharing>