

Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 14, 2020 at 6 pm via Zoom conference call

Continued to Saturday, December 19, 2020 at 12 pm via Zoom conference call

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Clif Emmons (Member)

Arriving for 7 pm: ORCA Media, Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Hans Melhus, Judith Robert, Jay Copping, Wilson Hughes, Jim Barlow, Gus Seelig, Susan Clark, Marc Mihaly (arriving 7:35 pm)

Absent: John Brabant (Member)

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm.
2. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: Clif Emmons made a motion to go into Executive Session at 6:02 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (3), personnel matters. The motion was seconded by Sharon Winn Fannon, voted on and carried 4-0. The Board resumed Regular Session at 6:58 pm. The Chair had nothing to report publicly.
3. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the regular portion of meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
4. Public Comment: None.
5. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
6. Update: Town Clerk on Town Meeting Day 2021: The Town Clerk reported that the new phone system has been installed and Town Office staff have received training. There are some snafus with Consolidated Communications and one of the lines that must be resolved. The legislature will be acting right off the bat regarding Town Meeting. The group considered the option of voting by Australian ballot. The Australian ballot allowance would be a one-time thing in the COVID-19 context, and the Town would be obligated to return to a floor meeting the following year (decision to move permanently to Australian ballot must be voted on from the floor). The group discussed Town Meeting deadlines and corresponding statutorily defined schedule; Town Meeting mailings; social service requests.

Susan Clark (Middlesex moderator) reported that towns have options: to hold the meeting with whatever COVID-19 restrictions exist; to postpone the meeting (this option anticipated to be allowed by the legislature); or to hold Town Meeting entirely by Australian Ballot this year (legislation was passed last session to allow this). An informational meeting is a Selectboard meeting and run like a public hearing. The Moderator may be asked to run an informational meeting; his election is for one year and his name would need to be on the Town Meeting ballot for reelection. Attorney Jim Barlow noted that anecdotally, his clients are opting to go to Australian voting for this year. Delaying a vote until June could leave a town in a difficult situation in terms of the budget getting passed for the July 1 fiscal year. The Selectboard will need to vote to decide on Australian ballot for Town Meeting 2021; an Australian ballot vote

requires one (1) informational meeting (it could be recorded for later viewing). Susan Clark noted that the Board may want to communicate to voters that Australian ballot removes the ability of voters to amend articles as is done in a traditional town meeting when voted from the floor.

7. Town Health Officer's Request for a Health Order: *The Board of Health meeting was called to order regarding Marianna Truman, 1238 Lightening Ridge Road. The minutes from their meeting is a separate document. Upon conclusion of the Board of Health meeting, the Selectboard meeting resumed.*
8. Other Updates: The Town Clerk reported that all the pieces of equipment that were part of the LGER grant have been ordered and are in motion. The LGER-funded web design work has been initiated. Clif Emmons made a motion to authorize the Chair to sign the George Road grant reimbursement paperwork on behalf of the Board (all Board members' names will be listed on the grant paperwork). The motion was seconded and voted; it passed 4-0.
9. East Calais Community Trust (ECCT) Snow Removal: Marc Mihaly presented a simple contract for snow removal by the Town at the ECCT building parking lot. This was discussed last meeting as the ECCT agreed to host free outdoor food deliveries organized through Everybody Eats, weekly (an effort to alleviate COVID-19 food insecurity). The contract presented indemnifies the Town and holds it harmless. The contract articulates the real need for Calais residents to have access to food due to the unique COVID-19 pandemic food insecurity situation compounded by the closing of the store. The contract is flexible in the ending date of the agreement; the Board asked to amend it to say "...duration through the 2020-2021 winter season." The board also asked the ECCT team to make the request directly to Alfred Larrabee, road commissioner, when there is a need for plowing.
Rose Pelchuck made a motion authorizing the Vice Chair to sign on behalf of all Board members for the letter that Marc presented, with changes as discussed. Clif Emmons seconded, and the motion was voted and passed 3-0 (the Chair recused herself from the discussion and vote as she serves on the ECCT Board).
10. Brook Field Generator Contract Payment: This generator is serviced yearly and the group reviewed the presented Preventative Maintenance Policy contract. The generator keeps the Town Office running in the case of a power outage (there is also a Brook Field serviced generator at the school). In the past, the Town has paid half and the school paid half. (The cost is \$569 for annual service paid upfront; \$853 for two visits paid upfront; \$200 of that covers the state annual inspection). Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion that the Board approve the Brook Field contract for one generator unit for the twice-yearly maintenance program (at the Town Office building) and authorize the Chair to sign on behalf of the Board. Rose Pelchuck seconded and the motion passed 4-0. The Chair will communicate with the Town Treasurer to clarify with the school about paying their portion of the bill for the generator located there.
11. Staff Bonuses: The Board discussed staff bonuses for services provided throughout the calendar year by the Road Commissioner, two Road Crew, temporary Road Crew worker who has been relied on, Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, assistant Town Clerk, and Recording Secretary. In the past the bonus amount was \$250. Clif Emmons made a motion to pay

bonuses to existing staffers for the Town of Calais as discussed in the amount of \$250 each. Denise Wheeler seconded the motion; it was voted and passed 4-0.

12. IT Update: LGER grant purchases have been put in motion.
13. Review and approve minutes, warrants
 - a) The Board reviewed the invoices and orders were processed for payment.
 - b) Approval of minutes was tabled for a subsequent meeting.
14. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: Sharon Winn Fannon 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 by Rose Pelchuck, voted on and carried 4-0. The Board resumed Regular Session at 8:51 pm. The Chair had nothing to report publicly.
15. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: Denise Wheeler noted the Selectboard will meet on Saturday, December 19, 2020 at noon to review the proposed FY22 budget.
16. Adjournment: Denise Wheeler stated this meeting is continued to December 19th at 12 noon. The Selectboard was in agreement.

Selectboard Meeting (Continuation)

Saturday, December 19, 2020 at 12 pm via Zoom conference call

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), Judy Robert (Town Clerk), Sandra Ferver (Town Treasurer, joining at 1:15 pm), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary)

Absent: John Brabant (Member)

17. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler resumed the continued meeting at 12:07 pm.

18. Public Comment: None.

19. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.

20. Mt. Tamers Snowmobile Use of Roads; This is a standard request presented by the Mt. Tamers for use of plowed highways for 2020-2021 season, with no changes from previous years. Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion which Rose Pelchuck seconded to approve the Mt. Tamers Snowmobile request for use of plowed highways for the 2020-2021 season. The motion was voted and passed 4-0.

21. Review and Approve Minutes

a) Sharon Winn Fannon moved and Denise Wheeler seconded to approve the minutes of the 11/30/2020 meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 4-0.

b) Denise Wheeler moved and Clif Emmons seconded to approve the minutes of the 12/3/2020 special meeting, with the changes as noted; the motion passed 3-0 (Sharon Winn Fannon abstained as she was not present) 5-0.

22. Town Meeting 2021 Planning Update: The Town Clerk attended a VT Secretary of State workshop led by the Director of Elections and the information she received has further informed Calais's planning for "key deadlines for Town Meeting." The Board reviewed a document she prepared by the same name which includes details for making sure town meeting and town report deadlines are met. The legislature will meet in January and will make some decisions that may impact this planning. There are two actions the legislature (in light of the pandemic) has given town selectboards the authority to vote on, both of which need to be decided by 12/28/20:

To approve that all articles for town meeting be voted on by Australian ballot for March 2 election;

and

To waive signatures required for petitions for articles and funding requests for March 2 election.

The Town Clerk reminded the group that delaying Town Meeting can cause a negative impact to setting the town tax rate in a timely manner; there is no guarantee that citizens can gather in groups by April or May; even April weather can be highly unpredictable. The Director of Elections pointed out that this allowance for Australian ballot is only for one year, and if any town wanted to move from a town meeting to Australian ballot outside of this one-time allowance, it would need to be voted by the voters (from a floor vote). If a Selectboard votes to

waive signature requirements in an effort to discourage knocking on doors and potentially spreading the virus, it would still up to the Selectboard to decide if a petition is “frivolous.”

Special service organization People’s Health and Wellness raised their request by five hundred dollars. They included an explanation of how COVID-19 has impacted their finances and describes why the increase. The Friends of the Calais Town Hall (\$3,000) and Good Samaritan Haven are organizations making new requests. The group discussed but did not decide whether to list social service agencies as a single item on the ballot or individually. Any item that does not pass would need to follow the law for reconsideration at another town meeting.

Sharon Winn Fannon commented that she loves Town Meeting Day, including hearing from all her neighbors. That said, we are not going to have herd immunity and shouldn’t be encouraging people to come together until public health and safety needs can be met. The weather in the spring is very unpredictable and by May, black flies are an issue. She noted there is a lot going on for the Board, and if this is put off, planning for Town Meeting Day will take a lot of time; she emphasized the need to make a decision on town meeting and move forward many pressing issues. Denise Wheeler agreed; a delay that causes issues with the budget and setting the tax rate could complicate things enormously. The group acknowledged that a lot of people will not feel safe coming to a town meeting this spring; limitations during COVID-19 would mean some people who do want to attend would be turned away. The Town Clerk’s office is working hard to create the Town Report earlier than usual so that people have it in hand for a virtual informational meeting with plenty of time to then mail in their ballots. Just like the general and primary elections, ballots can be mailed, or dropped off or voted at the polls on Town Meeting Day.

The Chair asked the Board to review the Selectboard Report for the Town Report. It gets mailed January 5 to the designer. The legislature will need to vote to allow towns to mail a ballot to every voter (it is not yet clear whether the Selectboard will need to vote to allow this as well). Once that has happened, the ballot will be mailed to all voters in Calais. The Town Clerk drafted a cover letter to explain the situation; she is still waiting to learn if/how the school ballot will be mailed and will update her draft letter accordingly.

The draft warning was reviewed. The Town Office staff has some time off before the holidays and will continue to keep things moving along on schedule.

23. FY 2022 Budget Development Work Session: FY22 will complete a significant long term debt payment; budget planning for FY23 will be the first time there will be a budget reduction from this debt being complete. There is a truck being paid off this year. The Road Commissioner is considering purchase of a truck and the Chair asked him to follow the procedures for making a request to the Board.

The group reviewed every line of each section of the proposed town budget. The group noted that once a line is no longer utilized, it still gets listed in the budget for 3 years (even if the line amount is \$0). The last payment for digitizing the land records is in FY22; the Board validated that the Town’s initiation of the digitization process was very timely and has positively impacted town office activity in the COVID-19 context.

The listers have not provided their proposed budget yet. The Board noted that as discussed over the last few years, sometime in the near future a professional lister will likely be needed and included in the budget. The Town Treasurer reported that the State is threatening to make a change in software (from NEMRC to a new provider) which may require a significant amount of listers hours. The Town Office routines under COVID-19 have resulted a newer, more efficient process and the Town Clerk plans to continue with processes that are in improvement. There is not a need for hiring for regular cleaning and this has resulted in a reduced maintenance cost. The remote context, with appointments, also may change the office staff's thinking around office renovation. There is less foot traffic and with remote working, it cuts down on all of the issues around space, equipment, and phone call chatter. A professional assessor, likely also working remotely, will also reduce office space needs. The Town Office Reserve Fund, therefore, is reduced \$5,000 due to COVID-19 but may need to be included again in the future. Sharon Winn Fannon noted that the office may open again with in-person work hours before the Reserve Fund is funded again.

The Town Treasurer explained that the HRA amount is a reduction (the Town fully funds the HRA which recently has not been fully utilized). The Board asked the Town Treasurer to separate the "Health Insurance" line into "Health Insurance Premiums," "Dental Insurance Premiums," and "HRA."

County tax is going up approx. 2.5%; CVRPC is going up 3%; VLCT is not raising dues. The Board is still waiting for confirmation of budget details from East Montpelier Fire Department and Rose Pelchuck will follow up. Woodbury Volunteer Fire Department proposed figures have been received and show 0% and 1% increases for line items. Planning Commission has reported a flat budget. The swim program at Curtis Pond is not likely to be able to be held again this summer. There is approx. \$14,000 in investment funds for the program. Some funding is allocated for the program in anticipation of dock repair and replacement, trash, and water testing. Cemetery Commission has responded that they are flatlining.

In Highway, the line item for seasonal will be changed to read "Temporary non-CBU." (CBU refers to "collective bargaining unit.") The Road Commissioner's salary is listed as a line item now. The Selectboard notes that it is the job of the Selectboard to propose and decide on salary increases. There was a change in number of dependents that resulted in some Highway savings for insurance. The Board is still in a process of negotiation with the highway union. Personnel wages are discussed in executive session. The roadside mowing line item has been funded to ensure continued commitment to invasive species control (twice yearly). Gravel has been identified by the auditors as an area where budgeted and spent amounts have a discrepancy. The Board left the Road Maintenance budget line items level-funded until the Operations Manager provides an explanation of increases. Clif Emmons will ask the Operations Manager to provide a budget with explanations and numbers rationale of any increases by December 23 at noon (to be addressed at the December 28th budget meeting; the Operations Manager will be requested to attend). The woodchipper situation is still being worked out between the Town and the seller; addressing the loan and refund will be dealt with when that happens. The line item will remain until then.

Potential Cuts:

- Volunteer/Comm Appreciation
- Town Office maintenance
- Town Office Reserve Fund
- Conservation Fund
- Swim Program
- Town Hall items
- Roadside mowing
- Gravel

Potential Adds:

- Selectboard Assistant \$6600

Questions to follow up:

- Denise to follow up with Jan and listers about budget (deadline 12/28)
- Denise to follow up with Cathleen Gent about increase in charge from CVSWMD
- Katie to learn restrictions on swim program fund
- Clif to follow up on a data backup cost with rbTech
- Sandra to update Highway salary as discussed
- Highway Uniforms up 10% - why there is a requested increase?
- Equipment Hired up 33% - why is the \$5,000 increase requested? Sand hauling?
- Clif Emmons will ask the Operations Manager to provide a budget with explanations and numbers rationale of any increases by December 23 at noon
- Why is Town Garage Communications reduced from \$4220 to \$1000?
- Rose to review the EMFD budget and Calais's line items
- The Board asked the Town Treasurer to separate the "Health Insurance" line into "Health Insurance Premiums," "Dental Insurance Premiums," and "HRA."

24. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion to go into Executive Session at 3:12 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (3), personnel matters. The motion was seconded by Denise Wheeler, voted on and carried 4-0. The Board resumed Regular Session at 3:55 pm. The Chair had nothing to report publicly.

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

26. Adjournment: Rose Pelchuck made a motion to adjourn at 3:55 pm. The motion was seconded, voted on and carried 4-0.

Date: 12/20/2020 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 1/11/2021 meeting

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