

Selectboard Public Hearing and Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 13, 2021 at 6:30 pm, Town Hall + Zoom

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair) joined the meeting at 7PM, John Brabant (Member), Rick Kehne (Member), Marc Mihaly (Member), ORCA Media, Katie Lane-Karnas* (Recording Secretary), Rowan Jacobsen*, Jan Ohlsson, John McCullough, Bill Powell*, Wilson Hughes*, Barbara Butler (Assistant Town Clerk), Grace Vinson*, Clif Emmons*, Alfred Larrabee (Road Commissioner), Maggie Weiss*, Jeremy Weiss, Sandra Ferver* (Town Treasurer),

**Indicates attendance by Zoom video call*

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the public hearing to order at 6:31 pm.
2. Public Hearing: The Chair noted the goal tonight is to solicit comments regarding the proposed amendments to the 2016 Calais Town Plan. The proposed amendments affect two sections of the Town Plan: Economic Development (pgs. 32-33) and Natural Resources, Part II (pgs. 64-71). Neither amendment alters the designation of any land area. John McCullough and Jan Ohlsson attended to assist in explaining these proposed amendments.
 - a) Economic Development: The Chair thanked the Planning Commission for working on this. Rowan Jacobsen offered to answer any questions and commented that North Calais is excited that they may get designated as a center; if they do, there are opportunities for funding sources and tax credits to fund various community projects. This is a good opportunity for the North Calais Memorial Hall, whose Association just put out bids for the next phase of the construction project; the hope is that it will occur next summer.
 - b) Natural Resources: John McCullough explained how he has worked on the maps section of the document, which are available on the Town website. The Calais Conservation Commission provided input. The Planning Commission brought the group's attention to the four new maps, for example, a "Connectivity Blocks and Wildlife Road Crossing" natural resources map. John McCullough explained the impact of landscape connectivity to wildlife species. The State of Vermont, and Calais resident Eric Sorenson, are creating the thresholds for defining these block priority levels. The Board then reviewed maps "Interior Forest Blocks," "Riparian Habitat & Riparian Crossings," and "Physical Landscape Diversity Blocks." Calais is noted for being especially unique by its enduring feature on this map of physical landscape: calcium-rich bedrock of the Wells River Formation, which supports rare species and rare communities such as the fens of "Chickering Bog."
 - c) Next steps: Jan Ohlsson explained that CVPRC's municipal review of this Plan occurs in February. When it is approved, it is final and goes to the state. Calais then sends all the documentation for the designated village center to the board that approves that. Denise Wheeler made a motion to approve and put forth the changes to the Calais 2016 Town Plan. Rick Kehne seconded the motion which passed unanimously. This concluded the public hearing portion of the meeting (6:55 pm).

3. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the Selectboard meeting to order at 7:00 pm.
4. Public Comment: None.
5. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
6. Review and Approve Warrants: The Board reviewed and approved processing of invoices and orders.

7. 2022 Ballot Mailings: The Assistant Town Clerk clarified that the mailing is specifically to “active” status voters. Denise Wheeler moved and Rick Kehne seconded to approve WCUUSD School Board to authorize ballot mailing to all registered, active status voters. The motion passed unanimously.

Denise Wheeler moved, and Rick Kehne seconded to approve mailing town ballots to all registered, active status voters for Town Meeting, March 2022. The motion was voted and passed unanimously.

8. Lister’s Errors and Omissions Report: This document, once signed, gets filed in the Town vault (it does not get sent elsewhere). Lister Jan Ohlsson explained that when the year’s first grand list is issued, it is usually in June; then comes grievances, and corrections as needed are made. For example, when NCMHA received a tax bill erroneously (the Memorial Hall has been made tax-exempt), the listers recognized the error and fixed it. The listers must track and document any changes made. This “Lister’s Errors and Omissions Report” form is the formal approval by the Selectboard of these documented adjustments. Marc Mihaly made a motion and Rick Kehne seconded to approve the Lister’s Errors and Omissions report, as presented, for filing. The motion was voted and passed unanimously.

9. Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) FEMA Grant for Kent Hill Road Culvert: Grace Vinson, CVRPC, reported that she is submitting the application to the state on Friday. This grant application is to FEMA under their BRIC program. (This is to do a culvert scoping study for the Kent Hill culvert near the Town Hall.) The Town match may be in-kind. The application submitted gets sent to FEMA, and the timeline is such that the grant could potentially start in September 2022. CVRPC would support the Town with all steps as the grant-funded administrator. Rick Kehne made a motion and Marc Mihaly seconded to submit the application to VEN and FEMA for the Kent Hill Road culvert replacement and upgrade, and to authorize Denise Wheeler to sign the local match commitment letter. The motion passed unanimously.

10. Road Commissioner Update
 - a) Road Crew Hiring: The Road Commissioner commented that he met with the new employee, who will be starting in mid-January. One position remains unfilled, and advertising will continue. The Road Commissioner gave an update on many moving pieces of the Town trucks: purchase, sale, repairs, and how the crew has been adjusting work based on these combinations of factors. Truck mechanic costs are running \$160/hour; in order for a Calais truck to pass inspection, repairs were needed and the Road Commissioner reviewed items that were not covered by warranty. The International truck has needed brake lines and cooling lines. As a result, the road crew has had to be creative

staggering road work with less trucks. The Road Commissioner will share grader estimates with the Board for the future, and the group discussed a truck purchase (and trade-in) for FY23 budget. The Fayston town truck that Calais is purchasing is still in process (delayed due to the sudden business relocation of the company that does the rebuild of their own replacement truck). The Road Commissioner concluded that he is desperately in need of a third truck to fulfill all winter road routes, and is in communication about renting a truck (with insurance rider).

- b) Highway Budget: The Road Commissioner is working on the FY23 budget.
- c) Winter Roads Contingency Plan: The Chair shared the State of Vermont's documents on this topic for reference.
- d) Winter Operations Plan: The Board requested a written contingency guide created by Rick Kehne and the Road Commissioner that can be published for the Town that would specify an orderly plan for if the crew is down one, two, three people (an emergency scenario that has become a Board priority to address in context of the pandemic). They asked this document be returned to the Board as soon as the budget work is completed. The Contingency plans will designate areas or roads that will be impacted by an order of priority in the case of an emergency. This would allow the public to be aware of where their location falls in terms of highest, middle, or lowest plowing/sanding priority. The Board discussed the importance of a policy that communicates with the public about the sorts of circumstances that will result in changed or reduced service to their road. This supports the Road Commissioner by having a clear, Selectboard-approved, simple plan that can be referenced in case of emergency.

John Brabant moved to authorize the Road Commissioner to order a new truck to replace the 2016 truck which is due on the replacement schedule and to negotiate a trade on that, and at the same time order a new truck as necessary to plow and sand (Western Star, 10 wheels). Marc Mihaly seconded. Denise Wheeler made a friendly amendment for an amount not to exceed \$220,000. The motion with amendment was voted and passed unanimously.

- 11. Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)'s "Walking Tours of Calais": The HPC is looking to submit paperwork for another CLG grant for walking tours of Calais. It includes involvement of students from the school. Marc Mihaly moved approval of Selectboard support of this grant; the motion was seconded, voted, and passed unanimously. (This is a \$7500 in-kind volunteer hours grant.)
- 12. Lakes and Streams Committee (LSC) and Town Website: The Chair explained that the LSC members are not appointed by the Selectboard; if they are not a committee appointed by the Selectboard, they would not need to follow Open Meeting Law. In that case, the Chair posed the question, would the Board want to add names of members to the Town website? Sharon Winn Fannon was in support of drawing a clear delineation between Town-appointed groups, rather than incorporate groups into the Town website. Denise Wheeler was in support of including them on the website with clarification that they are volunteers, not appointed. The Board noted other groups such as Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, and Green-Up Day Volunteers who are listed in one area.

13. Town Hall Cleaning: The Town Clerk has requested an estimate from 802 Cleaning that will be provided to the Board.
14. Staff Bonuses: John Brabant moved to approve \$250 bonus amounts for Town Office staff, including the Assistant Town Clerk and Recording Secretary, and road crew. Denise Wheeler seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion and Denise Wheeler seconded to give Andy Felice, Maintenance/Handyman for Town Hall and Town Office, the same staff bonus as everyone else. The motion was voted and passed unanimously.
15. Town Hall Connectivity Issues: The Town Clerk met with rbTech and reported that best practice is for the Town Hall laptop computer to be left on, with a user logged out, so that scheduled updates may occur. Town Office updates occur at 9:30 pm; speeds were inconsistent and on the edge of strong enough to support Zoom, at mid-morning on a Saturday. It is possible residents on the same internet line are dragging down what is available for the Town Hall at 8-9 pm on meeting nights, and nothing can be done about that. rbTech has also created an additional account for other Town commission members to log in and utilize it for hybrid meetings. The Owl device can be turned off. The group eagerly anticipated the installation of fiber optic in the near future.
16. Budget Review: Rick Kehne has been working with Highway on their budget and will send it to the Town Treasurer and members. The Town Treasurer joined the Board for updates and reviews. When the legislature reconvenes in January, they will likely look at whether Town Meeting can happen in person or if it will be mailed by Australian ballot. The Town Clerk commented that VMCTA and VLCT are supporting a Secretary of State effort for Australian ballots to be mailed to all voters (as was the case in March 2021) for Town Meeting. Absent any legislation, the Town must pay the cost, but again, it may be reimbursed by the State if Australian ballot is decided. Absent any guidance about what will happen with elections, the Town Clerk is basing his budget for elections on the former town clerk's figures from last year, plus some padding to be safe.

The group continued through the budget line-by-line. The Town Clerk suggested in the essence of time (and need for further clarification without pressing need from the Board) to remove the DotGov expense for FY23 (this line item would have funded moving from Gmail accounts to DotGov Outlook email accounts). East Montpelier and Woodbury Fire Departments' budgets have been received. The Town Treasurer reported that even with increases from both fire departments, the general government budget is below last year by approximately 2-3%. This budget does not include the separately presented and warned social services agency requests (deadline December 15), and does not include the highway budget yet. The deadline for the Selectboard to submit its budget to the Town Office falls on January 4 this year. Sharon Winn Fannon clarified that if social service agency requests have not been received by the end of this week, each agency is locked in to the amount they requested last year. Members agreed; the Chair noted it is a simple process of printing and sending a form.

Cemetery budget is going down because they can now draw on their invested endowment fund to contribute to their own yearly budget. The Chair reported on the EMFD joint meeting from last week: the Department wants to buy a truck that costs \$425,000, with Calais and East

Montpelier responsible for \$200,000 (1/3, 2/3 split by town). The Chair asked the Board what they think about a financing time length. Calais will need to warn the fire truck item on the warning, along with cost and term of a loan length. The Town Treasurer commented that the Vermont Capital Equipment Replacement Fund provides very low interest loans for this purpose. Our excavator was purchased with a loan from that fund, and the last payment was made, so we are eligible to go back into that fund and get a loan for this purpose, or for a truck. Rick Kehne advised leaving the Fund option open for the more expensive purchase of the grader in the near future; the Town Treasurer will determine if there is a cap to the borrowed amount.

The Town Treasurer will update the budget spreadsheet with Highway numbers and share with the Board later this week. The emergency services budgets (EMFD and WVFD) will be warned and voted separately this year. For the Calais voter, the total budget bottom line will still be easy to compare between last year and this. The Board explained to new member Marc Mihaly that the Board has worked hard the last few years to keep any overall increase below 3%. This has been accomplished by use of data points, looking at percentage increases on a line-by-line basis.

The Selectboard stipends had been approved by vote in a previous meeting. Sharon Winn Fannon noted her request to complete appraisals before awarding increases, and to tie increases to the appraisal. She asked if mask mandates in Calais will be a conversation; the Chair commented that there has not been time on the agendas yet and confirmed it will be on a future agenda.

17. Town Report: This item will be addressed at the 12/27/2021 meeting.
18. Executive Session for Personnel Matters: John Brabant made a motion to go into Executive Session at 9:17 pm per 1 V.S.A. subsection 313 (a) (2), real estate matters; the motion was seconded by Marc Mihaly. The motion carried 5-0. The Board resumed Regular Session at 9:44 pm. The Chair had nothing to report publicly.
19. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: The Board agreed to meet on Monday, December 27, 2021 at 7 pm for completing the budget with the final information nailed down; the focus will be warning and budget and will avoid extraneous items added to this meeting.
20. Adjournment: Rick Kehne made a motion to adjourn at 9:45 pm. John Brabant seconded the motion which was voted on and carried 5-0.

Date: 12/15/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 2/14/2022 meeting

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

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZCcv4aYQGfy1QMUKsHpsyV8vE4z6lVvv?usp=sharing>