

Informational Meeting Minutes

Saturday, February 20, 2021 at 1 pm via Zoom conference call

Present: Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair), John Brabant (Member), Rose Pelchuck (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Gus Seelig (Moderator), Judy Robert (Town Clerk), Sandra Ferver (Town Treasurer), Barbara Butler (Assistant Town Clerk), Jamie Moorby (Q&A Monitor), Polly Wheeler (Q&A Monitor), Scott Bassage (Tech Helper), Nick Emlen (Q&A Monitor)

Attendees: Carolyn Brennan, Craig Line, Fletcher Dean, Jan Ohlsson, Janet Ancel, John McCullough, Larry Bush, Linda Gray, Marianne Miller, , Pam DeAndrea, Randy Koch, Richard Hyde, Scott Thompsom, Stephanie Kaplan, John Rosenblum, Toby Talbot, Tom Blachly, Chance Payette, Paul McAleer, Charles Storrow, Kristina Bielenberg, Paul Hannan, Brian Basor, Linda Schütz, David Schütz, Reenie DeGeus, Mark (last name not identified), Rick Kehne

1. Preparations with Panelists: The Chair and Moderator had created an outline for the meeting. At 12:30 pm the Chair reviewed the anticipated sequence of events. During planning, the Moderator's internet connection was interrupted, and the group planned to assign backup moderator duties to Nick Emlen.
2. Call to Order: The Moderator began the meeting at 1:05 pm, welcomed attendees, and reminded the group that this is an informational meeting ahead of the Australian ballot town meeting vote during COVID-19. He thanked Clif Emmons for his work setting up rehearsals and immense tech support to allow this Zoom webinar to happen. This is going to be a different experience; the purpose of the meeting is to ask and answer questions, but we cannot act on or amend warned articles today. All the work that has gone into our community over the past year, given the pandemic, is truly remarkable.
3. Welcome from Selectboard: Clif Emmons welcomed everyone and explained what attendees could expect in terms of the technology and the webinar participation process. At the start of the meeting, there were a total of 41 participants in attendance, joining by computer or telephone. The Chair welcomed everyone; we are trying our best to replicate the experience of a town meeting, and a ton of volunteers have come together to make this webinar informational meeting happen. She shared highlights of the past year: Calais responded quickly to the pandemic just after last year's Town Meeting Day, meeting virtually for the past year. The Board worked really hard to keep the budget under control, completing it with a 1% decrease for FY22. They are working with CV Fiber to push Calais to the front of the line for high-speed internet, including a new budget line item to appropriate \$10,000 to help defray costs to get lines in through CV Fiber (Calais's rep, David Healy, has worked hard in this effort). The Chair thanked retiring Selectboard member Rose Pelchuck for her years of service, which began as the Selectboard's recording secretary, and emphasized the continuity and historical knowledge her participation has provided the Board. She also thanked retiring

volunteer Jennifer Whitman for her work on the Cemetery Commission and as Sexton, which included work on green burials in Calais. She thanked all volunteers for their work for Calais.

4. Public Comment: Kristina Bielenberg asked, “Why isn’t there an article this year for the Calais voters to authorize the Town to borrow money in anticipation of receipt of taxes? Does the town have enough in reserves to allow the Town to operate until taxes are received?” The Chair and Town Treasurer confirmed that the last two years, the Town has not had to borrow money in anticipation of taxes because there has been a healthy General Fund Balance to carry it over to the beginning of the fiscal year.

5. Article 3: *Shall the voters approve total highway and general fund expenditures of \$1,710,976 of which \$1,402,071 shall be raised by taxes and \$308,905 by non-tax revenue?* Craig Line asked, “Please explain what the 22 K budget item is for, and why it has increased so much from \$6600 from last year.” This is a line item for the proposed Selectboard Assistant position. It is a placeholder to allow the Town to hire someone to assist in managing and running this part of town government. The Town hasn’t had a Selectboard Assistant in a while, and the Board has been discussing what duties would need to be delegated to a staff person. In earlier years, we had a greater amount in that fund; once the previous Assistant resigned, the Chair volunteered to do those duties; in the coming fiscal year, they hope to bring aboard a Selectboard Assistant once again. Sharon Winn Fannon added that the amount of work Denise does is astonishing and not sustainable; if she was unable to do these many tasks, the Board would be unable to find someone to just step in. Denise Wheeler noted she appreciates the trust from people in her doing that work, and it is a significant amount of work, and she is not complaining about it.

Pam DeAndrea asked, “Why has the Tax Map assistance increased from \$2,000 to \$3,650? Is the consultant providing more services or are there just more surveys to map?” Jan Ohlsson, Lister, answered that mapping falls in the listers’ budget. They did not do a parcel map for 2020; they are putting together both 2020 and 2021 changes into the parcel map, and that is why it went up to \$3600, getting two years for a year and a half price. Indices will be added that allow viewers to gain more information on each map. Pam continues, “I have is the \$8,000 for technology reserve fund - what is that for? A new server or computers? The Chair explained that there are ever growing technology expenses and this fund is to support those requirements. Having some money in reserve is a better way to budget than to find it somewhere else in the budget. Last year it was put in front of the voters (essentially a capital fund for IT); the Town had to take out a loan last year to pay for an unanticipated server replacement. Because of how technology grows and evolves, having a 4-5 year capital replacement plan is best practice.

6. Legislative Update: Representative Janet Ancel thanked the Selectboard and Town officials for making this meeting happen and noted the Town has done a phenomenal job with virtual meetings. The Vermont Legislature is also meeting virtually since March. They have been able to do work that is good for Vermonters, and anybody can easily watch via livestream; they miss the opportunity to see people and work through issues more casually. Racial justice and equity have been a continuing theme at the Statehouse, considering the impact as committees work through issues. Secondly, there has been a significant increase in the amount of federal money coming into the state. Economists explain that the federal money coming into the state (going directly to individuals, businesses, health care providers, schools and to the state) is

upwards of \$10 billion or so. The challenge is how to use one-time money strategically, in transformative ways. One item high on the list is broadband internet. The next federal legislation is likely to include money for local government (schools and towns, counties). Kristina Bielenberg asks, “Janet, can some of the federal money be used for resiliency programs to deal with climate change?” Rep. Ancel replied that the new money is a lot more flexible than the first incidence and she thinks the answer is yes; she offered to talk privately with Tina about ideas. Pam DeAndrea asks, “Do you know if the education committee may be working on revamping curriculum for truth history and/or black history that extends past February?” She thinks generally the State has left curriculum questions to communities to make decisions on; she will ask the Chair of the Education Commission about this. Gus Seelig appreciated Rep. Ancel’s work.

7. Article 4: *Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$49,400 for the operation and maintenance of the cemeteries?* Fletcher Dean, Cemetery Commission, noted they level-funded the budget from last year, and are sad to see Jennifer Whitman leave the Commission. Joe Mangan will receive the sexton stipend for his services (he is a contractor)—he is being paid for his extra duties in the same amount that Sexton Jennifer Whitman had performed; this will mean customers deal directly with Joe Mangan and streamlines that process. Joe Mangan attends Commission meetings and communicates with them regularly.

The discrepancy between p. 52 (the FY20 appropriated amount) and p.62 (the actual expenditure) is in rolled over funds in addition to appropriations (these combined funds were used for actual expenditures). Fletcher Dean described a survey that was needed that cost approx. \$8,000. Rose Pelchuck recommended the Commission keep the Cemetery Sexton stipend separate in the budget, which would maintain transparency in case the mowing contract compensation and sexton compensation need to be separate in the future (the Chair seconded this request). Fletcher Dean noted that before Jennifer Whitman, the sexton commission had not been separated out from other contracting services and the Commission prefers to remove a separate sexton stipend altogether. Denise Wheeler reiterated it would be helpful to see the amount paid to the sexton, which would increase transparency. Kristina Bielenberg commented in agreement. Jan Ohlsson noted that from a bookkeeping perspective, it is possible to note the mowing and sexton amounts separately in the budget while writing one single check for both amounts to the contractor.

As of now, there is no official plan to have green burials at more cemeteries in Calais; there are currently three cemeteries where it is permitted, with availability. This spring, flowering crab trees and shrubs are scheduled to be planted in the green burial area at Robinson Cemetery.

8. Article 5: *Shall the voters appropriate \$27,132 for the Kellogg-Hubbard Library?* Craig Line commented that it has been a challenging year at the Library, but staff have risen to the occasion. There were no staff laid off or furloughed; the Library closed for a short time while numbers soared; at this time, you can request books and pick them up at the foyer of the Library, order on inter-library loan, get materials through outreach services right in Adamant/East Calais/Maple Corner, access weekly programs for all ages, use expanded digital services (Kanopy, a digital streaming program or Flipster, a digital magazine service). This is the fourth year in a row the Library is asking of the same amount from Calais. Calais’s request

is 3% of the overall budget (\$17 per capita). The budget is decreased by 5% this year thanks to management of the co-directors. Craig Line offered to email more information to anyone. Co-director Carolyn Brennan offered to answer any questions. The Board thanked them both.

9. Article 6: Shall the voters appropriate the sum of \$30,110 as requested by the following organization in the Calais and the Central Vermont area Barbara Butler explained that due to COVID-19, the process for social service agencies to be added to the warning was simplified and she described that process.
10. Article 7-12: These items are about how we pay our taxes. The group reviewed them and there were no questions or comments.
11. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: Rose Pelchuck commented that it has been a pleasure and an honor to serve the Town as Selectboard member. The Moderator thanked all the people involved in working on the many projects in Town. Jan Ohlsson announced that the Planning Commission has had a vacant seat for some time, and seeks a new member to fill it. They are hopeful that at some time this year, there will be a public hearing about changes to regulation bylaws, which will deal with river corridors, surface waters, and other water regulations. She encouraged participation in the form of input at the public hearing and then in voting in support of the changes as presented.

Fletcher Dean asked, “Any guess as to when the Town Hall will be available for small town committee meetings? example : Cem. Comm. mtgs usually have only about 6 participants and we can certainly follow COVID protocols.” The Chair noted that this will depend on the Governor’s executive orders and CDC guidelines. When someone uses the Town Hall, there are very specific requirements for cleaning and procedure. As soon as we can, we will all be excited and ready to communicate to groups about using it. Many thanks and appreciation were expressed for Rose Pelchuck’s service, the Selectboard’s and town officers’ work, and for the enacting of a professional meeting.

Barbara Butler reminded participants about the three ways they may cast their ballots: mail no later than February 23, 2021, deliver early to the drop box in the Town Office entryway, or vote in person on March 2, 2021 with COVID-19 protocols in place. You can bring your ballot with you on March 2 or if you have not voted yet you can get a ballot there. Denise Wheeler thanked Clif Emmons for his volunteer work making this meeting possible and Gus Seelig for his work moderating,

12. Conclusion: The meeting was concluded at 2:24 pm.

Date: 2/20/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary
Approved by the Selectboard at the 3/29/2021 meeting