

## Selectboard Emergency Meeting Minutes

Saturday, June 18, 2021, 10 am, Calais Town Hall

**Present:** Denise Wheeler (Chair), Sharon Winn Fannon (Vice Chair), John Brabant (Member), Clif Emmons (Member), Rick Kehne (Member), Katie Lane-Karnas\* (Recording Secretary), Scott Bassage, Barbara Butler (Assistant Town Clerk), Fletcher Dean, Stephanie Kaplan\*

\* *Designates participants attending via Zoom*

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. COVID-19 State of Emergency Status: The Chair explained that the Governor lifted the state of emergency on June 14, therefore, public bodies of municipalities need to make available in-person meetings in compliance with the Open Meeting Law. There is the option, as there was before the pandemic, to hold in-person meetings and offer a remote option. She added that we have learned some people have found Zoom remote meetings a better option and this is a possible option for the future. The upstairs portion of the Town Hall is not yet open for public events, and the details of that will be worked out with the Friends of the Town Hall when they bring the operating documents proposal to the Selectboard. The Town Hall is being reopened at this time for use by Town entities.
5. Logistics of Opening Town Hall: The pile of gravel outside the Hall needs to be moved. The cleaning process and schedule needs to be determined, and the town office staff has an option in mind.
6. Meeting Technology, Calendar Scheduling Town Hall, and Opening of Town Hall: Clif Emmons explained that we could go to a hybrid model with the Board in person and a Zoom option simultaneously. If the board takes that approach, the Board may want to invest in technology called "Owl Pro," a 360-degree camera, mic, speaker in one device, at a one-time cost of \$999. The Owl Pro sits in the middle of the table, has good audio quality, the camera device recognizes when someone is speaking and pivots directionally, has 18-foot audio pickup radius, 8 smart microphones, and ability to connect to 2 Owls. Setup requires a smart device, after which point the Owl Pro could be plugged in and displayed on a monitor. It can integrate with any conferencing technology. The public can speak just like in a regular Zoom meeting.

The group considered who the tech point person will be to communicate with Town board and commission leaders and Clif Emmons agreed to support this technology transition; Sharon Winn Fannon offered to learn how to use the technology for this device. Ultimately the Selectboard administrative support position may include this responsibility.

Clif Emmons described his experience using this system as “flawless.” ORCA Media plans to be back in meetings recording in person. (ORCA decides which meetings they cover as a public service; it is not a service that results from requests by towns).

We may have a computer that could be used in the interim, i.e. as a laptop to be used immediately for upcoming meetings.

The Owl will initially need to be setup with a smart device, and it uses a laptop or phone thereafter. (The initial purpose of the smart device is to get the Owl up and running, connecting it to the network, download the Owl’s app, initialize it; thereafter, using a smart device to control its movement is optional.) The Owl is then plugged into the laptop designated for meeting purposes, from which it operates.

The scheduling for Town Hall municipal meeting use will work through the Town Clerk’s office, with staff managing the town calendar on the town website, as we used to do. A physical copy of that web calendar is posted on the Town Office bulletin board. In the future, an events coordinator will post things on an events calendar, notifying the Town Clerk’s office, ensuring any prebooked event is on the Town calendar; ultimately, the calendars will be synchronized between the events and town calendars. The initial phase will be done manually. The event coordinator (someone from the Friends group) is intended to have the responsibility of notifying the Town Clerk so anyone serving in a municipal function only has to look at the Town calendar, which always takes priority over private events at the Hall.

Effective immediately, town and commission chairs have to notify the Town Office (Judy, or Barbara, or Katie) for reservation of the Town Hall for meetings. The Town Clerk’s Office will email all chairs on Monday requesting dates to reserve for the next six months (for example, third Thursdays each month), requiring additional communication only if there are changes or extra meetings.

The Board reiterated that the work of this emergency meeting is officially opening the Town Hall for use by Town public bodies. The Cemetery Commission and boards and commissions where there are appointments have authority to meet at Town Hall at this time (any municipal body). The question was raised: Is the Board necessarily positioned to tell municipal bodies to use video conference, in terms of lines of authority? Clif Emmons proposed that if the Board decides to invest and utilize this device, the Selectboard would practice first, and be able to train other groups in the use of the device.

The open meeting law mandates that there must be a quorum present at the meeting, but only one individual must be at the physical location so any member of the public could physically attend. Stephanie Kaplan asked: until some kind of system is set up with the ability for people to join by Zoom, is the expectation that meetings will be in person? The Board said “yes” until the hybrid option can be worked out, because it was the Governor’s emergency order (now lifted) that authorized 100 percent virtual meetings. The Chair commented that the Governor’s office failed to give municipalities time to create a solution for hybrid meetings.

Discussion returned to clarifying how the Board wishes to address a remote video access. Two Owls can be synchronized for a larger venue. There is not a maximum number of people who can participate with the Owl, the limiting factor would be the number of callers on a Zoom meeting. Without quality technology like the Owl, the audio quality for communicating in the Town Hall space is less than ideal; more people present would mean more noise and challenges; it is distracting for a Board member to be participating as a member while managing the technology and physically panning a screen around. There is the potential for a lot of time to be lost by fussing with semi-functional technology. The accessibility overall will be improved by high-quality technology.

Over the weekend the Chair will send an email about using the space including entrance/access, cleanup expectation, and what the plan is going forward.

Sharon Winn Fannon made a motion to authorize an amount not to exceed \$1500 for the purchase of an Owl Pro device (to include peripheral cabling, setup materials, etc.), delegating Clif Emmons to work with the Town Treasurer to order the device. Clif Emmons seconded the motion. John Brabant proposed a friendly amendment, which was accepted: in the event that the Owl is not loud enough, the office is permitted to add additional speakers up to the \$1500 total. The motion was voted and passed unanimously.

**John Brabant moved to open the Town Hall downstairs space for municipal purposes.**

Discussion ensued. The Friends group will review the working document for usage of the Town Hall at their meeting on June 28 and will return to the Board. The Friends has been working on a grant with a quick timeline, and are now back to working on the policies for usage.

Assistant Town Clerk Barbara Butler noted that prior to COVID-19, there were some Town groups, such as the Robinson Sawmill group, the Calais Democratic Committee, etc., who scheduled their meetings at the Town Office; she asked how to respond to questions from such groups. The Board considered whether groups other than municipal bodies that were using the Town Office prior to COVID-19 could still use the downstairs of the Town Hall with permission. The Board decided that while we appreciate these groups and they are all friends to the Town, the Board is going to proceed in incremental steps, beginning with opening the Town Hall to Town municipal groups only, until a usage policy is in place.

Barbara Butler offered to locate signage in the kitchen for washing dishes prior to use. She also asked about food/snacks and who will clean up after groups at the Town Hall; crumbs left unswept or even left in the unmonitored trash in an historic building are a potential pest problem. The Chair will note a cleanup and carry in/carry out policy in the email and this detail will be added for consideration in the usage policy.

**Denise Wheeler seconded the original motion. The motion was voted and passed 5-0.**

7. Adjournment: The emergency meeting adjourned at 10:53 am.

Date: 6/18/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary

*Approved by the Selectboard at the 8/26/2021 meeting*

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

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