



# TOWN OF CALAIS

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## Calais Board of Abatement Meeting Minutes

Approved

May 13, 2024, 5:00 pm, Calais Town Hall

**Present:** Jordan Keyes, Kari Bradley, Dillon Burns, Wilson Hughes, Anne Winchester, Michael Loignon, Kristina Bielenberg, Janet Ancel, Charlotte Hanna, Scott Bassage, Teegan Dykeman-Brown, Jamie Moorby, ORCA

**Present on Zoom:** Steve Sweeney, John McCullough, Barbara Butler, Craig Line, ORCA

**Call to order:** Janet Ancel called the meeting to order at 5:00 pm. She turned the meeting over to Charlotte, who invited Craig Line to address the Board.

**Feedback Regarding the Hearing Process:** Craig described how overwhelming a hearing could be for an applicant and suggested that applicants be better prepared for what to expect during and after a hearing. He requested the Board members introduce themselves at the start of a hearing. He commented that the proposed financial disclosure form felt invasive if it was going to be shared with such a large board, particularly given that he did not know any of the members well. He expressed disappointment that the Board was not more accommodating to his schedule during the sugaring season and requested that scheduling be more collaborative. Charlotte thanked him for his feedback.

**Minutes of prior meetings:** The Board reviewed the minutes from the last meeting, which took place over three dates. Teegan told the group that Janet had already asked her to change “conflict of interest” to “the possibility of a perceived conflict of interest” in the February minutes and that Kristina requested that her name be consistent, rather than sometimes “Tina” and sometimes “Kristina.” **Jordan moved to approve minutes of February 12, 2024. Scott seconded. Motion passed.**

Dillon requested that it be made clear that her comment about the financial form was that the Board should not be required to use it for every case, *not* that the applicant should not be required to complete it if asked. **Kristina moved to approve minutes of March 25. Scott seconded. Motion passed.**

**Charlotte moved to approve the April 8 minutes. Jordan seconded. Motion passed.**

**Proposed Financial Disclosure Form:** Charlotte requested that the form include a space to write the parcel ID and that it should be clear that the numbers listed under Total Expenses are the totals of the previous categories. She also clarified that while Craig was correct when he quoted her as saying no one had ever asked for an abatement who didn’t need one, she felt confident in that statement because previous applicants had provided adequate proof in the form of financial statements and descriptions. The proposed form would bring consistency to the

hearing process. She offered to assist applicants with the form if they found it overwhelming or confusing.

Kristina said that the form should clearly define the dates the information should be based on. She asked whether the form would be given to all applicants along with the original application or if it would be given to them later on.

Jordan brought up the idea of a liaison to communicate with and assist the applicant. Teegan offered to continue to serve in that role, as she had been doing so with the two applicants this year. As to making the form a requirement, Jordan expressed uncertainty.

Charlotte and Janet asked about the legality of keeping the financial form private information. Teegan explained that most municipal documentation has regulations on public/private, how long it can be maintained, and how it should be disposed of. Janet commented that the form doesn't need to be quite so specific – for example, people shouldn't need to share precisely how much they spend on cigarettes.

Barbara liked the idea of appointing a liaison but reminded the Board that it needed to ensure that all Board members received all of the information the applicants provide.

Teegan recommended offering the currently proposed form as a worksheet for applicants to use and then providing a simpler form that requests just the big picture information. Dillon pointed out that the abatement process was designed around the idea of neighbors making decisions to help neighbors and that it doesn't need to be so regimented. Michael expressed the opposite, that the board is quasi-judicial and representative of the town government and therefore should endeavor to be as objective as possible.

Jordan agreed with making the current form a worksheet as it would allow applicants who may be less articulate before the Board to convey their situation. He thought the signature attesting to the truth might be excessive.

Janet suggested that the applicants be asked to submit to the Board the totals from each category but not each item from within. She pointed out that whatever the Board decides, it should be the same for all applicants who are applying based on financial hardship. Jordan suggested language such as, "A failure to fill out this form could adversely affect the Board's ability to make a decision."

Dillon said that in her experience, applicants are often totally overwhelmed, and so this form might be a barrier. Charlotte said that maybe the worksheet shouldn't be a requirement but some explanation of their finances should be. The liaison could clarify to the applicant what constitutes sufficient evidence.

Janet offered to redraft a simpler Financial Disclosure sheet using feedback from this meeting. Dillon, Teegan, and Kristina offered to help.

Charlotte asked if the descriptor “quasi-judicial” is on the application and recommended that it at least be on the town website. Jordan will work with Teegan to update the Board of Abatement web page with more information.

**Rules of Procedure:** Janet requested that the language be made gender neutral. She pointed out that the proposed language gives the Board a deadline of two weeks to publicly share a written decision but statute gives thirty days, so the Board should follow statute.

Kristina is uncomfortable with one board member communicating verbally with an applicant about a decision before the written decision is issued. Janet pointed out that anyone attending through the end of the meeting or reading the posted draft minutes can find out a decision pretty quickly. If the applicant could not attend the entire meeting, Janet wondered if waiting five days for draft minutes might be too long. Teegan said that she usually posts draft minutes within a day or so of the meeting. She also suggested that the Board could tell applicants ahead of time that they can stay until the end of the meeting or wait for draft minutes. Dillon thought it was important that we let applicants know as soon as possible.

Jordan asked about the new legislation with regard to email – could the Board email a simple approve/deny decision to the applicant right after the meeting? It was suggested that it would be best if the email came from the Town Office. Teegan suggested drafting form emails for approvals/denials/extensions of hearings so that the entire Board would be comfortable with the language. Dillon expressed concern that the process was sounding very prescribed and impersonal for something that is a very personal and difficult process for applicants. She prefers a phone call.

**Kristina moved to make the following addition to the Board of Abatement Rules of Procedure:**

*5. The Chair of the Board or a person designated by the Chair shall draft a written decision which shall be circulated to members of the Board for approval. The final decision shall be posted on the town website and made available to the applicant as soon as practicable but no later than thirty days. Failure to meet these deadlines shall not invalidate a decision of the Board.*

**Dillon seconded. Jamie made a friendly amendment to also make the Rules of Procedure gender neutral. Wilson seconded. The motion passed.**

Janet pointed out that the new legislation, H.629, allows for the abatement of very small amounts. Dillon asked if anyone had looked into the Board utilizing the lien process. Teegan said she would look into it and get back to her.

**Anne Winchester moved to adjourn. Jordan seconded. The motion passed.**