

SELECTBOARD MEETING
LOCATION: Calais Town Office
MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2017 @ 7:00 P.M.

Approved 1-16-17

Present: Selectboard Members Denise Wheeler, Rose Pelchuck, Scott Bassage, Toby Talbot, John Brabant

Others Present: Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary; Donna Fitch, Town Clerk & Treasurer; Judith Robert, Assistant Town Clerk & Assistant Treasurer; Rob Richert, John Simanskas, Bill Davis, Jan Ohlsson, Karin McNeill, Mack and Cindy Gardner-Morse, and James Barlow, Esq.

Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

● **Public Comment:** Rose Pelchuck expressed displeasure from a community member (Greg Pelchuck) about road markers in front of a property on Lightening Ridge Road. She stated that it is a safety hazard and impedes the road crew's ability to plow the road to a safe width, thus making the road narrow for vehicles to safely pass by each other. Mr. Brabant suggested that one row of markers (from one side of the road) be removed. This would eliminate the road travel portion from being so narrow. He stated that he understands the desire of property owners to try to prevent the roads from getting wider, especially through the winter. Denise Wheeler suggested that a Selectboard member speak to the property owner. Scott Bassage will speak to the property owner; John Brabant offered to speak to him as well. Mr. Brabant stated that he understands this concern; he has similar issues on his property. He offered to help this property owner restore his roadside lawn, as he and other property owners do yearly, in the spring.

● **Review & Sign Town Invoices, Highway Orders and Budget Update:** Invoices and board orders were reviewed and processed for payment.

● **Appointments:** Denise Wheeler stated that Eileen Simpson has resigned from the Development Review Board.

● **Review and Approve Minutes:** Scott Bassage moved to approve the minutes of January 2, 2017. Seconded by Denise Wheeler, this motion carried unanimously.

● **Road Commissioner update:** no updates

● **Operations Manager update:** Mr. Talbot spoke about the addition at the Town Garage. John Brabant shared a complaint about the bottom of Balentine Road. Residents in that area are concerned about safety when the roads are icy, and have asked for more sand. Mr. Talbot will

ask the road crew to put more sand in that area. Rose Pelchuck also shared that a stop sign is down at the top of Lightning Ridge.

- **Residents feedback to letter regarding delayed plowing to next day after storms of short portions of Class 3 roads:** Toby Talbot reported that these letters have not yet been mailed. One of the community members present at the meeting asked for more specifics about this letter. The Board shared specifics; this had been discussed at the previous board meeting.

- **Status of repairs to Town Office roof:** Toby Talbot stated that there are no updates, due to the weather.

- **Review and sign Better Connections Grant and Resolution:** Karin McNeill and Jan Ohlsson had shared the grant application (which is due on January 13th). Central Vermont Planning Commission will be the project manager for this; Eric Vorwald has been instrumental in this grant application. John Brabant moved to approve the resolution for the Better Connections Grant. Seconded by Scott Bassage, this motion carried unanimously. Board members signed this resolution.

- **Radon mitigation at town office:** Donna Fitch had shared a report from Vermont Department of Health. It suggests, based on radon levels, that the Selectboard plan for radon mitigation at the town office. John Brabant suggested that a few of the radon mitigation providers be contacted to ask for estimates. The Board will address this at a future meeting.

- **Clarification for treasurer regarding truck loan payments:** The Board discussed the logistics of financing over ten years for a used vehicle – the excavator. The check for the loan would go into income (highway funds), and then the Board would submit payment to the vendor (from expenses). The loan payment amounts are included in the budget. Scott Bassage stated that we continue to get farther away from the traditional way of managing town finances – of raising money for the year, and spending the money that year. He does not believe it's healthy to continue to borrow money over longer periods of time. Toby Talbot stated that financing over time is meant to ameliorate tax impact. John Brabant stated that, although this is a separate issue, he does believe that at some point the Board should discuss the issue of purchasing in light of the deficit. Some discussion followed regarding the Capital Plan.

- **Continue discussion for development of FY 2018 Budget:** John Simanskas, Cemetery Commission Chair, had shared a memo with the Board explaining in detail the proposed Cemetery budget. The Board discussed “special projects” for the cemetery, whether it be a line item in the budget, or a separate article on the warning. Donna Fitch suggested changing the “Cemetery Special Projects” to simply “Cemetery Projects.” This year the amount for that line item in the budget will be \$6609. The separate article will be eliminated.

James Barlow, Esq., advised the Board regarding how to retire a deficit: towns are to either (1) create “Special Tax” as a line item in the budget, or (2) get authority from the voters to borrow and pay it off over time. Otherwise, the Board must levy a tax in 5% increments to eliminate the deficit. He suggested that if the Board can afford to pay the deficit off in a year, to include it in the budget. Donna Fitch noted that a deficit still exists from FY2015

(approximately \$133K. whereas the ballpark deficit figure from FY2016 is approximately \$90K). Given this combined amount, the Board believes that asking voters to approve an article to borrow and pay off this deficit over time is the best option. Some discussion followed around fund balance, as the Board believes it has been drawn down over time to pay for this deficit spending. Some discussion followed around unpaid delinquent taxes. The Board spoke about having to, in the past, borrow at the end of the year to cover unexpected, unanticipated expenses (in large amounts.)

James Barlow spoke about the requirement around borrowing or bonding – for a longer period of time (e.g. 10 years), a bond is required, which has a higher level of notice requirement than short-term borrowing.

James Barlow will research the exact language for this article and the Treasurer will calculate the exact amount of the deficits.

The Board continued to discuss the proposed budget, item by item.

Discussion followed regarding the proposed excavator and trailer purchase. John Brabant asked whether the Board can wait a year to make this purchase. Scott Bassage asked whether the Board can sell the excavator it currently owns, and rent an excavator when needed, as a temporary measure. John Brabant asked – can we borrow from neighboring towns for this year? Toby Talbot stated that borrowing from a neighboring town would not work. He stated that it would be wiser to keep the current excavator than to sell it, if another will not be purchased. Toby Talbot spoke about the tax impact of this purchase, and he suggested letting the voters make the decision. Board members are in agreement with this.

● **Continue discussion for development of FY 2018 Town Meeting Warning:**

James Barlow, Esq. asked the Board whether the Warning could have fewer articles, combining some of the separate articles and/or including some of the items into the budget. The Board explained that they are trying to move toward that. Mr. Barlow suggested:

Article 1: Elect moderator

Article 2: Reports

Article 3: all of the other officers that are elected from the floor (school board members are not included in the Selectboard's warning)

Next: money articles (starting with the largest amounts and then descending)

Next: borrowing articles

Next: tax exemptions for certain properties(Mr. Barlow recommends doing each separately)

Mr. Barlow is going to check to see if the content from Article 14 and Article 15 need to be included on the Warning every year.

He suggests that the parenthetical explanations in the article be eliminated.

James Barlow is going to take the Warning draft and edit it according to the discussion from tonight; he will share it with board members tomorrow before noon.

● **Continue discussion of Charter adoption and timeline – public outreach process and mailing:**

John Brabant explained to residents present the impetus for creating this Charter, specifically around the two separate positions of Town Clerk and Town Treasurer, and the need for a Town Auditor.

Donna Fitch explained the difference between the Clerk's and the Treasurer's salaries, historically. She also noted that these salaries were not presented accurately in Town Reports in the past. Discussion followed around the responsibilities of the positions. Denise Wheeler asked those present what they would find helpful to understand these issues. Public hearings about the proposed Charter will be held on January 23rd and January 30th. Some discussion followed about the timeline for this new model of organization, which will begin July 1, 2017, if approved on Town Meeting Day. The Board discussed the difficulty of finding a resident to be elected by the town as Treasurer, versus having the Selectboard appoint a Treasurer, not limited to a Calais resident.

Some discussion followed around neighboring towns, and around the unique population of the town of Calais, and the amount of land parcels in town that has a direct effect on the workload of the Clerk and Treasurer.

Denise Wheeler would like to finalize and accept this FY2018 budget at the next Selectboard meeting.

Donna Fitch suggested getting an extension for Front Porch Forum to post the entire charter on the forum. The Board discussed a mailing to community members to explain the proposed Town Charter.

Cindy Gardner-Morse suggested that the Board answer the question to the community – why is a charter needed? The topic of Town Treasurer was discussed again. The topic of property taxes was discussed. Rob Richert suggested including in a mailing to the community an outline of the duties of the positions.

Adjourn/continue meeting: The meeting adjourned by consensus at 9:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary

<http://calaisvermont.gov/>