

CALAIS SELECTBOARD MINUTES

LOCATION: Calais Town Office

MONDAY, JANUARY 23, 2017 @ 7:00 P.M.

Approved 1-30-17

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; James Barlow, Esq., Will Walters, Hardwick Gazette

Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

Public Hearing on Proposed Charter:

Scott Bassage stated that the Hardwick Gazette recently ran an informative article about the proposed charter. The Board had prepared a one page informational handout. Some discussion followed about the Town Treasurer position. Mr. Walters asked whether the Board will have an Assistant Treasurer. The Board had not planned for the position of Assistant Treasurer. Donna Fitch will send to Will Walters the draft job descriptions under the proposed charter. Some discussion followed about proposed bills in the state legislature.

Assuming the proposed charter is supported by vote, it would not take effect until passed by the state legislature. However, James Barlow, Esq. reminded the board that the positions of Town Treasurer and Auditor will begin on July 1, 2017, if the charter passes on Town Meeting Day.

Mr. Barlow explained that the proposed charter includes a provision stating that the Town Treasurer shall not be the Treasurer of the Town School District. The School Board's legal counsel had suggested a clause for the charter to indicate that the Town School Board will appoint its treasurer.

A copy of the proposed charter must be posted in the voting booths.

The Board discussed some of the proposed new state legislation, now that a new session has begun.

At 7:20, John Brabant moved to close the public hearing portion of the meeting. Seconded by Rose Pelchuck, this motion carried.

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

Review and Approve Minutes: Scott Bassage moved to approve the minutes of January 16, 2017. Seconded by John Brabant. Discussion: Some discussion followed about the part of the last meeting regarding loans and terms of loans (five years or less, or greater than five years). The Board approved the minutes unanimously.

Operations Manager update: Toby Talbot reported on the wintry conditions and the icy roads. Toby Talbot stated that the Better Roads Grants paperwork has come out; the applications will be due in March. Toby Talbot will complete the electronic Agency of Transportation grant assessment survey, which is new this year.

Continue discussion for development of FY 2018 Budget:

The Board continued to discuss specific details of the budget. Denise Wheeler thanked everyone for working so hard on this budget, especially Donna Fitch. The Board members thanked her as well. Ms. Wheeler stated that this Board is a hard-working group that has put a great deal of time and effort into the business of the town office, and will continue to do so. Scott Bassage asked some hypothetical questions for the Board to consider tonight: Do we have to decide on the final budget tonight? Do we have to publish the final town budget in the town report, or could it be included as a separate handout/ amendment? Is this the year to buy an excavator? Can we see a similar list (to that created by this year's audit) to see what caused the 2016 deficit?

Donna Fitch stated that the Town Report has to go to the printer by January 31st. Scott Bassage stated that he would like to give more time to consider new information that has come in during the past week. Toby Talbot stated that the excavator will have no tax impact on the FY 2018 budget (it will begin to impact the budget in FY 2019). He explained the long range planning that takes into account equipment replacement.

The Board continued to discuss the topic of deficit spending.

Toby Talbot discussed the H.R.A funding which may be a budget line item to decrease. The Board discussed the line items in the Highways portion of the budget. Toby Talbot stated that he had talked with Melanie Rodjenski today about grants. He explained her suggestion regarding accounting for projects that involve grants.

Scott Bassage asked about the line item: gravel. Toby Talbot explained that gravel, salt and chloride are purchased in the year that they are used. Sand is purchased toward the end of one fiscal year for use in the following fiscal year. That is, the \$65,000 in the 2018 budget for sand will be spent at the end of FY18 (April 2018) for use in FY 19 (December – March 2019.) He explained that this practice carries over each year into the next year.

Scott Bassage asked whether the Board can consider waiting until FY 2019 to take a loan (for deficit), in light of the proposed changes in salaries for the Town Office for FY 2018. The Board discussed this but concluded to not put off addressing the deficit.

James Barlow, Esq. asked whether the Board would like to consider borrowing from its own Reserve Funds – for example, Conservation Reserve Fund and Town Hall Reserve Fund. The Board discussed this but decided to stay with the original plan to seek a loan to address the deficit.

The Board briefly discussed the estimated tax impact, including the estimated school tax. Denise Wheeler spoke about in the past when taxpayers received two separate bills – the town tax and the school tax. Some discussion followed around Australian ballot voting. The topics of negotiations for teacher contracts and Executive Session/ Open Meeting Law were discussed. Donna Fitch suggested posting the proposed budget on the Town webpage.

James Barlow, Esq. reminded the board of Vermont Statute that requires that the Board share a summary of some of the issues from the audit, in the Town Report. He will share with her a link to this statute.

John Brabant moved to approve the budget as amended and presented tonight. Seconded by Denise Wheeler, this motion carried unanimously.

Continue discussion for development of 2017 Town Meeting Warning: The Board discussed the wording for the warning, to eliminate confusion regarding what time to attend. Mr. Barlow had advised that the school district warn its own meeting; the town should warn only the town meeting. The Board agreed to use the verbiage that the Town Meeting will begin at “approximately 9:30, after the Calais Town School meeting.”

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

The next meeting/ hearing will be next Monday, January 30th.

Other/New/Old Business that may come before the Board

John Brabant clarified that his comment at the January 9th meeting about winter conditions on Balentine Road related to not only icy conditions, but the steep embankment as well. This comment was duly noted.

Adjourn/continue meeting: The board adjourned by consensus at 9:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Stoudt, Board Recording Secretary

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