

Selectboard Meeting Minutes

December 28, 2015

Unapproved

Present: Selectboard members Scott Bassage, John Brabant, Rose Pelchuck, Denise Wheeler, Toby Talbot; Town Hall Task Force members Larry Bush, Cy Lamberton, Gail Graham, Chris Cochran, John McCullough; David Schutz, Historic Preservation Committee; Lisa Ryan, Arc & Arrow Consulting; Road Commissioner, Alfred Larrabee; U-32 School Board Representative Scott Thompson; Donna Fitch, Clerk.

Chair Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:03 pm.

Non-agenda Item - Location of Future Selectboard Meetings

The Board met for the past two months at the Calais Recreation Center Building in E. Calais as a trial in order to accommodate a larger number of attendees. Donna reported she tallied the number of attendees at meetings during the past year and a half. The average is 15 attendees; that includes Selectboard members and the clerk. She prefers to meet at the Town Office. It was agreed to meet at the Town Office in January as a trial and to rearrange the table and chairs to more comfortably accommodate attendees.

Zoning Administrator Appointment

John McCullough stated the town needs a long-term zoning administrator. He will commit to the three-year position, but he and the selectboard should be looking for a replacement. The possibility of conflict of interest between the zoning administrator position and being on Planning Commission was discussed. (John is on Planning Commission). Toby pointed out John can recuse himself from any situations where there may be a conflict of interest. John suggested the town have two zoning administrators who are authorized to sign zoning applications so that there is backup. He stated he believes that being on the Planning Commission provides a connection between the zoning application process and the Planning Commission; he can bring issues to the Commission. Toby made a motion to appoint John Calais Zoning Administrator effective January 1, 2016. John Brabant seconded the motion. Scott said John is the best person for the job and that is why the Board is hiring him. Rose stated her appreciation to John for his expertise and for his commitment to the town. Motion passed 5-0.

Road Commissioner Update

Patrick Smith will be working for the town on an on-call basis, replacing Bruce Campbell who has been hired full-time. The State lost Patrick's CDL paperwork so he has to be retested; he has taken the written test and will take the driving test January 6. Colin Doolittle requested in writing a culvert at his driveway. Alfred said, "All he has to do is call me." Alfred spoke with Colin's wife, but hasn't heard from Colin. A used culvert is available to the landowner for \$200. The town will install it. "It is a big savings to the property owner to have the town install it," Alfred said, "and it benefits the road."

Operations Manager Update

Ops Manager Toby Talbot had nothing to report. Scott asked if there was information about the status of future bridge repairs on Route 14 that might be included in the town report. Toby said he would find out.

U-32 Budget Update

Scott Thompson, Calais representative to U-32 school board, reported on the status of the U-32 budget.

- With the new Common Level of Appraisal (CLA), there are good projections. The 2015 education property tax rate was 1.758. In 2016 it will be 1.596, bringing the education rate down to about where it was for the 2013-2014 school year. The rate of 1.596 is about \$162 for every \$100,000 of property value.
- 80% of U-32 taxes are paid by property taxes.
- While there is only a .6% increase in the school budget, other factors are raising it to a 4% increase.
- U-32 has more equalized students this year, positively affecting the tax rate. (There is a different base rate calculation with Act 46.)
- The CLA has helped to bring down the tax rate. In 2015, it was 93%; it is now 98.5%. This means 98.5% of town property appraisals are at market value.

Scott pointed out that, to meet the Act 46 spending cap, the administration (U-32 administration and the Washington Central Supervisory Union administration) is in a cutting mode. The VT Youth Conservation Corps is being eliminated. The program's cost is \$120,000 and has eight students. The Administration says it can cover those students and activities with in-house staff and resources. A Selectboard member expressed concern that programs that work for nontraditional students are being cut. Any program with less than 10 students is being looked at to be cut, including AP courses, Scott said. "Closing the achievement gap" is the new buzz word. "Our school is for *everybody*," Scott stressed. "It is for *all* students."

- Calais pays 1/6 of U-32 cost.
- The trend is decreasing enrollments.
- Calais is the only town among the U-32 towns that has a steady enrollment. Berlin and East Montpelier's enrollment is declining dramatically. By 2024, it is projected that E. Montpelier will have 125 fewer pre-K through grade 12 students.
- The big Act 46 question is: Who will decide which schools close?
- U-32 could accommodate 100 more students.

In a merged elementary school scenario (one of the goals of Act 46), the ownership of Calais Elementary School's building and land would revert to the merged school district. Both assets and liabilities would go to the unified school district. Scott reported that our state rep, Janet Ancel, is working on a bill to introduce to the legislature that would allow towns to retain ownership of a school's assets. If Washington Central's Act 46 committee proposes a merger, "Articles of Agreement" will be developed and presented to the voters. This vote would take place at a special meeting before July 1. Therefore, the Act 46 Committee will have recommendations by June. Scott noted that he attends the Act 46 Committee meetings at the invitation of Chauntelle Eckhuas, CES board chair, but does not have a vote.

In summary, Scott acknowledged Conrad Smith's positive contribution to how budgeting is done at U-32. The Board enthusiastically thanked Scott for serving on the school board and for the budget update. Denise said a future meeting might be dedicated just to school budgets and Act 46.

Town Hall Task Force Report

Larry Bush, Town Hall Task Force member, presented the final "Report on the Use and Funding Plan for the Calais Town Hall." It is on the town web site at www.calaisvermont.gov. Larry reviewed the action items:

- #1 Floodplain determination. The Historic Preservation Commission has applied for a grant to hire an engineer to clarify floodplain boundaries and fluvial erosion hazard areas. Grant recipients will be announced in March 2016. (Lisa Ryan, Arc & Arrow Consulting, said planning grants are available for addressing issues with buildings in floodplains.)
- #2 Arnold & Scangas Architects will update their previous report on the condition of the Town Hall.
- #3 Accessibility improvements and major building repairs.
- #4 Interior space reconfiguration.
- #5 Partnerships.
- #6 Promote Town Hall for community use.
- #7 Fee-for-use policy.

The overall purpose is to restore/repair the building as a valuable town resource. The survey and public meetings reveal public support for meeting space at the lower level of the building. Lisa said there is public support for the building if it is used, but not to simply restore the building and not use it. Larry suggested keeping the task force together until Town Meeting. The recommended action items could take place under the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) or a subcommittee of the HPC or another ad hoc committee.

Lisa suggested sections of the report be posted periodically to keep the Town Hall fresh in people's minds until town meeting. Chris Cochran pointed out over 90 hours of volunteer labor were contributed by the Town Hall Task Force.

"This is a very valuable report," Scott Bassage stated. "It shows where we are coming from and where we are going." He thanked Arc & Arrow for being available to work with the town.

Gail Graham reinforced the need for publicity. People are not aware of the lack of meeting space for town committees and commissions unless the Town Hall is available, she said. David Schutz said it is important for the Selectboard to advocate for a positive future for the building especially during the floodplain analysis process. The building is town owned and owned by all of us. We have a responsibility to it, he said.

Siting of Renewable Energy Projects

Referring to the town's experience, and the legal cost to the town to defend the town's zoning regulations and Town Plan in regard to the Public Service Board and the proposed VTel tower

on Bayne Comolli Road, John Brabant presented what has come to be known as “The Rutland Resolution.” Selectboards in some towns in the state are passing this resolution to send a message to the legislature that towns want to be a part of any renewable energy siting process. John requested the Board vote on the resolution in order to go on record as wanting local control and input on the siting of renewable energy projects.

John said out-of-state renewable energy companies are coming to Vermont because the permitting process allows companies to ignore town zoning. The companies have a large lobbying presence at the State House. Rose said the resolution is appropriate, and it is wrong to go around a town’s Town Plan and zoning regulations. Scott gave his support. Toby said that, in coordination with the resolution, Selectboard members should meet with our state rep and senators. John made a motion to adopt the resolution to increase the input of Vermont municipalities regarding the siting of renewable energy projects in Certificate of Public Good proceedings before the Public Service Board. Rose seconded the motion. Motion passed 5-0. The full resolution follows these minutes.

Town Plan Natural Resource Language

Denise received the Conservation Commission’s changes to the Natural Resource section of the Town Plan an hour before tonight’s meeting. She forwarded it to Selectboard and Planning Commission, but had not had a chance to read it before the meeting. Denise recommended continuing tonight’s meeting to the Planning Commission meeting of January 5, 2016 in order to discuss the changes.

FY17 Budget

- Add 2% cost of living to salaries. Scott pointed out that the Board has been talking about having raises based on evaluations.
- PACIF grant income – put in total amount town has to match in order to purchase items for town garage office.
- Woodbury Fire Department budget will include dispatch, therefore, account #6057 Dispatch can be zero for 2017.
- Delete the request for a chipper.

Alfred suggested taking advantage of Better Back Road grants now that they are granting larger amounts of money. These grants are for road work that eliminates sedimentation and controls erosion. The town budget would need to include the town’s grant match amount.

The warning was reviewed. The article requesting a contribution to the reprinting of “Forever Calais” will be in the amount of \$2,000. Gail said the Historical Society plans to offer the book to Calais residents for \$30 and “at cost” for non-residents (approximately \$40). Scott will provide a draft article to clarify how general fund surpluses should be handled.

At 9:40 pm, a motion was made, seconded and unanimously approved to continue the meeting until January 5 to meet with the Planning Commission at their meeting (7pm, Town Office).

The next meeting of the Selectboard will be January 11, 2016 at the Town Office.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Fitch, Clerk

**RESOLUTION TO INCREASE THE INPUT OF VERMONT MUNICIPALITIES
REGARDING THE SITING OF RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS IN CERTIFICATE
OF PUBLIC GOOD PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE BOARD.**

WHEREAS, The General Assembly has set aggressive goals for the development of renewable energy in Vermont.

WHEREAS, as a result of these aggressive goals the number of certificate of public good (CPG) applications before the Public Service Board (PSB) has increased substantially.

WHEREAS, at best, the current CPG process provided by 30 V.S.A. §248 affords a limited and ineffectual role for Vermont municipalities, municipal planning commissions, and town selectboards. Regardless of the content, scope, or impact on a proposed renewable energy project or a municipality's efforts to have a say in the project's siting, the §248 process and the legal analysis employed by the PSB enable the PSB to disregard and/or avoid the policies and standards of the very municipality in which the renewable energy project is to be located. By focusing on regional impacts, to the exclusion of local municipal impacts, the PSB routinely ignores the input and evidence offered by Vermont municipalities. As a result, the "due consideration" of municipal viewpoints required by 30 V.S.A. §248(b)(1) has become consideration in name only.

WHEREAS, it has become clear that legislative changes are needed to afford Vermont municipalities a greater say in the approval and siting of renewable energy projects.

THEREFORE, it is RESOLVED by the undersigned Vermont municipalities, to instruct their state representatives and senators to develop amendments to the statutes that concern the siting and approval of renewable energy projects and to the procedures of the PSB in order to ensure that Vermont municipalities have a more meaningful role in the CPG process and to require compliance with appropriately-developed municipal siting standards.

Adopted by the Calais Selectboard December 28, 2015.