

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
THE STRAFFORD BOARD OF SELECTMEN
September 6, 2011

Present at 7 a.m. at the Town Office: Steve Willbanks, Chair; Rod Maclay and Tori Lloyd, Members; Jon Mackinnon, Road Foreman; John Freitag; Mark Pelow, B.U.R project foreman; and Corky Scott, Recording Secretary.

CITIZENS CONCERNS: There were questions from John Freitag about the Town's involvement with the replacement of Rod Maclay's bridge, which was destroyed during the flood. It was explained that because of the precarious health of Rod's wife and the need for access by emergency medical vehicles, the Town had agreed to sell the large concrete blocks necessary to support his new bridge to Rod and charge him for the use of the equipment necessary to transport the blocks from the Recycling Center. Two road crew members had volunteered on their day off to load and transport the blocks. John Freitag said he thought the Town should make this service available to everyone in Town. The Selectboard responded that the Town was already willing to help when it could in emergency situations. In fact, it was noted that when John Freitag's own driveway was being repaired the previous week, his contractor had asked if he could take gravel from the Town's stockpile and later reimburse the Town rather than make several long round-trips to one of the area's commercial gravel pits and he was allowed to do so. John Freitag said that he didn't know anything about that.

Minutes of the 8/24/'11 meeting were approved. (Motion/Second: Tori/Rod. All were in favor; motion carried.)

STORM DAMAGE & RECOVERY EFFORTS: There was a discussion of the flood damage to the town and recovery efforts to date since Tropical Storm Irene arrived on Sunday, 8/28/'11. A summary of the events occurring in the wake of the storm can be found in these excerpts from the letter to VTrans, signed at the meeting, formally requesting financial assistance from FEMA for the Town's recovery efforts: "During and in the immediate aftermath of the storm, the Town of Strafford was completely isolated, but when Gove Hill Road in Thetford was opened on 8/29, we had a link to the outside world via Mine Road to Gove Hill Road to Route 132/Union Village Roads and on to hospital and other emergency services. Internally in Strafford, all primary roads were initially blocked, either by flooding or flood damage, but even as we opened the through-roads, we discovered that the continuations of these roads into adjacent towns were blocked for a matter of days. Through an intense local effort we were able to mobilize and deploy more than a dozen local contractors to begin clearing and opening roads and we are grateful to the Environmental Protection Agency for making a large stockpile of stone located at the Elizabeth Mine Superfund site in South Strafford available for our use in this emergency. Access to this material saved us literally hours per round trip truckload of material as we were able to keep our contractors supplied with riprap and road-reconstruction material to repair the flood damage.

“...Thirty (30) of our, mostly primary, roads and 8 bridges were impassable for periods of time ranging from 12 hours up to 4 and a half days. To our knowledge, there is no residence that was accessible before the storm that is not now accessible. Only Route 132 to Thetford, which is heavily damaged .8 miles east of South Strafford Village, remains closed for the foreseeable future.”

Strafford's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) at the Town Office was opened early in the morning on Monday, 8/29, and local contractors with excavators, bull dozers, tractors and dump trucks were invited to meet with the Selectboard and Road Foreman Jon Mackinnon, priorities were developed and the contractors and road crew were asked to begin opening roads. Also volunteers were divided into teams to assess, photograph and document the conditions of every road in Strafford in anticipation of the arrival of FEMA inspectors. Altogether 44 roads were or are still in need of repair, many with multiple areas of damage. The Selectboard is grateful for the efforts of so many of our residents to help the community recover so quickly from the extensive damage and isolation caused by the flooding.

In addition, Tori reported that she had attended a meeting in Sharon last night (9/5) regarding assistance for individuals and private property owners and now that Orange County had been included in the disaster declaration for individual assistance, which allows individuals to make property damage claims, the Town will be making information available on how to apply for this assistance. She emphasized that contacting the State's 211 hotline number, which was set up for reporting purposes only, was not the same as registering with FEMA. There are plans to set up a clinic on Monday evening (9/12) at the Harris & Morrill Library to assist anyone who wishes to make a claim.

Jon Mackinnon said that the continuing rain was hampering recovery efforts, but that when the rain stopped the contractors were prepared to resume work on various damage sites around town. He reported that Northwoods Construction had begun to rebuild Route 132 where the road is currently impassable and it was thought that Thetford's section of Route 132 would be open through to Miller Pond Road by Wednesday (9/7). There was also discussion about using material directly from the river and local streams now that ANR, in order to facilitate the recovery effort, has actually relaxed some of its restrictions. There is still some uncertainty about what work FEMA will pay for and it is hoped that a FEMA inspector will be contacting the Town soon. It was noted that the VLCT is sponsoring a teleconference with FEMA and state officials for later in the morning.

As far as other flood impacts, it was noted that among the recreation fields only the Murray Field had been flooded and sustained damage. Steve reported that the up to 20' of river bank had been lost along a 200' section of river frontage at the Recycling Center and that at least one recycling trailer, if not several, might easily have been lost if the flooding had continued for a little longer.

TOWN HIGHWAYS: There is now a question about whether in all the confusion the contractor will be able to start on TB#22. Steve has contacted VTrans and confirmed that the project could be postponed until next spring and the June 30th grant deadline extended if necessary. Rod reported

that VTrans has set aside its December 31st deadline for requiring that new road signs be installed to comply with recently adopted standards regarding size and reflectivity be installed.

SIDEWALK PROJECT: The weather has delayed the completion of the sidewalks, but the final concrete pours are expected later in the week. A Construction Meeting is scheduled for Thursday and remaining project details will be reviewed then. Mark Pelow, B.U.R's site foreman, was thanked for the use of a B.U.R dump truck and other assistance to the Town during the flood recovery.

GENERAL: Audit completion was delayed by storm damage. Streetlight retrofit is awaiting completion of the last few tasks by Greenlights and CVPS, including moving a light to the Park & Ride and masking a light at the Morrill Homestead. There was a discussion about additional work, not originally covered in the RFP, to insulate the attic and replace the roof of the Municipal Building and it was agreed to add foam insulation to the vault roof since its roof was to be replaced anyway, but to postpone insulating the vault walls to some future date. There was also a discussion about replacing the front door handle of the Municipal Building with hardware that complies with handicap accessibility requirements.

NEXT MEETING: Proposed: 7 p.m., Wednesday, September 14, 2011 at the Town Office.

Respectfully submitted,

Corky Scott, Recording Secretary