

Strafford Selectboard Meeting

June 10, 2020

6pm Justin Morrill Education Center and via Zoom

Members present: Toni Pippy, Patrik Kelly, Rett Emerson, Mary Linehan, Brent Cadwell

Others present: Lisa Bragg, Jon McKinnon, Jennifer Brown, Cameron Speth, Susan Hodges, Katrina DeCoff-Webster, Eric Lopez, Aileen Lem, Janessa Nelson, Jessica Brown, Nicole Pavick, John Freitag

Meeting called to order at 6:02 pm

Motion passed to appoint Brent Cadwell to the Selectboard

Public Concerns

Toni Pippy noted that the Public Concerns agenda item was extended to allow discussion regarding 3 letters received by the Selectboard related to racism. Aileen Lem thanked the Selectboard for their quick response to her list serve message and asked if there a code of conduct that currently exists for Town staff, volunteers and other representatives. Noted that Hartford has a governing policy, but it is not clear how they hold people accountable. Suggested that it would be good to know how the Town would handle such an issue in the future. Selectboard is in favor of such a code. Toni noted that she spoke with Garrett Baxter from VLCT, who advised that the Selectboard is responsible for the general supervision over the affairs of the town.

Eric Lopez noted that the State has no enforceable code of ethics, and this has been a long standing weakness. Noted that the Town does not need to wait for the State to provide guidance, and suggested that the Selectboard should create a code for our own use

Toni proposed that the Town consider instituting an ethical code and enforcement process at the next Town Meeting. Noted that an established Code of Ethics that is signed by Town volunteers, officials and employees, so that expectations are clear and agreed to in advance, would be enforceable. Susan Hodges noted her support for this proposal.

The Selectboard adopted the following statement:

The Strafford Selectboard strongly condemns the use of a racialized and stigmatizing term in a recent notification by the Town Listers. The Selectboard requested that the Listers formally resend the notification excluding use of “Wuhan Virus” to describe the SARS-COV-2, commonly known as the coronavirus or COVID-19, which has been done.

The tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, and so many before them, are a strong reminder of the urgent need for social justice and dignity for all Americans. The Selectboard commits to anti-racism as a governing principle, and to promote racial, ethnic and cultural equity in all matters of the Town of Strafford.

Emergency Management COVID 19 update. ICS continues to meet. No important updates

Town Highways and Equipment Update

- Summer projects. Jon McKinnon presented a list of proposed projects for the summer.
- Truck bids. Lisa has prepared the invitation to bid to be posted. Other details and documents are available on request from Lisa

- Fallen trees. Toni has received many recent calls about trees that have fallen and requested clarification of who should handle these complaints. Jon noted that he gets calls for fallen trees all the time, and is willing to be the point persons for future calls
- VLCT insurance claim for town garage damage on November 18, 2019. Jon had a minor accident. A claim was submitted to VLCT; Jon spoke with VLCT the insurance will cover the damage.

Correspondence

- Selectboard continues to receive email updates from the State Emergency Operations Center Situation Reports, re: **COVID 19**, Vermont Department of Health. We also receive emails from The Office of the Governor, TRORC and VLCT
- Email, Ed Hathaway, US EPA, re: Elizabeth Mine May 2020 report, provided an update on the mine work
- Email Brett Tofel, re: Racist reference in the Town's official correspondence. Discussed in Public Concerns
- Email Aileen Lem, re: Racist term in Town communication: A perspective and request. Discussed in Public Concerns
- Email Peter Payne, re: Racist term in Town communication: A perspective and request. Discussed in Public Concerns
- Email forwarded to board from VT Municipal Government Discussion Network, re: Education Tax Rates: What we know. The Department of Taxes anticipates that tax rates will be published on August 1 (subject to change). This delay, along with the July 15th Homestead Declaration deadline, will likely require VT Towns to adjust tax billing dates without holding a town meeting. Towns are still expected to make their September education payment, with the State paying the interest. The Selectboard will discuss in a future meeting how to best set the future due date for Strafford taxes (likely after September 2), once more definitive information is provided by the State. Discussion re: potentially realigning tax due dates with the fiscal year.
- Letter from VT Finance Administration, Agency of Transportation, re: Local Highway Finance Report – FHWA-536 due 7/2/20. Toni will work with Lisa on this report
- Email Kelly Avery, Senior VERB Programs Administrator, re: One-Month Premium Credit from Northeast Delta Dental. The Town received a one-month premium credit for the Delta Dental policy. Personal contributions will be refunded to those covered by the plan.
- Letter Tory Littlefield, Regional Planner, TRORC, re: Changes to the Regional Plan since October 30, 2019 draft – none affect Strafford. Toni reviewed the plan and did not see issues for Strafford, will send to Planning commission
- Casey O'Hara, Program Manager, Property Valuation and Review Division, Vermont Department of Taxes, re: Strafford FY21 General Building PILOT Inventory. Lisa will call Casey re state properties (land) other than MH buildings
- David Gunn, VLCT, re: Vermont Local Government Resolution. Motion passed to sign at VLCT letter to VT congressmen requesting that federal funds be made available for towns and cities to address shortfalls and costs associated with the COVID pandemic and response.

Motion passed to approve minutes for the May 27th regular meeting and June 3rd emergency meeting. Brent abstained

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), Next Steps

The Town has allocated \$5000 to address EAB; Pat talked to David Paginelli to get guidance. Next step is for Dave and Bob Wilson to identify options for how to best use the funds, and provide suggestions. Noted that the Town has an existing inventory of app. 1500 ash trees along roads that are vulnerable to the EAB. Pat checked with VLCT and learned that the Town has the right to take down trees in the right of way; where the trees are on private land, landowner has first right of refusal for the downed tree. Given the

high cost of tree removal, and the number of ash trees, the Selectboard needs further information to make a reasonable decision. Pat will ask Dave to come to speak at the next Selectboard meeting.

Update Regional Energy Coordinator

Town lawyer, Paul Gillies, has reviewed the documents and reported that he did not see any problems. The position has been posted but hiring will take place only after all towns have approved the agreement.

Liaison updates

- Green Up Day success. Pat will write a letter thanking Becky Bailey for coordinating Green up day activities
- Rocky Fuller notified the Selectboard that the Town House is closed for the remainder of the 2020 season.
- Lister Request for remote access to data. Lisa will find out more about their needs and any risks for data safety.
- Use of the Town Common is approved for Newton School graduation
- The Cemetery commission will use \$5,000 of their funds to refurbish gravestones.
- Tentative approval (pending any COVID-related restrictions) is provided for use of the Town Common for the Morrill Library Reading Program

Other

- Susan Cloke proposes to organize a coordinated period of silence in honor of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter. Selectboard responded that it is a fine idea and should be organized by town citizens
- Noise in South Strafford on Rte 132 related to the use of jake brakes by large trucks continues to be a concern. Noted that these brakes are a safety measure and restricting use of these brakes may not be enforceable by the town.
- Brent Cadwell appointed to serve as liaison for Road Crew with Rett Emerson

Meeting was adjourned at 7:59 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Linehan, Recording Clerk