

Strafford Selectboard Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 12, 2022, at 6:00 pm
Strafford Town Office

Members participating: Toni Pippy, Rett Emerson, Pat Kelly, Jeff Solsaa, Mary Linehan

Others participating: Lisa Bragg, John Freitag, Aaron Dotter, Beth Preston, Hilary Linehan, Anne Peyton, Carol Langstaff, Sherry Duveneck

Meeting called to order at 6:00 pm

1. Public Concerns. Some residents have expressed concern that the Selectboard minutes are not posted on the listserv. The link to meeting is currently posted on the listserv and can be accessed through the link, on the Town website. Hard copies are posted at the two town post offices, as required by State law. Posting the minutes on the listserv required complete re-formatting and consumed a significant amount the Town Clerk's time. The process was found to be overly burdensome for the Town Office staff.
2. Town Road Crew, Highways and Equipment Update.
 - Road crew is doing a very good job maintaining the roads, and the Selectboard thanks them for their work.
 - Bogie Farms offers pre-paid sand at \$7/ton; other sources were found to be \$9/ton. PD Hardy's preference is to go with Bogie as the source for sand. Motion passed to authorize the purchase \$20,000 worth of sand from Bogie Farms.
 - Bogie Farms has also offered to provide gravel at a \$9/ton for dense grade; \$10/ton for crushed grade. Alternative sources were found to charge at least \$2 more per ton. Motion passed to pre-buy \$20,000 of gravel from Bogie Farms.
 - One of the town trucks has a clutch that needs to be replaced at an estimated cost of \$5,000 and may indicate that the vehicle will require more frequent and expensive repairs. Liaison suggests that we may want to consider a 7-year cycle for vehicles rather than the current 10-year cycle, to reduce future overall vehicle maintenance expenses.
 - Liaison has discovered that the town owns a dump trailer which is in disrepair and not currently being used. But it could potentially be sold, and the funds used for another piece of equipment that is needed or other expenses. Liaison will investigate options for selling the dump trailer.
 - Vacancy. Another application for the road has been received. Qualified candidates will be interviewed in the next week.
 - High visibility uniforms for the road crew have been ordered and will take 3 weeks for delivery. Badges will read "Strafford Highway Department."
 - Lisa hopes to prepare the tenders for approved contract work in the coming week or so.
 - VLTC has requested an estimate of the cost of replacing the bridge guard rails for the Brook Road Bridge. Lisa has submitted an insurance claim for repairs. An estimate of other repairs to the bridge deck will be obtained.

3. Approve minutes to the January 5, 2022, special meeting. Motion passed to approve the January 5, 2022, Special Meeting minutes.
4. 2021 budget to actual review. Chair reported that the 2021 budget is in good shape, expenditure records are not yet final, but we do not be overspent.
5. 2022 draft budget review.
 - a. Fire and Rescue have requested a \$71,000 contribution from the town from the 2022 General Fund budget. Aaron Dotter presented on behalf of Fire Dept, noting that the Fire Dept has prepared a careful budget which more closely reflects the anticipated costs and a realistic reflection of funds they have been able to raise. Want to add and train two new EMTs; the call ratio is currently approximately of 2-1 EMS calls to fire calls. Beth Preston reported that the State maintains a record of 54 calls for 2021, mostly requesting transport to hospitals, and approximately 10-12 of the calls were to check in people, with about half of these being transported. All Fire Dept. members have up to date turn out gear, which has a 10-year life span, unless damaged. Discussion about the reserve fund and how it is used and accounted for; there is \$35,000 currently in reserve, intended to be used in the event of equipment failure. Discussion about how budget is tracked and managed. Chair requests a clearer presentation of the budget specifying income and expenses including the balance in the reserve, which has not been reported since 2017. Aaron will provide additional information to clarify budget line items. Selectboard requested that a long-term plan for the fire department be developed, noting that the budget request has dramatically increased in recent years (from \$36,000 in 2015 to \$71,000 in 2022), a rate of increase which is unsustainable for the town.
 - b. Town Nurse. Carol Langstaff presented a request to form a board, potentially located within the church, and to request \$3,000 for a Community Nurse. The petition submitted did not meet requirements for an article to be added to the ballot for a town vote, so the committee will do more work on the concept.
 - c. Pocket Park. A petition for \$4,800 annually to support maintenance of the Pocket Park was submitted and accepted by the Town Clerk and will be included on the Town Meeting warning. Rec Board will prepare a plan for how to manage the funds and maintenance and educate the town in advance of the vote.
 - d. Extensive discussion re 2022 budget line items, clarification of specific allocations, anticipated donations and revenue, the preliminary bottom line, and possible options to cover any excess funds requested. Discussion about need to address the outstanding Town Office issues, which have been highlighted, repeatedly reviewed, and not yet acted on. Lisa reminded the board that the requests for funding increases for the Town Hall, Pocket Park, Fire Department, and other town facilities receive prompt approval while the Town Office remains an urgent problem.
6. Town Meeting planning. Given on-going pandemic situation and the State's legislation to for modifications to 2022 Town Meeting rules, discussion re floor vs Australian Ballot options. Aaron Dotter reported that the School Board will hold a meeting next Monday, Jan 17, to sign a warning to conduct the 2022 budget vote by Australian Ballot and would also like the vote to coincide with the Town Meeting vote. Given that it is impossible to plan for a safe gathering for an in-person Town Meeting at this time, the Selectboard also prefers an Australian Ballot, which resulted in much higher voter turnout last year. Motion passed to hold Town Meeting 2022 via Australian Ballot, jointly with the School Meeting, holding the vote on Town Meeting Day

March 1, 2022. Motion passed to hold the Town Meeting Hearing on February 19, 2022, jointly with the School Board.

7. General Correspondence:

- a. Byron Breese, RE: issue resolution. Pat Kelly replied to Major Breese.
- b. Stephen Willbanks, on behalf of the Strafford Historical Society, RE: Exempt Status. Plan to put forward a petition for tax exempt status was withdrawn.
- c. Geoff Martin, IREC, TRORC, RE: December 2021 Progress Report submitted.

8. Other

- Chair spoke with sidewalk volunteers who confirmed they are willing to continue clearing the sidewalks in S Strafford for the season.
- TRORC has received a housing grant.
- Next selectboard meeting will be January 20th at 5:30 pm; special meeting to work on the budget. Regular meeting will be held on Jan 27th at 6:00 to finalize and sign warning for town meeting. Consent forms for town office candidates will be available at Coburns
- Lisa will finalize plan for communicating the timeline and deadlines for Town Meeting ballot, report, and public hearing.

Meeting adjourned at 9:03 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Linehan
Recording Clerk