

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STRAFFORD SELECTBOARD

October 14, 2015

Members of the public body present: John Freitag, Stephen Marx, Toni Pippy, Brent Cadwell, Brian Johnson

Other active participants: Jon MacKinnon, Road Foreman, Jennifer Brown, Herald of Randolph Reporter, Lee Vormelker, Marie Ricketts, Bill Burden, Barbara Smith, Steve Willbanks, James Garner, Russ Farley, Janet Kavanagh, Alan Wylie

Meeting called to order in the Town Office at 6:00 p.m.

1.) Citizen Concerns:

Russ Farley asked about the replacement of the three trees that were cut down from his property for the by-pass that was needed during the bridge project on the Justin Morrill Highway this summer. Jon told Russ he would arrange the replacement of these trees.

2.) Correspondence

Green Mountain Power proposal for Renewable Energy Credits – John updated the Board on emails pertaining to the Elizabeth Mine Solar 1 project and a proposal by Green Mountain Power. John suggested that the Board consider a motion “To change the current Strafford Selectboard position on Elizabeth Mine Solar 1 from conditioning support for the project on 100% of the Renewable Energy Credits going to meet the renewable energy needs of the State of Vermont by 2017 to conditioning our support of the project on the time line proposed by Green Mountain Power whereby all the Renewable Energy Credits would be retired by year 10 of the project with significant increases starting in year 7. This change is dependent on the Green Mountain Power plan outlined in correspondence to the Strafford Selectboard being part of the final written agreements with the State, Green Mountain Power and the developers of the project.” Toni moved to consider the motion and Brent seconded. The Board then took turns giving their thoughts all Board members felt that there had been misinformation given in the process. Brian had strong feelings that there was little reason to trust agreements that were proposed. It was acknowledged that the site was a good location for the project and that there would be a benefit to the aging and undependable current electrical infrastructure. Letters from John Echeverria and James Garnet urging the Board to keep to its original position to make a statement regarding how the project should only benefit Vermont's renewable energy needs. Gail Boyajian on the other hand wrote to encourage the Selectboard to support the project and Green Mountain Power's proposal. The public present was similarly divided in their opinions.

The motion was moved, Toni, Brent and John voted to approve and Brian and Stephen voted nay. The motion passed.

3.) Minutes: Stephen moved and Brent seconded a motion to approve the minutes of September 22nd as written. The minutes were approved unanimously.

4.) Town Highways

Restatement of Compliance for Discharge Permit No. 4292-9015, Strafford Town Garage (Project no. 11194) -- A proposal from Pathways the engineering firm who designed the water system for the Town garage to meet State reporting and permit requirements was discussed. It was noted that some of the work was due now and some due in 2016. Brian suggested that we separate the work so the work is done and paid in the year it is required. All agreed and John will follow-up.

Highway and Equipment update – Jon reported all is in working order. Grading and hauling of sand ongoing.

Mine/Tyson Road Intersection Yield Sign, Old City Falls bridge guard rail, Conservation Commission

Culvert Project updates -- Jon said that he has been holding off on a yield sign since the placement will be near where the power pole is due for replacement as part to the Solar project and wanted to wait until that was done. He said that if the pole is not replaced soon he would get a sign in before the ground freezes. Old City Falls guard rail and the guard rail for the Conservation Commissions culvert project are on the list to be done this fall.

Reclassifying Class 4 portion of Alger Brook to Class 3 and Class 3 Roads that are now driveways to Class 4 roads – Reclassifying roads is complex and time consuming. It was agreed to table these items until after the budget was completed in January.

Budgeting for Paving Grant other major road projects-- Jon said that we will need to put aside \$35,000 in next year's budget to cover our share of a bridge grant to replace the Brook Road Bridge by Wetmore Road and for our share of a paving grant.

Scheduling Annual Meeting with Town Employees – Annual performance evaluations are part of our Personnel Policy and take place on or about October of each year. Jon will do the evaluations for the road crew and the Board will review Jon. The Personnel Policy states that the Board will meet with Town staff as well. We agreed to continue using the forms that have been used in past years. John will follow-up on a schedule to meet with the staff.

5.) General

Emergency Management update - Emergency Management Director Bill Burden updated the Board on procedures for opening emergency shelters in Strafford. Bill and Lee will attend the VT Emergency Preparedness Conference this month and receive VTAlert training for our town. VTAlert is a safety application designed to electronically push alert messages out to the community when the need arises. Bill, his Assistant Lee Vormelker, Town Clerk Lisa Kendall and Toni will be trained in this notification procedure.

Dog Kennel update – Brent said the covering is in. He is very busy at the moment but will bring to the Town Garage when he has a chance. Brent was asked to see if the road crew when they had time could set it up. He will check on this.

Cell phone and VTel update -- John reported that VTel has completed the hook up and is now in the process of testing before becoming operational. Stephen reported that the Cell Phone equipment installed along Rte. 132 a year ago and never hooked - up appears to be going nowhere. He would like to go to the media to make people aware of this failed project. The Board gave him our full support.

Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District (GUVSWD) solar project/communications -- District Director Tom Kennedy asked to come to the meeting to address concerns over lack of transparency over a 5megawatt solar facility at our District's property in North Hartland.

In a May 25, 2015 email Tom had written, “Recently the GUV Board discussed the feasibility of developing a solar park of sufficient size that it would generate a revenue stream that could reduce member town's bond payment contributions. We are still in the initial stages of this project but it looks promising. We will keep all the towns informed as the progress progresses.” Unfortunately keeping towns informed has not been the case. After a request from a constituent on how the renewable energy credits would be handled for this potential project it was found that the minutes for the District Board had not been posted on their website since April. Nor had there been any communication with the member towns. A call to the District office was met with the response that there were no approved minutes to post on the website. Tom apologized to the Board for the mistakes. He said the minutes of meetings since April are now on the website and as well as an update on the project and they intend to do better at following the Open Meeting rules of the State. Strafford District Representative Steve Willbanks also expressed his regret at the lack of communication saying he thought that as

has been the practice in the past that minutes were being sent to the Selectboard. He did not realize that this was no longer the case. Tom then went on to update the Board. He said that the District had hired Dori Wolfe to draw up specifications for a Request for Proposals for the project which will be roughly twice the size of the one seen form I89 in Sharon. He said 14 contractors had expressed interest and Gro-Solar was chosen by a selection committee to be the contractor and they were now in negotiations with GMP regarding implementing the project. He said that things were still at an early stage but when questioned agreed that in order to receive federal tax credits the project would have to be up and operational by just over 14 months from now when those credits expire. Tom said that the issue of Renewable Energy Credits has not come up but the goal of the project was to raise as much money for the District as possible to offset the costs of bond payments on the landfill for which there are no longer any plans to put into operation. John asked if there are no longer plans for the District to open a landfill at the site, had there been any attempt to determine the value of the site if it was put on the market as there are no other potential landfill sites in Vermont that have met the strict criteria for a landfill. Tom said they had not but might pursue this after the solar facility is built. John expressed his frustration at again being faced with lack of information and misinformation regarding another commercial solar facility for which the town has some responsibility. Stephen and Toni asked Steve Willbanks to in the future provide regular updates to the Board. Steve said that he would be willing to do that.

Budget Goals and Timeline -- John submitted a revised budget time line based on changes made at the last Board meeting. He said that his main goals for this year was both transparency and making the budget choices more understandable to the tax payers. John submitted figures showing that more than 25% (over \$300,000) of the current budget is to pay principal and interest for the Highway Reconstruction, Town Garage and GUVSWD Bonds and equipment. He says this severely limits the amount we are able to spend each year on operating expenses. Toni spoke of her desire as well to make the budget more understandable. She has spent a considerable amount of time going over the recommendations of the outside audit that was done this year. She felt in particular, the Equipment Fund, which Strafford does in a way that is unique could be improved. A final goal is to allow more public input before the budget is adopted.

Budget projects – Town Office stairway - The town office stairway has been cited by our insurance provider as something that needs addressing. It has been on the Selectboard's radar as well. Strafford architect Tim Utt has provided drawings (pro-bono) that could be used to estimate the job. Brian has come up with a figure of between \$15,000 and \$20,000 that would be needed to rebuild the stairway and paint that side of the building. Any project this size if put in the budget and adopted by the voters would have to go out to bid.

Body Camera Policy – Town Agent Alan Donohue has not had a chance to review final policy proposal. John moved to table the discussion until the next meeting and all agreed.

6.) Other –

Brent has received complaints about dogs barking that live at 85 Alger Book Road from the neighbors. A call was made to Ed Eastman the dog officer by one of the neighbors, but he was not there.

Stephen brought up a long standing concern over provisions that allow for two houses to be built on one lot. He thinks this may cause problems in the future. He will bring his concerns to the Planning Commission.

Stephen also informed the Board of concerns over a steep driveway being built on Carpenter Hill Road. Brent said that he is the contractor on the job and it is indeed steep but it has been given approval to proceed from Jon Mackinnon who has been given the job of approving highway access based on town policy in this regard.

Brent made a motion to adjourn and Brian seconded. All approved and the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Next Meetings: Regular Board Meeting – Town Office on October 28th at 6 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Toni M. Pippy



