

Strafford Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 8, 2023, 6:00 pm

Town Office, 227 Justin Morrill Hwy, Strafford, 05072

Members participating: John Freitag, Brian Johnson, Jeff Solsaa, David Paganelli.

Other participants in person: Curt Albee, John Echeverria.

Via zoom: Rocky Fuller, Jane Prescott, Karla Bushway, Lisa Bragg.

Meeting called to order at 6:10 pm.

1. Election of Officers: Brian nominated John Freitag as Chair, seconded by David. Approved 4-0. John nominated Jeff Solsaa as Vice Chair, seconded by David. Approved 4-0. Brian nominated David as Recording Clerk, seconded by Jeff. Approved 4-0.

John read the Selectboard Rules and Procedures aloud, then all members signed the document.

No copy of the Policy Regarding Conflicts of Interest and Ethical Conduct was available so review of this policy was tabled until the March 22nd meeting.

John read the Guidelines for Selectboard Conduct aloud, then all members signed the document.

John made a motion to appoint Brian and Jeff to be authorized to approve and sign orders for payroll and operating expenses for the period March 11, 2023 to March 8, 2024. Brian seconded the motion and it was approved 4-0.

John made a motion to reinstate all appointees whose position is up for reconsideration, with the exception of the Zoning Administrator. Brian seconded the motion and it was approved 4-0.

John made a motion to re-appoint Brian Johnson as Zoning Administrator. Seconded by David and approved 3-0, with Brian abstaining.

Jeff agreed to act as liaison with the Highway Department. Brian agreed to act as liaison with the police, the DRB and the Planning Commission. David agreed to act as liaison with the Recreation Committee, the Conservation Commission, the Ashley Community Forest Board and the Town Office Committee. John will act as liaison to the school and will coordinate our effort to obtain grants for various town projects.

John mentioned that he would be signing up for VLCT training on Selectboard Essentials, via Zoom on March 30th. He gently encouraged other members to consider this training as well.

2. Public Concerns: John Echeverria updated the Board on the Bridge 30 project, and suggested that the Bridge 30 group may ask for time on the agenda at the next Selectboard meeting. Currently there is a pending grant application for \$300,000 with a decision expected soon. If that is successful, there is a second grant process underway that could result in another \$300,000.

A third grant is also being considered that could result in an additional \$200,000. If all grants are awarded to the project, it is expected that grant funding would cover approximately \$800,000 of the estimated total cost of \$900,000 for the bridge project. John Echeverria also made the Board aware that VTRANS is pressing for a decision on acceptance of the trusses within the next month.

Jeff expressed the opinion that the town should not accept the trusses until successful funding has been confirmed.

Jane Prescott offered the opinion that the Selectboard should discuss appointment of a fifth member in open session. John Freitag explained that our intent during this meeting was to discuss only the process of finding a fifth member, and not to discuss any individuals that may have expressed interest. John agreed to check with VLCT to obtain an opinion about whether discussions regarding specific individuals who express interest in appointment, should be held in open meeting or in executive session.

3. Town Office Update. Since Curt Albee and Rocky Fuller had joined the meeting, the Board agreed unanimously to take up this agenda item out of sequence. David began by updating the Board on recent progress regarding acquisition of land for the proposed town office expansion. In the tentative agreement, Susan Cloke has agreed to donate approximately 0.1 acre to the town. The town would then trade this 0.1 acre to Morgan Smith for the 0.05 acres needed for the town office expansion. No money would change hands and the transactions would take place simultaneously. The only condition that Morgan Smith and Susan Cloke place on their respective donations of land, is that the town hold them harmless for the expenses involved in the land transfers. David made a motion that the Selectboard agree to pay all transaction costs associated with the land acquisition as proposed. The costs would include legal fees for all three parties, survey costs, and any fees or taxes that may result from the transfer. Brian seconded the motion and it was approved 3-1 with David, John and Brian voting in favor, and Jeff in opposition.

The next step in this process is for the Town Office Committee to attend the DRB meeting on March 15th to consult with them regarding the potential to approve this tentative agreement as a lot line adjustment. If DRB is able to approve the proposed lot line adjustment, then David will talk with attorney Brooke Trottier to ask her to represent the town in this transaction. Further, David agreed to ask for an estimate of legal costs, and to check with surveyor Tom Otterman to obtain an estimate of costs to survey the 0.1 acres that would be donated to the town by Susan Cloke.

Curt Albee and Rocky voiced support for acquisition of the land in the manner described above. Curt also explained that delaying acquisition would delay the project and likely result in a 5-8% increase in the cost of all work pushed forward into next year.

There was additional discussion about potential grant/funding sources to help fund the project. One is a grant through the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) for \$7,500 that actually would help us with a grant administrator and with finding appropriate grant opportunities that we may apply for. John read aloud a letter of interest and support for the REDI grant and offered to complete the grant application. David made a motion to approve John sending the drafted letter to REDI in support of our grant application. Brian seconded

the motion and it was approved 4-0. The second source of potential funding discussed was Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS). Jeff moved to ask John to apply to our Congressional delegation for a \$325,000 appropriation to help fund our Town Office project. David seconded the motion and it was approved 4-0.

4. Motion was made by Jeff and seconded by David to approve the minutes of the 2/22/23 meeting. Motion approved 3-0, with John abstaining.
5. Highway Update: Jeff informed the Board that the F550 needs service, and the Western Star has a brake issue. We have ample materials in place to get us through winter and mud season. Roads are currently posted. Pothole patching on Route 132 will begin soon, using equipment borrowed from Thetford. Jeff reminded the Board that we recently approved ditching, culvert replacement and paving on Route 132 from the Thetford line to Whitcomb Hill Road. He estimated that the town crew would spend approximately two weeks with two men, assisting with ditch improvement. Jeff also explained that we might alternatively apply for an Infrastructure Grant to fund this work or a larger reconstruction project, but there was no guaranty that we would receive the funding, and even if we did, we would likely not have money in hand for at least two years. During that period, the condition of the road would continue to deteriorate. He supports moving forward with the Route 132 project as previously planned.
6. Town Office Safety Violations: Brian has been in contact with the Fire Marshall to discuss how we might address safety concerns detailed by the Fire Marshall. There are problems with the front porch supports, side stairway, side access door and access to the interior electric panel. The Fire Marshall has given the town a deadline of March 22, 2023 to submit a plan to him that details how we will address these issues. Brian will request a site visit with the Fire Marshall to discuss specific strategies to properly address these important safety issues. John will attend the site visit as well. Once we have more clarity on what is required, we will formalize a plan and submit it by the specified date.

Jeremy Kendall, who has done work on the Town Office in the past, is scheduled to do some work at John's home. John offered, if Jeremy is willing, to have him switch his time to working on the Town Office repairs required by the Fire Marshall. The Board thought this would be good if it works out with Jeremy.

7. General Correspondence:
 - Note from the organizers of the Ranger asking to meet with the Selectboard.
 - Invoice from the Orange County Sheriff's Office that appears to bill the town for charges in excess of the amount contracted. Town will hold the invoice and Brian will request a visit by the new Orange County Sheriff, George Contois, to our next meeting, to discuss this invoice and also general policing requirements in Strafford. Ed Eastman will be notified of this meeting, once confirmed, so that he may be present at the meeting.
8. Other Business: John Freitag read a draft invitation to the public to submit letters of interest to fill the current vacancy on the Selectboard. Motion was made by David to post the invitation, seconded by Brian and approved 4-0.

Motion to adjourn was made by Jeff Solsa. Second by David. Approved 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

David Paganelli