

MEETING OF THE  
STRAFFORD BOARD OF SELECTMEN

January 8, 2013 pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 312 (b)(1) Selectboard meeting minutes include

- (A) All members of the public body present;
- (B) All other active participants in the meeting;
- (C) All motions, proposals and resolutions made, offered and considered, and what disposition is made of same; and
- (D) The results of any votes, with a record of the individual vote of each member if a roll call is taken.

Although meeting minutes have complied with 1 V.S.A. § 312 (b)(1), additional information is included as a courtesy.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

**Members of the public body present:**

Rod Maclay, Chair, Sally Hull and Victoria Lloyd, Members

**Other active participants:**

Lisa Kendall, Town Clerk; Marie Rickett, Lee Vormelker, Chip Lewis, Stephen Marx, Jeanne Castro, Mark Castro, Paul Kifner, Jessica Tidman, Kevin Plunkett, Curt Albee, Rebecca Seibel, and Barbara Smith, residents; John Freitag, correspondent to the Randolph Herald.

**Motions, proposals and resolutions made, offered and considered, and disposition of same:**

Citizen concerns – Freitag asked if the Selectboard will appoint someone for the vacancy on the Board of Listers.

Minutes –

- 12/3/13 Minutes were amended to add attendance by Bill Burden. (M/S: Tori/Sally. Motion carried.)
- 12/11/13 Minutes were amended under citizen's concerns, striking one sentence and adding "The check was delivered to the Town office the next morning." (M/S: Tori/Sally. Motion carried.)
- 12/19/13 Minutes were approved as drafted. (M/S: Tori/Sally. Motion carried.)

Discussion with Paul Gillies, Esq.

1. Dissolving the Board of Listers

Paul informed the meeting that the Selectboard may ask the voters to dissolve the Board of Listers, which happens at Town Meeting. This is happening throughout the state, including in Berlin where Paul lives. He observed it is sometimes difficult to have Listers keep up with state laws, and the

appraisal process with a citizen board is very time consuming. With a hired professional, this person would serve for about 6-8 weeks, advise the Board of Civil Authority continuously, and town wide reappraisal is not needed as often as with a citizen board. One disadvantage is that we may lose local understanding of the market; however, this is not always an objective view. There is also a cost to this approach. The town is more vulnerable to appeals using citizen Listers; towns are protected better using a professional. Using a professional can help towns avert an instance where a long-serving Lister retires and the town loses the institutional memory of that person. The approach changes from a cost basis (using a citizen board) to a market basis (professional appraiser). Curt Albee indicated Strafford has a hybrid system. Using a professional, grievances would go to the hired appraiser. If Strafford were to change, Paul recommended the Board of Listers remain in place until the reappraisal is complete. It is unclear from statute whether this change is reversible, though it likely is.

## 2. Delinquent Tax Collection

We asked Paul what options exist for delinquent tax collection. Any changes to the process must be made at Town Meeting. Paul reflected that the delinquent tax penalty breeds hardship. Hinesburg has eliminated the penalty completely for this reason. Berlin has changed how their tax collector is compensated for their work to an hourly rate of pay; delinquent tax payments now go to the town.

Our options include:

1. Voting to keep or change the penalty amount as allowed under state law
2. Decreasing the delinquent tax penalty and paying the tax collector an hourly wage
3. Clarifying that taxes must be delivered to the Town Office by a certain time and/or United States Postal Service postmarked by a date certain
4. Graduating the delinquency penalty amount after a time certain

A few people spoke in support of option 4. Paul clarified that neither the Town Clerk nor the Tax Collector have any discretion if a payment is late, under law, regardless of the reason. Although a grace period can be considered, it effectively is equivalent to changing the due date. Tori reported she will conduct an online survey about suitable language to vote on at Town Meeting. Steve Marx has spoken up at Town Meeting for years about abolishing the penalty, but no changes have been made to date. Lisa reported that all surrounding towns charge 8% penalty and 1% interest. The Town Clerk has always processed payments the way we currently do – with the Town Clerk receiving the payments and giving them to the Tax Collector after the payment date. Our Tax Collector Jeannie Castro has worked for Strafford for 25 years and works hard for the money she receives as commission reported by Lisa.

Any new Town Meeting warrant items, including this one, must be brought to the Town Clerk by 1/23/14. All petitions require signatures from 5% of the registered voters..

## 3. Pros and Cons of changing Selectboard membership to five persons

Paul reported Vermont's smallest towns have three member boards, but there are fewer such towns today than in years past. Often Selectboard members are assigned areas of responsibility, such as the Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, etc. Five member boards are more political

and votes can be polarized. If any one Selectboard member is spending more than 10 hours per week on town work (as is the case in Strafford), he recommended we go to a five person board. If Board members are spending more than 20 hours per week on Selectboard work, he recommended we hire a Town Administrator. Changing the number of members on the Selectboard requires a vote at Town Meeting. He recommended first a vote on this issue, followed by nominations from the floor for candidates.

The Selectboard clarified that this issue will only appear on the Town Meeting warrant if a petition, signed by 5% of the registered voters, is brought to the Town Clerk by 1/23/14.

#### 4. Hiring a part time Town Administrator

Paul indicated that a Town Administrator would need a background in public administration and municipal affairs. Having a Town Administrator is extremely useful, Paul reported, offering that if a corporation was managed in the way Vermont towns are (with part time volunteers), no one would invest in it. Some Town Administrators are required to bring grant money to the town equal to their salary. Sally reported that the Town of West Windsor (Brownsville), which has a population and budget similar to Strafford's, has a Town Administrator who has been indispensable to their Selectboard. The Town Administrator has a background in law, and works primarily at grant writing and administration, coordinating with state and federal officials (such as for FEMA grants), and financial reporting and compliance.

Cost for records requests – Tori reported the town has no policy currently, though many other towns do. A recent request for NEMRC records by Lee Vormelker took six hours of staff time to complete. . The Town needs a policy to reflect the costs to the Town of records requests – Tori will draft one for review at the next regular SB meeting.

Town House sound system – Paul Kifner thanked the Town for its past support of requests for funding for a new sound system at the Town House, which is a great improvement over the old system. In order to promote the Town House, incremental improvements to the system are recommended. A first set of improvements would be to add amplifiers and speakers at a cost of about \$1,500.

Town House Appeals Letter – Tori reported that Rocky Fuller could not attend. The draft appeals letter, sent to the Selectboard, has been fully vetted by the THAG, and they wish to send it out to raise funds to compete the restroom project. A motion was made to approve the letter. (M/S: Tori/Sally. Motion carried.)

Recycling Center Maintenance – Tori sought to clarify maintenance duties at the Recycling Center. The Recycling Committee and volunteers will do smaller tasks, like sanding harder to reach areas at the Center, while the road crew will be plowing and sanding the road way.

Creative Preschool land survey – Larry Swanson completed the survey requested by the Town. The Selectboard can now discuss ownership and maintenance of the preschool property with the Newton School Board at an appropriate time.

Unpaid dog fines – Lisa will send an invoice to the owner of the dog who has thus far not paid fines associated with their dog.

Budget meetings and other Selectboard meetings – Budget meetings will be held on 1/13 through 1/17/14, at 7:00 p.m., 1/20/14 at 7:00 a.m., 1/23 and 1/24/14 at 7:00 p.m. If the budget is completed in less time, the meeting schedule will be changed accordingly. The Selectboard has decided to postpone the VTAlert training, planned for 1/14/14, until March or April when Bill Burden can join us. Sally will contact DEMHS regarding this change. A community meeting about bridge #29 will be held on 1/21/14 at the Justin Morrill Homestead Education Center. The Selectboard will hold a regular meeting on 1/22/14. Since all information for publication in the Town Meeting Warrant must be submitted by 1/24/14, a Community Budget meeting will not be held on 1/27/14.

Personnel policy – The policy will be changed to clarify that town staff must work 40 hours per week to be eligible for benefits. The policy currently states that staff working 32 hours per week are eligible.

Other business –

- Liquor license – A motion was made to approve the liquor license application from Coburn's Store. (M/S: Tori/Sally. Motion carried.)
- Building permit – The state Fire Marshall has sent a building permit to rebuild the stairs behind the Town Office, as shown on drawings recently completed for the Town by a local architect. The project can now be put out to bid. Lisa raised the question of whether the stairs should be rebuilt outside or the building should be redesigned to accommodate them inside, with other changes. The Selectboard would like to revisit the idea of forming a Committee to look at these issues and will post a signup sheet at Town Meeting. Anyone who has not already expressed interest should contact the Town Office.

Town Highways – FEMA Project Bridge Bid Awards have not been made yet. Hook Construction has submitted acceptable bids for the White & Bean bridges, but they need to get bonded first, and Northwoods has submitted acceptable bids for Van Dyke and Watson bridges. The Van Dyke bridge design is being modified by the state, however. The status of the stream alteration permit is also unclear – this request should be made to Rick DeWolfe. The Town also cannot go out to bid on Farley's bridge until the borings are complete and those data are incorporated into the drawings.

Meeting adjourned 8:4w p.m. (M/S, Tori/Sally. All in favor.)

Results of any votes (1 VSA Section 312(b)(1)(D)): No votes taken.

Next Scheduled Meeting:  
January 13, 2014, 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Hull, Recording Secretary