

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STRAFFORD SELECTBOARD

December 16, 2015

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

Other active participants: Lisa Kendall, Town Clerk, Jon Mackinnon, Road Foreman and Public Works Supervisor, Regina Gioia, Assistant Town Clerk and Treasurer, Wayne Josle, Jennifer Brown, Herald of Randolph Reporter, Chris Gex, Steve Gex, David Webb, Sue Clark, Martha Walke, Steve Wetmore, Ian Bullock, Chris Kendall, Lee Vormelker, Marie Ricketts, Jane Prescott, John Echeverria, Carlton Phelps, James Garnet, Greg Bognato, Sarah Root

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

## 1) **Citizen Concerns:**

Sue Clark had a concern over scrap metal being hauled onto Marvin and Candy Pixley's property on the Brook Road. Steve Wetmore expressed concern over a significant amount tires behind the trailer. John Freitag will follow-up.

David Webb reported that ECFiber has established redundancy for the phones to prevent what happened with the last 12 hour outage. If there should be a failure on one line they can switch over to another. ECFiber is also working on the same solution for the internet service.

John Echeverria expressed his continued concern over the Evan's highway access application on Carpenter Hill. He presented a letter to the Board along with an engineering assessment that he had paid for.

Sarah Root expressed her concerns over the current conditions of the upper part of Old City Falls Road which is in the midst of a mud season. She also expressed concerns over dust in the summer. She asked why other towns don't seem to have these issues.

Chris Kendall has a concern over the FEMA bridge project next to his property and the lack of replacement for gravel to his driveway. Brent said he would follow-up with the contractor, Northwoods.

## 2) **Correspondence** (copies of these letters are available at the Town Clerk's Office)

John A letter regarding the emergency VTAAlert and who could use it, which John signed with the Board approval.

John Echeverria sent an email to the Board with a link regarding the Open Meeting Law.

A letter from an attorney regarding lease land off of Alger Brook Road. John will seek information and respond that we are looking into it.

A letter from the State regarding clarification on whether the Board has thrown up part of Johnson Road in Taylor Valley. John will respond that this action was not taken.

A letter from the State Financial Operations Office approving plan to make corrective actions to our accounting procedures based on the recent audit.

A letter from the State Department of Taxes, Division of Property Valuation and Review Certified Equalized Education Property Value (Effective 1/1/2016) – The Equalized Education Property Value for Strafford is \$170,355,000 and the Coefficient of Dispersion is 8.60%.

A letter from Lisa Kendall, Town Clerk and Treasurer to the Board raising her concerns that the Pay and Compensation Report does not include all the tasks/responsibilities the Town Clerk and Treasurer, Assistant Town Clerk and Treasurer and the Administrative Assistant perform resulting in an inaccurate comparison. The Board will follow-up at the next regular Board meeting.

3) **Minutes** –Stephen made a motion and Brian seconded to approve the December 2nd minutes. All approved.

4) **Town Highways**

**Highway and Equipment update-** Jon reported on the mud season now occurring and actions be taken. All equipment in good working order.

**Highway emergency problem notification process** – John brought up an incident last week where a bit of black ice happened after hours on the Tyson Road and resulted in a minor accident. He asked the Board for clarification in the process for contacting the Road Foreman and Public Works Supervisor in an emergency situation. The Board decided that any Board member or the Constable could contact Jon with a road problem either by leaving a message at the Town Garage or in an emergency situation at home. Jon understands that he could be called and is expected to respond at any time of the day or night with an emergency situation and if he cannot be reached that Dany Prescott, senior road crew member should be contacted.

5) **General**

**Gym Crosswalk** - Principal Greg Bagnato came in to discuss with the Board what could be done to make it safer at the cross walk to the gym during evening hours. He felt the existing street lights were inadequate. He expressed his appreciation for flashers for either end of the road until the school was able to purchase their own. Selectboard member Stephen Marx who serves as liaison with the School will work with Greg on longer term options. Constable Ed Eastman has offered to step up his presence in the evening and as he has done for the last few years provide traffic control when there are basketball games.

**Domestic Partner Benefits** - A Town employee has requested domestic partner benefits. This is currently not included in our Personnel Policy. Our insurance broker has provided information that this is not a requirement and that since civil unions, it is a relatively rare benefit being offered. The cost of providing this benefit is roughly \$5,600. Brian moved and Steve seconded that the Board not approve until we have legal advice from an attorney. All approve. An inquiry has been made to the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and once this information is received a decision on the request for domestic partner benefits will be made at the next Selectboard meeting.

**Review and Approve Town Office walkway repair bid and process** – John has drawn up a draft bid document. Strafford Architect Tim Utt, who has provided drawings on a pro-bono basis has said he is willing to continue pro-bono consulting on the project. John, Brian, Tim and Jon will follow up with the intention of getting it out to bid and a price in time to be included in the budget.

**Elizabeth Mine REC update** – John reported that when going through the Pre-Hearing filing paperwork he came across a letter from the Green Mountain Power General Counsel Charlotte Ancel to Vermont Department of Public Service Commissioner Chris Recchia, detailing the commitment from GMP to “begin phasing in retirement of project REC's in year 7 of the Project's operation, and to retire all REC's from the Project at the 10 year mark”. While the letter was cc'd to the developers and their lawyer, the Town of Strafford was not included. John will write GMP and the Commissioner of the importance of communication with the host community.

**Dog kennel/Dog officer update** – Brent reported that Janet Hardy was willing to continue as Dog Officer even though the covering and insulated dog house will not be installed this winter. John asked Lisa to pay Janet for being the Dog Officer for the second half of the year.

**Dog problem procedure** – Recently a number of Board members have received calls regarding dog problems. The Board decided that when there is not a safety issue involved Board members can respond directly to people citing our dog ordinance. If there are safety issue or continued problems, Dog Officer Janet Hardy and Constable Ed Eastman will take over and decide what course of action to take and if needed bring in the Orange County Sheriff for enforcement. A question was raised from the floor regarding a problem with a neighbor's barking dogs and the Board suggested that the first step is contacting the neighbor to make them aware of the problem and see if it can be resolved. If not, then contact either a Selectboard member or the Dog Officer.

**Budget 2016** –The Board must make decisions regarding pay for 2016 before the start of the new budget year on January 1. There were three areas that the Board has discussed in previous meetings. These included whether to offer a pay difference for the skill of grader operator, a pay increase for the town employees and the 2<sup>nd</sup> assistants hours. Toni moved and Brian seconded that we provide a 50 cents an hour pay increase for a road crew member who has become our main grader operator. All approved. The Board then discussed the pay increase for 2016. It was noted that the Board had previously level funded the amount the Town would pay for insurance leaving employees to pick up the increase this year. Toni made a motion and Brian seconded to approve a 2% pay increase for all existing employees. All approved. The question of the second assistant to the Town Clerk/Town Treasurer was then raised. It was noted that this position of extra clerical help was approved as a separate Article at Town Meeting in 2010 to be 8 hours per week @\$12/hour for a total of \$4,992. This position is in the current budget for 18 hours per week @ \$13.96 an hour for a total of \$13,066. The average actual hours worked for the last two years is around 9 hours per week. Lisa felt that she could use less than the 18 hours of extra help and felt that 15 hours a week would be workable for her. John moved that we go back to 8 hours per week @ \$13 an hour. There was no second and the motion failed. Stephen moved and Brian seconded that we approve an amount equal to 10 hours a week @ a rate of \$14 hour for a total of \$7,280. Brent asked to amend that motion to 12 hours per week. There was no second and the amendment failed. After discussion, Stephen’s motion was called to a vote. Brian, Brent, Stephen, and Toni voted in favor, John opposed and the motion passed. An amount of \$7,280 will be included in the budget for the second assistant position.

**VTel and Cell phone update--** - John expressed frustration that while the VTel pole with broadband service is now operational, his request on behalf of the Board to the company to provide information on area, type of services, and how to enroll has not been answered. He asked the Board if he and Stephen Marx who has been the point person on the cell phone units could draft a letter expressing the Board's disappointment with these projects and that a locally owned provide, ECFiber, who has been working hard to provide services in our area were not given the grant funds that have now been shown to be wasted. The Board approved

**Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District newspaper article** – Brent expressed his concern over what he felt were misrepresentations of the Board by the media. A letter written by John to the GUVSWD was presented to the Board at 10/28/15 Selectboard meeting for us to consider sending was voted down and was not sent. On November 19<sup>th</sup> there was an article in the Valley News about the letter. The Board approved Brent contacting the Valley News with his concerns.

6) **Other** –

Brent would like to go over some questions he has about the Pay and Compensation Sub-committee Report. John said that if we want to talk more about this report we need to have it as an item on the agenda and notify members of the Sub-committee so that they can participate if they so choose. It will be put at Brent's request as an item on the agenda for the December 30 meeting.

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

Next Meeting: 12/30/15 Regular Board meeting 6 p.m. at the Town Office, 1/6/16 Special Budget meeting 6 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Toni M. Pippy