

Strafford Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday April 12, 2023, pm
Town Office 227 Justin Morrill Hwy, Strafford Vermont 05072

Member participants: Brian Johnson, Rod Sloat, David Paganelli, John Freitag
absent: Jeff Solsaa

Others participating in person: Orange County Sheriff George Contois, Lt. Lenny Zenonos, Kait Norton, Constable Ed Eastman, Steve Marks, David Grant, Susan Cloke Eric Thorp

Others participating via zoom: Chris Boyle, Town Clerk Lisa Bragg, Town Attorney Michael Tarrant, Rocky Fuller, Steve Willbanks

Meeting called to order at pm by Chair Freitag. Reading of Selectboard Code of Conduct

Public Concerns: Kait Norton spoke of her concern over speeding in the upper village particularly large trucks. She has young children and is worried about ability of vehicles traveling at higher rate of speed being able to stop if needed. Kait was invited to stay for the discussion on law enforcement.

Town Highways: Freitag gave update from Solsaa. Still some pretty bad spots but overall far better than last year. 2024 Structures grant and paving grant due date is April 15.. Lisa and Jeff will get out before the deadline.

Draft minutes from Regular Meeting 3/22/23 were amended to include discussion of Orange County Sheriff contract and then approved by all. Special Meeting draft minutes of 3/27/23 and 4/5/23 were approved by all as presented.

Coburns Store liquor and tobacco license was approved by all.

Orange County Sheriff – O.C. Sheriff Contois and his Lt discussed the \$15,000 contract they have with the Town and the limitations of what they can provide given that amount of funds. They and their Patrol Officer Jenkins have been in contact with Constable Ed Eastman and will work with Ed to provide the best use of their time. There was general agreement that the highest priority for their time was addressing speeding in Strafford and South Strafford village area. The town has two speed indication signs and Kait Norton suggested we should get more. The Sheriff said they had a mobile unit they would see if they could bring down.

Stanley Property line/legal action – After being authorized at the previous Special Meeting, Freitag spoke with the Town Attorney about the issue with the neighboring property encroaching on the Stanley property and driveway now owned by the Town. At the end of this meeting the Board will go into Executive Session with our attorney to consider what the next steps are to take.

Town Office compliance/ Lister Office option – Johnson reported on work being done to come into compliance on the downstairs. The upstairs which will have to be closed off is being cleaned out this week except for the Listers Office. A temporary Lister Office will be set up in the home of Lister Ross Gortner. Lister Tim Denny and Gortner are working out details of a lease, insurance and how best to connect with the town office computers. The Board all approved a draft lease with some details still to be worked out. Fire Marshal deadline for the move is May 1. The Board also all approved going forward with what work is needed to make this office functional. It was also noted that the existing Town Office only has provisional approval of continued use based on the Board working on an option to address deficiencies with a major renovation project.

Town Office Committee update: Rocky and David updated the Board on how things were proceeding with getting additional land to allow for the addition. The land needed for the addition is being gifted to the Town by Morgan Smith and the land needed by Morgan Smith to keep his property within the zoning regulations of having a one acre lot is being gifted to Morgan by Susan Cloke. All the needed legal work should be done in order to get the Development Review Board approval at their April 19 meeting.

Bridge 30 update: The Bridge 30 group which received authorization from the Selectboard at a October 10, 2022 meeting to go forward with “the concept of refurbishing Bridge 30 using the Ludlow trusses providing it can be done at a fair and reasonable price to the town and its taxpayers” has been able to secure a \$300,000 Transportation Alternatives Program award for the project. They are working on a \$300,000 Northern Borders Grant to apply for the project. The Selectboard has approved applying the 2024 Agency of Transportation structures grant request to the Bridge 30 project with the understanding that if the truss project does not get the funds needed, this grant will be put towards removing the damaged sides of this bridge and rebuilding them in another manner. Solsaa is working with the State to get an extension on accepting the TAP grant until we know if the other grants will come through. The Vermont Agency of Transportation believes this is a worthy project and Solsaa is seeing what other funds may be available. There are still many moving parts to be put in place before we know if this project will go forward. The Board all approved a letter to the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation prepared by the Bridge 30 group as part of their effort to get a Northern Borders Grant for the project and approved the Town sending a letter of inquiry and supporting documents the Bridge 30 group will prepare for the Northern Borders Grant.

Grant position/grant priorities - Sloat presented a draft advertisement for the grant position approved in the budget at Town Meeting. It is based on the job description for the current Tunbridge. Their grant person works 10hour/ week and is payed \$50/hour. They are very pleased with how it is working out for their town. The Board all approved going forward advertising for the position. Sloat will interview candidates. Freitag reported he has met with a grant team for the Town Office who have been brought in by a grant from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. Freitag says he was very impressed with their expertise and they gave examples of similar projects they were working on, what grants are available for our Town Office project and how to fit them into the costs of the project. He will be working to update them on the project and grant investigations he has done to date. Freitag and Sloat also

had a zoom meeting with the Town's energy consultant Jeff Grout. Grout said the Board could apply for a "mini grant of \$4,000 which could be used to offset his stipend from the Town. Grout would then put his time towards a major grant to insulate the Town Garage the biggest user of fossil fuel of any town. The Board all approved John applying for the mini grant and proceeding with this project. John will loop in the Town Energy Committee which has already done some work at looking at reducing the carbon footprint at the Town Garage.

Town Common Tree proposal - Paganelli, who besides his role on the Selectboard is the Orange County Forester, updated the Board on a meeting he and Town Tree Warden Bob Wilson had with Dave Taplin who has proposed to cover the costs of taking down two damaged and disfigured ash trees at the Town House end of the common and three elm trees he planted some years ago on the Brook Road side of the common that are not doing well either. Taplin proposed planting three red oaks to replace the elms and two crab apple trees to replace the ash trees. Taplin said he would cover the cost involved and follow-up with the care of the trees this summer. The Board gratefully were in favor of this improvement to the common. A public information/site visit will be held on Saturday April 15, at 2pm to allow the public to learn more and comment on the proposal. Tree Warden Bob Wilson, his brother Sherm Wilson and John Freitag have volunteered to clean-up the downed limbs on the common on Thursday in advance of the meeting.

Eric Thorp contract: Eric Thorp came in to talk about his contract, that was signed last year and has a two year extension, to take care of the mowing and spring and fall clean-up around the Town House, the Common, the Town Recreation areas in South Strafford and the verge between the sidewalk and the road in South Strafford. Eric said that he is facing increased costs and asked for a 10% increase in his contract, There was discussion. It was noted that the Board last year adjusted a signed contract for work on the Town highways up in recognition of price increases. The quality of Thorp's work is excellent. All approved a 10% increase in the mowing contract and a switch to an hourly rate for the Spring and Fall clean-ups of all Town areas not to exceed \$2,500. Eric will work with Rocky Fuller on the care of the Town House hill and Freitag will be the point person on the other areas, looping in the Recreation Board.

Sale of Town Properties: Last year the Board approved the sale of there town properties: one at the top of Sharon Hill, and two small parcels, one at the end of Blanchard Road and one near Miller Pond. Money from the sale to go to the Town Office project. Paganelli left the office building for the discussion as he has an interest in the Blanchard property which is next to his land. Freitag said he had been in contact with Bonnie Bergeron, the realtor chosen earlier. She felt this would be a good time to put the properties on the market. The Board all voted to proceed with starting the sales process with David Paganelli not participating.

Steve Willbanks inquired about a parcel acquired by the Town with a conservation easement which is next to his property on Old City Falls Road. Freitag said this would need further investigation into the provisions of this property regarding the easement going from Town to private ownership and if there was any connection with the Town acquiring the Old City Falls Nature Area Willbanks understood the need for doing due diligence on this matter. If the Selectboard finds no problem this sale as the others would be offered as part of a public sale.

Rachel Kendall's request to the Selectboard for a letter of support for her Wellness Center was put on hold as it has not yet gotten approval from the Development Review Board. The Selectboard respects and understands the need of working with our other Boards, Commissions and Elected Officials.

Barrett Hall Generator Request: Barrett Hall Trustee Stephen Marx was informed that the Selectboard last year allocated \$13,250 toward a generator for Barrett Hall from the American Recovery Act Funds the Town received.

Correspondence;

A email from Lisa Durstin concerning the condition of the Brook Road.

There were no liaison reports.

Opioid settlement money – Freitag reported he looked into Strafford signing on but the process is extremely complex and not sure we will be able to get any funds.

Other: The Board approved the Donaldson Highway Access Application.

The Board approved signing document appointing as Strafford's Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District representative Steve Willbanks and Alternate Michael Scanlan.

Stanley property line dispute/Executive Session: The Town has been having an issue related to the location of the boundary and the various rights of way. Unless voluntary resolution can be reached, such matters can only be resolved through litigation. To date the Town has been unable to resolve it.

Thus there is probable litigation the Town may be a part of. The Town needs to be able to discuss and understand its position privately before it moves forward in light of this probable litigation.

Accordingly , Freitag moved to find that premature knowledge of the Town's discussion of such probable civil litigation related to the town's property rights would clearly place the Town at substantial disadvantage. The motion was seconded and all approved.

On that finding, Freitag moved to enter executive session , pursuant to Title 1, Section 313 (a) (1)(E) to discuss civil litigation related to 194 Mine Road. Seconded and approved by all and the Board went into Executive Session at 8:45pm

The Board came out of Executive Session at 9:23pm . No action taken

A motion was made, seconded, and approved to adjourn at 9:25pm

Respectfully submitted,
John Freitag