

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STRAFFORD SELECTBOARD

November 18, 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,

Subcommittee on Pay and Compensation members, Tori Lloyd, Bob Bushway, Martha Walke, and Steven Gex, Jennifer Brown, Herald of Randolph Reporter, Chris Gex, Rocky Fuller, Chuck Sherman, John Echeverria  
Meeting called to order in the Morrill Education Building at 6:00 p.m.

Presentation of Pay Classification, and Compensation Sub-committee

John asked for a motion to suspend our regular order of business so as to allow first the presentation of the Subcommittee's report and recommendations. Brent made the motion and Stephen seconded. All approved.

John F. explained that over the last few years the Selectboard with the assistance of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) had been updating its policies and procedures. Last year the Board decided and budgeted \$5,000 to the 2015 budget to have VLCT perform a Pay, Classification and Compensation study to ensure that our town employees were being compensated in a manner comparable with other towns. The \$5,000 was removed from the 2015 budget because at Town Meeting 2015 the budget was reduced and passed by the voters to be level funded requiring that cuts be made. Thanks to the efforts of Chris Gex who facilitated through The Class of 1964 Policy Research Shop of the Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College, A comparative Assessment of Vermont's Towns report. This report and research was done by Dartmouth undergraduate students under the direction of professors in the Rockefeller Center at no cost to the town. A subcommittee was also appointed in April of volunteers to do a more detailed study of comparable towns in our region. John F. thanked the subcommittee for the many hours of meeting and research they have done. Tori Lloyd, Chair of the subcommittee was introduced and the meeting was turned over to her. Tori passed out a summary of their work as well as background material. She explained that due to time issues the summary and recommendations was a draft and not the final product. The final version would be done on Friday and be sent out electronically. The next hour was spent going over the results, how the research was done, the Subcommittee recommendations and answering questions. The compensation and benefits paid to the towns employees and elected officials are in-line and in some areas higher than the six towns included in the survey. Tori made it clear in her presentation that this study was a purely statistical comparison. How best to include the results of the study in the overall particulars of our own town and using the information in the most helpful way will be a challenge for the Board. The final version of the report when completed will be posted to the town website: [www.straffordvt.org](http://www.straffordvt.org).

After a pause to allow those who wanted to leave, the Board then continued with its regular agenda.

## 1) **Citizen Concerns:**

John Echeverria expressed a number of concerns over the home being built off Carpenter Hill Road. His first concern was the driveway and highway access. John Freitag explained that there had already been a warned site visit and Special Meeting on October 21<sup>st</sup> in regard to the highway access which is the only aspect of the development that comes before the Selectboard. At that meeting (minutes of which are on the town website) the Board with the agreement of the Road Foreman who usually issues these permits, decided to make final approval of the highway access a matter for the whole Board to decide. Selectboard member Brent Cadwell, who is working as the contractor on that job recused himself from being part of that decision making process and made it clear that on this project whenever the highway access comes before the Board he will speak to it only as the contractor involved and not as a Selectboard member. Toni reiterated that the highway access is not finished and still under construction and that the Board fully expects it will be in compliance when finished in order to meet approval.

John Echeverria also raised concerns over the visual impact of the new home, whether the drive way itself was too steep and if the owners were taking a financial risk. While there was some brief discussion about these aspects, John F. said that this was not part of the Selectboard's area of responsibility and John E. should take these concerns to the Development Review Board which approved the project.

2) **Correspondence** -- There was no correspondence to come before the Board.

3) **Minutes** -- Stephen made a motion and Brian seconded to approve the November 11<sup>th</sup> minutes. All approved.

4) **Town Highway Updates** –

Jon reported that equipment is in good shape and work continues to prepare for winter. He said the guard rails on the Old City Falls Bridge were brought to proper height at no cost to the Town.

5) **General**

**Grant Updates** - John reported that the only grant that was currently available was a Recreation facility grant. He and Lisa have been working on the Towns part of the grant and Hilary Linehan, President of the Strafford Athletic Association and Ellen Bagnato, Co-Chair of the Recreation Board have been working on their end of things for this \$25,000 grant to help rebuild the tennis courts. Lisa will send out the final version on Friday which is the grant deadline.

**Mowing Specs** - Brent and Scott Moore, from the Recreation Board have gather background information and will hopefully be able to put the town's mowing needs out to bid before winter. It was felt that as much concrete information regarding costs for next year was important in the budget process.

**Ward Bridge bid** - Lisa and Jon are ready and will proceed with putting the Ward Bridge (on the Brook Road) out to bid.

**Ton Truck** - There was discussion on when to put out the bid for the ton truck which is due for replacement. Jon will do some more research on possible costs and the truck will be put out to bid in time to have a figure for the Town budget. The bid will make clear that no final decision will be made on purchasing the truck until after Town Meeting.

**Town Office** - Brian will put together a bid for work on the walkway and outside stairs to the upper floor of the Town Office. John F. suggested that we might want to separate the painting from the construction and consider painting the front and south/east side of the building as well. There was some discussion whether a Selectboard member could bid on a project or if this was a conflict of interest. John F. said that as long as the bidding process was conducted in a proper manner with the work fully advertised and then sealed bids opened in public with the lowest qualified being accepted there would be no conflict. Any Selectboard member participating in a bid could not be a part of the awarding of the bid.

**Selectboard Assistant Job Description** - There has been no formal job description for the work Lisa Kendall has been doing assisting the Selectboard in their duties. This funding for this work is expensed under the Selectboard line item in the budget. A job description based on duties included in other towns for this job where applicable to Strafford was presented to the Board. Brent moved and Brian seconded to approve the job description. Toni suggested eliminating the wording “to help direct the workload” from item 9. The motion was then put to a vote and all approved. Brent made a motion and Brian seconded to appoint Lisa Kendall Selectboard Assistant until March when appointments are made for 2016. All approved.

**2016 Insurance** - Lisa said that in a decision on insurance plans for 2016 needs to be made before Thanksgiving. The town currently pays 90% of single, 2 person or family plans of the BC/BS of Vermont Platinum Plan. The town, according to the Sub-committee report also provides dental vision and other compensation equal to or better than other similar communities. The increase in insurance costs are around 7% or roughly just over \$4,000 Board

members expressed unease at having to make a decision without first being able to talk with employees. At the same time Board members are fully aware of the budget constraints facing the town and the fact that those members of our community who are on social security will not be getting a cost of living increase this year. The Subcommittee has made recommendations of significant reductions in what the town should provide. No Board member was willing to act on those recommendations at this time. John suggested that we perhaps should consider going to the Gold plan as there will be additional taxes on premium plans starting in the next few years and this might be the time to move to that which would eliminate most if not all the increase. Brent said he did not feel comfortable in making any changes and would prefer trying to find cuts in other areas of the budget to make up the difference. Lisa suggested that for this year the town keep the same benefit package and level fund the amount that the town contributes to employees insurance. After more discussion, Stephen made a motion and Brian seconded to level fund the Town's contribution to the the BC/BS Platinum plan Stephen, Brian , John, and Toni voted in favor and Brent opposed and the motion passed.

**2016 Budget Discussion** - The Board decided to hold off on further 2016 budget discussion. The Board agreed to reschedule the next Board meeting from December 9<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup>,

6) **Other:**

The cost of planting replacement trees near the Farley bridge was brought up. Stephen had asked that the bill be put on hold until he could get more information. Jon explained that we had promised to replace the trees removed and that the contractor who put in the trees was reputable and guaranteed replacement should there be any problems in the next year. Stephen dropped his objection and the bill will be paid.

Brian made a motion to adjourn and Brent seconded. All approved and the meeting was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Next Meeting: Wednesday December 2nd at 6 p.m. at the Town Office.

Respectfully Submitted, Toni M. Pippy