

Strafford Selectboard Special Meeting
September 6, 2023 6 pm
Town Office Building, 227 Justin Morrill Hwy, Strafford Vermont

A Special Meeting of the Strafford Selectboard was called to order at 6pm by Selectboard Chair John Freitag

Board members participating in the meeting: David Paganelli, Jeff Solsaa, Brian Johnson, John Freitag
Participating in person: John Echeverria, Gretchen Graner, Curt Albee, Martha Walke, Donald Graham
Participating via zoom: Peter Jeffries, Kyle Katz, Steve Kredell

1. Reading of the Guidelines for Selectboard Conduct
2. Citizens Concerns – Peter Jeffries a longtime neighbor of 203 Miller Pond Road spoke of his concern over trash pile and bears. Selectboard member Johnson told of his and Health Officer Stephen Marx recent visit to the site, documentation of the problem and with the assistance of Town Clerk Lisa Bragg submitting all the needed forms to the State Health Department. Marx had previously passed on that this is the first site he has not been able to resolve without bringing in the State. Johnson said that in addition the property has been purchased at a tax sale. Current owner has one year to pay off the taxes and penalties to the Town before the property is transferred.
3. The Minutes to the Meeting of August 23 were approved with minor spelling changes. The Minutes to the Special Meeting of August 24 were approved as presented.
4. Town Highways – Selectboard Member Solsaa updated the Board on the Rte. 132 project which is near completion and has had site visits by officials pleased with the work done. Completion has been delayed due to a breakdown of a grinder needed to prep pavement damaged on the edges of the site due to the construction. He hopes if all goes well including weather, that the project will be completed by the weekend. Solsaa reported that one repair project has gone out to bid and work is being done on Kibbling Hill Road. Solsaa said the rest of the July Storm event highway work will be done by our road crew. He said some structure work may go out to bid and be done this fall. This includes the Freeman bridge replacement and a culvert replacement on Van Dyke Road. There is a meeting on Thursday September 7 with FEMA officials and town personnel involved in the clean-up and documentation of work.
5. Infrastructure Meeting. Selectboard member Freitag read a draft proposal of having a Special Public Informational Meeting on the Town infrastructure. The purpose is to make the public aware of the substantial challenges we face and to involve the public looking at the hard choices needed in order to balance what needs to be done with the resources available. The Board approved the draft proposal and set a date for the meeting on Saturday October 21 at 1pm at Barrett Hall. Freitag will reserve the Hall.

Bridge 30 - Just before the Selectboard Meeting on August 23, notice was received that the Northern Borders Grant for the Bridge 30 Truss project did not get funded. At that meeting the Board decided to see what other options there were and to make a decision on how to proceed at this meeting. Since that time Solsaa obtained an estimate from Daniels Construction, to remove the side walls of the bridge and replace the sides using historic concrete panels similar to what was done on many bridges in town after the Flood of 1927 and similar to the concrete portion of the new bridge after Coburns Store.

Daniels gave two options regarding the deck: the first was to remove the pavement and make repairs and the second to replace the roughly 70 year old deck. The cost of the whole project was estimated at \$450,00 for the first option and \$550,000 for the second option. This is less than have the cost of re-

furnished truss option. A State structures grant for \$200,000 for the Truss project Solsaa said could be part of the historic concrete panel option but we would need to be re-applied as it involves changes. The Truss option did get a \$300,000 Transportation Alternative Program grant but without the Northern Borders Grant as well, the Truss option would be significantly more expensive to the Town. John Escheverria from the Bridge 30 group who has done a tremendous amount of work writing the grants for the truss project and working on the logistics of how it would all happen, conceded that at this point the difficulties going forward precluded using the truss option. A motion was then made and approved by all to not go forward with the Truss option but to go forward with the alternative proposal of a historic concrete panel option for Bridge 30 with efforts made to pursue trying to use the TAP grant for that option. Although the project did not work out as hoped, John Echeverria was thanked by all Board members for his and the Bridge 30 group considerable efforts at trying to find a way to re-use a truss structure similar to what once was at the site in a way that did not have an adverse economic impact on the town taxpayers.

Unified ByLaw -Flood Hazard Ordinance – The Selectboard began the process of making changes to the Unified Bylaw. A motion was made and approved by all to include a section 3.2 Wind Energy Generation Facilities which had mistakenly left out of the Bylaws presented to the Selectboard. Next came a proposal from Selectboard member David Paganelli to eliminate the section on Trailer Parks. He felt that we did not need to have trailer parks in town and should not have a provision regulating them. It was explained by Kyle Katz, planner for the Regional Planning Commission that State law said trailer parks can not be excluded from a town. Planning Commission Chair Donald Graham explained that the provision in the By-Law limited their placement in town to the area Rural Residential 1 which was most appropriate. The Board voted 3-1 with Paganelli opposed to keep the provision as written in the By-Law

Selectboard member Solsaa, who said he believes that the By-Laws are too restrictive and hinders needed growth to our community especially the ability of young people to build homes so needed to keep our school viable. Solsaa began to go through a series of changes he would like to see starting with the motion to strike section 3.14 4 regarding the need for spacing between housing. Motion was defeated 3 to 1 with Solsaa voting in favor. Solsaa then brought up section 3.11 regarding Accessory Development Units and what appeared to be some contradictory language. All approve clarifications. Solsaa then made the motion to eliminate the section regulating cell towers. Graham explained that cell tower developers could go through a town or Public Service Board process and most developers chose the PSB process as the town regulations, and ours are based on what other communities use are usually stricter. Motion was not defeated with Solsaa voting yea and all other Selectboard members voting nay. Solsaa also pointed out at least one grammatical error which needed to be changed. Planning Commission Secretary Martha Walke working with Kyle Katz from the Regional Planning Commission will incorporate all changes and they should be ready for review at the next Selectboard meeting. After an hour for what had been expected to be a 15 minute discussion, there was still more review that needed to be done. Chair Freitag proposed and it was agreed upon to continue work on the ByLaws and Flood Ordinance at the next Selectboard meeting on September 13. Donald Graham suggested and the Board agreed that people write out and share what changes they wish to make before the next meeting. While there due to the Open Meeting Law can be absolutely no discussion over email, providing this background information is acceptable and should facilitate the process. Due to taking more time for review, the planned Town vote on the ByLaw and Flood Ordinance will have to be rescheduled till later in November.

Town Office Project – The Board had intended to review a proposal from our grant consultants on the Town Office project (whose limited services are paid with a State grant) to approve a Request of Proposal for architectural service. A \$325,000 Congressional Directed Spending appropriation put in by Senator Peter Welch has been included in the Senate version of the federal budget that must be approved at the end of this month. It still needs to be reconciled with the House version and signed by the President. The

RFP would be for two phases of service – the first phase to provide enough specifics to apply for more grants, specifically at this point an

Accessibility grant of up to \$150,000 from federal funds and a \$100,000 Outstanding Historic Building Grant from the State. Unfortunately Peder Rule sustained an injury that prevented him from attending the meeting. Town Office Committee Chair Curt Albee had questions that were unable to be answered with out the consultant being there and this item was postponed until the September 13 Selectboard meeting.

Conservation Commission vacancies – Upon the recommendation of the Conservation Commission, the Board unanimously approved the appointment of Erin Younger and Kitty Mackie to the Conservation Commission.

Liaison reports.

David Paganelli who is the Selectboard liaison to the Ashley Community Forest Board and is currently serving as Chair, asked the Selectboard on behalf of that organization to re-install a gate on the short section of town road that is entirely within the Ashley Forest due to unwanted vehicle use. The Selectboard approved the request with the provision that David check with the Road Foreman to make sure it would not interfere with snow plowing.

Constable Ed Eastman inquired what action he should take regarding an abandoned vehicle. It was suggested that he see if the State Police would take care of it.

Motion made and approved to adjourn at 8:56 pm

Respectfully submitted,
John Freitag, substitute minute taker