

Strafford Selectboard Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, July 26, 2023, 6:00 pm
Town Office, 227 Justin Morrill Hwy, Strafford, 05072

Members participating: John Freitag, Jeff Solsaa, David Paganelli, Brian Johnson.

Other participants in person: Tim McCormick, Rockwell Fuller, Steve Marx.

Via zoom: Kyle Katz, Courtney Hardy, Lisa Bragg, Michael Tarrant.

1. Meeting called to order at 6:00 p.m..
2. John Freitag read the Guidelines for Selectboard Conduct.
3. Selectboard Vacancy.
Hannah Levinger has submitted a letter of interest to serve on the Selectboard until March 2024. She is the only applicant. Motion to appoint Hannah Levinger to the Selectboard was approved unanimously. She can be sworn in by the Town Clerk prior to the next regular Selectboard meeting on August 9th.

4. Public Concerns: None.

5. Tax Rate:

The Town Clerk provided calculations of the estimated town tax rates.

General Fund	0.2080
Highway Fund	0.4909
Town Garage Bond	0.0208
Local Agreements	<u>0.0005</u>
Total Municipal Tax Rate	0.7202

Homestead Education	1.5015
Non-Homestead Education	1.5767

The Selectboard voted to set the tax rates as presented. Tax bills to be sent out by 7/31/23.

6. Review and Approve Minutes of the July 11 and July 12 meetings. Minutes for 7/11/23 were approved as amended and minutes for July 12, 2023 were approved as presented.
7. Highway.
 - a. Jeff reported on flood damage and road repairs. Two outside contractors (other than the Road Crew) are still working in Strafford on FEMA road repairs. Alan Rowell is doing contract grading for the town and Northwoods Excavating is working on Old City Falls Road. We will be shifting from using paid contractors to using our own Road Crew to do future repair work.

- b. Jeff reported that five hydraulic studies have been done by VTRANS of bridges and culverts in town and all have been determined to be undersized. The State will re-design these structures and FEMA will pay to upgrade them according to engineered designs. All of these five projects will be put out to bid, and Chris Behr a Strafford resident and retired civil engineer will oversee these projects on behalf of the town.
 - c. FEMA will fund repairs to drainage structures on Class IV roads. We would need to assess the damage and document with photos prior to seeking repair reimbursement.
 - d. L&M have been working on Route 132 between the Tyson Bridge and the Thetford town line. This is a federal repair project, rather than a FEMA project. There have been problems with motorists ignoring the road closure signs and driving into the active construction zone. As of today, additional measures have been taken to restrict access. Corings of Route 132 in the damaged zone indicate that the base of the road was imperfect. Paving has been taken up and a proper base is being installed.
 - e. Jeff stated that FEMA-related repairs to roads will be ongoing for at least the next two months.
 - f. John Freitag informed the Selectboard that we have received two grants, the Bridge 30 grant and the municipal resilience grant. A motion was made, and approved unanimously to allow John to sign on behalf of the board, accepting both grants.
8. Town Office Project: Rocky Fuller reported on behalf of the Town Office Committee that the DRB has conditionally approved a subdivision of the Morgan Smith lot that will allow him to give 0.05 acres to the town in order to advance the Town Office modernization/expansion project. Morgan Smith's attorney will submit a subdivision request on his behalf to complete the process. He also reported that the town attorney has recommended a title search of both parcels, Smith and the Town, and that this is in progress.

John Freitag suggested that since the town will need to vote on the unified bylaws and Flood Hazard, that it would make sense to have the vote on the Town Office project at the same time. A timeline was discussed with Kyle Katz of TRORC. First the land must transfer from Morgan Smith to the Town. Then at least one, and possibly more, informational meetings will be held to update the public on the proposed project and its estimated costs. Then there would be a combined vote. If voters approve the Town Office Project, John Freitag explained that future architectural services would need to be put out to bid.

Rocky suggested that the informational meetings should be held in the Townhouse and requested the full support of the Selectboard at those meetings.

John suggested that the Town Office Committee meet to discuss next steps, then we would schedule a Special Selectboard meeting to discuss together.

Kyle Katz said that separate hearings would be necessary on all three matters to be considered at a combined vote, with a target of early September for informational meetings and mid-October for a joint vote. With respect to the unified bylaws, Kyle said that first, the Selectboard would need to consider and approve of the bylaws, then hearings would need to be 30-40 days before a vote.

The nature of the vote, whether in-person or by mailed ballot is yet to be determined and will be decided at the next Selectboard meeting.

9. Old City Falls:
Mark Chute had raised safety concerns about visitors near the Falls. There appear to be adequate warning signs asking people to stay on trails. There is no way to insure that all individual visitors read and follow instructions. Tim McCormick reported that he has been working to stabilize the trail down to the Falls. John Freitag suggested that the Strafford Conservation Commission might have a work day to assist Tim with this project and possibly with rebuilding the outhouse. He also suggested that perhaps the Strafford Conservation Commission might enlist and fund a Vermont Youth Conservation Corps crew for a week next year to do more substantial improvements to the trail and grounds. David agreed to contact the Conservation Commission to make these suggestions.
10. Unlicensed Dogs:
Courtney Hardy reported that there are 6 remaining dog owners in town that have not yet vaccinated or licensed their pets. She indicated that two of these may need financial assistance to come into compliance. The Selectboard clarified that she does have authority to use funds allocated or donated for the purposes of animal welfare or public safety, to ensure compliance. The Selectboard expressed support for Courtney's efforts to vaccinate and license all dogs in Strafford, and will support her in impounding dogs of non-compliant owners in the event that it becomes necessary.
11. Steve Marx reported on recent events at 203 Miller Pond Road. This parcel, ID #03-203 being 1.0 acre more-or-less and premises is being sold at tax sale with a public auction to be held on August 24, 2023 at 10:00 a.m. at the Strafford Town Office.
Steve has been working to get garbage stored on site removed. He requested a joint visit with a Selectboard member and Brian Johnson volunteered to accompany him. Steve asks the public to report any fires on the premises to the Strafford Fire Department. If the reported fire is in a dumpster, they should report it specifically as an active, dumpster fire.
12. Law Enforcement Update: The Selectboard reaffirmed support for Ed Eastman and his work as Town Constable. John Freitag reported on a speed study done by Ed for both villages and for Mine Road. Most vehicles are following the posted speed limits, but a small minority are exceeding the posted speed limits by 15 mph or more.
The Selectboard approved providing a radio antenna to Ed from a surplus at the Town Garage.
13. Grant Updates: Stephanie continues to explore grant opportunities, and organize our grant efforts. She has begun working with Lisa to track repair efforts and costs for FEMA.
14. Parking Map: Tabled until a future meeting.
15. Correspondence: Multiple correspondences complaining about trucks, volunteering to help with flood recovery efforts, or thanking the Town Crew and other town officials for their efforts on behalf of the town.
16. A motion was made and approved to enter executive session to discuss a legal matter with our attorney, Michael Tarrant. Due to impasse in negotiations in an ongoing boundary dispute it was decided that the town should hire a surveyor to review the EPA survey of the Stanley parcel, to assist the town in advancing a proper resolution of the matter.

17. A motion was made and approved to re-enter executive session to discuss a personnel matter.
No action was taken.

18. Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m..

Respectfully submitted,

David Paganelli