

Selectboard Minutes 6/1/2020

Members Present by Zoom: Christine Werneke, Katie Mather, Bard Hill, David Sander, Roger Brown

Members Present by phone: none

Absent: none

Others Present by Zoom: Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Kathy Daub-Stearns, Admin. Assist.; Connie Bona, Finance; Pete Gosselin, Hwy; Superintendent; Larry Muldoon Police Chief; Kyle Kapitansky, Police; Linda Parent, Town Clerk; Ravi Venkataraman, Town Planner; and Angelica Contis recorded the meeting for MMCTV Channel 15, also present: Virginia Clark, Planning Commission; Marshall Paulsen, Jay Furr, Lee Rosen, Jessica Arendt, Magee Leugers, Jacob Royer, Ike Patch, Keith Kasper, Greg Elias, Logan Hegg, Larry Fischer, Martha Nye, Patty Breshett, Francine Pomerantz

Called to Order: 7:08 PM

Welcome by David.

Comments from the public:

Magee Leugers read a statement of support from Community Senior Center asking the Selectboard to adopt the mask resolution as written by Patty Breshett. Josh let Magee know the mask resolution was on the third item on agenda and would be discussed then.

I. Additions or Deletions to Agenda

Josh shared a video that he and the Selectboard put together as a thank you to the staff for keeping positive and making certain the Town has continued to function during COVID.

Bard made a statement about the happenings in Minneapolis and other places saying he was having flashbacks to 1968, a time in history when race relations were volatile. Bard stated that he appreciated the sound practice and behavior of the Richmond Police Department and recognized that those practices and behaviors are not practiced around the world. Bard believes that the rioting and looting taking place is due to injustices that are long standing frustrations adding that as a nation we should eschew violence, anger and hatred.

II. Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

a) Update on COVID-19 health crisis response

i. Discussion of options regarding budgeted expenses

Josh reported that at the last meeting discussion regarding the budget had taken place with the Selectboard asking to look at items that could be deferred department by department. Josh went on to say:

- that Highway will have underspent \$18,000 on sand this year, and will put off paving until spring,
- that the police department has some budget savings in OT in FY20 and FY21 has identified \$50,000 that can be spent later in the year,
- that Admin will put off the purchase of computers equaling \$3,700

Connie was asked if she had any large projections, she responded

- that Unassigned funds may go up a little
- that in her mind the big thing is taxes stating she is trying to get clarification on when the education taxes will have to be paid in light of the fact that homestead declarations were postponed a month and are used to determine property taxes.
- that the earliest she will hear what the education tax rate will be is August 1st
- that if she has the number by August 1st then she could get the tax bills out by August 15.
- that the Selectboard has been given authority to change the dates bills are due but that may not change when education taxes are due to the school.
- that usually the school bill is \$1.5 million dollars and is paid the first week of September. That is a problem if we aren't getting taxes from residents until the 15th. Connie thought we may need to take a loan for a short time to pay the education bill until taxes are collected.
- that there is a bill going through the legislature that may reimburse interest towns incur due to needing to borrow money to pay the education bill. She added that it has not yet passed.

Discussion included:

- Roger saying that every other town in the state is dealing with this
- Connie responded that there are 2 parts, when will we be able to get bills out and will people be able to pay. We may get the number from the state on the 1st of August, that would be the absolute earliest.
- Roger asked if we could make a partial payment, Connie said she will find out. Roger thought if the school was ok with us being a few weeks late they wouldn't have to impose the penalty, saying we should just ask.
- Katie asked if Connie was given a timeline for better information, Connie replied she has not adding that the legislature has a bill that they have passed that allows the forgiveness of loan interest to municipalities that have to borrow to cover their education bill but the governor has not signed it yet.
- Connie stated that there are people who pay their taxes for the whole year in August. Katie thought we could ask people to pay in full on Front Porch Forum or put a note in with the bills making the request.

Connie reported that she and Josh did some digging regarding delaying the paving job until spring, saying it still needs to be done even if not done in the same physical year. She said we would want to make the decision in January when we are working on the budget. If we do the paving in the next physical year the money collected now has to be used toward that budget line.

Discussion included:

- Roger asking whether vacancy savings were the same thing, Connie responded that vacancy savings are different. Roger replied that he did not think that over or under spending the budget meant having to go back to taxpayers. Katie said, so we cannot ask the taxpayers to pay for a project they have already approved the budget for, Connie replied, yes that's right.

- Pete asked if all the departments come in under \$100,000 collectively where does that money go? Roger responded that the money goes into unassigned funds. Josh said every year we 0 out the budget regardless of what has been spent. In the past we have used overages to keep the tax rate down and used it to help with shortfalls in other areas. Josh added that highway money has to stay with the highway budget.
- Roger asked if we should stay the course and see where we are in the spring. Pete agreed. Josh said that if we come out of the next two tax payments ok we can make decisions and have more information by next Town Meeting Day.
- Connie voiced her concern that the Town will have a shortfall in the coming year. Roger said, if we get to a point of not having money to pay staff it's a reason to pull things like paving out of the budget. Roger added, let's save as much money as we can and feed it back in when we need to. Roger gave Pete credit for bringing up pushing the paving budget to the spring to see where we are financially.

ii. Discussion of ventilation in small conference room

Josh reported:

- that he called Marshall Paulsen who gave him a couple of options. He said that a temporary air handler could ventilate out one of the Town Clerk windows and that a more permanent option would be more expensive. Josh said Marshall suggested calling Mayhew, which he did, they had similar thoughts but suggested calling Efficiency VT. Josh said this is a long-term issue for the whole building. He thought maybe an air purifier would work as another short-term option adding that he is getting information from the state as to the effectiveness of air purifiers against COVID.
- that in the meantime researchers are coming in one at a time and following distancing and other guidelines
- that ventilation in the large conference room would be much easier using box fans in the windows and setting up a network connection for the copier. The issue is that Linda needs to physically watch anyone using the books so maybe setting up video cameras would work. Josh will follow up on the legalities.
- Christine reported that she had recently been at Town Center and there are two doors that are kept open, surfaces are wiped down, employees are wearing masks, she thought that precautions were being taken and she sees the small conference room ventilation as a small risk, not a huge one that needs to be addressed right away.

iii. Consideration of adopting a resolution regarding use of face coverings within town owned buildings and in places of public access

Josh read the newest resolution draft.

Discussion included:

- that the Richmond Market has signs that encourage people to wear masks and employees are wearing masks or behind sneeze guards. That the Market's manager thinks about 90% of the customers are wearing masks.

- that Roger followed up with Dan Noyes who said that employees at the hardware store do follow the Governor's orders, they have sneeze guards up and that he would not require customers to wear masks unless an order comes from the Governor.
- Jean Kelly asked if all employees have to wear masks, Katie responded that employees need to wear a mask or be behind a shield. Kathy Grueber said that when she was in the hardware store staff were not wearing masks and that an unmasked employee took her down the aisles to find what she was looking for. She said she felt vulnerable because the employees were not wearing masks.
- Maggie Leugers said she liked a poster she saw in Burlington that said "Masks mean good business" because it is about protecting people. The sign explains why it is important to wear a mask. She feels it is important to take care of all our citizens and thinks if businesses understood better, they would support and protect people by requiring masks. Roger thought her comment was very well put. He said that there are people who do not believe masks are an appropriate response. One way to make wearing masks a requirement is to talk to the Governor's office or legislature about making the wearing of masks a statewide mandate. Another way is voluntary compliance, if there were masks available and a sign asking people to wear them, they would. Roger thinks making masks a requirement is going to be tough without a statewide mandate but added that we should do everything we can to encourage mask wearing. Christine said she thought that was a great approach and let the hardware store and market know what people are seeing and concerned about. Katie thought that there is a cultural push and pull and there will be people who are going to be against wearing a mask and that enforcement was going to be an issue.
- Patty Brushette said that the proposed resolution only says protects town workers, not anyone else. The bottom line she said, is that people not wearing a mask are putting me and everyone else in harm's way. Burlington is bigger and they are not having any issues. Patty would like Richmond to make masks mandatory. She did not think there would be any conflict saying businesses should get feedback from the police about calls where people are not wearing masks. Patty expressed that it is the Selectboards job to keep the residents safe and that means making masks mandatory. Patty said she does not want to wait for the Governor to do something, she asked the Selectboard to review her resolution and requested that Josh put it up on his screen for everyone to see.

Josh shared his screen with Patty Brushette's resolution.

The discussion continued:

- Jessica Arendt said it will always be easier if mask wearing were a straight forward rule. She said, we are allowing people to come in and spend money in our town, and people coming from other places will be encouraged to see signs requiring masks. There will be more business, not less.

- Jacob Royer thought that a universal message carries weight adding you are never going to convince people who are opposed to wearing a mask to wear one. A clear message from the town is needed.
- Bard thought that we should retrofit the poster Burlington did, "Masks mean business" for Richmond. Katie asked if the Town was going to purchase masks to be handed out. Bard said he did not know why we are stuck on whether we are going to buy and distribute masks. The purchase and distribution of masks is separate from the resolution.
- Larry reminded everyone that Richmond has no dispatch service of our own and usually only one officer on duty at a time.
- Francine Pomerantz felt that there are a number of people who are making masks and if people wanted to distribute them the sewers would supply them.
- Jay Furr was concerned that people are taking for granted that COVID is over. He said, if we make bad habits over the summer, we will get swamped in the fall.
- Larry Fisher agreed with Patty saying he is one of many people not shopping in Richmond because of people not wearing masks. If volunteers could provide masks it would be easier for businesses to encourage customers to wear them. People are coming here because there is very little COVID.
- Christine said that as a Selectboard member she does not like to mix her daytime job, that has her immersed in COVID information, with her duties on the Selectboard adding that the one thing about masks is that they are a rally point for people, something they can do, it can be seen, you feel it is protecting you but cloth masks are not going to prevent you from getting COVID, hand washing is the main way to prevent COVID. Christine said that as a Selectboard member, if I can't enforce something then I don't want to mandate it. She felt that more proactive conversations with the community would better address concerns being voiced.
- Patty Brushette added that we are not just educating Richmond residents, 40% of COVID cases are within 4 hours of our borders. She agrees that cloth masks do not stop COVID droplets but that if both people have cloth masks people are safer.

Katie said, if we require people to wear masks tomorrow what are we doing to get businesses onboard. Patty said the town should provide signage and make businesses post them adding if the Selectboard says it's required, it's going to happen. Roger felt that enforcing everyone wearing a mask could be confrontational. If we said businesses had to post a poster, I think they would do that. Christine wanted to use the words "strongly suggests wearing a mask" but require the signage.

David asked how the board wants to proceed. Christine asked Josh, does anything we do have to be checked by the attorney, Josh responded, not the draft proposed but if we do something else it should be reviewed.

Christine moved that to adopt the resolution as was shown tonight with an edit that businesses are required to post a sign that strongly encourages the use of face masks, Roger seconded. Roll call vote: Christine and Roger, voted affirmatively. The motion failed.

Bard observed that he likes the Burlington language, Katie agreed with Bard saying if we adapted the Burlington resolution it would help to create statewide consistency.

Bard moved to modify the resolution to include Burlington resolutions language starting at line 46 on page 2 replacing Burlington with Richmond, down through the end of the document and add the enforcement section we currently have. Being no second, the motion failed.

Discussion continued:

- Roger said that what he liked about Christine's proposal was that he was against requiring something and then not have anything to do about enforcement. Posting a sign is something he thought everyone would do. David asked if we should be silent on enforcement. Roger thought that people will call the police regardless. Christine felt this was part of the challenge, she doesn't want to require something that is not enforced saying it sets a bad precedent. If we pass this now it does not mean, we cannot take stronger action later. Bard responded that another approach would be to use Burlington's resolution from line 46 on and to change required to requested because a requirement that is not enforceable is not a requirement.

David asked where do we go from here?

Roger said we could do something now and make it stronger later if we need to. Katie didn't want to do something that was not enforceable she thought going back to businesses and asking for their cooperation was best. Roger said having something consistent posted is most important. Start with a cooperative approach.

Discussion continued:

- Connie asked if someone should try talking to the Western Slopes Business Association instead of talking to individual businesses would be more successful.
- Larry said the clearer the message, the better. Roger asked if people call 911 for others not wearing masks, Larry responded that the AG's office is accepting calls regarding businesses not complying adding that he did speak to the chief of South Burlington's police department who said they are getting a lot of calls from individuals calling about other individuals not wearing masks. This puts undo pressure on our limited resources.

David asked, do we feel there is any action we can take on this tonight?

Katie said she would like to see a concerted effort ask businesses if they would you post a sign adding she did not want to end up at odds with businesses in town. Roger thought we should develop some language for a sign but did not know if a resolution was needed for that. Bard agreed with starting with a sign. Patty Brushett offered to take a picture of Burlington's sign and send it to Josh.

b) Discussion of CSWD Drop Off Centers and update on Solid Waste Implementation Plan

Josh reported that he has not heard back from CSWD on reopening Richmond adding that they are on the agenda in two weeks. Logan Hegg was at the meeting to answer any questions. Bard said, we will be working on a new lease agreement and will want to talk about the reuse zone at that time. Christine asked about the recycling program saying we bring recyclable and drop it off, is there some kind of accountability that we know recyclables are not just thrown away? Logan responded that CSWD's long term program is trying to determine what is going to be the best for not raising rates or restricting the recyclables that are taken in but that currently all recyclable materials dropped off are recycled.

c) Update on progress on affordable housing by the Planning Commission

Ravi reported:

- that there are issues above the planning and zoning commissions ability to oversee related to affordable housing.
- that the planning commission has been looking into how a developer could apply for affordable housing units
- that more focus is needed to understand the details and regulations related to affordable housing so the planning commission wants to create a housing committee that can make recommendations. When ready they will present their ideas to the Selectboard.

d) Update from the Town Center and Library Building Committee and discussion of expectations of income generation from the rental of office space on the third floor

Josh reported that the committee has been dormant since October and that Christine Werneke, who is now chairing that committee wants to give a report to the Selectboard Christine reported:

- that a subcommittee has been formed to deal with the failing Library heating system since there is a concern about going through another heating season this will be a top priority
- that there are repairs and maintenance that need to be made to the Town Center Building
- that it was of particular importance that she hear from the Selectboard regarding the terms of use for tenants that would be coming in, asking what the rent would need to be? and whether the Selectboard is looking for a commercial tenant or someone like the historical society? Christine noted that the previous tenant paid \$42,000 annually in rent and that her understanding is that the money was used to maintain the building. Christine asked if the Selectboard was looking for rent to pay for maintenance of the building? Katie said, it is hard to make any decisions about what to do with the building without knowing what the Selectboard is expecting. Bard said. the Library Trustees have authority for building maintenance and asked Josh if he was correct. Bard added that the Library Trustees could ask to have the heating repairs built into the Library budget. Christine said she will look into the process.
- Bard went on to say that he thought going out to bid for the rent to see who is interested and at what cost would be a good way to proceed. He added that before saying the rent is free, we should find out what people are interested in.

Christine said that MMCTV, the Historical Society, and Senior Center were interested asking if there is a number that would be a minimum number that would cover utilities, then determine the value of the space. Bard replied he liked the idea of a bidding process to know who are all the people who are interested and have them tell us what they could pay and what part of the space they wanted, then determine who gets the space. Connie asked if a decision about what space staff needs had been made yet. Christine said, first the space staff needs should be identified, then decide what is available to rent out.

- Roger asked what the building costs are, not just utilities, annual maintenance and how does that divide out per sq. ft. Once we have those numbers then we could understand if we need to make money, break even or if a renter would cost us money.
- Bard said a third approach would be to determine how much commercial space leases for. Katie said, we are trying to figure out how to lease space when you can't lease space. Bard thought having short term leases instead of long term would be better.
- Christine said, MMCTV would have to invest some money into the space to make it usable for them, there is restoration work that is needed and fixing the windows is going to be costly. What the committee is trying to do is understand what has to be done before someone moves in, what renovations can be done while people are occupying the space and then once renovations are done rents could go up.

III. Other Business

a) Update on Dugway Rd. project

Josh reported that we received some word back from FEMA that was cryptic and that after talking to people at the state it has been determined that we are as close as we are going to get to having their approval to proceed.

b) Update on Bridge St. infrastructure project

Josh reported:

- that the stormwater line had been installed up to Main Street. He also said that the PO that had previously been approved did not include the 10% contingency the contract calls for, so he was looking to have the PO amended.
- that the lot on upper Bridge Street needs drainage improvements so the engineer has been looking at creating a remediation plan. Josh added that the work should be able to get the work done through a change order within the contingency amount. He said that \$18,177.80 is the contingency amount that would be added to the original bid price and would cover the change orders adding we might need a little more from Pete's stormwater reserves but not much.

Roger moved to amend the PO to J Hutchins to include the contingency amount stated and to do the stormwater work at the 27 Bridge Street parking lot, Christine seconded. Roll call vote: Roger, Katie, Christine, Bard, and David voted affirmatively.

III. Approval of Minutes, Warrants and Purchase Orders

Roger moved to approve the Minutes of 5-26-20, Katie seconded. Roll Call Vote: Katie, Bard, Roger, Christine, and David voted affirmatively.

Invoices and warrants:

Roger looked through the invoices and thought they looked ok.

Roger moved to approve warrants as presented, Katie seconded. Roll Call Vote: Roger, Katie, Bard, Christine, and David voted affirmatively.

Josh will send the warrant out for signatures using DocuSign.

IV. Discuss Items for Next Agenda

What western slope association (Christine will talk to them) thinks about signage

V. Adjourn

Roger moved and Katie seconded to adjourn. Roll call vote: Roger, Katie, Bard, Christine, and David voted affirmatively. The meeting ended at: 10:35 pm.