

Selectboard Minutes 4/13/2020

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

Members Present by phone: Roger Brown

Absent:

Others Present by Zoom: Josh Arneson, Town Manager; Kathy Daub-Stearns, Admin. Assist.; Linda Parent, Town Clerk; Connie Bona, Finance; Pete Gosselin, Hwy Superintendent; Ravi Venkatataman, Planner; Kendall Chamberlain, Water & Sewer Superintendent; Chris Granda, Planning Commission; Virginia Clarke, Planning Commission; Jeff Forward, Energy Coordinator; Dillon LaForce, Highway; George Brownell, Highway; Josi Kytte, Buttermilk; Brendon O'Reilly, Buttermilk; Margaret Haskins, Marcia Levison, and Angelica Contis recorded the meeting for MMCTV Channel 15.

Called to Order: 7:00 PM

II. Welcome by David.

2. Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

I. Additions or Deletions to Agenda- none

III. Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present

a) Update on COVID-19 health crisis response

i. Update on Town departments' operations

Josh provided an update for each department beginning with information that there have been weekly department head meetings to stay in touch and make certain departments have what they need.

He reported:

- that Connie is experiencing an increased workload in order to process payroll and AP and that she is coming into the office every day
- that he (Josh) is in the office every day keeping things going
- that Linda is in the office part of each day to maintain the records, get mail and get back to residents with questions they may have. She also helps get documents for Suzanne and Ravi so they can continue to work from home.
- Kathy is working from home.
- the police department is working staggered shifts and allowing for social distancing. The Governor has asked for their help in enforcing stay home stay safe as it relates to businesses. The process is to educate an out of compliance business and if there is still non-compliance a notice is sent to the Attorney General's (AG's) Office for a determination of how to proceed. No notices have needed to be sent to the AG's Office at this time. The police department has been recognized by the Burlington Free Press for the community policing project that provides a gift bag to children who are having birthdays. The bags are delivered with lights flashing and sirens blaring. When available the Fire Department has been joining in on the fun.
- Water & Sewer has their regular staff on site demonstrating social distancing. The department continues to receive septage from haulers.

- the Fire Dept. has adopted safety measures that include not entering a home without wearing full bunker gear. The no burn ban is still in effect and extended to match the stay home stay safe order.
- Both the Fire Dept and the Police Dept have enough PPE's for now.
- the Highway Dept. workload has been reduced to essential work. Employees are working at solo jobs or work that needs to be responded to immediately in pairs. Employees are using masks when near each other. The grounds crew work will begin next week. The Highway Dept cordoned off the play structures at Volunteers Green leaving the rest of the park open for responsible use.
- the Library is staying busy. Rebecca and Wendy there every day. There are no book or materials lending happening but they are doing other work that has been needed but not had time for.

Discussion included:

- Bard asking if anyone was aware if Richmond Rescue was having any financial hardship due to the lack of ambulance service calls. Josh responded that he had gotten the Rescue's quarterly report that noted calls down significantly but didn't see anything regarding financial issues. He will reach out to them.
- Pete reported that he was able to obtain face masks for his entire crew. He planned on having all employees in to switch over from winter to summer equipment over the next few days. Pete also said that it was his understanding that no grant funded work could be done during the stay home stay safe order. Pete added that if it were done there would be no reimbursement to the Town for work during the order. He added that he has spoken to other towns and they were not laying off highway workers, that the towns he was in touch with were all keeping crews paid even if employees were not working their full 40 hours.

ii. Discussion of employee compensation

Josh reported that he has been checking in with the Board each week updating information regarding employee compensation. He noted that with new understanding of the recent updates to unemployment laws, coupled with the extended stay home stay safe order, he thought it would be prudent to look at payroll under different scenarios. He then provided information specific to payroll expenses related to overall wages and the amount of wages being paid to employees for hours not worked. He also outlined how if most employees were furloughed (part time on unemployment) they would actually be paid more than if the Town continued to pay them. He added that there were some employees that work so few hours that they would not be eligible for unemployment those employees were mainly library workers and one other part time person. Josh let the Board know that consensus among the department heads was that employees would prefer to continue working as needed and be paid their regular wages by the Town as opposed to being on unemployment for hours not worked.

Discussion included:

- that there be no interruption to health or other benefits for employees if a furlough was necessary
- that with the \$600 federal unemployment benefit employees would be made whole or may have more money available each week
- that employees would have to report weekly to unemployment and that with the system overwhelmed it might take a week or more to get a claim filed

- that not all employees may be in a financial position to wait for unemployment to kick in
- that new legislation has employees paid from day one on unemployment, there is no longer a one week waiting period
- whether municipalities would be included, as the private sector has, for tax credits for payroll
- that Josh spoke with John Albergini and school staff are currently being paid
- that even though the budget has been voted on by the residents the funds have not been collected
- that some employees from the highway dept feel like they put their lives on hold all winter for the Town and now that times are getting tough the Town doesn't want to take care of them and would rather lay them off
- that it's not just a matter of dollars and cents
- that school taxes of 1.4 million dollars will be due in May
- that the Town surplus could be reduced if there is a drop in tax revenue
- that May 15 when property taxes come due residents may not be able to pay them and that will be a determining factor on how the Town proceeds
- that transparent conversations about the future are necessary
- that we need to plan for the worst and hope for the best so that if we need to deal with the worst there will at least be a plan.
- Bard acknowledged it is a difficult position to be in for an employee but also that that anyone who writes a paycheck is looking at the options
- that the plan would be to make sure everyone is whole
- that the Towns funding stream is at risk and we are trying to figure out a plan
- that it's unfortunate that there is a stigma around unemployment of being unappreciated when what is being contemplated is a way to keep having employees paid by using unemployment as a resource for funding

David concluded the discussion by saying that this is a new situation, that through no one's fault sacrifices are having to be made. Adding that he hopes everyone can recognize that we are dealing with financial restraints, that we want to keep employees whole and keep health insurance for them. He added that the board is weighing the needs of employees and residents and that these discussions will lead to decisions down the road. This topic will be ongoing. Everyone's patience and understanding is hoped for.

iii. Review of postcard to residents

Josh reviewed the postcard information that Christine put together. The board made a few recommendations including information about face masks in public and where they can be obtained.

Discussion included:

- Marcia letting everyone know that masks are available at the food shelf and that they have been busy seeing 3-4 new families a week
- that Front Page Forum has had information about where to get face masks
- whether to include information on this post card regarding evictions, utility bills, property taxes and reducing or limiting payments. It was decided that these were not necessarily within the power of the Board to determine. Josh will get guidance from VLCT and a future post card may be sent to address these items.
- if it was possible to include information that flushing wipes can cause employees to be at higher risk

- Chris Granda recommended restarting the emergency fund that was instituted by the food shelf after Hurricane Irene. He added that if at the end of all this we've managed to keep people fed but we have no businesses in town it will take years to come back from.
- Marcia provided information that the food shelf had been the umbrella organization for the emergency fund and that another entity had administered the donations/ funds. When asked she replied that the food shelf would consider a similar arrangement but had concerns about who would administer the funds.
- Jeff Forward added that this is a trying time and commended staff for doing a great job to figure out what needs to be done. He added that the Board is a convening authority and could be a platform for the town to come up with creative ways to keep things going. He suggested having a town hall call to ask what can be done to support town businesses adding that it could be a way to have creative thoughts collected and exchanged.
- Josi let everyone know that she had been part of a round table discussion that wants to highlight how people are surviving and networking together in new ways. Getting out stories about what people are doing. Josi offered to allow the use of her Zoom account that has 500 participant capability to do a town hall call.

iv.Consideration of how to aid Richmond residents
(see above)

v.Update on Bridge St. Infrastructure Replacement Project

Josh reported that with the extension of the order no one seems to know how to proceed. He has called the Governor's office and is waiting for information on how to make our case on proceeding with the project now.

In talking with the contractor, there has been a plan to have a trailer on Browns Court, instead they would like to lease the office upstairs at \$500-\$600 per month for a few months. It was agreed that being at Town Center would help with communication during the project.

vi.Other COVID-19 health crisis items

None

b) Review of changes to Jolina Ct. Zoning Amendment and consideration of setting a date for a public hearing

Ravi presented the proposed amendment to the Jolina Court section adding that when the Jolina Court section is finalized he will that move onto affordable housing.

During discussion it was noted that the wording came straight from the current Town Plan. All Board members were satisfied with the way it was written.

Roger moved to warn a public meeting on consideration of the Jolina Court amendment including affordable housing, Bard seconded.

Ravi interjected that he was not sure affordable housing language will not have substantive changes so Roger withdrew his motion. Ravi represented that he could have the wording available for next weeks meeting since he expected to hear back from Michael Monty early in the week.

Bard moved to bring back the Zoning Amendments next week for consideration, Katie seconded. Roll call vote: Bard, Christine, Katie, Roger, David voted affirmatively.

Brendon O'Reilly added that he liked the way the proposed amendment represented the Town Plan but he was worried it would get kicked down the road 4 more meetings. Ravi responded that he is confident that Michael will be back to him with a marked up copy of the draft he was presented with and he would be ready for the next meeting. Bard responded saying he appreciated Brendon's comments and that no one wants to slow this down.

IV. Approval of Minutes, Warrants and Purchase Orders

Bard moved to approve the Minutes of 4-6-20, Roger seconded. Roll Call Vote: Katie, Bard, Roger, Christine, David voted affirmatively.

Josh reported that he had approved a PO earlier that was finalizing a FEMA hazard mitigation grant that had cost overruns. Now that FEMA had finalized the grant the Town would pay Matt Perezi the amount that was due him after adjustments.

Invoices and warrants: Roger looked through them and thought they looked ok.

Bard moved to allow the acting chair to sign the warrant and approve invoices on behalf of the Board, Katie seconded. Roll Call Vote: Roger, Bard, Katie, Christine, David voted affirmatively.

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

V. Discuss Items for Next Agenda

VLCT advise on collection of taxes

Water & Sewer bills -what authority we have to deal with delayed payments

Kendall reported that he is currently following the regular rules, but shut off's may be put off. – he will check in with other towns to see how they are handling it.

Zoning Jolina Court

Communication with businesses/ individuals

VI. Executive Session if necessary

VII. Adjourn

Bard moved to adjourn, Katie seconded. Roll Call Vote: Bard, Katie, Christine, David, Roger voted affirmatively. The meeting ended at 9:07 PM.