

## Minutes 6/22/2020

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

Members Present by phone: none

Absent: none

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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; and Angelica Contis recorded the meeting for MMCTV Channel 15, also present: Marshall Paulsen, Jay Furr, Jessy Heiser, Roger Pedersen, Martha Nye, Sean Witters, Stephanie Hartsfield

Called to Order: 7:00 PM

**Welcome** by David.

**Comments from the public:** none

**I. Additions or Deletions to Agenda-** none

**II. Items for Presentation or Discussion with those present**

**a) Update on COVID-19 health crisis response**

**i. Update on Town department operations**

Josh reported:

- that every department has been following the health and safety guidelines in place,
- that Chief Muldoon has met with a few citizens one on one to discuss recent events,
- that water and sewer remains busy with septage and the Bridge St construction,
- that the Fire Department has gotten back to trainings.
- that the Fire Department may need to replace their repeater which is essential to communication between radios if it cannot be repaired
- that Highway is busy working on culverts and ditching adding that their summer workplan on schedule
- that Library reported circulation staying comparable to recent years except for last week when it dipped a little. Summer programs will begin a shortly and Rebecca expects that use will go back up,
- that when it comes to reopening the Library, Rebecca is checking with other libraries and will continue to monitor their progress and plans before determining how/ when to reopen our library
- that the Finance Department continues working through these difficult COVID times adding that the audit is coming up and is expected to take place as scheduled,
- that Planning & Zoning meetings are continuing as scheduled. The Planning Commission is looking to form a committee on affordable housing and zoning permits are similar to last year's numbers
- that Linda is continuing to remotely help people. Absentee ballots are going out for the election increasing the amount of work for Linda.

## **ii. Discussion of Town Center operations**

Josh reported:

- that Town Center is currently open to employees, if an employee can work at home, they are working at home per the Governor's order.
- that he, Connie, Linda, and Martha are working at Town Center with Planning, Zoning, and the administration assistant being productive at home and taking turns coming in as necessary. Josh said that everyone is being conscious of social distancing and following protocols
- that researchers have been coming in by appointment for the last few weeks and the process is working well
- that he has been working on getting quotes for the ventilation UV system recommended for the small conference room
- that Town staff are available by email and phone so if someone needs to meet in person they are able to reach staff
- that other department staff are coming into Town Center, but the vestibule is still being used to transfer items,
- that the next phase may be that the Zoning officer will have people to come in by appointment only, meeting in the large conf. room, and will following tracking and cleaning protocols
- that if one staff member tests positive it would effectively shut down operations and there would be no level of service to the public, therefore Town Center is opening slowly and cautiously

## **iii. Update on education tax payment options**

Connie reported:

- that if the education tax due date is changed then the education tax bill will be due 20 days afterwards
- that she feels the Town is in good shape financially
- that the property tax rate may be on time
- that property tax delinquencies are \$28,000 less than last year this time
- that Water and Sewer delinquent payments have the lowest outstanding balances in a long time, less than \$1900
- that loan payments have been postponed but bonds are not able to be postponed

Discussion included:

- that Josh said we could have the education tax rate before the next meeting date and if so, we are all set and that if we don't have the rate from the State then the Board may decide to make a motion to move the property tax due date to have time to get the rate and send bills out
- Bard wants to be updated at the July 6<sup>th</sup> meeting about whether the Board needs to do anything

## **iv. Follow up on requiring the use of masks in public spaces**

Josh reported:

- that the sign is ready to be distributed to businesses

Discussion included:

- that Bard asked if there was a sense of how business felt about putting up the sign? Josh said, not at this point other than the market is willing to post the sign.

- Christine thought we should reach out to the other businesses in town. Katie replied that she was willing to walk around with hard copies and talk to business owners. Josh said the sign is available to be emailed for people to print themselves .
- Roger thought having a professional presentation would be more noticeable. He thought having a sandwich board type sign with a place for hand sanitizer and a place for masks would be better than just the sign. Christine said something like that could be positively received adding that one of the challenges is whether the two key businesses were interested, do they have space for something like that?
- Roger said he does not believe the hardware store is planning on posting the sign because of the word "required". Roger asked, if the goal is to get people to wear masks, how can we help the business owners to move this forward so that we are not just passing a resolution then walking away. Bard said, we have the final sign, Katie will walk it around and we can reassess at the next meeting. Christine and Roger agreed to get together and talk about ideas on how to engage businesses further

#### **v. Update on park use and restrooms**

Josh reported:

- that in looking at reopening the public restrooms at the park the cleaner is available to clean mid-day and evenings. Once cleaned in the evening the restrooms will be locked. An approved disinfectant is being used and after consulting with VLCT Josh said he is confident that we are following a good plan
- that there is an increase in the number of Park Use applications being requested. In addition to the spring soccer league there is a wedding planned and Arabesque held their performances at the band shell. The park has become a central meeting place. Applicants that are organizations are being asked to submit their safety plan and insurance certificate prior to acceptance. Kathy has been working with applicants to be certain they have information on ACCD guidance.

Discussion included:

- Bard thought we may need signs as a reminder about outdoor distancing as opposed to parents being all grouped together yelling at kids on the field. Roger said anything related to little league, at least in Jericho has explicit rules for parents too adding that any formal sport is going to have strict criteria. David asked if we have signs? or language for signs? Josh replied, yes when we closed the playground Pete posted signs, we will make sure they are up to date and maybe put additional signs at intervals throughout the park.
- Christine felt signs are helpful as a reminder but that what is more instructive is having every 6' marked out. She said that the visualization helps people to remember. She said that Arabesque made zones and limited people in spaces. Pete said, that in an open field it will be difficult to mark 6' spacing, that the grass gets mowed frequently. He thought signs get the message across best adding that we should get aluminum signs that are professional looking.
- Katie asked if fees for cleaning the restroom were increasing due to the additional time being spent. Josh said that the cleaner is paid a fixed fee for cleaning and that any additional fees would be covered by the COVID FEMA claim.
- Katie asked if, on the application or permit for park use, there any language regarding what happens if users do not follow their own plans? Pete asked how that could be enforced? Katie replied, using scary language in the permit. Roger said, the same body that issues the permit could go to the park user and say you must follow the plan submitted. If someone observes a group violating their own plan, then maybe say you

cannot use fields. Katie said that if there is something that says users have to follow the rules and users are being made aware of what the rules are then, ok.

#### **vi. Other COVID-19 health crisis items**

##### **b) Discussion of CPI in relation to the employee pay grid**

Josh reported:

- that there is a CPI relation to the pay grid and every July if an employee has a positive review they receive a 2% step increase, then the grid is adjusted using the CPI Northeast rate, not to exceed 1.5 % and that this practice started in 2018.
- that this year from March 2019 to March 2020 the CPI stayed level at 1.5% increase until April when the CPI dropped to .8, and then in May it dropped further to .6.
- that there is nothing in the town policies that indicates what month to use. Considering with COVID we do not know where the economy is going the question becomes where do we go with adjusting the scale? Josh suggested starting with .8 and looking at it again in a few months to see if it has gone back up.

Discussion included:

- Bard saying that this change in CPI is unprecedented and we are working under unusual circumstances. He said that other cities and towns are laying off staff. David said to keep in mind that CPI numbers go back 12 months and he is sensitive to people expecting a bigger number adding that if the economy rebounds then we could reevaluate adding that we may be looking at decreasing revenue and we have been spared the worst of it but may still become affected.
- Christine said she does have a degree in economy and the reason that CPI is used is to keep up with inflation. 2% is what municipal employees count on and makes sense, going with the .8 with the idea that should the CPI change dramatically it could be changed at a later time. Katie asked if she felt we are maintaining what our employees will be able to purchase. Christine replies, yes
- Connie asked if the Board was going to change the budget? She said that there is a 1.5% cap on CPI rate increases, suggesting that there should be a lower end cap as well. She said that for a long time the CPI was at 2% and we were capped at 1.5%. She said that she has tried to relate to the CPI indicators noted but she has not seen the decreases in expenses that are noted in determining the CPI and that food has skyrocketed. Bard said he appreciated the challenges but that the best available data says .8% even though an individual's experiences may be different. He said that moving forward he would like to reserve the right to move the rate up should the CPI rebound. Connie asked if leave budget would be left as is? Bard replied, yes. Roger said that part of the reason for tying the budget to CPI is because the taxpayers are in the same boat and so the Board has been trying to stay at whatever the CPI increase is.
- Connie said that the police grid says it is to be updated in April but is not mentioned in any policy for other employees. She thought the Board should establish a policy.

Roger moved to use the CPI policy from the Police Union collective bargaining unit and apply it to the rest of the Town staff, - there was no second.

- Connie commented that April is not written in the Agreement but is noted on the attached pay grid that was established at the same time.
- Bard was sure the staff feels they may have been getting something higher raise but thought the Board should move ahead with .8% and if the CPI goes higher then raise it

later. Roger asked if the Board should we go with the March number and aim high? Josh added that in April the CPI was .8%, in May .6%, and March 1.5%. Connie said she would love to use the March CPI but if the Board decided to then someone would have to be in touch with police union for approval. Bard said he would like to go with .8% and monitor the situation over time.

Bard moved to use the April CPI, .8%, Christine seconded.

Discussion continued:

Roger asked for a friendly amendment was asked for to reflects the date referenced in the collective bargaining contract for the police.

Bard amended his motion to use the April CPI, .8% which is the date referenced in the police pay grid. Christine seconded. Roll call vote: Bard, Katie, Roger, Christine, and David voted affirmatively. Motion passed.

Discussion continued:

- with Connie asking about the pay grid update that had been talked about months ago. Josh said the Board had decided on an approach the end of Feb. and a plan and process was put in place. He said that one employee had been completed and had thought one would be able to be done every few weeks but that COVID hit and the people working on it were torn in different directions. He said that earlier in the week a plan was put in place to continue the work. Bard would like this to be a monthly item for update.

#### **c) Consideration of setting the FY21 municipal tax rate**

Roger moved to set the tax rate at .7297 Bard seconded. Katie, Roger, Christine, Bard and David voted affirmatively. Motion passed.

#### **d) Consideration of adopting a resolution in support of Black Lives Matter**

Josh reported:

- that last week a black lives matter sign and flag were placed at Town Center
- that in checking with lawyer and VLCT and it is not necessary to do the same for every organization or person that makes a request
- that it was recommended that a resolution about the sign and flag be made

Discussion included:

- that Bard said, this is one step that the Town is taking with more steps to follow
- that Jay Furr let everyone know that tomorrow is the first scheduled session on racial equity and that the meeting is being done by zoom. He said that an agenda has been sent out on Front Page Forum and he hopes that it will help move things forward
- Linda asked if the resolution meant that from June 19<sup>th</sup> for the next 3 months the sign and flag stay up, then come down? Bard replied that the resolution is framed as a single time – 90 days. Linda reported that there have been problem calls coming into her office about the sign by people who feel it is a political sign, she said she has explained that it was the Selectboard that was working on this. Linda added that the people calling are people who do not get on Zoom. She added that she received an

anonymous call on answering machine challenging us to “take it down or someone else would”. Linda said the message was a little threatening, Christine asked if Chief Muldoon should listen to the message to see what he thought. Roger said any threatening message on the town clerk’s answering machine should go to the police.\

- David said he was hesitant to provide feedback but that this is first time since being on the Board that he has gotten nasty, emotionally charged feedback on a subject. Linda said the gentleman from Huntington who had been supporting the police by the veteran’s monument told her he was not coming back because of comments people yelled at him made him feel threatened
- Sean Witters thanked the board for taking on the challenge saying it will be uncomfortable but is proud that the Selectboard is committing to a longer-term discussion saying that the conversation is historically powerful adding that the resolution is an important step.
- Roger said this is a resolution, not an ordinance so it can be changed as the discussion continues. Christine said that the group meeting tomorrow could look at it and shape what it looks like in life going forward. Bard thought that getting something simple done for one time and have discussions and decide what to do going forward was best.
- Linda reported that the Governor has ordered that on the 19<sup>th</sup> every month the flag is to be flown at half-mast memorializing the first death due to COVID in VT.
- Katie said, back to legalities, the sign is government speech so Radiate would not be able to put something out on the property. Bard said the lease would probably dictate that. Josh said he would look at it.

Roger moved to accept the resolution as amended, Bard seconded. Roll call vote: Katie, Christine, Roger, Bard, and David voted affirmatively. Motion passed.

#### **e) Discussion of adding social service providers to the Town website**

##### **Josh reported:**

- that there is an interest in how to better utilize the town website and provide a page dedicated to social service providers to the Town of Richmond

Discussion continued:

- Katie saying it is clear from the last few meeting that not everyone knows what partnerships the town has, and this would be a way to educate people. Josh suggested looking at list of organizations we appropriate funds to as a starting point.
- Katie also suggested updating the website to education people about how to access town processes, like adding a subject to the Selectboard agenda.
- Larry said he had been doing a lot of community outreach but because of COVID has not been able to. Bard suggested having a Zoom meeting to provide public awareness and distancing. Katie added that meetings could be recorded for future viewing. Bard added they could be posted on the website as well.

#### **f) Update on Bridge St. Infrastructure Project**

Josh reported:

- that Upper bridge street largely completed
- that the stormwater hookup at 27 Bridge Street still needs completion
- that in early to mid-July sidewalk restoration and paving will be done

- that currently the water line under and south of the bridge is being worked on with one-way traffic through that area and the pedestrian walkway remains open. Josh said that two-way traffic will resume next week
- that he is still working out the details for extending the 400 foot of waterline up to Esplanade and that the decision will be made some time this week.
- that doing the extension would take advantage of favorable funding, pricing and reduced traffic.

### **III. Approval of Minutes, Warrants and Purchase Orders**

#### **Approval of Minutes, Warrants and Purchase Orders**

Bard moved to approve the Minutes of 6/15/20, Christine seconded. Roll Call Vote: Katie, Bard, Roger, Christine, and David voted affirmatively. Motion passed.

#### **Invoices and warrants:**

Discussion included:

- Christine looked through the invoices and thought they looked ok but wanted to know about an international phone charge of \$104 made by Michael Mashia from Canada. Pete said he would ask him. It was thought that he may have picked up a tower and was not in Canada especially since the border is closed. Christine said that she agreed that could be what happened.
- Roger asked about Hickock and Boardman, Josh said it was for the work done related to health insurance and is billed quarterly.
- Roger asked why we buy office supplies from several vendors suggesting it would be better to consolidate and negotiate a discount. Connie said salespeople may stop by and offer a special deal and that Linda shops them all and gets the best pricing.

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

Josh will send the warrant out for signatures using DocuSign.

### **IV. Discuss Items for Next Agenda**

Josh reminded everyone there is no special meeting and the next week next meeting will be July 6<sup>th</sup>

update from committee that is meeting tomorrow

### **V. Executive Session if necessary- none**

### **VI. Adjourn**

Bard moved to adjourn; Roger seconded. Roll call vote: Katie, Christine, Bard, Roger, David

The meeting adjourned at 9:29 PM

